NEIGHBORHOODS AND YOUTH VIOLENCE:
A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF NEIGHBORHOOD MECHANISMS

by

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Neighborhoods and Youth Violence: A Qualitative Analysis of Neighborhood Mechanisms

Abstract

by

TANISHA KIMBERLY TATE WOODSON

The present study uses secondary data transcripts from in-depth interviews conducted with Latino and African-American youth and their primary caregivers \( N = 79 \) from Denver, Colorado. This study uses a constructivist grounded theory approach to elucidate the factors associated with the witnessing, victimization or perpetration of youth violence. The study also seeks to explore the congruence or incongruence between the perspectives of primary caregivers and their young adult children regarding the association between neighborhood contextual factors and youth violence. Findings from the study identified three risk factors (deviant peer affiliation; lack of formal social control; and exposure to violence) and two protective factors (availability of local institutional resources and social ties and informal social control) associated with youth violence. Results from the dyadic analysis suggest that the majority of the dyads were congruent (e.g., the pair shared similar perceptions of the neighborhood and its impact on youth violence). This study offers a more nuanced explanation of these mechanisms by describing the various pathways by which they operate. The study concludes by
providing programmatic and policy recommendations for youth violence prevention programs which highlight the importance of strengthening community-level youth development resources, improving relations between local police forces and residents, and strengthening social bonds among residents.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Study Purpose

Despite more than two decades of neighborhood effects research establishing the association between neighborhood conditions and youth violence, there is still a lack of empirical evidence that clearly explains the social processes underlying this relationship (Small & Feldman, 2012, p. 57). According to Small and Feldman (2012), the new phase of neighborhood effects research calls for the integration of “ethnographic research” into the research agenda (p. 68). In this context, ethnographic research refers to both open-ended interviews and participant observations conducted by researchers interacting one-on-one with people and organizations in urban communities. The current study answers this call for new studies by using in-depth, qualitative interview data from the Denver Child Study to assess the perspectives of low-income Latino and African-American primary caregivers and their young adult children regarding how the neighborhood influenced the extent to which their children witnessed, were victims of or perpetrated youth violence. Further, these data include dyads which allow for the measurement of congruence and incongruence between the perspectives of primary caregivers and their young adult children. The proposed study seeks to contribute to the neighborhood effects and youth violence literatures by identifying salient neighborhood mechanisms – theoretically plausible accounts of how neighborhood bring about a change in a given outcome – and elucidating the social processes by which these mechanisms operate (Sampson, 2012).
Problem Statement

Violence perpetrated by and against youth is a critical public health issue that has troubled our society for more than a century (Stoddard et al., 2013). Before the first juvenile court was established in 1899, the issue of “wayward youth” concerned communities across the United States (Esbensen, Peterson, Taylor, & Freng, 2010). Youth violence is a general term used to describe when individuals between the ages of 10 and 24 years intentionally use physical force or power to threaten or inflict physical or psychological harm against another person, group or community (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014; Haegerich, Oman, Vesely, Aspy, & Tolma, 2013). Youth violence can take different forms ranging from fighting, slapping, and hitting to bullying, gang-related incidents and threats with weapons (Dahlberg & Potter, 2001; Dahlberg & Simon, 2006; Mercy, Butchart, Farrington, & Cerda, 2000). More serious acts of youth violence include robbery, assault (with or without weapons) and homicide (Haegerich et al., 2013; Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002).

On a daily basis, the media bombards the general public with reports of violent acts committed by youth thereby making youth violence one of the most visible forms of violence in society (Esbensen et al., 2010; Krug et al., 2002; Mercy et al., 2000; Singer & Rocque, 2014). In 2013, an average of 12 youths each day were victims of homicide and more than 1,200 were treated in emergency departments for non-fatal physical assault-related injuries (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention & National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2013). Staggering numbers like these make youth violence the second leading cause of death for individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 and the leading cause of death for African-American and Latino youth living in urban areas.
Young people are usually the ones that hurt other youth and commit a significant portion of the violence in communities (David-Ferdon & Simon, 2014). Additionally, “more youth die from homicide each year than from cancer, heart disease, birth defects, flu and pneumonia, respiratory diseases, stroke, and diabetes combined” (David-Ferdon & Simon, 2014, p. 6).

According to findings from the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey, approximately 18% of high school students carried a weapon (e.g., gun, knife, or club) on at least one day during the 30 days prior to the survey (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). Among students who indicated they carried a weapon, 5.5% reported carrying a gun. In addition, approximately 25% of high school students were involved in at least one physical fight during 2013 and these rates were significantly higher for males (30.2%) than females (19.2%) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). Due to safety concerns, seven percent of high school students did not attend school in the month prior to the survey because they did not feel comfortable either at school or on their way to or from school.

The impact of youth violence is not consistent across all communities and subgroups. The rate of youth violence varies significantly by race and ethnicity. Disproportionate levels of youth violence across communities can be attributed to differences in exposure to community-level risk and protective factors (David-Ferdon & Simon, 2014). For instance, in 2011 the homicide rate for African-American youth was 13.7 times higher than the rate for White youth, 14.4 times higher than the rate for Asian/Pacific Islander youth, and 3.8 times higher than the rate for American
Indian/Alaska Native youth. The rates of different forms of violence vary across racial and ethnic groups as well. For example, a notably higher percentage of African-American (35%) and Hispanic (28%) high school students reported that they were involved in at least one physical fight during the last year compared to only 21% of White students (David-Ferdon & Simon, 2014, p. 10).

The prevalence of youth violence not only affects the specific individuals involved in the activity (e.g., perpetrator and victim) but also their families and the community at large by increasing health care expenditures, reducing productivity, decreasing property values, and disrupting social services (Mercy et al., 2000; Rosenfeld, Edberg, Fang, & Florence, 2013). Everyone in a neighborhood – regardless of whether the individual is a victim, an aggressor, or a witness – experiences the consequences of youth violence (Rosenfeld et al., 2013). Youth violence is a significant public health problem with serious and lasting effects on young people, families, and communities (Dahlberg & Simon, 2006). Violence attenuates the health of the community by generating fear amongst residents and destroying the social structure of the neighborhood (Markowitz, Bellair, Liska, & Liu, 2001). A single year of homicides and assault-related injuries among youth ages 10 to 24 costs Americans an estimated $16.2 billion dollars in lifetime combined medical and work-loss costs (Rosenfeld et al., 2013). This figure is considered as an underestimate of the total burden of youth violence because it does not account for the cost associated with the criminal justice system or the cost associated with addressing the psychological and social consequences for victims, perpetrators and their families (David-Ferdon & Simon, 2014). The estimated aggregate burden of youth crime in the United States is between $1 and $2 trillion per year (Ludwig, 2006, 2010).
Neighborhoods and Youth Violence

A central focus of the literature on neighborhood effects on youth violence has centered on identifying community structural characteristics associated with youth violence (Baller, Anselin, Messner, Deane, & Hawkins, 2001; Bellair, 1997; Bursik, 1984a, 1984b; Ellen & Turner, 1997; Morenoff, Sampson, & Raudenbush, 2001; Rosenfeld, Baumer, & Messner, 2001; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997; Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011; Taylor & Covington, 1988). The relationship between communities and youth violence can be traced back to the early 20th century (Shaw, 1929; Shaw & McKay, 1942). During the 1940’s, sociologists Clifford R. Shaw and Henry D. McKay collected data on delinquency in a number of American cities. Their work documented that very high delinquency rates occurred over long periods of time in deteriorating and commercialized inner areas of major cities despite population turnover (Shaw & McKay, 1942). In their classic study, Juvenile Delinquency in Urban Areas (1942), Shaw and McKay reasoned that socially disorganized communities characterized by poverty, residential turnover, and ethnic heterogeneity, impeded residents from establishing social ties among neighbors and maintain social control and resolve common problems. Their work shifted the discourse away from individual-level theories of delinquency and toward frameworks focusing on how factors embedded in the neighborhood environment lead to the development of youth violence (Pratt & Cullen, 2005). Social disorganization theory became an influential criminological theory that explained the relationships between neighborhoods and youth violence. Social disorganization was defined as the inability of a community to realize common values of
its residents and regulate itself through formal and informal processes of social control to achieve common goals (Bursik, 1988).

Following Shaw and McKay’s (1942) publication, sociologists, criminologists and scholars attempted to examine the process(es) that account for the relationship between socially disorganized communities and crime (Browning & Cagney, 2002; Bursik, 1999; Morenoff et al., 2001; Wilson, 1987). Initially, these studies used data from the U.S Census and other government and administrative entities to examine the validity of the social disorganization theory. Overall, findings from these studies provided support for the theory and showed that youth residing in impoverished neighborhoods (characterized by high rates of poverty, violence, unemployment, single-parent households, residential mobility and concentrated disadvantage) were at increased risk of engaging in aggressive (Duncan & Raudenbush, 1999); rule-breaking (Elliott et al., 1996; Rankin & Quane, 2002); delinquent (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997; Jencks & Mayer, 1990) and criminal behaviors (McLoyd, 1998) compared to similar children who grow up in more affluent circumstances (for reviews see Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002). These neighborhood factors remained significant after controlling for family and individual-level factors (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2011).

Beginning in the 1980s, a number of scholars moved beyond studying macro-level neighborhood compositional factors and began to explicitly theorize and directly measure specific types of neighborhood-level mechanisms for explaining why social disorganization is related to youth violence (Kornhauser, 1978; Sampson & Groves, 1989; Wilson, 1987). The literature grew exponentially as scholars began to explore the
neighborhood social mechanisms that contributed to youth violence (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Morenoff et al., 2001; Pratt, 2001). Social mechanisms are plausible contextual processes that link specific causes (e.g., disadvantaged neighborhood) to an outcome (e.g., crime rates) (Sampson, 2012; Wikström & Sampson, 2003). The growing availability of community-level datasets (e.g., Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhood Community Survey (PHDCN), along with advancements in statistical methods (e.g., hierarchical linear modeling, propensity scoring matching, instrumental variable analysis) assisted researchers in their efforts to understand neighborhood social processes.

These neighborhood effects studies have found that social and organizational characteristics of communities explain variations in crime rates independent of the demographic characteristics of individuals (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000, 2001; McNeely & Wilcox, 2015; Sampson et al., 1997; Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011). These studies found evidence that youth residing in deprived neighborhoods fair worse than their counterparts in better quality neighborhoods due to factors such as high levels of violent crime (Browning, Gardner, Maimon, & Brooks-Gunn, 2014; Mrug, Madan, & Windle, 2015); the presence of negative role models (Hoffmann, 2006); association with deviant peer groups (Elliott & Menard, 1996; Mrug & Windle, 2009); inadequate supervision by parents and adult neighbors (Lord & Mahoney, 2007; Maimon & Browning, 2010); the absence of high-quality local institutions (Fraser, 1996; Peterson, Krivo, & Harris, 2000); and the lack of social cohesion among neighbors (Bellair, 2000; Hirschfield & Bowers, 1997; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Rountree & Warner, 1999; Sampson, 2008; Warner & Rountree, 1997).
After more than two decades of neighborhood effects research, the literature is at a crossroads (Small & Feldman, 2012; van Ham, Manley, Bailey, Simpson, & Maclennan, 2012). A major critique of the neighborhood effects studies conducted through the 1990s and early 2000s focused on methodological limitations that made it difficult to draw causal conclusions regarding the processes by which neighborhood contexts influenced youth violence (Sampson et al., 2002; Small & Feldman, 2012). Starting in the late 1990s, the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) experiment attempted to track the effects of moving to non-poor neighborhoods in the hope of providing more clarity about these causal connections (Goering, Feins, & Richardson, 2003). Unfortunately, the results from the MTO study were inconclusive and prompted disagreement over the direction that the neighborhood effects literature should take and even whether examining the effects of neighborhood conditions remains a viable research approach (see Clampt-Lundquist & Massey, 2008; Ludwig et al., 2008; Sampson, 2008; Small & Feldman, 2012). The neighborhood effects literature is considered to be at a crossroads because there is not enough information regarding the underlying causal mechanisms that produce these effects as well as the circumstances under which these effects are important (van Ham et al., 2012). Many existing studies merely show correlations between individual outcomes and neighborhood characteristics and fail to convincingly identify true causal effects (Durlauf, 2004; van Ham & Manley, 2010; van Ham, Manley, Bailey, Simpson, & Maclennan, 2013).

The Current Study

The purpose of the current study was to understand the lived experiences of low-income public housing residents who lived in an array of neighborhoods in order to
generate a theoretical model explaining how neighborhood environments influenced exposure to youth violence. Building on this existing body of literature, this study used qualitative data from the Denver Child Study to gain a deeper understanding of how various social and organizational mechanisms facilitated the relationship between neighborhood contextual factors and youth violence. This study has three aims. The first aim is to use first-hand experiences of caregivers and their young adult children to identify neighborhood factors that influenced youth violence. The second aim is to explain in greater detail the processes by which neighborhood conditions produced these effects. The final aim is to examine the degree of congruence or incongruence in perspectives between primary caregivers and their young adult children regarding neighborhood contexts and their influence on youth violence.

The current study is unique and addressed several gaps in the literature. First, this study uses qualitative data to elucidate perspectives from primary caregivers and their young adult children about the processes by which neighborhood contexts influence youth violence. To date, very few neighborhood effects studies have used a qualitative approach to empirically assess the effects of neighborhood contexts on youth violence (Witherspoon & Ennett, 2011; Witherspoon & Hughes, 2014). Understanding how individuals perceive their neighborhood settings and its effect on youth violence are fundamental to understanding the neighborhood as an influential context (Nicotera, 2007, 2008). Therefore, interviews with primary caregivers and youth can provide insight regarding the possible mechanisms that underlie neighborhood effects (Galster & Santiago, 2006).
In addition, the study examines the similarities or dissimilarities in perspectives between primary caregivers and their young adult children regarding what these contextual influences may be and their underlying social processes. Youth and their primary caregivers may have different experiences in their neighborhoods, therefore, it is important to understand each of their perspectives in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of how neighborhood conditions influence youth violence. Their viewpoints about how neighborhoods influence youth violence and the processes by which these effects occur will provide a more nuanced description about how neighborhood contexts influence residents (Visser, Bolt, & van Kempen, 2015a). Further, to the best of my knowledge no singular work has examined the qualitative dyadic perspective of both youth and their primary caregivers regarding neighborhood effects on youth violence.

**Study Research Questions**

The current study focuses on the following questions:

1. How do primary caregivers and their young adult child(ren) perceive the relationship between neighborhood-level social and structural factors and the witnessing, victimization and perpetration of youth violence? How do these primary caregivers and their young adult child(ren) describe the social processes by which these contextual factors influence the witnessing, victimization, and perpetration of youth violence?

2. Are the perspectives of primary caregivers and their young adult child(ren) about the extent to which neighborhood conditions influence youth violence congruent or incongruent?
Why Denver?

Many of the previous neighborhood effect studies were conducted in Chicago (Duneier, 1992; Klinenberg, 2002; Patillo-McCoy, 1999; Small & Feldman, 2012; Venkatesh, 2000; Wacquant & Wilson, 1989). Small and Feldman (2012) proposed that the next phase of neighborhood effects research should study under-explored cities, such as Denver, with the expectation that neighborhood conditions and mechanisms would vary across cities. Drawing from a natural experiment, this study employed data from individuals who resided in public housing operated by the City and County of Denver, Colorado.

Importance to Social Welfare Policy and Practice

Given the high prevalence of youth violence and its associated high social and economic costs, it is critical for social welfare researchers, practitioners, and policy makers to intervene in ways that can prevent and mitigate the negative effects of youth violence. The overarching purpose of violence prevention interventions is to stop youth violence before it starts. By making violence prevention a priority, communities may experience greater reductions in youth violence and reap greater economic and health benefits compared to communities that only concentrate on reacting to violence after it occurs (David-Ferdon & Simon, 2014). In order to design and deliver effective interventions, it is important that social welfare researchers and practitioners understand the complicated lives of today’s low-income, minority youth and target factors that place these youth at risk for being exposed to violence particularly within neighborhood settings. The best way of understanding the influence of the neighborhood is to talk to individuals who live there (Small & Feldman, 2012). By examining neighborhood-level
risk and protective factors from the perspectives of caregivers and their children, this study helps inform prevention and intervention efforts aimed at reducing the prevalence of youth violence caused by such neighborhood-level mechanisms. Knowledge of neighborhood risk and protective factors and the mechanisms behind these purported effects is important for crafting policies that affect how people are organized across neighborhoods and for providing strategies to help community improve their capacity to prevent youth violence (Ludwig et al., 2013).

This study helps inform the field regarding the dynamic interaction between person and environment. Evidence of protective factors which facilitate youths’ reduced exposure to violence may direct social welfare practitioners to establish policies and practices that will reinforce and maintain these protective factors. For example, if recreation centers are perceived as protective in reducing youth participation in violent activities, then implications suggest establishing new or strengthening existing neighborhood organizations and underscore the importance of public spending and private investment in these impoverished areas. Similarly, identifying the neighborhood features that place youth at risk of being exposed to violence can inform social welfare practitioners of new avenues to reduce their interaction with such factors, and help youth develop skills to resolve conflicts in a nonviolent manner. Overall, policy decisions need to be made with the intent of developing communities where all youths can live in a safe environment, free of violence, and allotted an opportunity to realize a rewarding adult life. As Galster (2012) stated: “...it is risky for policy-makers to naively observe a correlation between neighborhood indicators and individual outcomes of interest and design programmatic strategies as if neighborhoods were a ‘black box’. At best,
inefficiencies and, at worse, negative unforeseen consequences, are all too likely to follow in these circumstances” (p. 18). Therefore, it is important to include youths in addition to their families in the process of identifying community-level protective and risk factors as well as in policy decision-making (Visser et al., 2015a).

In general, changing broad community conditions (e.g., youth violence) is quite challenging. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the processes through which community contextual risks are transmitted to individual residents. Understanding these processes may be informative for prevention programs by identifying more malleable points of intervention (Lamont, Van Horn, & Hawkins, 2014). By understanding the ways in which social mechanisms are developed and operate can serve as a means to comprehensively address the issue of youth violence.

Conclusion

The qualitative nature of the study further extends the current knowledge base generated by predominantly cross-sectional studies in the field of neighborhood effects and youth violence research. The current study seeks to generate new knowledge about the neighborhood contextual factors linked to youth violence and the associated underlining social mechanisms. The relationship between neighborhood-level factors and urban youth violence is largely recognized in the literature; however, the specific mechanisms underlying its relationship are often unclear (Small & Feldman, 2012; Yonas, O'Campo, Burke, & Gielen, 2007). Research on environmental influences has largely failed to specify in any detail the causal mechanisms that link social contexts with violence and pathways to violence. Therefore, it is difficult to determine empirically whether a specific neighborhood attribute or set of attributes contributed to youth
violence (Smith & Voorhees, 2014). More qualitative studies are needed in order to better understand the processes underlying macro-level variation in youth violence (Small & Feldman, 2012). This qualitative study contributes to this gap in the literature by offering a more nuanced descriptive explanation of the ways in which neighborhood contexts influence youth violence as experienced by low-income Latino and African American youth and young adults.

Chapter 2 reviews the theoretical frameworks that have been advanced to explain how neighborhood contexts impact youth violence. This chapter begins by reviewing social disorganization theory and then discusses the evolution of the model. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the empirical studies that examine the relationship between neighborhoods and youth violence. This chapter summarizes what we know regarding the social mechanisms posited to mediate the relationship between residence in disadvantaged neighborhoods and youth violence. Chapter 4 describes in detail the data that were used to address the research questions posed in the study. This chapter provides a detailed description of the sample used in this study as well as an overview of the constructivist grounded theory approach that was used to analyze the data. This chapter also discusses the qualitative analysis software analytical tools that were used to examine each of the research questions. Chapter 5 presents the findings for each research question and also presents five substantive-level theories to explain the social processes by which neighborhood conditions influence youth violence. Chapter 6 summarizes the study findings and places them in the context of the larger neighborhood effects literature as well as presents study implications for policy and practice. This chapter also discusses the
study limitations and explicates how this study met the requirements for credibility as a constructivist grounded theory study.
Chapter 2: Theories of Youth Violence

Introduction

The role of neighborhoods has been an enduring part of understanding how the social context influences youth violence. There is no single unifying theory of neighborhood effects that explains the linkage between contextual factors and youth violence, rather multiple perspectives exist (McNeeley & Wilcox, 2015). The previous literature identifies a number of potential mechanisms operating at the neighborhood level to produce youth violence including eight processes that will be the focus of this review: (1) social ties/networks (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993c; McCarty, 2013; Taylor, 1997; Warner, 2010); (2) informal social control (Greenberg, Rohe, & Williams, 1982; Kornhauser, 1978; Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003; Warner, 2014); (3) collective efficacy (Sampson, 1997a, 2012; Sampson et al., 1997); (4) social norms (Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991; Ellen & Turner, 1997; Henry, Gorman-Smith, Schoeny, & Tolan, 2014; Wilson, 2009); (5) social contagion (Crane, 1991; Furstenberg & Hughes, 1997; Gephart, 1997; Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000); (6) exposure to violence (Buka, Stichick, Birdthistle, & Earls, 2001; Skogan, 1986{Buka, 1996 #973); (7) physical surroundings (Haegerich et al., 2013; Perkins & Taylor, 1996; Wei, Hipwell, Pardini, Beyers, & Loeber, 2005; Yonas et al., 2007); and (8) local institutional resources (Elliott, Dupéré, & Leventhal, 2015; Gottfredson, Cross, & Soule, 2007; Gottfredson, Gerstenblith, Soule, Womer, & Lu, 2004; Leventhal, Dupere, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009; Richards et al., 2014).
This chapter first traces the theoretical origins supporting these neighborhood-level mechanisms. I begin this chapter by describing the development of arguably the most influential criminological theory, social disorganization theory. Following, I discuss how theoretical limitations led to the dismissal of the theory from criminological discourse and the subsequent reemergence of individual-level theories used to explain youth violence during the 1970s. The theory was later revived in the 1980s as William Julius Wilson’s (1987) publication catapulted concerns about neighborhood disadvantage and its relationship to youth violence back into the scholarly discourse. Starting with Wilson’s efforts, various scholars reformulated the theory and validated its relevance in explaining the association between variations in youth crime rates across communities. Next, I describe eight salient neighborhood mechanisms derived from social disorganization theory and how they are germane to understanding the linkage between neighborhood conditions and youth violence. This chapter concludes by identifying the theoretical gaps in our current knowledge about how neighborhood contexts influence youth violence and explains how this study will contribute to existing theory.

Historical Development of Social Disorganization Theory

The study of neighborhoods and its effects on youth violence emanated from research conducted by the Chicago School of Sociology. In the early 20th century, the city of Chicago grew exponentially due to increased urbanization, industrialization and immigration (Park, Burgess, & McKenzie, 1925). Scholars at the Chicago School of Sociology became increasingly interested in understanding how the city’s rapid growth affected social patterns in and around Chicago’s inner-city neighborhoods (Kubrin, 2009; Park et al., 1925). Starting in the early 1920s, Parks, Burgess and McKenzie (1925)
compared the growth of the city to ecological competition. Using concepts from plant ecology, they reasoned that cities grew through a process of continual expansion starting from their inner core (the downtown area) toward the outer areas (suburbs) in concentric circles. The authors hypothesized that individuals competed for scarce and desirable spaces. Their observations of the city formed the basis of Concentric Zone Theory (see Park, Burgess, & McKenzie, 1925, Chapter 2).

In their book, *The City* (1925), Parks, Burgess and McKenzie depicted the different sections of the Concentric Zone model. Zone one, the inner core, was referred to as the Central Business District (CBD), the city center or the downtown area. Factories, industries and businesses populated this zone (Park, Burgess, & McKenzie, 1925, Chapter 2). Moving away from the city center was Zone two. Impoverished newcomers, immigrants and poorer populations who were attracted to factory jobs and inexpensive housing quickly settled in this area (Cullen & Agnew, 2011). However, this area was not considered a desirable place to live because of its proximity to the industrial area. As the inner core grew, the expansion of the downtown area led to the deterioration of residential properties as people who could afford to do so moved farther away to escape the bustling city and left their homes uninhabited and unkempt. Consequently, individuals who could not afford to move to the suburbs stayed in the older run-down sections of the city that surrounded the central business district. This zone became known as the “zone in transition” or the slums since dilapidated buildings and poor housing conditions characterized it. Once groups adjusted to city life and accumulated more economic resources at their disposal, they left the zone in transition and moved progressively outward into increasingly expensive neighborhoods where better quality
housing was available. These outer zones were called the “zone of workingmen’s homes”, “residential zone”, and the “commuters’ zone”, respectively (see Park, Burgess, & McKenzie, 1925, Chapter 2).

Building on the work of their Chicago School predecessors, Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay used Concentric Zone theory and mapping techniques to trace trends in juvenile delinquency (Shaw & McKay, 1942). Shaw and McKay expanded on the model developed by Parks, Burgess and McKenzie (1925) by studying how the city’s growth patterns impacted juvenile delinquency. In their seminal study, *Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas* (1942), they used official arrest data to map the prevalence of juvenile delinquency throughout the metropolitan Chicago area. Shaw and McKay compiled a record of the home addresses of all male juveniles (ages 10-16 year old) referred to the Cook County Juvenile Court system in Chicago, Illinois during the period between of 1900 and 1930. From their study they noticed that delinquent behavior was related to the growth processes of the city since prevalence of delinquency was highest in the “zone of transition”, the inner core, and decreased as distance from the center of the city increased (Shaw & McKay, 1942, p. 156). Regardless of the racial or ethnic composition of the neighborhood, crime rates remained stable over time. As a result, Shaw and McKay posited that delinquency rates were a result of “delinquency-producing” features inherent in the neighborhood and not because of characteristics of the individuals who resided there (1942, p. 315). Consequently, Shaw and McKay rejected individual-level explanations of delinquency and focused instead on the social processes by which delinquent and criminal patterns of behavior were transmitted across generations in certain poor areas.
As part of their study, Shaw and McKay examined the economic and social characteristics of the neighborhood to better understand how the neighborhood contexts influence youth violence. They developed the following propositions, which formed the basis of social disorganization theory.

(1) Social control argument: Three structural factors—low economic status, ethnic heterogeneity, and residential mobility—collectively led to the disruption of local community’s social organization processes, which, in turn, weakened the community’s ability to control crime and subsequently accounted for variations in crime and delinquency rates.

(2) Criminal subculture argument: Areas of low-economic status were associated with a variety of norms and standards of behavior. Essentially, children in these areas were exposed to a wide variety of contradictory standards rather than a relatively consistent and conventional pattern.

Essentially, social disorganization theory offered an explanation of the effects of neighborhood characteristics on the capacity and ability of community residents to implement social control forces and maintain public norms (Sampson, 1985, 1987).

**Social control proposition.** Shaw and McKay systematically described the dimensions of disorganization and how each was criminogenic (Bursik, 1988; Bursik & Grasmick, 1993b). Throughout their investigation, they noticed that low-income areas brought low-income minority and immigrant groups together in close proximity. These individuals typically had little interest in maintaining long-term residence and were therefore characterized as residentially unstable. According to social disorganization theory, *residential turnover*, the frequency of residential movement into and out of the
community, inhibits the formation of social networks (Bursik, 1988; Kornhauser, 1978). As a result of the constant moving, residents do not invest in their community nor establish relationships with their neighbors since they are interested in transitioning out of the neighborhood as soon as it becomes economically feasible. Further, when local social networks are in a continuous state of flux, it becomes difficult to develop and maintain relationships that produce informal structures of social control (Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974). If residents are not connected, they are less likely to intercede in criminal events that involve strangers and are reluctant to assume responsibility for the welfare of property or people of whom they barely know (Bursik, 1999; Shaw & McKay, 1942). Essentially, residential turnover prohibits the community from forming the type of strong bonds needed to collectively control neighborhood crime levels.

In addition to residential turnover, racial/ethnic heterogeneity – the diversity of races, cultures, and language – obstructs the community’s ability to work together on common problems and increases social disorganization because people are less trusting of others who are of a different race or ethnic group (Bursik, 1988; Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003). Racial and ethnic heterogeneity decreases the degree to which relational networks span across the various subgroups residing in a community since mutual distrust often exists among these groups (Bursik, 1988; Merry, 1981; Shaw & McKay, 1942). Cultural differences between racial groups, language incompatibility, and the fact that individuals prefer members of their own group to members of different groups are some of the main reasons why racial heterogeneity limits the ability to establish strong connections among neighbors (Blau & Schwartz, 1984; Gans, 1968). Therefore, interactions between neighbors of diverse racial or ethnic groups will be low, thus limiting the ability to agree
on a shared set of values, reach common goals, or solve community problems including those related to crime (Bursik, 1988; Kornhauser, 1978). As a result of heterogeneous neighborhoods, individuals are less likely to look out for one another and will not take an interest in their neighbor’s activities.

Likewise, Shaw and McKay viewed the economic level of a community as a major determinant of variation in rates of delinquency (Smith & Jarjoura, 1988). The researchers measured community economic levels by examining the percentage of families on relief, the median number of rentals, and the prevalence of home ownership. Shaw and McKay (1942) reasoned that poor communities lacked adequate resources to defend their collective interests and maintain social control. Shaw and McKay argued that neighborhood poverty, the constant turnover of people moving in and out of the community and self-segregation of ethnic groups collectively inhibited the neighborhood’s capacity to organize socially, and weakened the community’s ability to control crime and other problem behaviors. As the community’s concern for the collective environment and its capacity to monitor and control behavior decreases, crime increases (Smith & Jarjoura, 1988). On the other hand, residents of cohesive communities, characterized by greater agreement on normative rules, are better able to control teenage behaviors and decrease the level of community violence.

Criminal subculture proposition. Shaw and McKay also noticed there was a correlation between crime rates and the community’s social values regarding crime. In low-crime areas they found more uniformity to conventional values and attitudes regarding standards of behavior and more conformity to existing laws. Further, in areas with low rates of delinquency there were subtle, but noticeable, pressure exerted upon
children to keep them engaged in conventional activities (e.g., constructive leisure-time activities) and the community also provided consistent resistance towards behaviors that were unlawful (1942, p. 171). Shaw and McKay acknowledged that not all activities participated in by community members in low-crime areas were lawful but most unlawful pursuits were carried out in other parts of the city. Therefore, children residing in low-crime rate areas were insulated from “direct contact with these deviant forms of adult behavior” (1942, p. 171). Further, the community’s shared attitudes and values towards social control were supported by the presence of institutions and voluntary associations (e.g., parent-teacher associations, women’s clubs, service clubs, churches, neighborhood centers) that served to uphold these values. Overall, youth residing in these communities were exposed to a common mode of life (e.g., conventional social values and conformity to the law) and alternative forms of living were not integral parts of the communities in which they live.

On the other hand, in areas with high delinquency rates there was a wider diversity in norms and standards of behavior, which ranged from behaviors that abided by the laws to behaviors that were unlawful. The presence of adult criminal gang members engaged in theft and marketing stolen goods symbolized the community’s tolerance for deviant values (1942, p. 171). Typically, youth in these areas were exposed to two conflicting systems of opportunities for employment and for promotion. Evidence of success in the criminal world was indicated by the presence of adults possessing certain types of clothing and vehicles. Within these communities, some might define theft as right and proper whereas others would define theft as immoral, improper and undesirable by others. For instance, someone might be found guilty in court for delinquency, which
represents the values of the larger society, but might also earn tacit approval in the community in which he or she resided. Therefore, children in these communities were exposed to a variety of contradictory standards rather than to relatively consistent and conventional norms of behavior. Shaw and McKay posited that delinquency “derives its impelling force in a boy’s life from the fact that it provides a means of securing economic gain, prestige, and other human satisfactions and is embodied in delinquent groups and criminal organizations, many of which have great influence, power and prestige” (Shaw & McKay, 1942, p. 312).

Additionally, inner-city delinquent youth typically had intimate personal relationships with adults who committed crimes whereas in other sections of the city these negative influences entered children’s experiences through more impersonal forms of contact such as movies, the newspaper and the radio. Shaw and McKay (1942) reasoned that the heavy concentration of delinquency in certain areas year after year indicated that youth in these areas had constant contact not only with other delinquents but also with older offenders who, in turn, had contact with delinquents preceding them, and this cycle dated back to the earliest history of the neighborhood (p. 174). Therefore, the subculture of delinquency was transmitted down through successive generations of youth in a pattern similar to the way language, roles, attitudes and other cultural traditions were exchanged across generations.

According to McCarty (2013), Shaw and McKay (1942) reasoned that poor, constantly changing and ethnically heterogeneous neighborhoods lacked the capacity to share common ideas and achieve goals. Residents in these communities had a difficult time establishing social networks, instilling norms for acceptable and unacceptable
behavior, and lacked the fortitude to instill informal social control mechanisms (McCarty, 2013). Collectively, these factors created an environment that was conducive to high levels of delinquency and crime.

**Theoretical Limitations**

Social disorganization theory was a prominent model for explaining variations in youth crime across cities and a central component of American criminology (Pratt & Cullen, 2005). Social disorganization theory inspired many scholars to move beyond individual-level explanations of crime to focus more on how social context was an influential factor in the prevalence of youth violence (Bursik, 1988; Kornhauser, 1978; Sampson & Groves, 1989; Wilson, 1987). Unfortunately, important shortcomings made it difficult to test its validity, which consequently led to its temporary dismissal during the 1970s (Bursik, 1988, 1999; Bursik & Grasmick, 1993a). The following section provides an overview of these limitations.

A common criticism of this perspective is that Shaw and McKay did not explicitly define the concept social disorganization (Bursik, 1988; Kornhauser, 1978). Rather, they described the social and economic characteristics of high-crime areas that prohibited residents from maintaining order and social control but they failed to define the construct. As a result, researchers struggled with how best to define and measure the concept of social disorganization (Bursik, 1988; Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003; Sun, Triplett, & Gainey, 2004). The lack of a clear definition led to some critical misunderstandings of the central assumptions of the model (Bursik, 1988). In particular, a misguided assumption of the theory was that low-income, predominately African-American neighborhoods were high-crime areas (Blau & Blau, 1982; Bursik & Grasmick, 1993a; Hsieh & Pugh, 1993).
Second, there were conceptualization and operationalization problems inherent in social disorganization theory. Conceptually, Shaw and McKay did not clearly differentiate the presumed outcome of social disorganization (i.e., youth delinquency) from disorganization itself (Bursik, 1988; Kubrin, 2009). Essentially, delinquency rates were both an example of disorganization and something caused by disorganization (Lander, 1954). Furthermore, they did not clearly explain the causal linkage between social disorganization and delinquency (Bursik, 1988). As a result, social disorganization theory became an exercise in circular reasoning and many found it difficult to test let alone accept its validity (for reviews see Kornhauser, 1978; Pratt & Cullen, 2005). This problem was further compounded by the fact that researchers were unable to directly measure this concept and incorporate it into their model and therefore, could only make educated guesses about its effects (for reviews see Bursik, 1988; Kornhauser, 1978; Kubrin, 2009).

Third, scholars could not measure social disorganization directly because they could not estimate the extent to which community members were socially integrated nor measure their ability to informally control the conduct of wayward youth with available data (Bursik, 1988; Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003). Indicators for many of the structural elements thought to cause social disorganization, such as poverty and residential mobility, were routinely collected in U. S. Census. However, indicators of social disorganization, such as social cohesion, social networks, organizational participation, were missing from standard administrative data sources since the government typically collects little information on the socializing properties of residents (Cullen & Agnew, 2011; Reiss, 1986). Therefore, limited access to these data restricted scholars from
accurately measuring neighborhood-level social processes to better understand what was happening locally. In addition, the lack of community-specific data left scholars without the ability to directly measure the intervening mechanisms. Thus, in an effort to test social disorganization theory, researchers mainly focused on how poverty and other neighborhood structural characteristics contributed to crime rates within a community (Blau & Blau, 1982; Bursik & Webb, 1982; Sampson, 1985; Simcha-Fagan & Schwartz, 1986).

Fourth, many data sources reflected the incongruence between government and official definitions of neighborhoods and community members’ perceptions of the geographical boundaries that define their neighborhoods (Santiago & Galster, 2014). Resident perceptions of neighborhood boundaries typically represented significantly smaller geographical areas than census tract levels of geography (Coulton, Chan, & Mikelbank, 2011; Galster & Santiago, 2006; Santiago & Galster, 2014). Shaw and McKay originally developed the theory to explain differences in delinquency rates across neighborhoods. However, initial studies of social disorganization relied on census data, which aggregated crime statistics to the city or standard metropolitan statistical area levels. As a result, social processes that existed at the neighborhood block level (e.g., sharing of information and resources amongst neighbors; social cohesion; social norms etc) could be masked by aggregation to these higher levels (Hannan & Burstein, 1974; Robinson, 2009).

Related to the availability of data, Shaw and McKay measured the crime rates using police data. Critics of the theory recognized that there might be a significant degree of community-specific bias within police departments (Bursik, 1988), meaning that some
neighborhoods are more likely to be “over-policed” than others. Therefore, policing practices may vary across neighborhoods and official rates represent a mixture of differentials in neighborhood behavior patterns, neighborhood propensity to report behavior, and neighborhood-specific police orientations (Kubrin, 2009). Using self-report data, in which information is collected about a variety of behaviors, may provide more information than police or court referral data, which usually report information only from the offense (or for the most serious of the offenses) for which an individual was arrested (Esbensen et al., 2010).

A final critique of the theory underscored the fact that neighborhoods were not necessarily completely disorganized, chaotic or dysfunctional. What might look like social disorganization from the outside may actually be an intricate pattern of internal organization (Whyte, 1943; Wilson, 1987). Whyte (1943) conducted extensive fieldwork and observed patterns of social ties embedded within the social structure of the low-income community of Boston’s North End and realized that there were organized gangs and an integration of illegal markets within the routines of everyday life. A critique of Shaw and McKay’s theory focused on the emphasis on disorganization or dysfunction in the neighborhoods while completely neglecting the level of organization that existed within these communities (Whyte, 1943).

The Evolution of the Social Disorganization Framework

During the 1970s, social disorganization theory lost its appeal among researchers studying the association between neighborhood contexts and youth violence (Cullen & Agnew, 2011). Instead, scholars reverted to individual-level theories to explain youth violence. These theories attempted to identify characteristics that differentiated criminals
from non-criminals such as biological characteristics, personality traits, mental health status or level of intelligence (Akers, 1998; Pratt & Cullen, 2005; Siegel, 2000). However, social disorganization theory experienced a revival during the 1980s as researchers recognized that earlier shortcomings in the theory could be resolved by reframing the concept of social disorganization. This reframing shifted the conversation back to the political and economic issues plaguing disadvantaged communities (Blau & Blau, 1982; Bursik, 1986a, 1986b; Kornhauser, 1978; Sampson & Groves, 1989; Wilson, 1987). The notion of disorganized communities seemed relevant again as Wilson (1987) drew attention to the deteriorating conditions of inner-city neighborhoods that were often plagued by rising violence and the growth of the “underclass”.

In addition to Wilson’s pivotal work, Ruth Kornhauser (1978) also was instrumental in reviving the theory. She believed that Shaw and McKay presented a mixed-model for explaining delinquency (McNeeley & Wilcox, 2015). According to Kornhauser (1978), Shaw and McKay’s model proposed two main sources of delinquency – lack of social control and cultural deviance. Further, their model posited that structural conditions in the “transitional” neighborhoods prohibited the creation of shared values necessary for effective informal social control, which, in turn, allowed for the development of a subculture of delinquency to form and to flourish. However, Kornhauser reasoned that social control was the most important mechanism linking neighborhood structural characteristics to youth delinquency. She reasoned that within communities with conventional norms, there might be a subgroup of people who held deviant values. However, this subgroup would only be able to dominate the larger culture if there was a lack of social control (Browning, Feinberg, & Dietz, 2004). Cultural
deviance could not exist without first having weak social control. Kornhauser removed the delinquent subculture aspect of the theory and instead focused solely on the element of social control. She defined social disorganization as the “inability of local communities to realize the common values of their residents or solve commonly experienced problems” (Kornhauser, 1978, p. 63).

Kornhauser’s reformulation of social disorganization theory became known as the systemic model of social disorganization which was a “pure” community-level control theory of delinquency (McNeeley & Wilcox, 2015). Kornhauser’s pivotal contribution (1978) shifted the neighborhood effects discourse toward examination of the intervening variables of social ties and informal control. This redefinition of social disorganization theory fueled its rebirth and made it much easier to conceptually differentiate social disorganization from the ecological processes that make internal self-regulation problematic as well as from the rates of crime and delinquency that result (Bursik, 1988; Bursik & Grasmick, 1993a).

Explanatory Models: Linking Neighborhood Contexts to Youth Violence

Reformulation of the theory coupled with advances in statistical analysis (e.g., hierarchical linear modeling, propensity score matching, instrumental variable analysis) and refinement of survey approaches to data collection all helped researchers move beyond studying crude estimations of neighborhood-level characteristics and toward studying community-level social processes (Bursik, 1988, 2004; Bursik & Grasmick, 1993b; Kornhauser, 1978; Pratt & Cullen, 2005; Sampson et al., 2002; Wilson, 1987). As social disorganization theory came to the forefront of criminological discussions, researchers began to examine specific types of mechanisms for explaining why social
disorganization was related to youth violence (Bellair, 1997; Browning & Cagney, 2002; Sampson & Groves, 1989).

As the articulation of neighborhood mechanisms burgeoned, various theoretical processes were proposed to explain the relationships between neighborhood contexts and youth violence (Galster, 2012; Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Sampson, 2012; Sampson et al., 2002). The most frequently studied mechanisms used to explain these linkages between neighborhood contexts and youth violence can be organized into three main categories following Galster’s (2012) organizational framework: social-interactive, environmental, and institutional mechanisms. The following section will briefly describe each of these categories.

**Social-Interactive Mechanisms**

According to Galster’s framework, *social interactive mechanisms* refer to the type of interaction and community sharing processes that are endogenous to the neighborhood (Galster, 2012, p. 2; Sampson 2012). These mechanisms capture the type of relationships established amongst residents, actions used to mitigate community programs and behavioral and cultural influences of community members. The social interactive mechanisms that are often cited as important in the linkage between neighborhood contexts and youth violence are social ties, informal social control, collective efficacy, social norms, and social contagion. I describe each of these mechanisms below.

**Social ties and networks.** One of the most prominent mechanisms that have been mentioned throughout the neighborhood effects and youth violence literature has been the concept of social ties and networks. Beginning with the reformulation of the theory by Kornhauser (1978), *social ties* have been defined as a system of friendship and kinship
networks established among residents within the same community (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993c). These social ties are considered to be the foundation of informal social control because they provide a way for sharing values and fortifying support for those values (McCarty, 2013; Warner, 2010). Therefore, neighborhoods with stronger social ties have the ability to come together to solve common problems, supervise neighborhood youth and subsequently decrease youth violence (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993c; McCarty, 2013; Warner, 2010).

Bursik and Grasmick (1993b) further characterized the types of ties that exist within communities that facilitate social control. They described three levels of social ties (private, parochial, and public) and how each might affect a neighborhood’s ability to control youth violence. The first level of social ties is a private tie. Private social ties consist of intimate relationships between family members and extremely close friends. Members of these ties can provide control through caring support and the threat of withdrawing that support (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993c; McCarty, 2013). The second or intermediate level of social ties is a parochial level tie. Parochial ties are linkages between neighborhood residents. In general, these ties can provide control by reacting strongly to displays of inappropriate behavior or reacting positively to displays of appropriate behavior. The third level of social ties is a public social tie. Public social ties link neighborhoods to outside actors such as the police, city officials, or other neighborhood organizations (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993c; Taylor, 1997). Public ties are typically the most distant level of social ties, in both proximity and intimacy. These ties can help a neighborhood secure services and resources that are essential in establishing control within the neighborhood (e.g., stronger police presence). Essentially, strong social
ties among residents help establish cohesive communities where conventional values are shared and maintained. If relationships at the private, parochial and public level are severed or strained, the ability of the community to activate social controls is inhibited and crime, delinquency and other social maladies are often the result (McCarty, 2013).

**Informal social control.** Informal social control is defined as the ability of the community to prevent, sanction or regulate the behavior of others (Sampson, 2012). Examples of informal social control consist of questioning individuals about suspicious activity, admonishing individuals who are misbehaving, and informing parents about their children’s misconduct (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003). Informal social control refers to the behaviors residents engage in to control inappropriate public behaviors in order to prevent conditions that are conducive to engaging in crime (Warner, 2014). Strong social ties among neighbors are instrumental for establishing informal social controls and decreasing community-level crime.

**Collective efficacy.** Sampson, Morenoff and Earls (1999) expanded the definition of social ties by explaining that ties are only important in terms of their resource potential. Social ties assist in fostering social control, but it is the expectations, willingness and working trust among residents to take action and intervene in solving problems that create social control. Sampson and colleagues (1999) further reasoned that social ties alone cannot impact crime if residents are not willing to enact methods of informal social control when a social norm or law is violated. The ability and willingness of neighbors to intervene on behalf of children may depend, in large part, on conditions of mutual trust and shared expectations among residents (Sampson et al., 1999).
Sampson’s construct of collective efficacy captures the linkage between mutual trust, solidarity (e.g., social cohesion), and the shared willingness to intervene for the common good (Sampson, 1997a, 2012; Sampson et al., 1997). Collective efficacy is not simply being organized and having close ties, but rather it is a dynamic process of activating or converting social ties to achieve desired outcomes (Sampson et al., 1999). Theoretically, communities with weak collective efficacy lack the closeness and trust to mobilize as a group and control their communities to get rid of troublemakers and disorder. Conversely, communities with strong collective efficacy are able to personally confront people, form crime watch groups, and if necessary, exert political pressure and get the police involved to help them solve their community problems related to youth violence (Sampson, 2006). The construct of collective efficacy supports Shaw and McKay’s theory that strong community bonds can suppress disorder while communities weakened by structural problems will be fertile soil for the growth of crime (Cullen & Agnew, 2011).

**Social norms.** Social norms are defined as shared beliefs about expected or acceptable behavior and attitudes (Henry, Gorman-Smith, Schoeny, & Tolan, 2014). The ability of social norms to influence behavior is one of the most enduring findings in sociology and criminology (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Sherif, 1936). Social norms are shaped by neighborhood structural characteristics and reinforced by residents through collective socialization practices (e.g., adult role models; community subcultures) (Wilson, 2009b). Social norms are formed and established once a minimum threshold or a critical mass of neighbors exhibit and display certain values, attitudes and behaviors that they collectively consider to be acceptable. Youth learn what behaviors are
acceptable from the adults they encounter in the community (Ellen & Turner, 1997). Adults serve as role models for what young people can aspire to become. The collective presence of adults in the community to monitor and support children’s activities is critical (Ellen & Turner, 1997). Adults’ actions and words communicate values about the importance of civility.

There are two types of social norms—descriptive or injunctive. Descriptive norms are typical behaviors that are not enforced through coercion. These norms, also known as informational social influences, involves people adjusting their behavior after observing the behavior of others – residents littering because they see other people littering and think it is acceptable for their community (Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Henry et al., 2014). In fact, Massey and colleagues found that high concentration of individuals who approve of deviant behavior makes it more likely that children will be socialized into violence or crime (Massey & Denton, 1993; Massey, Gross, & Eggers, 1991).

Injunctive norms or normative social influences are standards of acceptable behavior that are collectively enforced by community members (Cialdini et al., 1991; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). For example, residents may confront and ask a neighbor to cut their glass weekly due to having a shared belief lawn should be properly maintained at all times. Overall, social norms influence the behavior of youth by reinforcing acceptable behavior or sanctioning behaviors that do not align with the larger community’s beliefs or values.

**Social contagion.** The neighborhood mechanism of social contagion describes the process by which negative behaviors of peer or neighbors strongly influences or spreads
to others (Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). According to the social contagion model articulated by Crane (1991), peer influence is considered an intervening construct that mediates the relationship between neighborhood characteristics and youth violence. Peer influence occurs when individuals acquire attitudes and behaviors conducive to delinquency by associating with others already involved in delinquency (Akers, 1998). Theoretically, peer influence involves the processes of social learning through imitating behavior of peers, deviancy training (e.g., learning of skills), or intense peer pressure. Consequently, children who associate with street-orientated peers are at a higher risk of developing deviant behaviors because they either learn or mimic the behaviors of others thinking they are acceptable forms of behaving because they are pressured into engaging in them. Association with delinquent peers increases the risk of serious delinquency, violence and later involvement in criminal activities (Dahlberg & Potter, 2001; Ferguson & Meehan, 2010; Hawkins et al., 2000; Stoddard et al., 2013). In the absence of relationships with conventional peers, children involved in these encapsulated groups do not acquire the social and interpersonal skills that would allow them to function in mainstream settings (Crane, 1991; Furstenberg & Hughes, 1997; Gephart, 1997).

Youth residing in disadvantaged communities typically engage in fewer organized activities than youth from more affluent settings and subsequently spend more time in unsupervised activities with peers (Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Edler, & Sameroff, 1999; Mrug & Windle, 2009). The amount of unsupervised time spend with peers has been related to youth violence, particularly in unsafe neighborhoods (Coley, Morris, & Hernandez, 2004; Mrug & Windle, 2009; Pettit, Bates, Dodge, & Meece, 1999). It is
suggested that weakened social controls and low levels of collective efficacy enable higher levels of youth violence because residents will not attempt to stop such behaviors from occurring or escalating (Anderson, 1999; Mrug & Windle, 2009; Sampson, 1992).

Negative behaviors of peers influence or spread to the behavior of others as a result of a lack of formal and informal social control mechanisms (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Anderson (1999) underscored this point by acknowledging that when local social controls were weak, disadvantaged youth had greater opportunities to engage in violence and to become involved with violent peers who perceived violence as highly rewarding. In this case, friendship networks served as a “vehicle for perpetuating delinquent traditions” (Empey, 1982, p. 192). In contrast, youth living in communities with high degrees of informal social control were more likely to experience greater supervision and reduced opportunities for deviant peer group formation that attracted new participants (Osgood & Anderson, 2004).

Environmental Mechanisms

Larger structural forces in the overall metropolitan area that are external to the neighborhood but have an influence of its residents are categorized as environmental mechanisms (Galster, 2012). Several types of environmental mechanisms have been presented in the extant literature to have this effect on youth violence—exposure to violence and physical surroundings.

Exposure to violence. When exploring the effects of exposure to violence (ETV), many authors have considered the effects of direct exposure (e.g., victimization or perpetration) and indirect exposure (e.g., witnessing) on rates of youth violence (Buka et al., 2001; Martin, Gordon, & Kupersmidt, 1995; Osofsky, Wewers, Hann, & Fick, 1993;
Direct exposure or victimization is defined as intentional acts initiated by another person to cause harm (Richters & Martinez, 1993). Examples include being chased, threatened, beaten up, robbed, mugged, raped, shot, stabbed or killed.

There is less agreement regarding the definition of indirect exposure to violence or witnessing. It is presumed that being an eyewitness to an event that involves violence, death, injury or even the threat to the physical integrity of another person is considered witnessing violence (Shakoor & Chalmers, 1991). Others have included hearing violent events (e.g., gun shots, screams) take place (Campbell & Schwarz, 1996), witnessing property damage (Lai, 1999), having knowledge of another’s victimization or hearing about violent events through community gossip (Bell & Jenkins, 1993; Richters & Saltzman, 1990). Buka and colleagues (2001) used a three-tier classification system to organize the levels of violence—primary refers to direct victimization; secondary refers to violence seen or heard; and tertiary refers to learning of violent death, serious harm or threat of death or injury from others. Witnessing crimes or personally knowing people who have been victimized may significantly affect children’s outlooks leading them to see the world as fundamentally violent, dangerous, and unjust (Ellen & Turner, 1997). If young people constantly see property damage or vandalism in their community, they may be more inclined to believe there is nothing wrong with engaging in violent acts like breaking windows or spraying graffiti (Ellen & Turner, 1997).

Exposure to violence also affects level of community violence by creating fear amongst the neighbors. Skogan (1989) argues that neighborhood crime creates a level of fear among the residents. In turn, high levels of fear create social disorganization as
reflected by (a) physical and psychological withdrawal from community life; (b) the weakening of the informal social control processes that inhibit crime and disorder; and (c) a decline in mobilization capacity of the neighborhood (Jensen, 2003). Consequently, increased levels of social disorganization led to higher levels of crime and victimization.

**Physical surroundings.** Galster (2012, pp. 2-3) describes the social mechanism of physical surroundings as “decayed physical conditions of the built environment (e.g., deteriorated structures and public infrastructure, litter, graffiti, abandoned cars) which may impact psychological effects on residents, such as a sense of powerlessness”. Physical signs of neighborhood disorder are considered to be direct reflections of residents’ inability or unwillingness to collectively prevent, manage or improve undesired neighborhood activities (Wei, Hipwell, Pardini, Beyers, & Loeber, 2005). Higher levels of physical disorder – measured by signs of litter, graffiti, beer and liquor bottles, cigarette butts, broken glass, abandoned cars, volume of traffic, land use and street patterns and conditions – have been associated with increased levels of crime and firearm injuries/homicides.

Community residents perceive urban decay—vacant housing, trash mismanagement and inadequate street lighting—as signs of residential incivility and opportunities for illicit drug selling and hiding firearms and subsequently increasing opportunities for offending and leading to a devaluing of people in the neighborhood (Haegerich et al., 2013; Yonas et al., 2007). Social and physical signs of incivility not only inspire resident fear but it also may contribute to neighborhood decline. If incivilities are not controlled, residents will begin to witness more social problems in the locale and lose confidence in their neighborhood and in law enforcement’s ability to
prevent or control open displays of disorder (Perkins & Taylor, 1996). As resident fear and avoidance of certain areas increase, informal social control weakens. Consequently, incivility proliferates which then attracts criminals from surrounding communities and the downward spiral becomes self-reinforcing (Skogan, 1990). Skogan (1990) posited that social incivility or disorder (e.g., deteriorating housing, uncollected trash, rowdy teens, public drunkenness, panhandlers, abandoned autos and visible drug use) was associated with bringing about more serious forms of crime.

**Institutional Mechanisms**

**Local institutional resources.** According to Galster’s framework (2012, p. 3), institutional mechanisms reflect organized social and recreational activities that parents and youth can utilize in order to promote children’s healthy development. Examples of such resources include libraries, schools, non-profit and civic community-based organizations, childcare centers, art and theater programs, parks, sports programs, organized social and recreation activities and family support centers. Access to and availability of institutional resources play an integral role in shaping adolescents’ daily activities and in facilitating exposure to pro-social peers and adults as opposed to deviant peers (Gottfredson, Gerstenblith, Soule, Womer, & Lu, 2004). When these community-level resources are not available, youth may spend more time in unstructured settings and activities with deviant peers. Further, delinquency rates tend to be highest during the after-school hours between 2 pm and 6 pm (Elliott, Dupéré, & Leventhal, 2015). This also reflects the time when parents may not be home and available to supervise their youth. Adolescents living in disadvantaged neighborhoods may not utilize after-school programs, either due to their nonexistence in their communities or because they are of
low quality (Leventhal, Dupere, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009). Youth who are unsupervised, who do not have structured activities to keep them occupied, and are not exposed to pro-social peers and adults through organized programming are more likely than their program-involved peers to engage in risky or youth behaviors (Gottfredson, Cross, & Soule, 2007). The quality, quantity and diversity of available institutional resources constitute an important component in the linkage between neighborhood quality and youth violence (Sampson, 2012).

The existence of neighborhood-level organizations and centers provide resources to families and children, particularly for after-school activities when children are typically left unattended and unsupervised. These organizations can provide positive outlets for youth and lower their risks of being involved in illegal or violent activities. However, the presence of community organizations is not the same as the gauging the level of civic participation. Most studies have measured the presence of neighborhood institutions but failed to measure the level of actual participation in them and the nature of networks that are formed. More recent research has begun to examine the links between organizational density, civic membership in organizations, and the ability to mobilize for action (Sampson, 2011).

Local resources often provide structured activities for youth. In general, these activities have been voluntary and involved regularly scheduled meetings where youth have certain expectations and rules to adhere to while developing or achieving particular skills or goals under the supervision and guidance of adults (Mahoney, Larson, Eccles, & Lord, 2005). Unstructured or unsupervised activities during afterschool hours have been
linked to more delinquency for youth from environments of high levels of danger (Bohnert, Richards, Kohl, & Randall, 2009; Richards et al., 2014).

**Conclusion**

While current scholarship is not conclusive in determining which social mechanisms are most salient nor in clearly explicating how they operate, it suggests that several neighborhood mechanisms mentioned above might be operative and that different mechanisms may have varying salience across different groups and across different neighborhood settings which influence prevalence of youth violence (Burdick-Will & Ludwig, 2013; Clampet-Lundquist, Edin, Kling, & Duncan, 2011; Dietz, 2002; Ellen & Turner, 2003; Galster, 2012; Galster, Andersson, & Musterd, 2010; Sampson et al., 2002; Van Kempen, 1997). There may be both positive and negative synergisms operating among the various causal processes for any given neighborhood context (Galster, Santiago, & Lucero, 2014). However, these models do not explicitly identify how or under which circumstances does neighborhood contexts contribute to youth violence rather they permit researchers to hypothesize which of several mechanisms may be operating with limited specification of actual processes (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Also, it could be the case that multiple complementary or contradictory mechanisms could be operating simultaneously in the same social setting.

This current study examines the confluence of neighborhood mechanisms that may operate to influence youth violence. This study uses a qualitative approach to understanding the social mechanisms underlying the association between disadvantaged neighborhoods and youth violence. By using the first-hand experiences of low-income children and their primary caregivers, this study assesses and evaluates how
neighborhood contexts influence youth violence and provides additional details regarding the ways in which these mechanisms operate.
Chapter 3: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter synthesizes the findings from recent studies that examine neighborhood social and institutional processes related to youth violence. This review is limited to studies that focus on how neighborhood contexts influence the victimization, witnessing and perpetration of youth violence (e.g., fighting, hitting, slapping, punching and physical assault).\(^1\)\(^2\) This review of neighborhood studies is organized thematically by type of neighborhood intervening process examined (e.g., peer affiliation, informal social control, collective efficacy, etc.). I also present a critique of the literature, paying special attention to the methodological challenges and major limitations associated with the extant neighborhood effects and youth violence literatures. I conclude with a summary of the gaps in the literature and situate the present study within the context of the larger literature as well as identify the methodological issues to be addressed in the current study.

Mechanisms Linking Neighborhood Contexts to Youth Violence

Previous studies have documented significant relationships between residence in

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\(^1\) Throughout the literature youth violence has been classified in terms of externalizing behaviors, problem behaviors, aggressive behaviors and conduct disorders. I will focus on the literature that conceptualizes and measures youth violence in a manner that is similar to the definition of youth violence used in this study (e.g., hitting slapping, punching, physical fighting). This review will not focus on crimes (e.g., robbery, arrests) committed by youth or young adults.

\(^2\) Although family violence has been identified in the literature as a significant causal factor for youth violence, this review is limited to empirical studies that examine neighborhood-level causal factors (e.g., deviant peer groups, exposure to violence, etc.).
disadvantaged neighborhoods (e.g., characterized by concentrated disadvantage, poverty, residential instability, low rates of home ownership, percentage of single-parent households, etc.) and youth violence (for reviews see Bursik & Grasmick, 1993a, 1993c; Bursik & Webb, 1982; Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000, 2011; Pratt & Cullen, 2005; Sampson, 1985; Sampson et al., 2002; Wilson, 1987). Collectively, these studies have shown that children living in disadvantaged communities have a higher risk of engaging in youth violence compared to their counterparts in more affluent communities. Further, Pratt and Cullen (2005) conducted a meta-analysis in which they reviewed over 200 empirical studies published from 1960 to 1999 and found evidence that indicate measures of residential mobility, concentrated disadvantage, and racial heterogeneity were the best macro-level predictors of youth violence.

As the study of the association between neighborhoods and youth violence evolved, researchers attempted to explain the mechanisms through which community structural characteristics influenced youth violence independent of individual-level characteristics (Bellair, 1997; Markowitz et al., 2001; Morenoff et al., 2001; Sampson, 2006; Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999; Taylor & Covington, 1993). Unlike socio-demographic compositional factors (e.g., race, class, position), research about social mechanisms has provided accounts of how neighborhoods influence youth violence (Wikström & Sampson, 2003). This review will focus on the intervening mechanisms (e.g., neighborhood social processes) that link these disadvantaged neighborhoods to youth violence.

Following Wilson’s book (1987), and Sampson and Grove’s publication (1989), the neighborhood effects literature grew exponentially (Pratt & Cullen, 2005; Sampson et
Existing empirical research studies can be grouped according to the type of neighborhood social process identified in the study. In reviewing the existing empirical literature, I have identified five distinct neighborhood-level mechanisms through which neighborhood conditions may influence youth violence – deviant peer affiliation; informal social control and collective efficacy; exposure to violence; local institutional resources; and physical surroundings. This next section will highlight studies that assessed the effects of these mechanisms using correlational (non-experimental) studies, mediation models, experimental studies (mobility studies), and qualitative studies.

**Peer influence on youth violence.** Association with deviant peers has been one of the most consistent and well-established predictors of youth violence (Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce, & Radosevich, 1979; Elliott, Huizinga, & Ageton, 1985; Elliott & Menard, 1996; Haynie & Osgood, 2005). Thrasher (1927) introduced the concept of deviant peers into the discussion regarding neighborhood effects on youth perpetrating violence when he introduced the notion that youths committed violence in groups. Although the study of peer groups entered the neighborhood effects discourse to exam gang membership and affiliation, researchers have examined the concept to understand how associating with deviant peers influences youth involvement in violent activities beyond gang-related violence (Ary, Duncan, Duncan, & Hops, 1999; Brook, Brook, Rubenstone, Zhang, & Saar, 2011; Haynie & Osgood, 2005). Overall, association with deviant peers has been shown to increase adolescent risk of serious delinquency, violence, and involvement in criminal activity (Dahlberg & Potter, 2001; Ferguson & Meehan, 2010). In addition, youth residing in neighborhoods with lower social control
and social cohesion had more deviant friends and engaged in high levels of problem behaviors (Brody et al., 2001; Rankin & Quane, 2002).

Negative peer influence has been measured using either youth’s estimates of the proportion of their friends involved in illegal activities (Elliott et al., 1996) or neighborhood residents’ reports of how common it was for groups of teenagers to hang out in public and cause trouble (Sampson, 1997b; Sampson & Groves, 1989) or assessed parent’s estimates of the extent to which their children’s friends were positive influences or get into trouble (Simons, Johnson, Beaman, Conger, & Whitbeck, 1996). Although the operationalization of the deviant peers construct has varied across studies, overall these studies have found that deviant peers plays a significant intervening role in the relationship between neighborhood economic disadvantage and youth violence. For instance, Cantillion (2006) used three items to assess youth’s affiliation with delinquent peers. Using a scale from 1 (none of them) to 5 (all of them), youth indicated how many of their friends engaged in the following delinquent activities: breaking into buildings; selling drug and using marijuana. Then, Cantillion (2006) conducted a path analysis and noticed that delinquent peer affiliation was strongly associated with self-reported rates of delinquency (stealing, attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting him or her).

Haynie et al (2006) used a direct network-based measure of peer behavior to examine exposure to peer networks as a mediator of the relationship between neighborhood context and youth violence. Using a sample of more than 12,000 adolescents, they conducted interviews with adolescents, their friends and their parents at school and in the youth’s home. Each respondent was asked to identify up to ten of his or her closest friends from a school roster. Haynie and colleagues (2006) constructed a
measure of the deviant peer network by directly measuring the friend’s involvement in fights. Participants were asked to self-report their involvement with fights using a scale from 0 (never) to 4 (more than seven times). Results from their study indicated that neighborhood disadvantage and residential turnover was associated with greater exposure to friends who fight. Additionally, exposure to peer fighting was associated with youth’s subsequent participation in serious violence (e.g., pulled a knife or gun on someone, shot or stabbed someone, used a weapon in a fight, hurt someone badly enough to need bandages or care from a doctor or nurse). Specifically, for each standard deviation increase in exposure to peer violence there was a 29% increase in the odds of participating in youth violence.

Maimon and Browning (2010) used a nine-item scale to measure the presence and quantity of adolescent’s deviant peers. The authors used a scale ranging from 1 (none) to 4 (all) to respond to the following items: how many of the people you spend time with have been involved in behaviors such as “damaging property,” “attacking someone with a weapon,” and “using drugs”. Results from the study indicated that unstructured socializing with peer groups increased youth violence. More specifically, a one standard deviation increase in an adolescent’s unstructured socializing with peers increased the likelihood of engaging in youth violence by 37 percent.

The aforementioned studies suggest that disadvantaged neighborhoods with low levels of social cohesion and social control create environments where youth have a greater chance of interacting with deviant peers. Further, this association with deviant peer groups is correlated with increased levels of youth violence. Theoretically, deviant peers can influence other youth to participate in delinquent activities by using peer
pressure to change an individual’s positive or neutral attitude to one that is negative, or deviancy training, in which peers establish social norms that encourage the use of violence towards others (Laird, Jordan, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 2001; Patterson, Dishion, & Yoerger, 2000). However, the studies that examined the mediation effects of peer affiliation did not capture the process by which peers influence youth behavior. It is still unknown if peer pressure or deviancy training or any other process is the method by which peers influence other youth’s behavior.

**Informal social control and youth violence.** Informal social control refers to the behaviors used by community residents themselves to sanction, monitor and regulate undesirable public behavior (Greenberg, Rohe, & Williams, 1982; Kornhauser, 1978; Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003; Warner, 2014). Shaw and McKay (1942) argued that the association between neighborhood structural characteristics and youth violence existed because informal social control efforts were weak in disadvantaged neighborhoods. There have been numerous empirical studies that support this theoretical perspective (Bellair, 1997; Sampson & Groves, 1989).

Elliott and colleagues (1996) conducted a multilevel analysis using data from 50 Chicago tracts and 30 block groups in Denver to examine the relationship between social control and delinquency. Their measure of social control included the following items: mutual respect, institutional controls, neighborhood bonding and perceived informal control. Results reveal that informal control was negatively related to adolescent problem behavior in both cities. They also found that informal control played a mediating role between neighborhood disadvantage and delinquency in which informal control accounted for 60% of the variance in problem behavior in neighborhoods in Chicago.
while it only accounted for 26% of the variance in problem behavior in Denver neighborhoods. Part of the reason why the two cities differed in the effects on informal social control on problem behaviors was because the samples differed in demographic makeup. The Chicago sample consisted of African Americans whereas the Denver sample consisted of White, Black and Latino populations (Elliott, et al., 1996). The level of neighborhood disadvantage (measured by census indexes of poverty, mobility, family structure, and ethnic diversity) significantly influenced the level of perceived informal control where higher levels of neighborhood disadvantage were associated with lower levels of informal control. The variance in the level of informal social control explained by neighborhood disadvantage was high in the Denver sample and moderate in the Chicago sample. The Chicago sample had a higher level of racial/ethnic diversity and thus a higher level of neighborhood disadvantage and consequently, lower levels of informal control.

Similar results were found in a study conducted by Sampson, Raudenbush and Earls (1997). Sampson and colleagues (1997) measured informal social control using a five-item Likert scale. Using data from the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN), residents were asked about the likelihood that their neighbors could be counted on to intervene in various ways if: (a) children were skipping school and hanging out on a street corner; (b) children were painting graffiti on a local building; (c) children were showing disrespect to an adult; (d) a fight broke out in front of their house; and (e) the fire station closest to their home was threatened with budget cuts. In their study Sampson et al. (1997) evaluated the effects of informal social control on youth delinquency (gang fights, graffiti). They found that informal social control mediated 50%
of the effect of residential stability on youth violence. After controlling for the effect of prior levels of crime in the neighborhood, they found informal social control to be a significant inhibitor of adolescent misbehavior. Therefore they concluded that informal social control was a significant factor in reducing the prevalence of youth delinquency and violence.

Informal social control also has been linked to partially mediating the negative effect of residential instability on youth fighting and weapon carrying (Haegerich et al., 2013). Using longitudinal data from a sample of 1,111 youth (12-17 years of age) living in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area, Haegerich and colleagues (2013) reported youth living in neighborhoods with higher levels of informal social control were less likely to engage in a fight and were less likely to carry a weapon in subsequent years. More specifically, for each unit increase in the willingness of neighborhood residents to intervene, there was a 17% decrease in the likelihood of youth engaging in physical fights and a 27% decrease in the likelihood of youth fighting over time.

**Exposure to violence.** Exposure to violence refers to direct and indirect exposure to violent events. Direct exposure to violence is defined as victimization while indirect exposure to violence refers to hearing violence (e.g., gun shots, screams) or learning about violent events from other people (Buka, Selner-O'Hagan, Kindlon, & Earls, 1996). Overall, empirical studies have shown that acts of violence are considered more likely to occur in poverty-ridden areas (Friday, 1995; Sampson et al., 1997). In fact, rates of violence exposure for young children, particularly disadvantaged children, were between 42% and 78% (Schechter & Willheim, 2009). On average, youth in low-income, high crime areas are exposed to approximately one violent incident per day (Richards, et al.,
The types of violence experienced by youth ranges from witnessing people dealing drugs, being arrested, or getting robbed to seeing people threatening others and hiding from shootings. Further, youth residing in areas with greater exposure to violence and illicit drug selling were more likely to carry weapons (Haegerich et al., 2013).

Greater exposure to violence is associated with higher rates of victimization, witnessing and engaging in violent activities. For instance, Buka and colleagues (1996) examined the relationship between exposure to violence and violent offending (e.g., hitting a family or non-family member; attacking someone with a weapon; being in a gang fight; throwing objects at someone or sexually assaulting someone). The researchers interviewed 80 individuals between the ages of 9 and 24 from mid-September through early November of 1995. Results indicated that individuals who reported committing at least one violent event had significantly higher mean ETV measures during the prior year as well as over their lifetime compared to those who reported no violent offending. In addition, violent offenders were 3.5 times more likely to have been seriously threatened during their lifetime and almost 10 times more likely to have been seriously threatened during the previous year. Violent offenders were also three times more likely to have seen a shooting during the prior year.

In a longitudinal study on urban youth, Browning and colleagues (2014) found that both boys and girls who experienced exposure to life-threatening violence scored significantly higher on externalizing symptoms (e.g., hitting, fighting, physically violent) compared to youth who had not experienced any such exposure. In addition, Antunes and colleagues (2015) noticed that youth living in neighborhoods where concentrated disadvantage was pervasive, experienced greater exposure to violence and also reported
committing more acts of violence during the prior year. A one standard deviation increase in exposure to violence was associated with 29% higher odds of getting involved in violent activities.

**Local institutional resources.** The presence of quality neighborhood institutions has been posited to promote positive individual outcomes (Elliott et al., 2015). Local institutional resources include community-level organizations, such as child care service, schools, businesses, libraries, recreation centers and non-profit organizations that provide enriching, educational or physical health resources to community members. The quality, availability, accessibility, and affordability of different types of community resources were posited to influence healthy development by providing an alternative environment outside the home and school. Typically, organizations and services designed to promote physical and socio-emotional well-being that target young people and adults have been associated with curbing youths’ desire to engage in violent activities (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2001) and decreasing youth aggressive behavior (Molnar, Cerda, Roberts, & Buka, 2008).

Empirical measures of local institutional resources have been limited to the mere presence of neighborhood institutions based on survey reports (Coulton, Korbin, & Su, 1999; Elliott et al., 1996) and archival records (Peterson et al., 2000). Few studies have used surveys to capture levels of participation in neighborhood organizations (Morenoff et al., 2001; Veysey & Messner, 1999). Taylor and colleagues (1984) constructed block-level measures of the proportion of respondents in 63 Baltimore neighborhoods who belonged to an organization to which their fellow neighbors also belonged. They found that organization participation was significantly and negatively related to rates of
violence when controlling for ecological factors. Likewise, Simcha-Fagaan and Schwartz (1986) studied 553 residents from 12 neighborhoods in NYC and noticed that there was a significantly negative relationship between rates of self-reported delinquency and rates of organization participation by local residents. Organization participation can lead to the decrease in community levels of crime by facilitating the development of social networks among residents which may later help increase levels of informal social control and collectively efficacy and reduce the prevalence of crime (Veysey & Messner, 1999).

Haynie and colleagues (2006) reported that increased involvement of residents in groups and organizations lowered youth participation in violence. Children residing in more disadvantaged neighborhoods typically engage in fewer organized activities than youth from more affluent settings, and consequently spend more time in unsupervised activities with peers (Furstenberg et al., 1999). Unfortunately, many poor communities lack high-quality community services that are instrumental to the healthy development of local youth. Some parents living in disadvantaged communities that lack high-quality resources may seek to obtain quality resources for their children by using services in other communities (Jarrett, 1999). Unfortunately, children of parents who do not try or are not successful in connecting them to such resources may be restricted to a limited number of poor-quality local resources.

**Physical surroundings.** Physical surroundings were considered to be an important neighborhood mechanism in explaining neighborhood effects on youth violence because in general, disorder has been considered a direct reflection of residents’ inability or unwillingness to collectively prevent, manage or improve undesired neighborhood activities (Wei et al., 2005). Decayed physical conditions of the
neighborhood area, which can impose psychological effects on residents, are considered to reflect the mechanism of physical surroundings (Galster, 2012). Visible signs of community disorder, which include social disorder (e.g., public drug dealing, prostitution) and physical disorder (e.g., broken windows, poorly maintained parks) are typically used to measure the physical surroundings of a neighborhood (Sampson & Raudenbush, 2004).

Physical surroundings have been posited to indirectly influence levels of youth violence by creating fear amongst residents. A study conducted by Perkins and Taylor (1996) examined the effects of perceived physical, social and observed disorder on residential fear of crime. Using survey data collected from 412 Baltimore residents, systematic observation, archival data and the 1980 U. S Census, they found that perceived social and physical disorder was associated with higher levels of fear among residents. In addition, observed disorder was associated with higher levels of fear. Markowitz, Bellair, Liska and Liu (2001) found that disorder had an indirect effect on burglary through fear. They reasoned that disorder increases levels of fear, which leads to a reduction in social involvement and collective efficacy and subsequently facilitating higher levels of youth violence. In addition, some researchers have measured residents’ perception of neighborhood risk and its relationship to levels of crime (Griffin, Scheier, Botvin, Diaz, & Miller, 1999; Haegerich et al., 2013). They found that resident accounts of gang presence and their fear of danger or fear getting into trouble in the neighborhood was associated with higher levels of risk-taking behavior and physical aggression (Griffin et al., 1999; Haegerich et al., 2013).
Wei, Hipwell, Pardini, Beyers and Loeber (2005) assessed physical disorder using the physical disorder index (PDI), which consisted of five items: the presence or absence of graffiti; beer or liquor cans or bottles; cigarette butts; litter or broken glass; and abandoned cars. The PDI was significantly correlated with total crime, firearm related injuries and homicides when used on a sample of residents from the city of Pittsburgh. Neighborhoods with high levels of physical disorder were 2.5 times more likely to experience crime, including firearm-related homicides, even after controlling for neighborhood poverty and minority concentration.

**Experimental Studies Examining Neighborhood Effects**

The majority of neighborhood effects studies examining the links between neighborhood context and youth violence used non-experimental correlation study designs, which limits the ability to pinpoint causality. One of the first housing mobility programs was the Gautreaux residential mobility program. The Gautreaux Program was created as a result of a 1976 Supreme Court decision that mandated the desegregation of Chicago’s public housing projects (Fauth, Leventhal, & Brooks-Gunn, 2007). This program allowed low-income public housing residents in Chicago to receive Section 8 housing vouchers to move into private sector apartments located in either mostly white suburbs or the city (Rubinowitz & Rosenbaum, 2000). From 1976 to 1998, more than 7,000 families participated in the program. Results from the program showed significant improvements in the educational and employment opportunities for low-income African-American families that moved to one of Chicago’s mostly white suburbs (Rosenbaum, 1995). The families that moved to the suburbs were more likely to graduate from high school, attend college or four-year universities and to have jobs with better pay and
benefits (Rosenbaum, 1995). Overall, the results of this study illustrated the significance of neighborhood contexts and demonstrated that families from high-poverty neighborhoods are able to can take advantage and benefit from opportunities provided by residence in more affluent neighborhoods (DeLuca, Duncan, Keels, & Mendenhall, 2012). The Gautreaux residential mobility program results inspired the conceptualization and implementation of the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) study (Duncan & Zuberi, 2006).

The Moving To Opportunity demonstration was an experimental, housing mobility study that was designed to examine neighborhood effects using a random sample of low-income residents living across five US cities – Baltimore, New York City, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles. The U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development implemented the MTO demonstration in the mid-1990s with the purpose of creating an experimental-design for examining neighborhood effects and to assess whether children in families who moved from inner-city, high poverty areas to low-poverty areas experienced improvements in youth violence outcomes. Families were randomly assigned to one of three groups—experimental, Section 8, and control. The experimental group received housing vouchers, counseling, and assistance with relocating to neighborhoods with less than 10% poverty. Families in the Section 8 group were provided with a housing subsidy, which enabled them to choose and rent a unit in the private market. This group also received conventional Section 8 counseling and was allowed to relocate to any neighborhood of their choice. Lastly, the control group consisted of families who received no special assistance under the Moving To Opportunity program (Ludwig, Duncan, & Hirschfield, 2001). Although these families did not receive vouchers through
MTO, they continued to be eligible for project-based housing assistance and other social programs and services to which they would otherwise be entitled.

Over time, the results of the study were contradictory (Briggs, Comey, & Weismann, 2010; Kling, Liebman, & Katz, 2007; Orr et al., 2003). Following the first two years after relocation, male and female youth in the experimental group and Section 8 group experienced 30 to 43% fewer behavioral problems (e.g., bullying; disobedience) compared to their counterparts in the control group (Katz, Kling, & Liebman, 2001; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2001; Ludwig et al., 2001; Rosenbaum & Harris, 2001). However, follow-up data which assessed participant outcomes four to seven years after randomization indicated that males in the experimental group scored 20 percent higher on the problem behavior index compared to their counterparts in the control group (Kling, Ludwig, & Katz, 2005). Contrary to the results for males, female youth assigned to the experimental group reported lower levels of behavioral problems and delinquency compared to control group girls (Kling & Liebman, 2004; Orr et al., 2003). Results from the MTO study suggested that the impacts of moving to less dangerous and distressed neighborhoods on youth behavior might be more complex than the previous empirical literature reported (Small & Feldman, 2012, p. 62). Although the results indicated that neighborhood influence on criminal behavior followed a pattern predicted by most theoretical and non-experimental empirical studies for female youth, the impact of the program was more complicated for male youth (Kling et al., 2005).

Subsequent qualitative studies of MTO program participants illuminated some of the mechanisms that might help explain the neighborhood dynamics associated with these gender differences (Clampet-Lundquist et al., 2011). Using a sample of 86 MTO teens
aged 14-19 from the Baltimore and Chicago sites, Clampet-Lundquist and colleagues (2011) found that experimental girls were more likely than any of the other groups to spend a significant amount of their leisure time in the neighborhoods of their school or work friends. When girls were in their neighborhoods, they either stayed in the house or spent time on their front porches or stoops. Their patterns of socialization typically placed them in settings where there was some adult supervision. The authors posited that the differences in where these girls spent their leisure time put them at less risk compared to their male counterparts. They also found that experimental boys were more likely than any other group to experience contact with the police or experience police harassment. Based on youths’ stories, neighbors in their new communities called the police frequently over concerns about their safety. This meant that boys were more subject to public surveillance, including by the police. Therefore, they argued that girls fit in better with the norms and expectations of their new communities in ways that drew less police surveillance. Findings from their qualitative study also indicated that experimental boys who later moved back to the city were less savvy in navigating the neighborhood when compared to boys in the control group. Control group boys had an advantage over the experimental movers because they had always lived in these high-crime areas, they had detailed knowledge of their neighborhoods including the heavy drug or crime infested areas, and they were more selective about their friends. Since experimental boys did not have an adequate chance to develop and hone these skills, they were more likely to hang out with delinquent peers than any other program group (DeLuca, Duncan, Keels & Mendenhall, 2012). The surprisingly inconsistent results from the MTO study prompted debate among scholars regarding the “future direction of the neighborhood effects
literature and over whether studying the influence of neighborhood contexts remained a viable research agenda” (Small & Feldman, 2012, p. 57).

**Qualitative Studies on Neighborhoods and Youth Violence**

Qualitative studies are important for understanding neighborhood effects because they provide unique perspectives of the social problem by offering vividly detailed portraits of neighborhood life and social interactions which cannot be explored to the same extent using quantitative data alone (Ellen & Turner, 1997). Qualitative studies examining youth exposure to and participation in violence have provided accounts of the time of day they were exposed to certain forms of violence and the number of violent acts they witnessed in a single day (Richards, et al., 2014).

Previous qualitative studies exploring the linkages between disadvantaged neighborhoods and youth involvement in violent activities mainly described individuals’ attitudes and motivations for participating in these acts as opposed to providing a description of the neighborhood social processes that contributed to their engagement in youth violence (Anderson, 1978, 1999; Contreras, 2013; Farrell et al., 2008; Johnson, Frattaroli, Wright, Pearson-Fields, & Cheng, 2004; Quinn, Bell-Ellison, Loomis, & Tucci, 2007; Rich & Stone, 1996; Simon & Burns, 1997; Sullivan, 1989; Whyte, 1993). For instance, in *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City*, Anderson (1999) used participant-observation and conducted in-depth interviews to better understand why so many inner-city young people were inclined to commit aggression and violence towards one another.

In addition to exploring youths’ motivation for engaging in violence, other studies have documented resident perceptions of their neighborhood (e.g., perception of physical
and social disorder), the mediating role of parenting practices and resident concerns and fears of becoming victims (Jarrett, 1997; Visser, Bolt, & van Kempen, 2015b). These studies highlighted the various parenting practices used in order to shield youth from community violence such as keeping children in the house during after-school hours and on weekends or sending their children to spend time in a relative’s neighborhood that was usually safer and quiet.

Instead of interviewing youth and their families, one study in particular interviewed 16 prominent neighborhood individuals (e.g., pastors, program coordinators, unemployed parents and drug dealers) to better understand the relationship between social and structural neighborhood-level factors and youth violence (Yonas et al., 2007). This study found employment opportunities, vacant and dilapidated housing, and local business, trash management and street lighting to be important risk factors for youth violence. Similarly, a qualitative study conducted among youth from a neighborhood in Toronto, Canada identified the lack of recreation spaces, lack of positive role models, racial discrimination, and lack of opportunities to access post-secondary education as the primary causes of violence (Dlamini, Anucha & Lovell, 2015). Although these studies have identified neighborhood risk factors, they did not further explain the causal mechanisms underlining the relationship between these contextual factors and youth violence.

Overall, the qualitative literature suggested that youth have a comprehensive understanding of what constitutes violence and provided insight on how they handled violence in their community. However, there is a growing consensus that more qualitative studies are needed in order to more fully understand the relationships between
neighborhood contexts, youth violence and the social processes underlying these relationships (Small & Feldman, 2012).

**Gaps in the Literature**

Although the extant literature has demonstrated the association between neighborhood contexts and youth violence, there are some key methodological challenges and gaps within the literature. First, obtaining precise measures of neighborhood mechanisms has been a major challenge (Dietz, 2002; Duncan & Raudenbush, 1999; Ellen & Turner, 2003; Friedrichs, Galster, & Musterd, 2003; Galster & Santiago, 2006). The lack of consistency in the ways in which neighborhood social and institutional processes are operationalized and theoretically situated in sociological research makes it difficult to draw conclusions and deliver consistent messages regarding the importance of certain neighborhood mechanisms (Sampson, 2006). My review of this literature found little consistency across studies in the ways in which neighborhood social and intuitional processes were operationalized or theoretically situated.

In addition, the majority of neighborhood effects studies have been quantitative in nature and do not capture the voices of youths or parents and their interpretations of how neighborhood conditions might influence their exposure to youth violence (Small & Feldman, 2012). Thus, little is known about how neighborhood effects operate from a qualitative perspective. Understanding how individuals perceive their neighborhood settings and their impact on youth violence is fundamental to understanding neighborhoods as an influential contexts (Nicotera, 2007, 2008). Quantitative data can help identify important variables, frequencies and patterns derived from statistical associations whereas the related qualitative data helps illuminate in greater detail the
social processes and meanings embedded in these statistical relationships. Although statistical results can assist with distinguishing between some of the alternative causal mechanisms, it is thought that much more in-depth, qualitative analyses are required (Small & Feldman, 2012; van Ham & Manley, 2012; van Ham et al., 2012, 2013). This is particularly important because many studies have relied on adult proxies, such as the perceptions of parents, teachers or other professionals, to measure the experiences of youth (see reviews by Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2001; Visser et al., 2015a). These proxy accounts of how neighborhood contexts impact youth may or may not be accurate (Witherspoon & Ennett, 2011, p. 1245). As youth become more autonomous as they get older, they have the ability to explore more of their neighborhoods and form their own neighborhood experiences (Brody et al., 2001; Burton, Price-Spratlen, & Spencer, 1997). Youth play an active role in choosing and shaping their neighborhood settings by participating in neighborhood organizations, interacting with certain peer groups, and avoiding others. Therefore, adolescents and adult reports of neighborhood characteristics may be dissimilar (Allison et al., 1999; Fagg, Curtis, Clark, Congdon, & Stansfeld, 2008; O'Neill, Parke, & McDowell, 2001).

Although children are often the target population in research on neighborhood effects, their perspectives and experiences have occupied a “peripheral place” in the literature (Nicotera, 2003). Further, across the existing neighborhood effects literature, youth have been generally viewed as passive “victims” of neighborhood contexts and over time their perceptions and experiences have been understudied (Witherspoon & Ennett, 2011). These studies fail to recognize that youth have a “critical understanding of their neighborhood” and can negotiate the impact their parents have on their temporal-
spatial behavior (e.g., the places they can explore and the times they can visit these places) (Visser et al., 2015a, p. 6). Additionally, individuals’ documentation of how they are affected by various aspects of their neighborhood environment on a day-to-day basis can cast new light on the casual mechanisms that might not be statistically discernible (Ellen & Turner, 1997).

Another critique of previous studies was the use of official data to collect crime information and statistics. There are various reasons why crime is often underreported or overreported in certain neighborhoods. For instance, in predominately low-income, minority communities there is a higher level of police presence and therefore, the number of arrests may be attributed to the heightened police presence (Kubrin, 2009). The use of an outside interviewer creates an opportunity for interviewees to open up and feel comfortable about sharing their experiences with violence, especially if they feel their stories will not incriminate themselves or their close acquaintances. In an interview setting one is able to obtain additional information regarding the level of crime as experienced by the residents who live there.

**Study Overview and Purpose**

The next phase of neighborhood effects research underscores the need for qualitative research designs in which the researcher conducts open-ended interviews with people and organizations in urban neighborhoods (Small & Feldman, 2012, p. 68). These studies may help explain the results of prior studies or generate hypotheses for future research. Extant studies examining neighborhood characteristics have provided supporting evidence that neighborhoods matter. However, qualitative work will bring about a greater understanding regarding *why* neighborhoods matter and will also
highlight the processes that underlie specific neighborhood mechanisms (Small & Feldman, 2012; van Ham & Manley, 2012).

To decipher the slew of quantitative neighborhood effects findings is a difficult task “without deeply interviewing people in their neighborhoods and cities” (Small & Feldman, 2012, p. 69). The purpose of this study was to take a qualitative approach to examining resident perceptions about their neighborhoods and their impact on youth violence. The extant literature suggests that youth living in the same neighborhood can differ on their social outcomes which indicates that neighborhood effects are not as homogenous as some of the quantitative studies might lead us to believe (Furstenberg et al., 1999).

Previous research studies have identified a major limitation of these quantitative assessments – the reliance on accounts from adults, which may or may not be accurate. This study also takes a dyadic approach to examining neighborhood effects by interviewing young adult children as well as their primary caregivers to obtain a deeper understanding of neighborhood contexts and their influence. This current study examined the degree of congruence or incongruence of the perspectives of caregivers and their young adult children. The dyadic perspective allowed me to compare and contrast how primary caregivers and their young adult children experiences and perceptions of their neighborhoods. To date, there have not been any qualitative studies that specifically analyze how neighborhood contexts influence youth violence using this dyadic perspective of youth and their primary caregivers.

In total, extant studies examining the impact of neighborhood conditions on youth violence have not comprehensively utilized qualitative data to understand from the
perspectives of youth and their primary caregivers which neighborhood social processes are perceived to be salient and how they operate. Some researchers have included their interpretations as to what they saw and experienced while observing neighborhood activities or incorporated quotes from interviews with residents (Shuval et al., 2012; Yonas et al., 2007; Yonas, O'Campo, Burke, & Gielen, 2010). However, no prior study has explicitly asked residents if the neighborhood in which they lived influenced youth violence and how that process might transpire.

This current study takes a constructivist grounded theory approach to explaining the causal process by which neighborhood environments influence the development of youth violence. This approach to studying neighborhood effects will enhance our understanding of not only the mechanisms that are involved but also provide us with more in-depth evidence on how they might operate. Understanding how residents perceive their neighborhood settings and how these perceptions influence their exposure to youth violence is fundamental to understanding the neighborhood as an influential context (Nicotera, 2007, 2008).

Conclusion

Overall, this review of the literature has illustrated how social and organizational characteristics of neighborhoods explain variations in youth violence that are independent of the demographic characteristics of individuals (Sampson et al., 1997). The contradictory findings from the Moving to Opportunity Program in combination with prior studies examining neighborhood effects call for a coherent set of interpretations that require a strong grounding in qualitative research (Small & Feldman, 2012). Although a number of potential causal mechanisms have been found to link conditions of
neighborhood disadvantage to youth violence, these frameworks do not specify in any
detail exactly how these social mechanisms operate (Quillian, 2014; Wikström, 1998).
Therefore, it is still uncertain which neighborhood mechanisms dominate or are most
salient and why. The consensus in the field of neighborhood effects literature is that
additional theoretical and empirical work is needed before the processes underlying
macro-level variations in youth violence are fully understood.
Chapter 4: Research Methods

Introduction

The chapter begins with a description of the Denver Child Study (DCS), the study from which the data for this study were drawn. Following this description, I then discuss the data collection process and describe the data sample that was used in this study. Next, I present the constructivist grounded theory approach for coding and developing categories. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the analytic plan for dyadic analysis and an explication of the process for developing a theoretical framework from the categories that emerge from the data.

Study Description

To explore the proposed research questions, I used qualitative data derived from the Denver Child Study (Santiago et al., 2014). The DCS is a large-scale, mixed-methods study of current and former residents of the Denver (CO) Housing Authority (DHA) (N = 1,707 children and N = 711 families) (Santiago & Galster, 2012; Santiago et al., 2014). The central purpose of the DCS study was twofold: (1) to examine the relationship between multiple dimensions of neighborhood context and a variety of outcomes (e.g., physical and mental health, education, employment, risky behavior, exposure to violence and marriage and fertility) for Latino and African-American low-income children who resided in public housing for a substantial period during childhood; and (2) to better understand the causal mechanisms relative to how neighborhoods might cause these outcomes (2012, p. 1).

Participants for the Denver Child Study were recruited through a variety of methods including mail, phone and direct in-person canvassing efforts. Individuals were
eligible for the study if they identified as Latino or African-American parent or caregiver, aged 18 to 64 who had one or more children under the age of 18 residing in the home when they moved into DHA housing. In addition, participants had to have lived in DHA with one or more of their eligible children for at least two years. Finally, eligible participants had to have first entered DHA after January 1, 1987 when random assignment to Denver public housing units began.

The Denver Child Study consists of two major components. The first component was conducted between April 2006 and February 2008. During this timeframe, the researchers conducted a complex, retrospective survey to collect both quantitative and qualitative information from more than 700 households (Santiago et al., 2014, p. 16). To obtain more direct information about neighborhood effect mechanisms, the DCS conducted a second component in which they conducted one-time, in-depth interviews with a subset of DCS participants \( n = 34 \) and their young adult children \( n = 45 \) between August 2010 and February 2011 (Santiago & Galster, 2012, p. 5). Eligible DCS participants were recruited to participate in semi-structured, in-person retrospective qualitative interviews if (1) the primary caregiver indicated in the initial survey that their neighborhood posed either a positive or a negative influence on their children; and (2) there was at least two young adult children in the household aged 16 or older at the time of the interview. The caregiver and their young adult child(ren) both had to agree to participate in order to be eligible for the study (Santiago & Galster, 2012, p. 17-18).

Characteristics of study sample. The sample used in this study consists of the subsample of DCS participants who participated in the one-time semi-structured interviews between August 2010 and February 2011. The original sample consisted of 35
caregivers and 47 of their young adult children. The sample used in the analysis for this current study consisted of 34 caregivers and 45 young adult children ($n = 79$). One triad (e.g., a primary caregiver and two children) was eliminated from the final study sample because the primary caregiver responses were considered invalid since she referenced her adult children instead of her grandchildren who were the actual study participants.

The study sample consisted of 17 African-American families and 17 Latino families. Of the youth who participated in the study, 56% ($n = 25$) were Latino and 56% ($n = 25$) were females. The average age of the youth at the time of the interview was 22 years (range 16 to 32 years of age). Of the 34 primary caregivers who participated in the study, 27 were biological mothers (79%); three were grandmothers (9%); two were adoptive or stepmothers (6%); one was a biological father (3%); and one was an adoptive or stepfather (3%).

Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Caregiver ($n = 17$)</th>
<th>Youth ($n = 20$)</th>
<th>Primary Caregiver ($n = 17$)</th>
<th>Youth ($n = 25$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Data collection process.** One-time, retrospective semi-structured interviews were conducted separately with primary caregivers and their young adult children. Originally, focus groups were the planned method for collecting the qualitative data. However, once in the field, Santiago and colleagues recognized that the majority of the adult participants
were unwilling to participate in focus group sessions and felt uncomfortable with sharing information in these group settings. Therefore, Santiago and colleagues completed seven, small group interviews while the rest of the interviews were conducted in a one-on-one format with study participants (Santiago & Galster, 2012). The seven focus group interviews were conducted among thirteen youths and four caregivers. Individual interviews lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes and the focus group interviews were approximately 90 minutes in length.

Interviews were completed either over the phone or in-person in the family home or in a centrally located meeting room in the community (Santiago & Galster, 2012). For each interview, two trained project staff members completed the interviews with one person facilitating the interview discussion while the other person served as the recorder. Participants received a $25 Wal-Mart gift card for their participation. After the interviewer obtained informed consent, the participants were provided an overview of the purpose of the study and then preceded to complete the interview. All but three interviews were audio recorded. Audio recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and verified for accuracy and completeness by at least two project staff members. For all interviews conducted in Spanish, a native Spanish-speaker translated the transcript into English then back-translated the materials into Spanish per established study protocols.

**Description of instrumentation.** At the beginning of the interview, the interviewers confirmed the participant’s residential history for all of the places where the young adult lived during preschool, elementary, middle and high school (Santiago & Galster, 2012). This information was first collected in the residential history module during the original *Denver Child Study* interview and was reconfirmed during the second
phase of the study. This information was used in the interview to identify the activity spaces within the neighborhood that were frequently visited by the young adult children as recounted by the primary caregivers and young adults.

The overall purpose of the in-depth interviews was to have participants describe how various neighborhood conditions or environments might have influenced child development across six domains—physical and mental health; education; employment; exposure to violence; marriage and fertility; and risky behaviors. In addition, the interview sought to understand how these purported neighborhood effects might have been mitigated by parents, friends, relatives and institutions (Santiago & Galster, 2012, p. 5).

Using a semi-structured interview guide, the interviewers asked several open-ended questions to better understand participant perceptions about the neighborhood in which the young adult was raised and how these neighborhood contexts might have influenced the young adult’s physical and mental health, education, employment, exposure to violence, marriage and fertility, and risky behavioral outcomes for each developmental period of their life (e.g., preschool, elementary school, middle school, high school) (Santiago & Galster, 2012, p. 5). For each outcome, the interviewer asked the primary caregiver or the young adult to identify the specific aspects of their neighborhood that might have influenced a given outcome; at what point in their childhood did the context exert this effect; how exactly did the neighborhood affect them; and what, if anything, did parents, neighbors, institutions or other neighborhood resources do to either attenuate or enhance these effects of the neighborhood. More specifically, young adults were asked questions such as “When you were growing up, —
was there any aspect of your neighborhood that you think affected your behavior?” “How did the neighborhood affect you? How exactly did this play out?” “What did this mean to you?” Interviewers were trained to ask follow-up probing questions in order to gather rich, detailed descriptions regarding the influential factors within the neighborhood and the process(es) by which these contexts exerted said effects (Santiago & Galster, 2010; Santiago & Galster, 2012, p. 3-4).

The interview guides for the primary caregivers and the young adults paralleled each other. In their interviews, primary caregivers were asked how they felt about the way in which the neighborhoods in which their children were raised may have affected the child’s physical and mental health, education, employment opportunities, exposure to violence, marriage and fertility and risky behaviors (Santiago & Galster, 2012, p. 5). They also were asked about the developmental timing of these effects (e.g., preschool, elementary, middle, high school). To fully understand the potential causal mechanisms underlying these neighborhood effects, interviewers asked caregivers to explain how exactly the neighborhood influenced their children and about their response to these neighborhood influences. Further, they were asked whether they or other people or institutions within their community reinforced or buffered the influence of the neighborhood on their children. More specifically, primary caregivers were asked questions such as “When your child (you just named) was growing up, was there any aspect of your neighborhood that you think affected your child’s behavior?” “If yes, at what point in your child’s life did the neighborhood affect your child?” “[Probe if not volunteered about] How exactly did the neighborhood affect your child?” (Santiago & Galster, 2012). The interviewer focused on one particular outcome at a time, like
education or a risky behavior, and then discussed how the neighborhood might have influenced that particular outcome.

**Qualitative Methodological Approach – Constructivist Grounded Theory**

I analyzed the aforementioned interview transcripts using Kathy Charmaz’s (2006, 2014) constructivist grounded theory approach. Grounded theory was first introduced in 1967 by two researchers, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. During that time, inductive qualitative inquiry in sociology progressed from life histories and case studies towards the use of field research, ethnographic studies, and participant observations. However, the procedures for implementing such methodology was not theorized or clearly explicated and proponents of the method did not discuss in detail the methodology for conducting these types of field studies (Charmaz, 2014). Therefore, the actions employed by researchers while conducting fieldwork and upon exiting the field remained unclear. Further, the few published methodological texts available at that time emphasized gathering data and roles in the field rather than qualitative analytic strategies (Charmaz, 2014). Recognizing this gap in the field, Glaser and Strauss devised a method to systematically analyze qualitative inquiries, which they detailed in their publication *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (1967).

At that time, both Glaser and Strauss felt that there was a lack of literature that discussed the qualitative analytic strategies. Therefore, they developed systematic methodological strategies that researchers could implement when qualitatively studying social phenomena. Glaser and Strauss also noticed that theories used in research were often ill-suited for the participants in the study and therefore believed there was a need for theories that were “grounded” in the data collected from the field which specifically
accounted for the actions, interactions and social processes of people (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thus, the grounded theory approach provided a method for theory generation by interrelating categories of information based on data collected from individuals.

Instead of providing an exact description or picture of participants’ experiences, the central purpose of the grounded theory approach is to conceptualize the latent social processes that are embedded in the data (e.g., an interpretive depiction of the neighborhood social processes) (Charmaz, 2000, 2014; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012; Creswell, 2007, p. 63). The product of a grounded theory study is a substantive-level theory that explains a specific action, interaction or social process (Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The theory does not come “off the shelf” but is instead “grounded” in data and shaped by the views of a large number of participants who have experienced the process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Analyzing the perspectives of participants in the field generates an inductive model of theory development. Grounded theory is an appropriate approach to use when trying to further elaborate on existing theoretical frameworks or when a theory is not yet available to explain a process (Creswell, 2007, p. 66). Since the extant neighborhood effects literature had not clearly explicitated the processes by which neighborhood environments influence youth violence, a grounded theory approach is appropriate given the data and the intent of this study.

A more recent grounded theory perspective is that of Kathy Charmaz (1980; 2006; 2014). She introduced the constructivist grounded theory approach in 1980. The constructivist grounded theory approach to analyzing the interview transcripts provided a systematic method for developing conceptual categories, demonstrating relations among these categories and specifying the conditions under which these categories emerged,
changed or were maintained (Charmaz, 2014; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). Charmaz’s approach embodied the principles set forth by Glaser and Strauss (1967) (e.g., begin with inductive logic, data subject to comparative analysis, emergent development of codes, and aimed to developed theoretical analyses) but also placed an emphasis on the researcher’s role in the analysis process. Charmaz’s approach emphasized that the researcher makes decisions regarding which categories to develop, brings questions to the data, and also advances his/her personal values, experiences and priorities (Charmaz, 2014).

The analyst’s theoretical representation of the data is not an accurate rendering of the studied world but is rather a constructed rendering or an interpretive portrayal of the studied world (Charmaz, 2014, p. 17). According to Charmaz, “research participants’ implicit meanings, experiential views and researchers’ finished grounded theories are constructions of reality” (2014, p. 17). The analyst who constructs this reality is not a neutral observer or a value-free expert. Instead, the analyst brings certain perspectives to the research that is influenced by their position, privileges, values and interactions in the field (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13). Earlier variants of grounded theory failed to take into account this subjectivity that researchers brought to their studies. Therefore, the constructivist grounded theory approach as described by Charmaz (2006, 2014), enables the analyst to acknowledge their subjectivity by engaging in reflexivity and also provides a methodology for explicating the construction of categories and theoretical concepts, which are developed in the later stages of the method. The constructivist grounded theory approach used in this study is explained in greater detail in the following sections.
Plan for Data Analysis

All transcribed interviews were loaded into ATLAS.ti (version 7), a qualitative data management program designed to assist with coding and analysis (Friese, 2014). ATLAS.ti does not actually analyze data, it is simply a tool that supports the process of qualitative data analysis. ATLAS.ti enables the researcher to highlight, classify, code, sort and arrange text. Once loaded into the software, all transcripts were assigned to a central container file called a Hermeneutic Unit or HU for short. Once assigned to the HU, each transcription file became a primary document and contained the text for analysis. Once loaded into the HU, I organized the files into “primary document families” (P-Doc families). P-Doc families were used to group documents based on certain characteristics. For my analysis, I created P-Doc families based on participants’ demographic information – race/ethnicity, gender, and status as either primary caregiver or young adult participant. After I completed the coding process, I went back and assigned additional P-Doc families to label the type of neighborhood impact (e.g., positive, negative or no influence); the description of the neighborhood (e.g., violent or non-violent); and whether the young adult engaged in violent activities during childhood. The creation of P-Doc families allowed me to easily filter the data and helped me to conduct comparative analyses in the later stages of analysis. For instance, if I wanted to compare comments made by all Latino caregivers who felt that the neighborhood had a negative influence to comments made by all African-American caregivers who felt the same way, the P-Doc families could be used in the queries for this type of comparative analysis.
Analysis Process

Coding. Coding is the first analytic step that moves the researcher from description toward conceptualizing that description (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). Coding simply means that I attached labels to segments of the data to depict what each segment was about. During the coding process, grounded theorists emphasize what is happening in the scene and use words that reflect action, such as gerund-based phrases (e.g., action verbs ending in “-ing”) when creating codes. For instance, codes such as “avoiding neighborhood kids”, “carrying a weapon”, or “joining a gang” would be used as opposed to “avoid neighborhood kids”, “carry a weapon”, or “joined a gang”. According to Glaser (1978) coding with gerunds helps the researcher detect processes while also sticking closely to the data.

The general purpose of the coding process was to attach labels to segments of the text in order to describe, dissect and sort the data while preserving their essential properties (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012, p. 356). Codes emerge as one carefully scrutinizes the data and defines meanings within it. From this process, data were then rearranged to formulate a framework that focuses on three aspects of the phenomenon of neighborhood effects on youth violence: (1) the conditions of the neighborhood (e.g., neighborhood risk or protective factors); (2) the actions or interactions of people in response to what is happening in the situations; and (3) the consequences or results of the actions taken or inaction (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The process of coding helps define what is happening in the data and begins the analysis process. Throughout the coding process, the researcher moves beyond concrete statements in the data and attempts to make analytic sense of stories and statements (Charmaz, 2014, p. 111).
Constructivist grounded theory coding consists of two main phases: (1) an open-coding phase which involves assigning a conceptual label to each line or segment of data followed by a (2) focused coding phase that uses the most significant initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate and organize large amounts of data (Charmaz, 2006).

**Open coding.** In the open-coding phase, incident-by-incident coding was completed to inductively create labels for segments of the data that described occasions when the young adult child witnessed, was victimized, or perpetrated violent activities. I conducted open coding to look for descriptions of the neighborhood (e.g., neighborhood was ghetto; there were a lot of fights in the community; heard gun shots each night; lived next to a factory); description of the type of violence witnessed, victimized or perpetrated (e.g., shooting, fighting, etc.); the situation and circumstances surrounding these acts of violence; the consequences of such behaviors; and the type of influence the neighborhood had on youth violence. In addition, I coded incidents where participants mentioned their lack of involvement and active avoidance of violent activities. This allowed me to later compare the social processes that hindered some young adults or motivated others to participate in youth violence.

The codes created in open coding stuck closely to the data, showed actions and illustrated progress of events from the participant’s perspective (Charmaz, 2014, p. 112). Open codes were created inductively; I did not use predetermined codes during the open coding phase. Instead, I created open codes using my conceptual interpretation of the data or the actual words of the research participants also known as *in vivo* coding (Charmaz, 1983; Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 65). In-vivo coding techniques were used throughout this process in order to stay close to the data and capture the voices of the primary
caregivers and young adults as they described their experiences (Charmaz, 2014). In-vivo coding means that the investigator uses the exact words of the participant to form the names of the codes (Creswell, 2007; Friese, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 69).

The codes developed in the open coding phase are considered “provisional, comparative and grounded in the data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 48). According to Charmaz, (2006) these codes are provisional because they can be further developed, modified or even eliminated during the later stages of analysis. Codes in this stage are considered comparative because these codes will be compared with other codes and with other incidents to determine if they should be combined into higher-level codes (e.g., focused codes) or categories which typically have more explanatory and conceptual power. Further, these codes are considered grounded because during this stage in the coding process the codes are derived from the concepts used by study participants.

The general purpose of open coding is to use labels to separate the data into segments in order to identify processes (Charmaz, 2014). According to Charmaz (2014), there are several questions the researcher can ask oneself about the data to help focus on action and to identify significant social processes. These questions are as follows: “What processes are at issue here?” “How can I define them?” “How does the process develop?” “What does the research participant profess to think and feel while involved in this process?” “When, why, and how does the process change?” and “What are the consequences of the process?” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 127).

**Reorganizing the codebook.** ATLAS.ti automatically compiles a list of open codes into a file called a codebook. After I completed the open coding process with all of the transcripts, I organized my codebook to combine codes that appeared to have similar
meanings but different labels. For instance, codes such as “being afraid” and “felt afraid” were merged to a single code labeled “feeling afraid”. After I merged codes to create a condensed list of open codes, I then restructured the codebook by creating categories and subcategories for codes where necessary. Categories were used to group open codes. This categorization of codes moved the process to the conceptual level. During this step, the code list also was reviewed to look for certain themes. For instance, a category could be “Local Institutional Resources (LIR)”. Therefore, all of the open codes that were used to describe the type of resources used by youth, the situations surrounding their use of such resources, and the consequences of using those resources were grouped under the category “local institutional resources”. To structure the codebook, I added prefixes to the codes followed by a colon thereby sorting all subcategories under the same main category name. The use of prefixes also helped to organize the codebook. Since the software automatically organizes the codes alphabetically, the prefixes allowed the sub-codes to appear underneath the main code in the codebook. By editing the codebook, open codes were grouped into categories or latent concepts that were later used in the focused coding phase. The process of reorganizing the codebook also enabled me to study and compare my initial codes, choose the most telling open codes or even devise codes that subsume numerous initial codes (Friese, 2014).

Example. LOCAL INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCE (LIR)

LIR: Used the recreation center in the neighborhood

LIR: Boys and Girls Club

LIR: Could not afford to membership card

LIR: Help to avoid negative influences
LIR: Provided a positive environment

**Focused coding.** Upon completion of open coding and organizing the codebook, I went back through the interview transcripts and began to code and conceptualize the data as part of the focused coding phase. Focused coding means using the most significant or frequently reappearing initial codes to synthesize and explain social processes within the data (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). Focused coding involved closely studying and assessing my initial codes by examining the segments of data assigned to a particular code to identify recurrent social processes that cut across multiple interviews and to identify the properties and dimensions of that particular code. During this process, I treated the more significant initial codes (e.g., codes that were used most frequently) as tentative categories. Categories are used to explicate events or processes in the data and also form the conceptual elements in a theory (Charmaz, 2014, p. 189; Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 37). The reciprocal relation between coding data and creating analytic categories becomes more apparent in this phase as theoretical categories were developed from focused codes (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). In this process, categories are defined, properties of the categories are explicated and the conditions that produce, maintain or change these categories are further elaborated (Charmaz, 2014, p. 190).

**Constant comparative method.** Constructivist grounded theorists posit that the initial and focused coding processes are emergent processes (Charmaz, 2014). Therefore, unexpected ideas may emerge throughout the process. The constant comparative method was used to develop emergent codes from the data and to reveal the range of emergent categories and its properties by simultaneously coding and analyzing data (Kolb, 2012; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). With the constant comparative method, interview transcripts
were compared to each other to discover latent patterns (e.g., generate categories) across multiple participants” (Charmaz, 2014). With this process, the researcher compares new incidents to the conceptualization of incidents coded earlier. Events that are similar are compared to one another to identify patterns and significant processes and to further develop properties or dimensions of codes. Likewise, dissimilar events are compared to provide further insights and to develop new codes. In addition to comparing data to data, data are compared to codes. This helps to determine if the one of the existing codes should be applied or if a new code emerges to better identify the process.

The constant comparative method consists of identifying incidents, events and activities and constantly comparing them to an emerging category to develop and saturate a category (Creswell, 2007). Data saturation occurs when the researcher no longer finds information that has not been previously reported (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Kolb, 2012). Saturation does not necessarily mean seeing the same pattern over and over again, but rather happens when the researcher reaches a point in the data analysis where no new properties or theoretical insights are obtained from analyzing more transcripts (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2007).

**Dyadic analysis.** I used the dyadic analysis approach as outlined by Eisikovits and Koren (2010) to assess similarities and differences between the perspectives of primary caregivers and their young adult children. The caregiver and their young adult child(ren) in the study were interviewed separately and each pair forms a dyad, the unit of analysis. Dyadic analysis provides an opportunity for “deepening and broadening the content, as well as for ensuring trustworthiness” (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010). The dyadic approach enables the researcher to gain more information about the social construction of
experiences of living in certain neighborhoods during childhood by providing two distinct perspectives (youth and caregiver) regarding the same situation. This approach enables each participant to tell the story from his or her own perspective without having to consider the reaction of another person when voicing criticism or sharing sensitive information (Morris, 2001). Individual interviews allowed participants to share information that they might have withheld if either the primary caregiver or young adult child was present in the room.

There were four major benefits of conducting separate interviews when examining dyads. First, it enabled each person to tell the story from their own perspective without being influenced by the presence of the other person (Morris, 2001). Second, it enabled the researcher to capture the individual within the dyad, without forgoing the dyadic perspective. Third, the dyadic view enriched the perspective on the phenomenon and increased trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by allowing for comparisons, cross-checking, and data triangulation (Denzin, 1989; Yardley, 2000). Fourth, it allowed one person in the dyad to keep secrets from the other person (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010). For instance, a young adult might admit to the researchers that he or she belonged to a gang but they might not have disclosed that membership to their primary caregiver.

Initially, the dyadic analysis procedures are similar to the procedures for analyzing data at the individual level – coding significant statements, sentences and quotes that provide an understanding of how the youth experienced living in their neighborhoods. I developed the dyadic analysis by comparing and contrasting the perspectives of the two partners regarding their experience with a specific social
phenomenon – the neighborhood contextual effects on youth violence (e.g., witnessing, victimization and perpetration of youth violence).

When assessing the dyads, I searched for overlaps and contrasts among the individual versions. I read the transcripts over thoroughly and composed “story” memos. In the memo, I made note of how the participant described the neighborhood, what type of impact he/she felt the neighborhood conditions had on youth violence, and whether the young adult child witnessed, was a victim of, or perpetrated youth violence. I reviewed story memos for each dyad to understand whether there was overlap or contrast in their depiction of the neighborhood and its impact. It is possible to have both overlap and contrast across dyads when sharing a similar story regarding a specific incident. For instance, both individuals could agree (overlap) on the descriptive level (e.g., both caregivers and young adult acknowledge the occurrence of gun violence in the neighborhood) but may differ in the way each individual interpreted the identical descriptions (e.g., caregiver feels this negatively impacted their child’s behavior whereas the young adult states that it had no effect on their behavior.)

When performing dyadic analysis, I looked for the following four situations: (1) complete congruence (agreement on the description of the neighborhood and interpretation of its impact); (2) agreement on the descriptive level and contrast on the interpretive level; (3) contrast on the descriptive level, and agreement on interpretive level (the dyad presented opposing descriptions of situations, feelings and experiences while interpreting them in a similar manner); and (4) complete incongruence (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010). From an epistemological viewpoint, by contrasting and overlapping two individual versions I was able to provide a third perspective, the researcher’s perspective.
and interpretation, without losing or corrupting the individual ones. This enabled me as the researcher to follow the process of constructing dyadic versions, while keeping the individual ones intact for purposes of comparison.

**Hyperlinks**

Hyperlinking is the process of connecting coded incidents in one primary document to coded incidents in another primary document or to connect multiple incidents within the same primary document (Friese, 2014, p. 256). The hyperlinks technique was used to serve two purposes throughout the coding process. First, I used hyperlinks to facilitate the dyadic analysis. By using hyperlinks it was possible to identify examples of contradictions in the dialogue or illustrate how a partner in the dyad may support or complement their partner’s perspective. For example, hyperlinks were used to connect instances where the primary caregiver and the young adult child both described an experience of youth violence. In order to use hyperlinks, I selected one occasion as the source or the starting anchor and the following occasion as the target anchor (Friese, 2014). After connecting the two incidents, I labeled the linkage to describe how the two instances were connected (e.g., congruent incident description; congruent neighborhood description; incongruent perceived impact, etc.).

In addition to connecting perspective across dyads, I also used hyperlinks to connect stories within an interview. For instance, if a study participant described a particular incident (e.g., witnessing the shooting of a friend) multiple times throughout the interview, I used hyperlinks to connect each time the incident was mentioned under one singular code. This procedure enabled me to not have to code the same incident multiple times, which would lead to inflations of the code frequency.
Variable of Interest

The variable of interest in this study was youth violence. Conceptually, this refers to whether youth witnessed, were victimized or intentionally used physical force to cause physical or psychological harm against another person, group or community during childhood (Haegerich et al., 2013; Mercy et al., 2000). In addition to labeling incidents of youth violence, additional labels were used to indicate whether youth witnessed youth violence (directly or indirectly), were a victim of youth violence (directly or indirectly), or perpetrated youth violence. Operationally, incidents where study participants acknowledged that they witnessed youth violence directly (witnessed a friend getting in a fight) or indirectly (heard about youth violence secondhand) were identified as witnessing youth violence. Incidents that indicate youth were victimized by youth violence – bullied, jumped, beat up, etc.—were considered as incidents of direct victimization of youth violence. Additionally, incidents in which the youth or primary caregiver indicated that acquaintances or siblings were victims of youth violence were considered victimization of close acquaintances. Similarly, incidents that referred to youth physically fighting, involvement in gang-related activities; carrying and using a weapon; taking part in a group fight; or engaging in any other form of physical violence (e.g., physical assault, shooting, stabbing) were considered incidents of perpetration of youth violence.

It is possible that a specific incident may have multiple labels. For instance, if a teen directly witnessed another teen getting beat up in their neighborhood then that incident would be labeled as “witness youth violence – directly” and “acquaintances victimized by youth violence.” Since the teen witnessed the event unfold, it would be
labeled direct witnessing of youth violence. Similarly, since he or she was not the victim of youth violence then it would be labeled as “victimization of a close acquaintance”. Open and focused coding were conducted around these incidents of violence to better understand the circumstances and social processes that influenced these incidents of violence and the consequences of such incidents. The emergent codes that developed from this process were furthered developed into categories through the focused coding process.

**Theory Development**

The general purpose of the constructivist grounded theory approach is to develop a substantive theoretical framework to explain a particular phenomenon (Charmaz, 2014). The analytical categories developed and the relationships drawn between the categories provide a conceptual framework of the studied experience. Throughout each successive level of coding and analysis, codes develop into categories and these categories eventually coalesce as the collected data were interpreted (Charmaz, 2014). In addition, these categories become more theoretical as they are further developed to determine their properties and dimensions. As the process proceeds, the categories are interlinked to form the basis of the theoretical framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The product of this process leads to the development of a ‘middle-range’ or substantive-level theory (Glaser, 1978). Middle-range theories consist of abstract renderings of a specific phenomenon that is grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2014). In this particular case, I used this approach to develop a framework for explaining how neighborhood contexts influenced youth violence – the witnessing, victimization and perpetration of youth violence. Diagramming, the visual representation of codes and categories, also was used to draft
and infer linkages and relationships among the categories. As stated by Charmaz (2014, p. 218) “diagrams can enable you to see the relative power, scope, and direction of the categories in your analysis as well as the connections among them.” Diagramming, sorting codes and integrating memos are important steps used to create theoretical linkages among the categories and the starting blocks for building theory.

The purpose of middle-range theory developed in this study was to explain the social processes by which neighborhood contexts influence exposure to youth violence (e.g., witnessing, perpetration or victimization). The middle-range, or substantive-level theory, states relationships between abstract concepts and aims to explain the social processes behind them (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012, p. 41). Charmaz presented a set of questions to explore when developing codes into categories and then categories into theories (2014, p. 34). These questions assist with studying processes within a given setting and formulating a theoretical framework: From whose point of view is a given process fundamental? (e.g., does this process only apply to primary caregiver, youth or both?); How do the observed social processes emerge? How do participants’ actions construct them? Who exerts control over these processes? Under what conditions? What meanings do different participants attribute to the process? What do they emphasize and how do they talk about it? How and when do their meanings and actions concerning the process change? These questions were used as a guide when conducting focused coding to help develop the selected focused codes into categories and to further explain how the social processes operated thus creating the theoretical perspective.

**Reflexivity and the Position of the Researcher**

**Memo-writing.** Memos typically link the coding phase to initial stages of writing
the first draft of the analysis. Memos or memo-writing were used throughout the coding process to create notes about the data; define codes (this is important for ensuring that the code was being applied the same way every time it was used); summarize key details from the interview; conceptualize connections between categories; and to capture my thoughts regarding my interpretation of the data during this process (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012; Friese, 2014). Memos also were used to write additional notes regarding the categories such as specifying the properties of the categories, defining relationships between categories, and identifying any gaps (Charmaz, 2014, p. 7). Memos also were used to capture significant quotes that helped explain a particular social process. The process of writing memos helped me as the researcher to stop and analyze my ideas about the codes early in the research process and also helped keep me involved in the analysis and increasing the level of abstraction of my ideas (Charmaz, 2014).

I also created research question memos for each research question so that as ideas surfaced during the analysis that could help answer the research questions I was able to store those ideas in designated research question memos (Friese, 2014). Research question memos could be further developed to describe in detail the queries used to analyze the data in order to answer each specific research question. This step contributes to the trustworthiness, credibility, transparency and dependability (quality criterion) of the qualitative research by providing details of the queries and the steps used to analyze the data and also served as an audit trail for others to follow when verifying findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Friese, 2014).

After conducting open coding with each transcript, I summarized the interviews using memos. In the memos, I indicated details regarding how participants described the
social and structural neighborhood contexts (e.g., a lot of neighbors used drugs; we lived in the ghetto; neighborhood was calm and peaceful; all of the neighbors worked together to keep the community safe, etc.) and I also described whether participants indicated the type of impact the neighborhood posed on youth violence (e.g., negative, positive or no impact). I used the memos to note whether the young adult child and their primary caregiver shared similar descriptions of their neighborhoods and depiction of the social processes by which neighborhood influence youth violence. After creating the memos, I then placed the participant into a primary document family based on their race/ethnicity, type of impact, relationship to the dyad (e.g., primary caregiver, young adult child). Using the query tools in ATLAS.ti, I was then able to assess how participants described how neighborhood contexts influenced youth violence.

**Position of the researcher.** Charmaz’s approach to grounded theory acknowledges that one’s analysis is not necessarily an accurate representation of the study participants’ worlds but rather a social construction of their worlds (Charmaz, 2014). Throughout the coding and analysis processes it is important to take into account the analyst’s internal thoughts that are oftentimes unintentionally brought to the study by acknowledging them and engaging in reflexivity.

Memo writing also helped me in the process of being reflexive and to avoid allowing my perceptions to dominate the analysis process. While conducting constructivist grounded theory, is it important to engage in reflexivity because values and beliefs, which may stem from a person’s position in life, may influence the analysis without the researcher’s awareness. Every analyst holds preconceptions that may influence but not necessarily determine how he or she interprets the data (Charmaz, 2014,
p. 156). As such, one’s life experiences frame the way one sees the world and also may affect the way one sees the data. When conducting this research it also was important for me to become aware of any implicit beliefs or thoughts I was harboring about this topic of youth violence and how neighborhood contextual dimensions influence one’s exposure to such violence. Reflexivity is an important part of the analysis process. The central purpose of being reflexive and writing memos is for the analyst to pay attention to their thoughts when interpreting the data. Although it is not possible to completely extricate oneself from their thoughts when analyzing data, the purpose of reflexivity is to become conscious of those thoughts and to place them to the side. Without reflexivity, the analyses may reproduce current ideologies, discourses and values. A useful technique to employ to ensure these preconceived thoughts do not dominate the analysis is to follow-up each thought with analysis to see if the data actually fit the preconceptions. If the data do not align, then the lingering thought is a preconception that should not be used in analysis.

As an African-American female born and raised in a predominately minority, urban city, I was accustomed to witnessing fights among neighbors, hearing distant gunshots and learning about the prevalence of violence in my neighborhood from friends or from the local news. During the early 1990’s, drugs and gangs infiltrated the neighborhood and it was common to attend school with peers who were affiliated with gang organizations, carried weapons or even fell victims to youth violence. My childhood background may have influenced my perspective of the data when analyzing the interview transcripts of youth growing up in violent neighborhoods. On the one hand, my experience living in such a neighborhood motivated me to want to study this social
problem and to see if there were new insights that could help improve conditions in these distressed communities or even policies that would effectively reduce the level of violence. In addition, I spent a significant amount of time studying and reading about the issue of youth violence and had developed some ideas regarding how neighborhood contexts could influence youth violence. Based on my previous experience living in violent neighborhoods and later studying about violent neighborhoods, I entered into the data analysis phase with prior thoughts regarding events, actions or social processes that I might find in the data.

To my surprise, I found my previous experiences helped me to relate to the study participants and allowed me to easily visualize the incidents they experienced. I also noticed that I spent a lot of time scrutinizing their stories to fully understand what was meant by certain phrases or stories and I did not take their stories at face value. My role as a doctoral student forced me to not just glance over the details but to dig deeper to understand what was explicitly stated and implicitly valued. For instance, some study participants mentioned how violence was common throughout their neighborhoods growing up but also indicated that such violence had no effect on their engagement in (or avoidance of) violent activities or youth violence in general. With this finding, I wanted to take it at face value and believe that the neighborhood had no effect. But on the other hand, my previous experiences led me to believe that the neighborhood may have had some type of effect. For instance, although the young adult child may have indicated that the neighborhood had no influence on youth violence when asked outright, as the interview continued, further elaboration of the story might have revealed that the neighborhood taught them life lessons regarding respect or the level of violence in the
neighborhood motivated then to carry a weapon. Therefore, I constantly used memos to write out my thoughts and to make sure I paid extra attention to interviews where participants were quick to reply that the neighborhood had no effect on youth violence. By using this method I noticed that participates articulated in other parts of the transcript the influence neighborhood contextual factors had on youth violence. The overall effect was implied when considering their total narrative regarding their experiences in the neighborhood.
Chapter 5: Results

Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief description of the types of youth violence experienced by study participants. Following this, I present the results for each research question. For the first research question, I described the five neighborhood-level factors that were attributed to youth violence, the associated social processes and substantive-level theory that explain how the mechanism operated. I conclude this section by presenting a grounded theory that interrelates the five mechanisms that emerged from the analysis. Following, I presented the results from the dyadic analysis and provided a summary of the overall level of congruence or incongruence between dyadic pairs in order to address my second research question.

Exposure to Youth Violence

Open coding was completed in order to document incidents of violence that occurred within their neighborhood settings during the youth’s childhood. This process identified instances where the respondents witnessed violence (directly or indirectly); were victimized by youth violence or had close acquaintances that were victims of violence; or perpetrated violence. Table 5.1 highlights the number of youth who were exposed to violence within their neighborhood. Witnessing youth violence was very common for the young adult children in the study. Overall, approximately 85% of African-American youth and 77% of Latino youth indicated they directly witnessed youth violence in their neighborhoods. These violent events ranged from witnessing someone fight or getting jumped to seeing someone get shot. In addition to witnessing violence directly, the majority of all youth in the study indicated that they witnessed
youth violence indirectly (e.g., heard about violent events from news reports or secondhand). Moreover, approximately 25% of African-American youth and 36% of Latino youth were victims of youth violence. These youth mentioned that they were bullied, jumped, or threatened by peers in their neighborhood. Additionally, 13% of all young adult children who participated in the study had a close acquaintance that fell victim to youth violence in the neighborhood. Engaging in violent activities was also fairly common among the youth in the study. Approximately 45% of African American youth and 44% of Latino youth mentioned that they perpetrated violence by either fighting, participating in gang-related violent activities, or by carrying a weapon (e.g., guns or pocket knives).

Table 5.1

| Number of Youth Exposed to Violence during Childhood by Ethnicity and Gender (N = 45) |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
|                                               | African-American (n = 20)                      | Latino (n = 25)                                |
|                                               | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Directly Witnessed Youth Violence              |  7   |   10   |  9   |   10   |
| Indirectly Witnessed Youth Violence           |  4   |   7    |  7   |    8   |
| Direct Victim of Youth Violence               |  3   |   2    |  6   |    3   |
| Victimization of Close Acquaintance           |  2   |   2    |  2   |    0   |
| Perpetrator of Youth Violence                 |  4   |   5    |  4   |    7   |

In addition, Table 5.2 summarizes the most prevalent forms of violence reported by the young adult children and their primary caregivers. The following section highlights the type of violence witnessed, victimized or perpetrated by the participants in the study.
Table 5.2

*Frequency of Quotes Describing Incidents of Witnessing, Victimization and Perpetration of Youth Violence by Ethnicity and Relationship*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Violence</th>
<th>Total # of Quotes</th>
<th>African American (n = 37)</th>
<th>Latino (n = 42)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Primary Caregiver (n = 17)</td>
<td>Youth (n = 20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Primary Caregiver (n = 17)</td>
<td>Youth (n = 25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Witnessed Youth Violence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gang presence</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heard gunshots</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heard about violence from watching the news or heard</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the story secondhand</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnessed fighting</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnessed shooting</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth Violence Victimization</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct victim of physical violence (shot; jumped;</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beat up; stabbed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied or threatened</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victimization of an close friend, sibling or an</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acquaintance</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perpetrated Youth Violence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in a fight</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joined a gang</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carried a weapon (e.g., gun, pocket knife)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Witness violence. Gangs, gunshots, secondhand exposure to violence, fighting, and shootings were the most prevalent forms of violence witnessed by both young adult children and their primary caregivers. For instance, a Latino young adult male mentioned how it was common to see gang members in her neighborhood:

*I mean, I’ve actually seen a lot of gang activity. I’ve seen a lot. I’ve seen shootings. I’ve seen dead bodies. I’ve seen dope deals, so I’ve seen a lot...People shooting out car windows, people breaking out people’s house windows...it was, that, it’s just a horrible neighborhood to live in.*

In addition to gang presence in the neighborhood, other participants mentioned how they saw guns and heard gunshots in their neighborhood. A Latino youth recalled:

“... when I was growing up, guns were no big deal. You saw guns all the time. You heard guns all the time... You know... violence was just a part of your environment...”

Similarly, an African-American female mentioned that “we seen a lot of things. We saw a lot of people die... when I was fifteen years old one of my closest friends died next to me.” In addition, an African-American male recalled the violence he witnessed growing up in his neighborhood. “I don’t remember when exactly this happened, but there was like, the dude that got shot in the head... in front of my neighbor’s house...I remember that day... the dude that was like walking with a bullet in his head.”

In addition to witnessing violence directly, there were some occasions where youth would learn about violent activities that occurred in their neighborhood by watching the news or talking to their neighbors. For instance, a Latino youth recounted an incident where he learned about a tragic event that happened in his neighborhood:
There was one time, it was all over the news that uh... there's a guy in a something—the cops wanted him for something and they shot him repeatedly. It was like, I don’t know maybe half a block away from our house. Well, luckily I was at the store uh, yeah my mom had me go to the store and uh, well, when I came home I uh, I found out.

Similarly, another Latino youth recalled frequently hearing news stories about violence in his neighborhood.

I guess there was violence everywhere. Like every single time I turned on the news, you know, they said that somebody got shot on this corner, somebody got shot on that corner, so, I guess you would say there’s violence everywhere you go in our neighborhood.

Witnessing various forms of violence directly or indirectly was a common experience for the participants in the study. In addition to witnessing youth violence, some participants reported being a victim of youth violence or described the victimization of a close acquaintance.

**Youth violence victimization.** Several participants mentioned being a victim of youth violence in their neighborhood. Incidents that described youth being shot, stabbed, beaten up, assaulted or attacked were labeled as direct youth violence victimization. Any incident where a youth indicated that he or she was a victim of violence was labeled as direct victimization. In addition, incidents that recounted stories of how acquaintances were victims of youth violence were labeled as “victimization of an acquaintance”. For instance, when a primary caregiver described an incident where a friend of their child
was a victim of youth violence, that incident would be coded as victimization of an acquaintance.

Six youths mentioned how their siblings or friends were victims of violence. When an African-American male was asked if anybody he cared about was ever seriously hurt due to the violence in the community he mentioned, “I had a friend that was stabbed to death.” In addition to his friend being attacked, he was later a victim of youth violence as well. He further elaborated,

...there was a point, like, a couple months after I got out of high school, I guess the violence caught up with me and I was jumped with a friend...Umm. My jaw was broken in six different places...So, umm, yeah, I guess there’s those instances. I mean I had a lot of friends that were beaten up or jumped...

Similarly, a Latina mother of two young adult men reported that one of her sons was a victim of youth violence, which had a negative impact on his mental health:

Kids in our neighborhood were bullying him... and those same kids bullied him at school... and for some odd reason they kind of blamed the um, victims instead of the bullies... and it affected his health I mean mentally and stuff because he’d get jumped a lot down here. You know, so it really affected him. You know.

An African-American primary caregiver recounted how children in her neighborhood were victims of youth violence.

One of my kid’s uh friends had gotten jumped by about ten dudes or more. And that wasn’t too good for them to see because you know, that was their friend and
there was nothing they could really do... We all, everybody in the whole neighborhood witnessed it.

The interviewer then asked how this affected her daughters and she replied, “just by being scared to like be in crowds and stuff because you never know exactly what’s going to happen you know.”

In addition to youth violence victimization, the perpetration of youth violence was another common experience articulated by youth and primary caregivers. The next section describes study participants reported involvement in violent activities.

**Perpetration of violence.** Incidents where residents admitted to participating in a physical fight, carrying or using a weapon and participating in gang activity were labeled as perpetration of youth violence. Twenty of the 45 young adults were perpetrators of youth violence. Among these young adults, 17 were involved in physical fights, 8 admitted to joining a gang, and 6 carried weapons (e.g., gun or knife). All of the young adults who engaged in youth violence lived in areas they described as violent neighborhoods.

A typical example of a young adult child admitting to being violent can be found in the following passage from an African-American young adult male: “... in first grade I remember being like a bully or something, I don’t know. I just remember fighting all the time...” Another African-American young adult male stated,

\[
I’ve been fighting since I was like uh, yeah like 2^{nd}, 3^{rd} grade... I was just like that...I’ve been physically scrapping since I was early (sic)... early, 3^{rd}, 2^{nd}, 3^{rd}...
\]
grade...it was like, the thing to do like, that’s the way of proving that’s your right of process (sic)... in the hood.

In addition to fighting, some teens became affiliated with gangs. An African-American female recalls her involvement in gangs:

*I used to claim Crips, but I never was from the ‘hood’. And that was part of why I was always getting into fights, because I was Crips and everybody else was Bloods...I did it [participate in the gang] for about a good year and a half.*

During the interviews some teens admitted to carrying a weapon. One Latino youth recalled getting kicked out of school because she carried a weapon.

*I was in Denver Public Schools until I took a knife to school they wanted me out of that so I went to a different school. I went all the way over to the east side. But, I got kicked out of there. They didn’t want me there because I had like, gun trouble there.*

When the facilitator asked why she carried a weapon to school the youth responded: “*I just had em. Just protection. Because I could have got people – people used to get jumped and everything.*”

In summary, study participants were exposed to diverse forms of violence by witnessing, being a victim of or perpetrating youth violence. The next section highlights the neighborhood-level factors that contributed to the witnessing, victimization and perpetration of youth violence. The first research question seeks to explicate the neighborhood social and structural characteristics associated with youth violence.
Following, the second research question highlights the similarities and dissimilarities in the perspectives of primary caregivers and their youths regarding neighborhood contexts and their influence on youth violence.

**Research Question 1:**

How do primary caregivers and their young adult child(ren) perceive the relationship between neighborhood-level social and structural factors and the witnessing, victimization and perpetration of youth violence? How do these primary caregivers and their young adult child(ren) describe the processes by which these contextual factors influence the witnessing, victimization and perpetration of youth violence?

To address the first research question, I used open coding techniques to document how each participant described the social and structural characteristics of the neighborhood in which the young adult child was raised (e.g., presence of gangs, abandoned housing, neighborhood watch groups, etc.) and to document their perception of the linkage between those neighborhood factors and youth violence (e.g., witnessing violence, victim of violence, perpetrator of youth violence). Five social processes (e.g., categories) emerged from the data to explain the processes by which neighborhood conditions influenced the witnessing, victimization or perpetration of youth violence. Some neighborhood contexts were perceived as having a protective influence on exposure to youth violence, meaning that it restricted residents’ access to neighborhood risk factors, while other contexts served as facilitators of such exposure. The mechanisms by which neighborhood social contexts influenced youth violence were: (1) access to
local institutional resources; (2) social ties and informal social control; (3) deviant peer affiliation; (4) exposure to neighborhood violence; and (5) lack of formal social control. Table 5.3 highlights the frequency of quotes for each neighborhood context and also details the intensity of the quote by highlighting the number of young adult children and their primary caregivers who mentioned the quote. The number of quotes will not match the number of people because several study participants may have several quotes for a particular mechanism. The following sections described the mechanisms associated with youth violence and also explains the social processes by which neighborhood influenced

Table 5.3

**Neighborhood Contexts Associated with Exposure to Youth Violence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood Protective Factors</th>
<th>Total # of Quotes</th>
<th>African American ($n = 37$)</th>
<th>Latino ($n = 42$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local Institutional Resources</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Ties and Informal Social Control</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Primary Caregiver ($n = 17$)</td>
<td>Primary Caregiver ($n = 17$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood Risk Factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deviant Peer Affiliation</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to Neighborhood Violence</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Formal Social Control</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Protective neighborhood mechanism: Local institutional resources.** Access to community programs and recreational centers were associated with the witnessing, victimization, and perpetuation of youth violence. Forty-one participants articulated the
connection between the presence of local institutional resources and youth violence. Community-based programs consisted of education enrichment programs such as “Denver Kids”, “Colorado Uplift”; mentoring programs such as “Big Brothers Big Sisters”; and programs at the neighborhood recreation centers. Overall, expressed utilization of community programs and resources were associated with less exposure to and engagement in youth violence.

A Latina mother indicated that her daughter grew up in a “bad neighborhood” explained the positive influence of recreation centers:

> Actually, the neighborhood was bad and it didn’t affect my kids in any way because they were good kids. They liked school, they liked activities, they liked sports, and now they all have great jobs... [After-school programs] kept her from you know, wandering the neighborhood... because it was a bad neighborhood.

Her daughter’s participation in the recreation center which was “right on the corner” provided a positive outlet and prevented her from being exposed to community and youth violence. Her daughter corroborated this point saying: “...I was athletic and my brothers were too. Every time they played any kind of sport or if they went to the rec center or any kind of activity function in the neighborhood... I was right with them.” She further explained that these neighborhood programs

> ... were there to show you how to you know, just play sports but how to do arts and crafts, how to um, you know, if you had anger or what not, you know there was pool, there was ping pong, there was something...they [the neighborhood programs] help me to stay active, to keep my mind off of things.
Similarly, a Latino youth mentioned that by participating in programs at his neighborhood recreation center he was able to stay off the streets. “Yeah, I was in Save Our Youth... they were my mentoring program. They gave me a positive impact. I was always there talking to people. It’s a place to keep off the streets.”

Another Latino youth lived in a neighborhood he described as having “a lot of gang members around” also mentioned that in his community “they have programs at the rec center, the police station, even in school.” When asked if these programs made any difference for him and his friends, he stated “yeah, they, they like always kept us like out of trouble and stuff, so. Yeah, it helped us a lot.”

An African-American youth expressed how he lived in the “bad part of town” where he would see “fist fights out in the neighborhood” and that he “steered away from, like, drugs, and like bad influences, because I, I always wanted to go to college... I didn’t want like the negative influences around me.” He further stated that he got involved in a local program in his community, which he found to be very beneficial.

“Uh, well like, the program I had mentioned, uh, it’s called Colorado Youth at Risk, here in Denver, Colorado, and, I mean I got a mentor through that program, and that program was very beneficial for me. Uh, going into high school, and just having someone to look up to, me being the oldest child, so I think, that was like a great improvement, like, because I was really depressed and like I felt my freshman year of high school, and they helped me a lot.”

Another African-American male living in a neighborhood he described as having a “lot of negatives, I went to one of the roughest schools in DPS... there’s drugs
everywhere, and gangs, and so, y’know obviously that’s stuff that could potentially derail anybody.” He further mentioned that he “had a Big Brother from Big Brothers and Big Sisters program.” He felt that his Big Brother “was a pretty big part of my life” because ...

any time before I even made a mistake my mom was on the phone with him, so, umm, he got after me quite a bit, whenever I’d slip up, so I would say yeah, he was a pretty positive influence, just life in general.. I mean I didn’t, I didn’t know my dad, and my uncles lived out of state, so he was really the only person that could’ve talked to me fact to face, or anything like that.

Study participants articulated how the utilization of community programs decreased exposure to youth violence. However, they also expressed how the absence of such programs increased youth violence. A Latina mother mentioned that she “reached out... and got each of them a Big Sister” from the Big Brothers Big Sisters Program. She further articulated that “it kept my children off the streets and source of entertainment and friendship” and she also stated that the program helped her children to “grow up to be compassionate and caring people.” Over time, her children no longer participated in the programs because it either “ended” or “everything seemed to be too expensive.”

Similarly, an African-American father mentioned that kids in his neighborhood “had a lot of things they could do. Well, before they ended the after-school programs and everything.” He further describes the type of programs that were available to his children,

... they could go play sports, watch movies, go and hang out at the center, basketball court, different things like that, but they phased out all that stuff, or a
lot of the people that didn’t have money that could afford to send their kids to the center...

He further states the recreation center started requiring the community patrons to purchase “rec cards and everything so the kids couldn’t go in the recreation centers for free or anything no more.” Once the programs ended or when they started charging a fee he noticed,

... the kids didn’t have anything to do... that’s when they [the kids] started hanging out in the streets and looking for things to do... like breaking in houses, stealing cars, you know because a lot of bored kids when they just sitting around with nothing to do, that’s when they start coming up with bad ideas.

**Explaining the mechanism—Local institutional resources.** Access to and the use of community-based programs such as activities at local recreation centers and mentoring programs mediated the relationship between neighborhood conditions and exposure to youth violence. In general, the availability, affordability and usage of local institutional resources shielded youth from the negative influences within the larger neighborhood. Access to recreational and extra-curricular activities limited the influence that neighborhood conditions had on youth by shielding them from neighborhood risk factors (negative peer groups, exposure to community violence, etc.), providing youth with positive role models, structured activities with adult supervision, and pro-social friendship groups. In most cases, study participants were kept busy in after-school or other extra-curricular activities, which limited the amount of unsupervised time they spent in the neighborhood. Further, when the youth were involved in local programming
at these recreational facilities or other non-profit programs, they tended to interact in their neighborhood less frequently.

An African-American young woman recalled seeing violence and gangs in her neighborhood but perceived the neighborhood as not having a negative impact because of her participation in neighborhood programs:

*I didn’t want to be a part of that, um, just didn’t, just didn’t interest me. Um. But for the most part it was just, you know my story is pretty much the same, uh, just being involved in, in sports, activities, school, summer camp. My mom actually stayed on top of making sure we got involved and, you know the friends I hung out with, we got, we got involved. Uh. We used to have like a little bike, the bike crew, we used to explore the neighborhood, and all that good stuff. And it wasn’t like, we were, I, I really didn’t see any too much gang violence. I mean I seen it, it was there, but it wasn’t like, we were scared to go be kids because of the neighborhood... I knew they exist but I was always busy doing other things with my friends.*

Another young woman reported that programs at the recreation center limited her interaction with negative neighborhood-level influences.

*Me personally, it [the neighborhood] didn’t affect me because although I was exposed to it, being in the rec center, being in school and my mom, it didn’t it didn’t matter to be because like, I’m not gonna go that path I have something better in life for me that I can accomplish. So, I, I seen stuff, but being ex--exposed to it, wasn’t really an issue because if I wasn’t in the house doing work,*
then I was at the rec center...And that was the main part of the rec center. They were keeping us away from that exposure.

Having immediate access to local recreation programs also helped an African-American young woman stay away from trouble.

Um, I think that fact that there were so many children and um, resources like the rec center and the playgrounds by my house that helped me stay away from trouble... there wasn’t like opportunities for us to go and uh, look for things that we weren’t supposed to be doing.

Participating in an enrichment program gave some youth a sense of purpose and provided them with a positive group of people with whom to socialize. For instance, an African-American young woman mentioned:

I became something like an optimist, because I’m always surrounding myself by positive people. Um, no so much community like, clubs in the community but, Denver Kids is a program where I live so, it is like community service programs, constantly getting ready for college and stuff that was getting more prepared and just being um, being with them and their organization event. I mean, I’ve been all that stuff just being around several people like me. I guess it gave me somewhat of a positive vibe or something. I kind of gave me a sense of purpose... I think the fact that there were so many children and um, like uh, resources like the rec center and playgrounds by my house. That like, because I didn’t really get into a lot of trouble.
Similarly, an African-American youth who grew up in a neighborhood he considered to be violent indicated that he “was so disconnected from my neighborhood.” He mentioned that he was “always busy playing sports... attending tutoring sessions after school... or doing activities with the Upward Bound program.”

Primary caregivers and their young adult children indicated that enrichment programs such as Upward Bound, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Denver Kids all had a positive influence on their children and limited the amount of unsupervised leisure time. However, the lack of available and affordable local institutional resources also had an impact on youth violence. During an interview with an African-American father, he mentioned that there were not enough local programs, violence prevention programs, or other institutional resources to help guide his children while growing up. Being a hard-working single parent, he looked to outside organizations to provide additional support but was unable to find effective and affordable community-level resources. The lack of these resources, he believes, led his children to be persuaded by negative influences in the community. This father also mentioned that a lot of programs were discontinued or started charging fees, which restricted him and his neighbors from sending their children to those programs.

*Well, before they ended the after school programs and everything, I mean, you know, they had a lot of things they could do. They could go play sports, watch movies, go and hang out at the center, different things like that, but they phased out all that stuff, or a lot of the people that didn’t have money that could afford to send their kids to the center, they had to get them, uh, these recreation cards and*
everything so the kids couldn’t go in the recreation centers or anything no more then that’s when they started hanging out in the streets and looking for things to do.. Like breaking in houses, stealing cars, you know because a lot of bored kids when they just sitting around with nothing to do, that’s when they start coming up with bad ideas.

He further speculated that if the neighborhood had had more local programs that created positive, stimulating environments for his children, then they might have chosen different paths in life. The programs that were once in existence were phased out or were not effective in delivering quality services. The lack of these resources left the children to find their own methods of entertainment, which oftentimes led to their involvement in criminal activities.

**Substantive-level theory: Local institutional resources.** The overall substantive-level theory explaining the neighborhood mechanism, local institutional resources, can be summed up as following: Access to community programs and resources can increase youth’s involvement in supervised, structured activities, provide opportunities to interact with positive role models and peer groups, and shield them from the negative neighborhood influences. As a result, these youth tend to have decreased involvement in the neighborhood, and decreased engagement in youth violence as witnesses, victims, and perpetrators of youth violence.
In addition to local institutional resources, another neighborhood-level protective factor that influenced youth violence was social ties and informal social control.

*Figure 5.1*

*The Relationship between Local Institutional Resources and Exposure to Youth Violence*
Neighborhood protective factor: Social ties and informal social control.

Strong social ties with neighbors were associated with less exposure to youth violence. Social bonds among neighbors helped with the establishment of informal social control efforts. Some participants described their neighbors as people who provided helpful advice to the children. For instance, a Latino young adult male mentioned how some adult neighbors provided him with the following advice,

"Yeah, they were just always telling me, they’re giving, they’re giving me positive attitude, energy, saying don’t do this, it’s not worth it, don’t get into gangs, it’s not worth it. It’s like, you know, always talk, they always talk to me about it. Even ‘til this day they still talk to me about it."

Similarly, an African-American young woman mentioned that older residents would provide advice and help her stay focused and on track.

"... I had old folks like um, Mr. Brown which we still know him, that’s a very close friend of the family to us. He would always just pull me aside and just let me know how things were going and if I needed any lunch money for school, and you know, he was just always looking out, always making sure I was on the right track."

An African-American mother mentioned that she lived in a quiet neighborhood and how the neighbors would look out for each other kids.

"A lot of the parents was, we were more into looking after our kids so our neighborhood was, I could say was good as far as raising kids in it. Especially when they were outside playing. We all kept an eye on each other’s kids."
Informal social control efforts employed by the neighbors helped some participants feel safe in their neighborhood. These participants indicated that their neighbors kept a watchful eye on things happening within the community. For instance, an African-American young woman perceived her neighborhood as violent but she felt safe living there.

**Facilitator:** Any other things that you think might keep the neighborhood safe and peaceful or not…

*Probably just the people who be watching everything...The nosy-rosies... It’s funny because you know it’s like a whole lot of old women that just be watching all everything, you know...gossip, but it’s just like it wasn’t for all the people, people would probably be getting away with way more stuff, you know.*

Similarly, a young Latino man who lived in a neighborhood he perceived as non-violent mentioned an informal social control effort he and his neighborhood employed to help reduce crime in the area.

**Facilitator:** Were any efforts from people in the neighborhood to keep it a nice, peaceful neighborhood, where people feel safe, and it’s safe.

*A few efforts. For example, when they tried to break into the houses, uh, recently they tried to break into a lady’s house, and she moved in recently, so she went around handing out pamphlets about what they look like, and a few numbers that we can call, you know... to ask for more patrols and what not. But, it’s nothing federated (sic). It’s really more of a local thing, you know, we go around, we say, hey, people tried to break in...or we put things on, you know, uh, lampposts.*
Facilitator: Right. So it really is a neighborhood effort to kind of keep it safe then.

Yeah, I, cuz, you know, I kind of think of uh, of us as a, a neighborhood watch group... because we go around and warn people.

A Latina mother living in a neighborhood she perceived as violent described the type of neighborhood watch groups that were present in her neighborhood. “The Neighborhood Watch was involved in dealing with the problem. They have tried to get rid of the drugs and the dealers. Keep us well informed. They contact us when the teens are outside after curfew.”

An African-American mother who lived in a neighborhood she described as non-violent articulated how the neighborhood watch groups influenced the level of youth violence in her community.

Facilitator: So did the neighborhood watch make the neighborhood just safer in terms of violence as well?

Oh yes! Because a lot of people, you know, instead of not saying that you see something, you know, they reported it anyway and that’s what I said, it make our neighborhood safer. They watched out for your kids, you know, they didn’t let anything bad happen. If you have an incident, you know the neighborhoods that I was around, that I grew up – you know, I was there for 20 years in that neighborhood. That they know where I live, they know my kids, you know...we got to know their kids, so it was a community thing.
Explaining the social mechanism: Social ties and informal social control efforts. Social ties with neighbors were helpful in terms of providing advice to youth and providing a watchful eye over children in the neighborhood. Social ties among neighbors helped residents form a network (e.g., neighborhood watch groups) and build a neighborhood environment where residents felt safe, and residents informed one another of events in the neighborhood. Youth reported less involvement with violent activities due to their adult neighbors’ guidance, mentorship, and surveillance.

Substantive-level theory: Social ties and informal social control efforts. Social ties were important for reducing youth’s exposure to violence as witnesses, victims and perpetrators. Overall, in neighborhoods where residents looked out for each other, provided helpful advice or mentorship to youth and implemented informal social control efforts, resident mentioned experiencing less exposure to youth violence. Figure 5.2 depicts the overall mechanism by which neighborhood contexts influence the witnessing, victimization and perpetration of youth violence through social ties and informal social control. In summary, social ties and informal social control efforts provided a layer shielding and protecting youth from being exposure to youth violence.
In contrast to the aforementioned mechanisms that reduced exposure to youth violence, deviant peer affiliation emerged as a notable risk factor.

**Neighborhood risk factor: Deviant peer affiliation.** Association with neighborhood children who engaged in youth violence was another risk factor associated with witnessing and committing youth violence. An African-American grandmother recounted how her grandson “…got into trouble and everything…he got into fights in Aurora…” She further stated, “…when I moved to Aurora is when he was, when he was just starting to get in junior high. That’s when he started getting in trouble.” When the facilitator asked what exactly about the neighborhood influenced his behavior, the grandmother responded, “I think well, mostly he started running around with the wrong crowd.”

Similarly, a Latina mother of a young man mentioned that “…you know, you, you run around with bad people, you’re liable to whether you are involved or not you you’re going to get in the mix of it some way or another…” She felt that associating with negative peer groups encouraged her son to engage in violent activities.
An African-American father of three children recalled how his two sons used to “hang around gang members, uh stealing cars, carrying a gun... one got charged with pulling a gun on somebody... My other son violated his parole by having a firearm.”

Later in the interview he explained what influenced his sons’ involvement in youth violence,

...because of associations and everything he was with... He was guilty by association...They couldn’t prove that he did the burglary but still, you know... guilty by association... and listening to their friends... the majority of them do, they cave into peer pressure.

An African-American mother expressed that growing up in a violent neighborhood contributed towards her son’s constant fighting. She stated that her son had to fight in order to defend himself and to not be viewed as a “pushover”.

Facilitator: How exactly do you think the violence he witnessed in the neighborhood affected him as he was growing up?

Well, oh my goodness. At one time he was getting into fights at least every other week... And and I know it had to do with peer pressure you know, I mean, uh, um, that’s just something that they did in in the ghetto, you know. If you was you know, if if somebody says something to you, and you didn’t fight em or jump on them, then you know, you weren’t considered, you know, you was considered a pushover... a punk or a sissy.
Young adult children also articulated how other peers in the neighborhood influenced their involvement in youth violence. For instance, an African-American young woman recalled becoming friends with violent youth from her neighborhood and being attracted to that lifestyle.

...and we went to like Montbello like, it was like gang-bang central. Like, everybody that was involved in some kind of gang, no matter if it was the Mexican gang or the Crips or the Bloods, everybody was there fighting all the time, doing something... it was mostly my friends like, everybody around me was doing something at that time, no matter how old ... So after watching them and being with them all the time it’s just you get attracted...

Similarly, a Latino youth mentioned that he started engaging in violent activities because he wanted to fit in with his peers:

Yeah, there was a lot of people like, let’s go steal. Okay, let’s go. We used to pick on people. I had a bad friend. And you don’t, you know when you have a friend you don’t want to be rude. Not rude, just, you want to, its not peer pressure, its just your turn. So you want to fit in.

Explaining the mechanism—Influence of deviant peers. Social contagion is a neighborhood-level mechanism that explains the process by which peers influence the behaviors of their counterparts (Crane, 1991). There are two distinct pathways that further describe the process by which peers influence behavior of their counterparts: peer pressure and social admiration. Having an affiliation with peers who engage in youth violence was mentioned 57 times among 12 primary caregivers and 9 young adult
children. From the perspective of primary caregivers, this influence is characterized as “peer pressure” or being coerced into engaging in such activities. However, the youth prescribed this process unfolding in a different manner. According to the youth, some admired the lifestyle of their peers and others were interested in participating in activities in order to because they thought it was “cool”.

A Latina mother recounted her son’s experience growing up in a violent neighborhood reflecting on peer pressure process: Her son “hung out with the wild kids in the neighborhood” and “his behavior started changing”. She further mentioned that it was due to the “peer pressure” which made him have to constantly decide if he “wanted to do what he’s supposed to do or if he wanted to go with them.” Later in the interview she acknowledged that her son joined a gang and was always fighting with “kids in the neighborhood.”

An African-American father who lived in public housing with his three children for 15 years also articulated this neighborhood-level process. Despite his best efforts to provide a stable environment for his family and protect them from the negative aspects of the neighborhood, at the time of the interview both of his sons were incarcerated. His daughter, a mother of two children, was not incarcerated but was a former gang member. He believed the neighborhood had a negative impact on his children. During the interview he mentioned that the neighborhood changed over time. Initially, when he first moved to the area the neighborhood “was quiet, family-oriented and there were a lot of older couples.” However, over time the neighborhood changed as young couples moved into the community with their “wild children”. He also mentions that these bad
neighborhood kids influenced his children to participate in youth violence and also become victims of youth violence. During the interview he mentioned:

...some of the kids that they were hanging around with, you know, the kids had a tendency to get in trouble...they started getting in trouble and different things like that depending up on who they were hanging around with...they started hanging around with gang members... one [son] was shot, uh another one was stabbed...the people with who they were hanging around with were depending on what would happen... they listen to their friends... they cave in to peer pressure.

Other primary caregivers in the study shared his sentiments. Another Latina mother mentioned that the neighborhood “corrupted” her son. While an African-American mother mentioned that her son put his peers on a “pedestal,” she further explained that “…its like your peers couldn’t do any wrong and old people didn’t know what they was talking about, you know that type of mentality that young people have.” Overall, these parents believed the negative influences of the neighborhood kids influenced their children’s exposure to and involvement in violent activities such as physically fighting, carrying a weapon, or joining a gang.

However, some of the young adult children described the process of their peer’s influence in their involvement with youth violence differently from the primary caregivers. The youths recalled “admiring” their peers and, on occasion, indicated they had elected to associate with gang members and participate in various activities. An African-American youth described how she grew up in a violent neighborhood and often “saw gang members coming together” to hang out in her neighborhood. She stated that
she “admired the gang members” and thought to herself that she “wanted to join the gang and be a part of their organization”. In addition, a Latino youth mentioned that he “wanted to join a gang after seeing the gangs in the neighborhood.”

Another African-American youth stated that her peers felt that getting involved with gangs was “fun” or “cool”:

There were, uh, influences for, you know, kids, at a early age that started getting in gangs... I, I did, I, looking back on it I think, people were doing it just because they thought it was fun... Or they had a, older, older sibling or relative or a, friend who was already involved in gang... So they tried to influence their friends to do it because they thought it was cool.

An African-American young man mentioned that gangs were prevalent throughout his neighborhood while growing up. He described gang members as being cool people and mentioned how he started his own gang.

...I remember that for sure and also the local gang there. I remember them being like huge. Like I remember seeing them all the time... al like, just thinking they were actually like thinking those were cool people... I also remember being in elementary school and actually wanting to be in a gang. Like wanting you know, like me and some of my friends starting up our own little gang...

In addition, gang presence and affiliation with gang members motivated some of the youth to want to start a gang of their own or even join their neighborhood gangs. Six youths mentioned that they had at least one sibling who was in a gang and that
encouraged them to want to become gang members. An African-American young woman mentioned that her brother’s behavior influenced her involvement in violence. “My brother made my behavior worse. I followed his footsteps. He was a gang member and I wanted to be just like him. I got into the gang…”

Another African-American young adult female recounted her desire to want to join a gang.

*I used to watch the um, the gang members get close together and stuff and they did different activities and then eventually I became part of one myself... I wanted to you know, just being with all those guys and do the things that they do because I thought it was cool.*

An African-American young man who grew up in a violent neighborhood recalled how his mom “*was there but she was always working*” and that he “*didn’t really have no stable, reliable father figure*” so he “*ended up turning to the—yes, the ones in the neighborhood.*” He further stated, “*I really started seeing people getting involved in the gangs. But they didn’t start getting membership until middle school, high school and so on...That’s when I got into middle school. I mean, you know, the rules, affiliating in elementary school.*”

Overall, the youth did not describe the process as pressure but rather as admiring the lifestyle of their peers who engaged in such activities. As one Latino male described that process of peer influence, “*... its not peer pressure, its just your turn. So you want to fit in.***”
Substantive-level theory: Affiliation with deviant peer groups. Peers play a significant role in influencing youth exposure to and involvement in youth violence. By interacting with these deviant peers, youth either developed skills related to committing certain crimes; their peers served as role models and a source of admiration; or they were pressured to engage in certain activities. Figure 5.2 depicts this process by which deviant peers influence the witnessing, victimization and perpetration of youth violence.

![Diagram showing the relationship between neighborhood contexts, deviant peer group affiliations, peer pressure, admiration, role modeling, and witnessing, victimization, and perpetration of youth violence.]

Figure 5.3

The Relationship between Deviant Peer Affiliation and Witnessing, Victimization and Perpetration of Youth Violence

Neighborhood risk factor: Exposure to neighborhood violence. Another neighborhood factor that influenced youth violence was exposure to community violence. Several residents mentioned that youth engaged in violence because they were a “product of their environment” or they witnessed violence often which prompted them to engage in it as well. Their stories indicated that growing up in certain neighborhood conditions encouraged them to engage in violence. For instance, a Latina primary caregiver who
lived in a neighborhood she perceived as violent mentioned that the neighborhood influenced her son’s engagement in youth violence.

**Facilitator:** Was there an aspect of the neighborhood that affected your children's disposition, or the violence?

*What caused him to, what affected him the most was the violence, and I think that the same kids that were growing up with that mentality grow up skipping school, joining gangs, doing graffiti, and doing drugs.*

One African-American, young man mentioned that his neighborhood had a negative effect on his behavior during his early adult years because it influenced him to associate with a certain group of friends. Eventually, he started carrying a gun and was later placed in jail for three months for drug and gun possession. He stated that he was a product of his environment and further explained:

*...And I mean, I guess I’m a product of my environment... when I was growing up, guns were no big deal. You saw guns all the time. You heard guns all the time. Same thing with drugs. Seen drugs all the time. You you know, drugs were a part of your environment and being older, I made some mistakes thinking that I could use those to my advantage, and that didn’t work out for me – obviously, I went to jail... I went to jail as an adult, for guns and drugs... I was in jail for three months. Not-Not long. It was a first offense for me and I learned my lesson, so, so I didn’t have too stay long.*
A Latina mother expressed that she felt unsafe raising her son in the neighborhood because there were a lot of gangs, shootings, and fights in their neighborhood.

**Facilitator:** Of, so how did it affect (youth adult child’s name) to see the things he saw—the violence?

Yes it has affected him because the neighborhood has made him want to do bad things like he sees, like he has seen... He was never in a program like that and he was affected by the way in which, he’s rather violent because of everything he has seen and bad things. They started to offer him drugs and things like that.

In addition, an African-American youth mentioned how exposure to community violence influenced his behavior:

**Facilitator:** OK. Can you tell me more about what types of violence you uh, were exposed to as you were growing up?

*OK, so in elementary, um alright, you, you heard gunshots all the time. Like, I I remember that for sure...and also the the local gang there. I remember them being like huge. Like I remember seeing them all the time. Seeing guns...and like, just thinking they were – actually like thinking those were cool people. Like, I think it was kind of weird and so, gunshots all the time and definitely being exposed to that gang all the time and I, I knew that gang all the time.*

**Facilitator:** OK OK. And so what did, what did that mean to you as an elementary kid? I mean you said, you thought they were actually kinda cool um,
Right, so I remember being in elementary and actually wanting to be in a gang.
Like wanting you know, like me and some of my friends starting up our own little gang... and like yeah, and just like and you know thinking we were like them ... those were the people we were looking up to. Like I said, they was just, there was no, there was no, I don’t remember any adult being in my life...

Explaining the mechanism – Exposure to neighborhood violence. Exposure to violence influenced the victimization and perpetration of youth violence through two distinct pathways – the need for self-protection and social norms regarding community violence. The following section explains how the two processes unfolded.

Self-protection. Several participants mentioned that they used physical violence in order to defend themselves or because they felt unsafe in their neighborhood environments. These young adults grew up in violent neighborhoods and had to develop a tougher demeanor in order to “survive” in their community.

Similarly, an African-American young male recalled his grandmother encouraging him to fight in order to defend himself. He mentioned that he fought to avoid the possibility of getting picked on in the future.

I don’t remember there ever being a punishment for me fighting in my neighborhood. I actually remember incidents where she [his grandmother] told me to fight. I ran in the house one time and my grandma asked me what I was running from and I told her, and she was like ‘well, you either get out there and beat him up or he beats you up. Otherwise he’s not going to leave you alone’. And
you know, telling me to get out the house and go fight.... So, it was like you know, we lived in a neighborhood where if you don’t fight you’re going to get freaking picked on, so yeah, you might as well pick it up.

He later stated that his experiences in the neighborhood helped establish his self-identity:

*I mean the person I am now is definitely because of my neighborhood. Like you can look at me and say, oh, that you know you shouldn’t mess with me I guess. I don’t know if that’s good or bad. It made me a, like a stronger person and someone who could stick up for their self.*

Another African-American youth stated, “*I think we had to fight...if you didn’t then you got picked on and no one wants to be picked on.*” Once you become a known fighter in the neighborhood you established a reputation. “*Like I remember just people knowing, well, you can fight, you can fight, you can fight, that guy can’t fight...and everybody knowing whom the fighter were you know? Like it was, it was weird.*”

Another African-American young woman stated, “*Oh I used to fight all the time!*” She further explained that she “*felt like I had to protect myself everywhere I went and I still feel like that.*” Similarly, an African-American woman mentioned,

*I’ve been fighting since I was like uh, yeah like 2nd, 3rd grade I was just like that... I mean, I got teased a lot that’s a lot of the reason why I was getting into fights but, I mean, it was like it was just like, the thing to do like, that’s the way of proving that’s your rite of passage... in the hood.*
Being taught to defend oneself was a very common lesson taught to the youth. For instance, an African-American young woman recalled getting into “physical and verbal fights” and that she had her “first one [fight] in middle school in 8th grade.” According to her, “a girl like blew, and, she walked behind me and pushed me so, I was always taught that if someone puts their hands on you, you have to defend yourself, so that’s what I did.”

Similarly, another African-American young woman recalled her mother’s advice regarding self-defense, “she didn’t like for people to fight either but she didn’t want us to not know how to defend ourselves. She always said, if someone hits you, you hit them back.”

Likewise, a Latina young woman mentioned how she fought kids in the neighborhood because her mother forced her to stand up for herself.

No. I got in to the fight when my mother made me!

Facilitator: Your mom made you get into a fight?

Yeah.

Facilitator: Tell me about that.

Um, well the way the houses were, it was, it was like a, a giant square, and like we lived in a corner house and all these others little girls like from everywhere around the neighborhood like, all ganged up in front of the house and they’re all standing there talking shit to me and after like so long, my mom is just like fine - you want to go? My mother opened up the screen door and pushed me out. She’s like, OK, OK, who’s who’s gonna go first? So this one little girl was like, OK I’ll do it I’ll do it and my mother pushed me at her and we got into it and then her
twin sister decided she was going to try to jump in and my mother pushed her back and she had to watch me kick her sister’s ass so...

Facilitator: So your mom just stood there while you just beat up this little girl?

Yeah, because I guess my mom figured if they’re not going to go away unless you know, one of them gets into a fight fine, go kick her ass, and that’s exactly what I did and... And I haven’t gotten in a fight since.

Some study participants mentioned that they carried a weapon in fear of potentially becoming a victim of youth violence. A Latina young woman described:

There was a point of time where I didn’t leave my house if I didn’t have a knife on me. You know, there was times where, well, me and my sister we stayed out until all hours of the night, you know, we were out there when it was dark so, we always had to carry a knife on us, no matter where we went.

Similarly, a Latino young man admitted to carrying a knife in order to protect himself. “I used to get in fights all the time.” When asked if he ever carried a weapon he responded, “not a gun but pocket knives... I just had em. Just protection. Even with the blade, it was only like that small.” The interview further asked why he felt it was necessary to carry a knife for protection and he responded, “Because I could have got people—people used to get jumped and everything.”

Social norms related to neighborhood violence. The frequent witnessing of violence in the community created a culture that violence was normal or “not a big
Study participants who perceived their neighborhood environments as violent recounted they often saw physical fights, heard gunshots and witnessed various crimes (e.g., drug dealings, prostitution, etc.). They also indicated how they were not bothered by the crime in the area because they became used to it and accepted it as a normal part of their lives. As one Latino primary caregiver indicated: “it was difficult for kids to be able to determine what is normal and abnormal when they are so surrounded by a situation where the abnormal almost seems normal.” Or as another Latino mother mentioned “I think they got more desensitized to it.”

An African-American youth mentioned how he was constantly in fights during elementary and middle school. There was one person in particular that tried to steer him to go down the right path but it was difficult to do that given the other influences in his life.

There was one person that tried his name was, uh, he was a counselor at the school. His name was Reverend Kelly and I, I remember he took us to “Scared Straight” and like he was always like trying to get us to do good in school, but it didn’t seem to help us. Like there were so many like bad influences, I mean like all the kids I hung out with were doing the wrong things. So, it was hard for one person to preach, ‘get better get better get better’ with all of your friends are you know, preaching “let’s just do the same thing we’re doing... I remember some of my friends starting up our own little gang... and just like thinking were like them [the gang members]... those were the people we were looking up to... there was no, I don’t remember any adult being in my life... So, they were the adults in my life.
In addition, another African-American young woman admitted to being a gang member and reported that she joined a gang because most of the people in the community were in a gang.

*It was mostly my friends, like, everybody around me was doing something at that time, no matter how old, everybody was supposed to be doing stuff like that...*  
*Like, everybody was involved in some kind of gang, no matter if it was the Mexican gang or the Crips or the Bloods, everybody was there fighting all the time, doing something... I thought I was the only person that wasn’t. So, after watching them and being with them all the time, it’s just you get attracted.*

Overall, living in a community where violence was pervasive and the majority of peers and adults in the environment were involved in violent or illegal activities, led some youth to believe that violent lifestyles were normal and as a result became a perpetrator of youth violence. In addition, seeing violence in the community also was associated with feeling unsafe and heightened the fear of becoming a victim. Both of these feelings were linked to youth engaging in violence in order to protect themselves from the possibility of becoming victims or in order to establish their identity in the community as a tough person to be avoided.

**Substantive-level theory: Exposure to neighborhood violence.** Overall, exposure to neighborhood violence was associated with the perpetration of youth violence. Figure 5.3 illustrates the pathways by which exposure to violence led to youth carrying a weapon, fighting or participating in other forms of youth violence. Being exposed to violence created the need for youth to carry a weapon in order to protect themselves from
potential harm. The fear of becoming victims or of not feeling safe, led youth to carry weapons. In addition, youth also engaged in fighting in order to establish a reputation in the community that they were strong. Exposure to violence also created the impression that violence was normal in the neighborhood and that it was okay to engage in such activities as well. Overall, exposure to violence in the community influenced youth’s witnessing, victimization and perpetration of violence.

Figure 5.4

The Relationship between Exposure to Neighborhood Violence and the Victimization and Perpetration of Youth Violence

**Neighborhood risk factor: Lack of formal social control.** The fifth neighborhood factor, lack of police protection, was associated with greater exposure to youth violence. For instance, a Latina young woman recounted the effects of delayed police response to violence in her neighborhood:

…well the police honestly, I mean the police station is right up the block, but they do not help any at all, I mean, I remember like last summer, one of my best friends
got jumped you know and, almost beaten to death and me, I’m calling the cops and the cops didn’t show up there for about an hour after my best friend got beat up. And you know like that, that right there, you know I mean, if the police station is right up the block, they should be there within you know, five minutes, ten minutes...

An African-American young woman also shared how the police did not respond quickly to violence: “It seemed like the police were nastier. Its because we lived in like, um, something like the projects... It was like they didn’t, if you would call them, they wasn’t responding quickly...”

A Latino female young woman also mentioned:

... the police would come 2-3 hours later. It’s bad. When you call’em, they don’t come. They take their sweet, sweet time. And then, when I was younger, police used to always walk around the neighborhood. But now, you don’t see ‘em walking in the neighborhood whatsoever. They’re scared. They don’t even drive by sometimes.

This resident also recounted that there was a significant amount of violence in the neighborhood.

It was bad. ‘Cuz it was the 90s... And that’s when all kinds of gangs and stuff—it was just so bad, like the whole neighborhood... there were fights almost every day... you’ll hear gunshots...people on drugs... selling drugs... buying drugs.
In addition, an African-American young woman mentioned how the police station was located close to their house but they would only come for less-violent offenses.

**Facilitator: You have a police station right in your neighborhood?**

*It’s right there, it’s right next to us. Literally next to us. And they don’t do nothing they don’t do nothing about it like we call the cops they only come like for a stolen puppy but they never come for someone got murdered or something like that... Really someone got killed in my front lawn and they, they take forever coming when they’re like across the street from the neighborhood.*

An African-American young man articulated that police contributed to the violence in the neighborhood.

*The police did not protect anything. They took away from the community. One of my childhood friends got killed due to the police. They thought he had a gun [but] he had a knife. He ended up shot and killed by them. He was only like, 17 or 18 at the time.*

In addition, a Latino youth also mentioned,

*the cops were really never around when you needed them... but they were always around when you didn’t... Or uh, hassle you if you’re just walking down the street or something. Um. I guess, you know, they figure you know, the area – it’s a bad crime area you know, you know.*
An African-American young woman mentioned that having the police in the community could have helped reduce the amount of violence experienced by residents.

Facilitator: So they did try to protect you from some of that and keep you away from some of what was going on outside.

Oh yeah, yeah. Just my parents, but like I said, other than that, there was no programs or, you know, they didn’t, they didn’t have no block watch, police weren’t there, you know, a lot of times to let, to give their presence, cuz even just their presence woulda helped, do you know what I mean? Just like, I’m not gonna do something if I see the police over there at the park, you know, I wouldn’t, I’m not gonna rob this lady if I, if she’s gonna yell and I’m gonna be in jail in three minutes, you know what I mean? So I mean, that, that would have helped a little bit, but like I said, other, other than my parents, no, there, there was no outside enforcers that were positive, as far as violence goes.

An African-American primary caregiver suggested that police enforcement in her violent neighborhood could have made a difference.

...I just think it’s just you know, the few people that are bad actors and in poverty stricken areas they make the whole area look like that and it’s just really makes me mad that just a few people can screw up you know, um, people’s joy if you will, and that’s what makes me mad in regards to um, them and then the police. You know, um, they’re it’s the same way in that poverty stricken areas the police aren’t doing what they should do they, you know, um, as far as um, talking to young people and stuff like that because most of the people in those areas are
single parents and I like I said, most of the women in those areas like that, they work so that you know, they can’t be around 24/7 when as we would like to but that’s just the way it is you know. We’re doing the best that we could can do with what we have.

*Explaining the social mechanism: Lack of formal social control efforts.* Formal social control such as police presence and enforcement was another neighborhood-level mechanism that explained the process by which neighborhoods influenced youth violence. Study participants indicated that the police were slow in responding to community violence or contributed to the level of community violence. Despite the close proximity of police stations to areas of crime within the neighborhood, the police were not perceived as being effective in controlling the level of violence in the community due to their delayed response which sometimes took “2-3 hours to show up”. Study participants reasoned that if the police were present and actively engaged in the community then it would have helped in reducing youth violence.

*Substantive-level theory: Lack of formal social control efforts.* According to study participants, neighborhoods that had higher levels of community violence tended to have less protection from the police. In general, the police were either very slow to react to criminal activities despite their close proximity to the neighborhood or completely failed to show up. Overall, participants expressed that the lack of police protection in the community contributed to greater exposure to youth violence. Therefore, better formal social control efforts may have decreased the prevalence of youth violence in the community.
The Relationship between the Lack of Formal Social Control and Exposure to Youth Violence

Development of Grounded Theory

This section reviews the neighborhood conditions and the associated social processes that were instrumental in the linkages between neighborhood conditions and youth violence. In summary, there were five key social processes operative in the neighborhood context, which contributed to the witnessing, victimization and perpetration of violence. Five substantive-level theories were offered for explaining in greater detail the processes by which these mechanisms operated. By explicating the relationships between these social mechanisms, a general theory explaining the process by which neighborhood contexts influence exposure to youth violence is presented.

Postulate 1: Living in communities with easily accessible and affordable community-level programs and recreational resources protect children from being exposed to youth violence. In contrast, the absence or unaffordability of such resources removes the protective effects and expose youth to higher levels of community and youth violence. In addition, the establishment of social ties among neighbors enhances informal social control efforts that diminish youth exposure to youth violence as witnesses, victims, and perpetrators.
Postulate 2: The combination of exposure to neighborhood violence, association with deviant peers and the absence of police control and protection created an environment where:

(1) The social norms around the use of violence are reinforced;
(2) Youth are pressured or encouraged to participate in youth violence;
(3) The fear of becoming a victim move youth to fight or carry a weapon in order to protect themselves from potential harm;
(4) Violence continues due to the lack of formal control efforts from the police.

As a result, these neighborhood risk factors are associated with greater exposure to, victimization of and perpetration of youth violence.

Figure 5.6
*The Social Processes by which Neighborhood Conditions Influence Youth Violence*
Research Question 2:

Are the perspectives of primary caregivers and their young adult child(ren) about the extent to which neighborhood conditions influence youth violence congruent or incongruent?

To measure the level of congruence among dyads and triads, I looked to see if the pairs shared a similar description of the neighborhood (e.g., violent or non-violent neighborhood) and of the type of impact (e.g., positive, negative, or no impact). For triads, I divided the threesome into two pairs of dyads. The dyads consisted of a primary caregiver and one youth. Since I transformed the triads into two dyads, the total number of dyads used in the analysis was 45 (e.g., one dyad for each young adult child). In order for a dyad to be considered congruent, both individuals had to agree on the description of the neighborhood and the type of neighborhood impact. There are three types of incongruent pairs: (1) disagree on both the description of neighborhood and type of impact; (2) disagree on type of impact but agree on description of neighborhood; or (3) disagree on description of neighborhood but agree on type of impact. Overall, the sample consisted of 41 congruent pairs and 4 incongruent pairs. Table 5.4 illustrates the levels of dyadic congruence or incongruence by characteristics of the sample.
Table 5.4

*Level of Dyadic Congruence or Incongruence by Dyad Characteristics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Congruence or Incongruence</th>
<th>Congruent ((n = 41))</th>
<th>Incongruent ((n = 4))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complete congruence ((n = 41))</td>
<td>Disagree on perception of impact ((n = 1))</td>
<td>Disagree on neighborhood description ((n = 3))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent Characteristics</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Congruent dyads.** Congruent pairs shared similar descriptions of the neighborhood conditions and the perceived impact that the neighborhood had on youth violence. Approximately 91% \((n = 41)\) of the dyads were congruent. Of the 41 congruent dyads, 61% were Latino; and 66% lived in neighborhoods that were perceived as violent.

For the congruent dyads, I first described the patterns among dyads living in neighborhoods that were perceived as violent and then I summarized the findings from dyads living in neighborhoods that were perceived as non-violent.

**Violent neighborhoods.** There were some congruent dyads who lived in neighborhoods that were perceived as violent but did not consider the neighborhood as having an impact on exposure to youth violence. For instance, an African-American mother and her son mentioned that they lived in a neighborhood where there were constant shootings and a lot of crime. However, the mother did not think the neighborhood had impacted her son’s involvement in youth violence because:
... he wasn’t out in the neighborhood... He was really involved in his, in his school and each school that he was in as far as sports, and so he really wasn’t in the neighborhood a lot. He was at school doing activities through the schools.

This primary caregiver mentioned how her son had limited involvement in the neighborhood because he was always busy with activities at his school. Her son had a similar perception about neighborhood impact. During his interview he stated, “...my neighborhood kind of wasn’t really relevant just because I was so disconnected from it.” Since the youth was preoccupied with other activities and had limited exposure to the neighborhood, the neighborhood did not have an impact on his overall exposure to youth violence.

Similarly, a Latino primary caregiver indicated that they lived in “a bad neighborhood” but there was a recreation center “right on the corner... There was a lot and she [her daughter] liked it and she had fun and it kept her from you know, wandering the neighborhood—because it was a bad neighborhood.” Her daughter echoed these sentiments by stating that

... I mean because 50 percent of my time was at the rec center. Doing one thing or another and then the rest was at home so it was not like really I was in the street... because if I wasn’t at home, I was at the rec center. If I wasn’t at the rec center, I was at home.

Her daughter’s involvement in neighborhood recreation centers limited her exposure to youth violence.
In addition to perceiving the neighborhood as not having an impact on youth violence, some dyads perceived certain neighborhood factors as having a protective effect and thus limiting their exposure to youth violence. For instance, an African-American youth and her mother both mentioned that their neighborhood was violent but they lived around a lot of family members and her children were constantly involved in various neighborhood programs. This pair mentioned how access to community-level resources and informal social control efforts protected them from the violence in the neighborhood. The mother mentioned how these protective factors had a positive impact whereas the teenage mentioned how the same protective factors block the negative impacts of the neighborhood.

Table 5.5

*Example of Congruent Dyadic Analysis for Pair Living in Violent Neighborhood*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Perspective</th>
<th>Youth Perspective</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They had summer programs. They had after school programs, um, just kept you know, keeping them busy. Keeping their minds strong. That’s what... it was good for them... nothing but positiveness [sic]... We had a lot of vacant homes in our neighborhood. We also had a person that would go around to patrol the area. A lot of people, you know, instead of not saying that you see something, you know, they reported it anyway.</td>
<td>...We lived across the street from my auntie and my cousin lived down the street. I had a lot of older folks that lived in the neighborhood. They would just always tell me ‘don’t do this when you get older and don’t do this and that’... As I get older I like, got very involved in stuff so I’m not always like at home... so it’s kind of like as I changed, the neighborhood was, I became—how can I say this... it wasn’t as big as much of a problem for me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both participants mentioned the protective effects of having neighbors that reported crime and acting as positive role models by providing useful advice. Similarly,
a dyad consisting of an African-American mother and her daughter both indicated that the neighborhood in which they lived was violent but also stated how the local recreation center and the relationships among neighbors helped to prepare the teens for the type of violence that was in the community and tried to protect them from the violence as well. Although the neighborhood was violence, the presence of recreation centers and the networking among neighbors mitigated the presence of youth violence.
Table 5.6

*Example of Congruent Dyadic Analysis of Pair Living in Violent Neighborhood*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Neighborhood</th>
<th>Parent Perspective</th>
<th>Youth Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...During the summer um, they witnessed shootings that was not too far from our home...it wasn’t something that we could have shield them from. I didn’t keep them form it because well, there was no way because a lot of times they could be out there playing and something would be going on.”</td>
<td>There was a lot of drug activity, drug dealings... We have um, gangs in our neighborhood. So, I mean, being exposed to gangs and sometimes there would be shootings and different stuff like that, so being exposed to that, was a big deal...Once we were playing outside and there was there ended up being a shooting right across the alley. Our back yard is the alley, so it was like, we were close to a dangerous situation, we were actually in a dangerous situation as kids.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Impact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Although there was shootings at certain times, I don’t think that affected her... There were a lot of kids and um, a lot of the parents was, we were more into looking after out kids... When they were outside playing we all kept an eye on each other’s kids...” “I kept them involved in the rec center in the neighborhood. My daughter especially, she was always engaged in uh, activities with rec centers, the YMCA, basketball, swimming, just a bunch of stuff that she was involved in...In our neighborhood the rec center would usually have um, little programs set u where the kids could come and see what the violence can do to you. So yeah, the rec center was really good about that and some of the churches as well was good about that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It didn’t affect me because although I was exposed to it, being in the rec center, in school and with my mom, it didn’t matter to be...There is a rec center in my neighborhood called Martin Luther King Rec Center. So, the people in the neighborhood would encourage the kids like look you don’t need to be out here in the streets or any negative activities so go to the rec center and be involved in something else. So there was always an adult in the neighborhood or at the rec center that was encouraging us as kids to do something positive with ourselves. They were keeping us away from that exposure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, there were several dyads where the primary caregiver and the young adult child both agreed the neighborhood was violent but neighborhood-level protective factors, such as recreation centers and informal social control, reduced the potential negative effects of living in a violent neighborhood. Some dyads perceived these protective factors as positive attributes of the neighborhood and also felt these factors prevented the neighborhood from having an impact on their young adult child’s exposure to violence.

Other dyads described their neighborhood as violent and perceived the neighborhood as having a negative impact on exposure to youth violence and thus their conversations mainly focused on the neighborhood-level risk factors. For instance, a Latino mother and her son both perceived the neighborhood as violent but had different reasons for how the neighborhood influenced youth violence. The mother mentioned that her neighbors did not do a good job of monitoring their children. Her son agreed that there was a lot of violence in the neighborhood and also expressed that neither the neighbors nor the police stepped in to reduce the level of exposure to youth violence.
Table 5.7

*Example of Dyadic Congruence of Pair Living in Violent Neighborhood*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Perspective</th>
<th>Youth Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There were lots of drugs around here... I’ve seen kids whose parents were on drugs and marijuana...But lots of mothers are watching TV and don’t watch the kids, you see? They ignore them and they come home whenever they want... its like over here parents don’t care about kids... they are very irresponsible...I told my kids if you don’t have a good friend, then don’t have friends at all... they don’t have friends here now.</td>
<td>It was definitely bad in the 90s, I remember seeing all kinds of stuff. People running, blood all over their face...I’ve seen a lot of fights too...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Facilitator: When things like that happened in your neighborhood, did you see neighborhood trying to do anything about it?

No, no one stepped in. The police would come 2-3 hours later. It’s bad. When you call ‘em, they either don’t come or they take their sweet, sweet time... You don’t see them walking around in the neighborhood whatsoever. They’re scared.

The mother and the son both agreed that there was a lack of informal (e.g., neighbor-led control efforts) and formal social control efforts (e.g., police protection). Overall, they felt like violence occurred due to the lack of these efforts to control youth violence.

In addition, an African-American young woman mentioned how she lived in a neighborhood where there was “pretty much a lot of drama everywhere... there was a lot of conflict with neighbors.” She also mentioned how she was a violent teen.
I was getting tickets. I got assault tickets, disturbing the peace, so I got a ticket for stealing something in the store. Um, I was just fighting and arguing with people all the time.” She further explained that the neighborhood “affected me mentally... the type of person I was before I actually got into living around certain people, I wasn’t I, became more of a, even physically, so I have to say it affected me more because I was always fighting, I was like cussing at people, just doing stupid stuff.

Her mother shared a similar description of the neighborhood and its impact on her daughter’s engagement in youth violence. Her mother mentioned, “they did a lot of shooting over there... lots of violence”. She also mentioned that when her daughter got in high school she “was the one that was getting suspended from school due to the fighting in school.” She further explained that the neighborhood affected her daughter’s mental health.

*We stayed locked up in the house a lot... I think sometime it made us depressed because um, a lot of times it made us depressed because in the projects you have to literally close your shades. They had like these old dark shades... it becomes dark in there so you live like a hermit and nobody should have to live like that...*

*Non-violent neighborhoods.* There were nine dyads that perceived their neighborhoods as non-violent but felt their neighborhoods did not have any impact on exposure to youth violence. These participants described their neighborhoods as safe and stated that there was no violence in their community.
For instance, an African-American mother mentioned that the neighborhood was not violent and did not influence youth violence.

*Um, but as far as the neighborhood itself, I wouldn’t say that the neighborhood affected, you know, for the, you know, the positive or negative, I mean it’s a, it was a nice area, it was you know, the best house that we could afford at the time. It seemed like a real peaceful neighborhood...*

Similarly her daughter mentioned:

*I was never worried. My mom, uh, we lived down the block from there [a playground] and because the neighborhood was so rich, she would let me, at seven years old, just run down the street, and play at the park, until the sun went down, and she would never have to check on me.*

There were five dyads that perceived their neighborhood as non-violent and that it had a positive impact on the prevalence of youth violence. For instance, a Latina primary caregiver of two young adult males mentioned that the neighborhood was “*relatively quiet neighborhood... You don’t see neighbors fighting... It’s a safe neighborhood.*” The primary caregiver mentioned how the neighbors would get together to help decrease the level of violence in the community.

*I have this paper here, the lady who lives on the corner brought us a paper because somebody tried to break into her house... So we circulated papers to alert the other neighbors... since this is a quiet neighborhood and I haven’t seen a policeman in months.*
Similarly, when her young adult son was asked about the type of impact he indicated, “If there has been one, it might be positive, in the sense that we’ve kind of gotten along with everybody... If someone’s in trouble, they might offer to help, or we might offer to help...” The relationships among neighborhood in a non-violent communities help create an atmosphere where they would look out for another and help each other out.

In addition to the congruent dyads, there were additional dyads where the primary caregiver – youth pair did not agree on either the description of the neighborhood or on the type of impact the neighborhood posed on youth violence.

**Incongruent Dyads.** There were three possible types of incongruent dyads – disagree on impact; disagree on neighborhood description; or disagree on both neighborhood impact and description of neighborhood. None of the dyads illustrated complete incongruence (disagree on both neighborhood impact and description of neighborhood). The following sections describe each type of incongruence.

**Disagree on impact.** There was one dyad in which the primary caregiver and the young adult child had similar descriptions of their neighborhoods but disagreed on the type of impact the neighborhoods posed on exposure to youth violence. An African-American grandmother and her grandson were both asked about the type of violence experienced in the neighborhood and the impact it had on youth violence. The grandmother indicated that the neighborhood had a negative impact on youth violence whereas her grandson reported the neighborhood not having an impact. Table 5.8 highlights both respondents’ statements.
Table 5.8

*Example of Incongruent Dyad -- Disagreement Regarding Neighborhood Impact*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood Description</th>
<th>Grandson’s Response</th>
<th>Grandmother’s Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>It wasn’t the best neighborhood at all... it was the projects, it was, there was gangs, there was drugs. The neighborhood was violent... I remember there was a local gang there. I remember them being like huge. Like I remember seeing them all the time.</em></td>
<td><em>Well, just like I said, in Aurora it was a pretty bad place... Most of the violence was mostly kids... He got into trouble in Aurora. He got into fights in Aurora, and all of that.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Impact</th>
<th>Facilitator: So, um, what, was there anything about your neighborhood, elementary through middle and high school, that you think really affected any um, part of your behavior? Either good or bad?</th>
<th>Facilitator: Ok. And what was it about the neighborhood that you know, really encouraged that? Like him getting into fights and stuff?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Um, I don’t know if it’s good or bad, but it, it made me tougher. I mean, like the person I am now is definitely because of my neighborhood, like, you know, you can look at me and say, oh, that, you know I’m - you shouldn’t mess with me I guess, I don’t know if that’s good or bad. It made me a, like a stronger person and someone who could stick up for their self.</em></td>
<td><em>It could have been and the people that he would run around with and in school. He was always in trouble and everything it could have been quite a few things... I think well, mostly he started running around with the wrong crowd.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the grandmother and the youth both agreed that the neighborhood in
which her son was raised was violent, they shared different perspectives regarding the way in which the neighborhood impacted youth violence. In other parts of the interview, the teen indicated that he was involved in violent activities and that he was arrested and went to jail due to it. Overall, he felt that the neighborhood did not necessarily have a good or bad impact on his personal involvement in youth violence but indicates that it made him a stronger person who was capable of sticking up for himself. However, on the other hand his grandmother reported that the neighborhood had a negative influence on his behavior due to his interaction with negative peers.

**Disagree on description of neighborhood.** There were three dyads that disagreed on the description of the neighborhood but agreed on the type of neighborhood impact. Within three of the dyads, the primary caregivers described the neighborhood as non-violent neighborhood but their young adult children described the neighborhood as violent.

A African-American stepfather mentioned that “…violence has never been nowhere in her life, never never ever taste that kind of stuff. She haven’t seen violence, you know, that uh, not in the neighborhood where I stay at.” However, when his daughter was asked about the kinds of things she witnessed in her neighborhood she responded, “Like, uh, people fighting and uh, just fights. A lot of fights… some shootings… I heard gunshots and I would try to be as far away as I could… there were gangs around the neighborhood.”

Similarly, an African-American mother indicated, “Everything was safe… It was nice…there was no violence in our neighborhood, it was very calm and peaceful.”
However, her daughter mentioned different forms of violence she witnessed growing up in the neighborhood,

...they had a lot of shootings and things going out there, at night... it was really annoying. Um, because I was aware of you know, flying bullets and things like that going on. Um, through windows and walls. When we were living on Akron, they shot the next door neighbor’s house, that's when one of the bullets came flying through my mom’s refrigerator... We lived in a duplex, so it came through the wall.

When the facilitator asked how did the violence affect her she responded, “I just kind of adapted to it, because that’s where we lived.”

There was one dyad where an African-American mother indicated that they lived in a non-violent neighborhood and that the neighborhood had a positive impact on youth violence (e.g., neighborhood had fewer risk factors for youth engaging in violence) while her son indicated that the neighborhood was violent and had a positive impact.
### Table 5.9

**Example of Incongruent Dyad – Disagreement on Description of Neighborhood**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Mother Perspective</strong></th>
<th><strong>Son Perspective</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Facilitator:</strong> For the neighborhood that you were in for those first 13 years, was it a really safe neighborhood? Did you feel like it had a good, like positive influence on your son?  &lt;br&gt;Yeah, I do. We were in the neighborhood where there were more adults than children. So, when he grew up so there was more adults around than children in the neighborhood...We had some good neighbors. Yes, we had some good people...  &lt;br&gt;<strong>Facilitator:</strong> Do you think having more um, adults than children was uh, helped him stay out of trouble or something like that?  &lt;br&gt;Yes, I do.  &lt;br&gt;<strong>Facilitator:</strong> We’re just curious when your son was growing up, was there any aspect of your neighborhood that you think exposed him to violence?  &lt;br&gt;<strong>Huh. No. Not a lot. Not a lot at all.</strong>  &lt;br&gt;<strong>Facilitator:</strong> Was there gang activity or...  &lt;br&gt;<strong>Uh, you know, like we’ve seen incidents... I can’t really... I’m trying to think of something that over there that he really, I mean.. I don’t know because there wasn’t very much over there in that neighborhood... over there it was pretty mellow. Because like I said, it was more adults than children in that complex where we lived.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Facilitator:</strong> You said it wasn’t a very easy neighborhood, what does that mean?  &lt;br&gt;<strong>Well, because there was gang activity and stuff like that was always happening around and um, avoiding that and still trying to stay on stay where I need to be and not get wrapped up in you know the negative...our neighborhood was kinda violent...but, the neighborhood kind of made me stronger... there was always fights and stuff, like, like the playgrounds and stuff. Always stuff like that happening.</strong>  &lt;br&gt;<strong>It wasn’t, wasn’t a very easy neighborhood, so kinda maybe tougher. Well, because there was gang activity and stuff like that was always happening around and um, avoiding that and still trying to stay where I need to be and not get wrapped up in your know the negative. Kinda making me stronger.</strong></td>
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The mother indicated that there wasn’t any aspect of the neighborhood that exposed her son to violence. However, the son reported often seeing gang activity in his neighborhood. Overall, among the dyads where there was disagreement regarding the description of the neighborhood, the primary caregivers indicated that the neighborhood was not violent and that their children were not exposed to any violence at all. The difference in opinion highlights the notion that youth may be experiencing certain forms of violence of which their primary caregivers were unaware. This also underscores the need to interview youth directly about their experiences in their neighborhood.

**Conclusion**

Results from the dyadic analysis indicate that the majority (91%) of the dyads were congruent. In most cases, the primary caregiver and their child shared similar perceptions of the neighborhood environment and how it influenced youth violence. In neighborhoods where the youth and their primary caregiver described the neighborhood as violent, both pairs of the dyad acknowledged how local institutional resources, such as recreation centers, mentoring programs or churches, as well as informal social control efforts buffered young adult children against being exposed to youth violence. In addition, dyadic analysis also revealed how violent neighborhoods placed youth at greater risk of being exposed to violence through their affiliation with negative peers groups, the lack of police protection, and constant witnessing of violence. Among the congruent dyads that lived in non-violent neighborhoods, both pairs agreed that the quiet neighborhood either did not bother them at all or were positive environments that provided the young adult children with adult supervised activities.
In addition there were only a few dyads where the parent and the caregiver shared dissimilar views of the neighborhood or its impact. This could have occurred if the parent and the teen were referring to two different neighborhoods. For instance, maybe they moved during the childhood and the teen could be referring to one neighborhood while the parent is referring to another. Further, primary caregivers and their young adult children could share different perspectives of the neighborhood if (1) the primary caregiver was not fully aware of the types of encounters their young adult child experienced in the neighborhood; or (2) the young adult child could interpret negative neighborhood-level influences as normal contextual factors whereas their primary caregiver may perceive these same conditional factors as being negative influences; or (3) one pair in the dyad was not completely honest in regards to the type of conditions the young adult child was exposed to during their childhood.
Chapter 6: Discussion

Introduction

This final chapter is organized into four sections. First, I discuss study findings regarding the participants’ description of the neighborhood conditions that contributed to youth exposure to violence and the associated social processes. I also place these findings within the context of the wider literature. Second, I discuss similarities and differences in the perspectives of primary caregivers and their young adult children. Third, I consider the study limitations within the context of the criteria for grounded theory research. The fourth section of the chapter provides a synthesis of the overall study findings, makes suggestions for future research, and presents implications for social welfare policy and practice.

Residents’ Perception of Neighborhood Factors and Social Mechanisms

There has been considerable discussion and debate about the various mechanisms by which neighborhood contexts influence youth violence (Ellen & Turner, 1997; Galster, 2012; Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Sampson et al., 2002). However, this discussion has not led to consensus over which causal pathways are most salient. Some social scientists (see Bauder, 2002; Cheshire, 2007; Durlauf, 2004) have even doubted that neighborhood contexts significantly influence youth violence and there is a lack of literature that explains how neighborhood mechanisms operate and under what conditions might neighborhood contexts influence youth violence (van Ham & Manley, 2012). For example, while there is evidence that deviant peers groups may influence children to participant in similar behaviors, it is not clear as to how exactly these peers influence others. Do peers pressure other children to engage in youth
violence? Do children socialize with their peers and admire their behavior? Are children learning from and transferring certain skills to their peers? In an effort to advance the neighborhood effects debate, van Ham and colleagues (2013) emphasized the need for “ethnographic” studies that assess the perceptions of residents to further understand how neighborhood processes operate. This study addressed this need for qualitative research and also tackled their questions about the processes by which neighborhood contexts might influence youth violence.

The central purpose of this study was twofold: (1) to better understand how neighborhood social and structural factors influence youth violence; and (2) to assess whether primary caregivers and their children shared similar perceptions about their neighborhoods and their influence on youth violence. Qualitative analyses of the perspectives of youth and their primary caregivers regarding their experiences of living in their neighborhoods provided insights about what they identified as salient factors influencing exposure to youth violence as witnesses, victims and perpetrators. Five grounded theory categories emerged from the data—local institutional resources; social ties and informal social control; deviant peer affiliation; exposure to violence; and lack of police protection.

**Local institutional resources.** Study participants reported how involvement in local recreation centers and mentoring programs such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, Denver Kids, and Whiz Kids, provided positive environments for youth and helped them to avoid negative influences in the neighborhood such as interacting with deviant peers and engaging in violence. According to some primary caregivers, the cessation of
unaffordability of these programs limited opportunities for youth to interact with prosocial peers and participate in supervised, constructive activities.

Previous studies examining the linkage between community programs and youth violence did not explicitly specify the process by which these factors influence youth violence. These previous studies measured the presence of communities programs by using data from archival records (Peterson et al., 2000); survey reports of the presence of neighborhood programs (Coulton, Korbin, Su, & Chow, 1995; Elliott et al., 1996); and self-reported organization participation (Morenoff et al., 2001; Veysey & Messner, 1999). Overall, these studies demonstrated a significant inverse relationship between the number of community programs, organizational participation, and youth violence. Essentially, the presence of such programs was associated with lower levels of youth violence. However, the existing literature failed to distinguish whether it was the availability of community programs or the utilization of services that was most salient in explaining the relationship between local community programs and youth violence.

Findings from this study suggest that youth utilized local recreation facilities and non-profit organizational programs as long as they were easily accessible, located in a safe environment, and affordable. Once neighborhood programs charged fees or were terminated, adults noticed differences in children’s behavior. For instance, several primary caregivers mentioned how children in the neighborhood expressed feeling “bored” once the community limited opportunities for friendship and entertainment (e.g., closing of recreation centers, removal of certain community programs sponsored by non-profit organizations). Although participants mentioned the benefits of using recreation centers, after-school programs and mentoring programs, participants did not use the parks
and playgrounds in their neighborhood as frequently. As an African-American mother stated during her interview “I wouldn’t say there was really any parks that I would feel comfortable with him playing at.” Park and playgrounds were oftentimes the sites for youth engaging in fights or witnessing violence. Therefore, the provision of local institutional resources in areas of the neighborhood perceived by residents as safe is important to ensure that residents are able to access and utilize such resources.

These findings are consistent with previous studies that found that poor, minority children with greater access to neighborhood-level resources in safe locations (e.g., recreation centers, after-school programs, library, etc.) were less likely to engage in violent activities compared to children without access to these resources (Scales, 1999; Scales et al., 2005). Young adults who spent time in unstructured and unsupervised activities with peers were at particularly high risk of participating in violence (Osgood, Wilson, O'Malley, Bachman, & Johnston, 1996). This was evident in study findings from caregivers and their children who acknowledged that having access to recreational services helped youth stay out of trouble. The lack of these services created opportunities for their children to hang out with negative neighborhood peers, which ultimately led to their increased involvement in violent activities. The hours immediately following the school day, when most parents are working, constitute a window of time that can be risky for low-income children living in disadvantaged and dangerous neighborhoods. During after-school hours, violent victimization of children triples, gang violence peaks, and youth crimes reach its highest levels (Maimon & Browning, 2010). Young adults in the study who mentioned that they were always participating in programs at school or at the local recreational center during after-school hours also indicated that they were able to
avoid the negative influences within their neighborhoods. Similar to the findings of Molnar and colleagues (2008), the combination of neighborhood resources and positive peer groups helped to significantly decrease the prevalence of aggressive and delinquent behaviors among youth. Regular after-school program participation may be associated with benefits for children by providing a safe, supervised context and provides a way for youth to build competencies to cope with neighborhood risks. In summary, local neighborhood resources when offered in safe locations within the neighborhood provided a protective effect and buffered youth from being exposed to youth violence.

**Social ties and informal social control.** Social ties among neighbors were another protective neighborhood-level mechanism that was associated with youth violence. Consistent with the findings from prior studies, social ties and networks helped establish informal social control efforts, which limited youth exposure to violence as witnesses, victims and perpetrators (Bellair, 1997; Browning et al., 2004; Rountree & Warner, 1999; Sampson, 1986). Two types of social ties were described through the transcripts: (1) relationships among adults within the community; and (2) the intergenerational ties between youth and older residents. Relationships among adult neighbors helped create an environment where neighbors would watch over each other’s children, keep each other well informed of crime activity in the neighborhood, and create neighborhood watch groups to attenuate crime in the community. Intergenerational social ties provided the opportunity for older residents to give advice to the younger residents, including suggestions to help them navigate the neighborhood and avoid negative influences. Sometimes this happened in unconventional forms. For instance, one African-American young woman mentioned she received advice from the older gang members in
her neighborhood: “…drug dealers would be our biggest fans. They would be the ones to say ‘Hey, how are your grades in school? How’s basketball?’ So it was like although they are out there doing negative things, they were making sure we were on the right path and looking out for us to be doing positive things.” Intergenerational social ties also were established as youth participated in activities at their local recreational centers and interacted with adult supervisors. Youth mentioned that they were able to find role models and get advice from the adults in and around the recreation centers, after-school programs, and mentoring programs.

Social ties were the foundation of informal social control efforts. Informal social control efforts were established by shared affiliation with local institutional resources, interactions among neighbors living on the block (e.g., neighborhood watch programs), and frequent communication among local residents (e.g., distribution of pamphlets, newsletters) (Bursik, 2001). Informal social control efforts were mentioned by the participants as positive features of their neighborhood and provided the means for limiting youth exposure to youth violence.

**Deviant peer affiliation.** Social contagion is the neighborhood-level mechanism most often associated with youth violence. According to Galster (2012) this process alters youth behaviors, aspirations, and attitudes through contact with deviant peers who are neighbors. Under certain conditions these changes can take on contagion dynamics that are akin to ‘epidemics’ (2012, p. 2). The process has been explained in the literature as negative peer groups having an effect on other peers causing their fellow peers to join in on their behavior. However, it has not been explicitly clear as to how exactly these contagion effects operate. Are teens pressured to participate in youth violence by their
peers? Are teens learning and transferring skills from other peers? Or do teens admire then later mimic the negative behaviors of their peers?

Findings from this study suggest that the process of social contagion operated through two distinct sub-processes—peer pressure and social admiration. According to primary caregivers, their young adult children were pressured to participate in the negative behaviors of their peers. Although primary caregivers used terms such as “peer pressure” or “corrupting”; youth used terms such as “admired” or expressed having the personal desire to participate in or emulate the behavior of their peers. In general, youth mentioned that they made a deliberate choice to hang around peers because they were attracted to a particular lifestyle. According to youth in the study, they were constantly exposed to deviant peer groups and often times these peers were their close friends or siblings. Through social admiration and perceiving their behavior as “cool” the young adult children grew attached to these deviant peer groups and willingly participated in violent activities with their peers. Therefore, the social “contagion” process is not just about peer pressure as the literature indicates but also indicates a sense of role model setting and admiration on the behalf of other youth.

Focusing on activities and time spent with peers, Osgood and colleagues (1996) proposed that adolescents who spent time in unstructured activities with peers in the absence of authority figures were at particularly high risk for participating in youth violence. This also was evident in my findings since the lack of accessible recreational centers, in combination with caregivers’ absence from the home forced youth to raise themselves and seek role models outside the house.
Exposure to violence. Being exposed to neighborhood violence influenced youth violence through two distinct pathways—collective socialization (e.g., “product of the environment”) and the need to protect oneself. Several youth mentioned how they engaged in violence because they were used to seeing it in their neighborhoods and they didn’t have other positive role models. In addition, others mentioned that violence in the neighborhood made them want carry a weapon or engage in physical fights in order to protect themselves. Youth reported that they had to establish their reputation in the neighborhood as a person who fights in order for others to leave them alone. Other youth mentioned how they carried weapons in order to protect themselves from potential harm. This either normalized violence making youth believe that “its just the way it is in the hood” or it made them “tougher,” “stronger,” “smarter,” or “like a man”.

Findings from this study echoed points previously made by Elijah Anderson (1999) regarding the “code of the streets”. In his book, Anderson argues that in neighborhoods characterized by limited employment opportunities and increased disadvantage, “the trust and perceptions of decency that once prevailed in the community are increasingly absent” (1999, p. 145) and in its place a “code of the streets” developed which emphasized toughness, risk-taking, and the use of violence to achieve status. He further articulated that violent solutions to resolving problems in poorer communities are essential components of local subcultures and are also the means of defending one’s honor and garnering respect from peers. As expressed by Anderson and also represented in the findings of this study, in neighborhoods where victimization was common, youth viewed having a reputation of toughness as a form of protection. Similar to findings of Shetgiri and colleagues (2015), fighting was described as a problem-solving strategy and
as a way of gaining respect from peers. In order to support this reputation, youth carried
weapons or engaged in physical altercations so that, as one youth expressed, “they know
not to mess with me.” Further, youths’ decisions to fight were often times supported by
their caregivers who endorsed fighting back for self-defense or retaliation.

Primary caregivers also supported youth’s role in fighting for the sake of self-
protection. Several youth articulated how their caregivers gave them advice to hit
someone or use violence to defend themselves. Occasionally, young adult children would
admit to engaging in a physical fight and reasoned that their mothers advised them that if
“someone hits you then you hit them back.” In addition, there was one case where a
mother made her daughter fight neighborhood peers who were constantly picking on her.
In that particular case, once the daughter fought the girls from the neighborhood, she
noticed that the bullying and teasing stopped. Similar to other studies self-protection is a
primary reason reported for carrying a weapon (Arria, Wood, & Anthony, 1995;
McNabb, Farley, Powell, Rolka, & Horan, 1996; Sheley & Wright, 1993; Simon, Dent &
Sussman, 1997). Carrying a weapon and fighting was mentioned by youth who indicated
that they felt unsafe in their neighborhood, knew victims of violence, and held
perceptions of vulnerability to victimization (Ryan & Kim, 1992; Simon, Dent, Sussman,
1997).

Lack of formal social control. Another important mechanism that was
articulated in the qualitative data was the importance of formal social control methods.
Formal social control refer to practices of law enforcement personnel to maintain order
and enforce legal and regulatory codes of conduct (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003). The quality
of police enforcement can influence crime rates (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003; Weisburd,
Groff, & Yang, 2014). Findings from this study indicated that participants speculated that if police were more active and engaged in enforcing the law, then there would be less crime in their neighborhoods. Some participants indicated that the police station was located fairly close to their home but when violent events or crime occurred, police were slow to respond. Overall they felt that a timely response to crime would have decreased the amount of youth violence experienced in their neighborhood.

Typically disadvantaged neighborhoods are less able to secure police protection and services as indicated by residents’ frequent complaints and by data on police practices (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003). Residents in poorer communities were more likely than residents in other areas to report that police were not responsive to communities issues (Sampson & Bartusch, 1998) or responded slowly to crime victims (Sampson & Bartusch, 1998) poorly prevented crime or were dissatisfied with police services (Reisig & Parks, 2000; Velez, 2001; Weitzer, 1999, 2000) or police engaged in unwarranted and excessive force in the neighborhood (Weitzer, 1999, 2000). As articulated by an African-American young woman “...you kind of learn to deal with your own problems no matter what the situation may be... whereas people in nicer areas where they do try to stop those things the police are involved. If something happens they just call the police...” Her observation of the neighborhood reflects the disparity in police protection between poorer communities and more affluent communities. Lenient policing can affect crime rates by influencing residents’ perceptions regarding the probability of being apprehended for illegal activities (Sampson, 1986; Sampson & Cohen, 1988; Velez, 2001). Consistent police enforcement alert potential offenders that they risk apprehension if they commit a crime, whereas lenient enforcements send a message that sanctions are weak or absent
which in effect create the perception that certain areas are hotspots for criminal activities (Stark, 1987).

The quality of the relationship between law enforcement and residents is also important to consider. Previous studies have indicated that having a positive relationship with policemen and their overall presence and enforcement of laws help reduce youth violence (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003; Weisburd, Groff, & Yang, 2014). As one participant indicated, police contributed to the level of crime in the neighborhood by shooting one of his friends. Other participants documented how police harassed residents for no reason, which caused residents to not trust the police. An African-American mother recalled how the police would harass young African-American youth in her neighborhood. “...We witnessed young men and young women being chastised by the police officers for no reason...there are instances where police would just stop people saying they’re somebody else... and they have their ID or whatever and telling the police no, they’re not them... and the police still body-slammed them to the ground.” She furthered explained how witnessing police mishandle youth impacted the relationship residents had with the police. “Things like that really hardened a lot of young men, not just my son, but a lot of young men at the time hardened their hearts towards the police. They [the police] are not right, they’re just picking on us.” Her sentiments are consistent with previous studies which found that residents of disadvantaged African-American neighborhoods are much more likely than residents of middle-class African-American neighborhoods to report police misconduct, police engaging in unwarranted stops, verbal abuse from police and the use of excessive force (Weitzer 1999, 2000). Studies examining police practices have reported that police activity varies from one neighborhood to another (Smith, 1986).
addition, police tend to treat residents of high-crime areas as “deserving victims, whose lifestyles invite victimization” (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003, p. 382). Therefore police tend to respond to calls much slower compared to calls from more affluent areas (Klinger, 1997; Liska & Chamlin, 1984). Lastly, additional studies examined police records and conducted street observations of officers and reported that police misconduct is higher in disadvantaged areas than in more affluent areas (Fagan & Davies, 2000; Kane, 2002; Mastrofski, Reisig, & McClusky, 2002; Smith, 1986). This type of misconduct typically creates a divide between policemen and residents, which ultimately stifle efforts to mutually reduce neighborhood crime.

**Dyadic Perspectives of Neighborhood Influences and Impact**

The literature on neighborhoods and youth violence has primarily used a quantitative approach to examining neighborhood effects. Very few studies have used the qualitative approach, and, to my knowledge, no previous studies have used a dyadic approach examining the perspectives of primary caregivers and their young adult children to examine the social processes by which neighborhoods influence youth violence. Dyadic analysis is important because it provides a dual perspective regarding a single phenomenon – the neighborhood contexts and its influence on youth violence. Dyadic analysis provides an additional layer of context to the youths’ story, informs us of perceived social processes operative in the neighborhood that either member of the dyad youth may not notice or be aware of, and also provides a way to triangulate the research findings. The majority of the dyads (91%) were congruent in terms of their perceptions about the influential factors in the neighborhood and their associated impact. Only four
dyads were found to be incongruent, of which three disagreed on the description of the neighborhood context and one disagreed on the description of the neighborhood impact.

Among the congruent dyads living in violent neighborhoods, the pairs generally agreed that informal social control and access to community resources generally served to protect and buffer against exposure to youth violence. Although these pairs agreed that they lived in neighborhood described as violent, there were some features embedded in the neighborhood that protected them from being exposed to youth violence as witnesses, victims and perpetrators. Participants residing in violent neighborhoods described contextual factors such as local institutional resources (e.g., recreation centers, mentoring programs, after-school programs), social ties, and informal social control efforts as having a protective effect on youth violence. Congruent pairs also shared similar perspectives regarding the influence of affiliations with deviant peers, exposure to violence, and the lack of informal and formal control as risk factors that heightened their children’s exposure to youth violence. Overall, these factors placed youth at greater risk of being exposed to youth violence. The high level of congruence among the dyads may suggest that the youth and their primary caregiver have a strong relationship and an open line of communication where the youth feel comfortable with sharing information about their experiences in the community. It also may suggest that primary caregivers and their youth may have had previous conversations regarding neighborhood influences and came to conclusions regarding how the neighborhood may have impacted the youth’s exposure to youth violence. For instance, primary caregivers typically try to protect their children from the negative influences in their neighborhood. If a primary caregiver notices that certain factors may place their child at greater risk of being exposed to youth violence
(e.g., deviant peers) then they may alert their children regarding the potential dangers associated with those factors. Such conversations are likely to happen frequently if and when a primary caregiver foresees certain factors as a threat. Therefore by the time of the interviews were conducted the pair may have shared opinions regarding potential neighborhood risk and protective factors.

There were a few dyads where the caregiver and the youth disagreed on the description of the neighborhood—whether violence was an issue or not. It is possible that the youth and the caregiver may have been referring to different neighborhoods. For instance, if they moved during the youth’s childhood, the youth could be referring to one neighborhood context while the caregiver referred to another. Another possible reason for the discrepancy is that caregivers may not feel comfortable sharing stories about the type of violence their youth was exposure to or they may not remember all the forms of violence their youth experienced. Further, it could also be possible that the caregiver was not aware of the types of neighborhood conditions their child experienced.

**The Relationship between Neighborhood Context and Impact**

Understanding how neighborhoods influence youth violence from a qualitative perspective is an important addition to the current literature. As revealed in the findings of this study, youth show considerable variation in how they feel about and respond to youth violence. Some may ignore or minimize it while others struggle against it, and still others reconcile themselves to it, embrace it, or event adapt to it. Therefore, not all violent neighborhood contexts were perceived as having negative impacts; some study participants were able to learn from their environments in terms of what things to avoid and also learned to toughen up”. In addition, not all negative neighborhood conditions
influenced youth to become violent. Some youth were buffered from the violence in the neighborhood by caregivers, some ignored the violence by participating in structured programs and activities through local recreation centers or other sources, while others used violence in the neighborhood as an example of how not to behave. Multiple young adult children expressed how they deliberately avoided the violence in the neighborhood. Oftentimes, these youth would spend a significant amount of time inside their homes, participate in after-school programs, or spend time at a relative’s house located outside the neighborhood in order to avoid socializing with negative peer groups. Further, the findings from this study were consistent with those reported by Stoddard and colleagues (2013), which found strategies that engage youth in positive social activities with other positive peers may help expose them to positive role models, and increase their chances to overcome the negative consequences associated with the risks they face while living in violent neighborhoods.

**Policy Implications**

Youth violence is a social and public health problem of national concern. In order to design effective programs to reduce the prevalence of youth violence, interventions need to be comprehensive and holistic in their approach by considering all ecological risk factors. As Hawkins (1995) argued, using a social ecological perspective “calls for first identifying the factors that put young people at risk for violence in order to reduce or eliminate these factors and strengthen the protective factors that buffer the effects of exposure to risk” (p. 30). Consistent with social disorganization theory, this study also found that social and structural factors embedded in the neighborhood influenced youth violence. Similar to the findings of Shaw and McKay (1942), when social ties are strong,
neighbors are able to share common values and implement informal social control efforts
to control youth violence. The lack of informal social control and formal social control
efforts are associated with youth’s increased exposure to violence as witnesses, victims
and perpetrators. Studies examining the effects of neighborhood contextual factors on
youth violence primarily focus on intra-neighborhood influences (e.g., social interactions)
as opposed to the larger urban political and economic contextual influences (Bursik &
Grasmick, 1993, p. 52). As articulated by Shaw and McKay (1942), any great reduction
in the extent of youth violence in large cities probably will not occur until a general
change takes place which results in improvements in the economic and social conditions
surrounding children in those areas in which the youth violence rates are relatively high
(1942, p. 321-322). This perspective is further supported by Wilson (1987) who
refocused the neighborhood effects discussion to examine the influence of factors
external to the neighborhood (e.g., politics, economy) that affect the availability of
opportunities within neighborhoods. According to Wilson “local conditions and the social
practices of residents of poor areas cannot be understood independent of the macro social
and economic forces which shape them (1987, p. 14 )”. For instance, macro social
influences, such as the deindustrialization of inner-city neighborhood, led to the
elimination of blue-collar jobs, which, in turn, increased economic deprivation (Shihadeh
& Ousey, 1998; Wilson, 1987). Consequently, the lack of job opportunities led to the
growth of the illegal drug market in disadvantage communities, which was associated
with increased homicide rates (Ousey & Lee, 2002; Shihadeh & Ousey, 1998). Therefore,
in order to tackle and prevent youth violence special attention need to be paid to the
economic and political decisions that shape neighborhoods and the opportunities
available to its residents. The provision of affordable housing, quality education and access to jobs that pay livable wages are examples of strategies that could provide residents with opportunities to develop skills to join the legal job market and steer away from criminal activities for monetary gains (Wilson, 2009a).

Consistent with prior studies that used quantitative and ethnographic data, this study shown that local institutional resources, informal social control, deviant peer affiliation, exposure to violence, and the lack of police protection were salient neighborhood factors that moderated the causal pathways between neighborhood contexts and youth violence. Findings from the study suggest that the availability of quality recreation programs in safe environments was particularly instrumental in assisting youth with staying occupied and out of trouble. Youth and their primary caregivers found these resources to be helpful in keeping their youth occupied in structured activities and out of trouble as long as these resources were affordable and located in safe areas within the neighborhood. Findings from this study reinforce the importance of easily accessible and affordable after-school, weekend and summer programs for youth living in low-income contexts (Richards et al., 2014). These programs are oftentimes absent from low-income communities because of diminishing tax bases, which typically fund these programs. When these programs were offered in safe environments, youth and their primary caregivers found these sources to provide a level of protection so that their youth were not bored or engaged in violent activities. Community-based organizations, philanthropic groups and local governments should continue to invest in the long-term sustainability of these programs. Researchers and community practitioners can work together by evaluating the effectiveness of these programs (e.g., resident utilization, participant
satisfaction, program efficacy) to fully understand the benefits of having these programs within the community and to identify programmatic elements that could be strengthened or modified. For instance, if a community program offers mentorship opportunities for youth but these are not being fully utilized, it would be beneficial to examine why resident youth are not using the program and identify what should be altered before completely eliminating the resource.

In addition, parks and playgrounds are neighborhood assets that could help youth stay active and out of trouble but are sometimes hotspots for crime, violence and drug activities. Community residents and local police forces could form partnerships to help rid these spaces of these negative activities. Law enforcement officials can patrol these areas in order to reduce criminal activities so that they could become natural meeting spaces for community gatherings. Community members, community partners and police forces can work together and enhance the safety of residence in and around neighborhood parks and recreational spaces in order to enhance the benefits afforded to youth from the provision of such resources. Local community members could create programs similar to the “Parks After Dark” program in Los Angeles. Nonprofit and community-based organizations can reserve the park space each night to host programs in the evenings. These programs can range from youth sporting events to dances and aerobics sessions for all residents to enjoy. By developing such programs, the parks would be active and occupied by community members in a constructive way. This would also help reduce the chances of these spaces being used as breeding grounds for criminal activities.

Another implication from this study suggests the importance of improving police practices. The timely response to criminal activities and consistent enforcement of the
law by police officers could create an environment where residents feel safe and protected from potential harm (Weitzer, 1999, 2000). Additionally, it is important to improve the relationships between police officers and the residents they intend to protect. Police officers can improve their relationships with youth by providing avenues whereby youth and police could work together for recreational and safety purposes. For instance, the Police Athletic League (PAL) provides a mechanism for youth to build positive relationships with police by coming together for sporting events. Additionally, local police departments could establish youth service jobs where youth can learn more about local laws and policies while earning money. Overall, the provision of a stronger police force and legitimate policing practices could reduce the levels of youth violence within neighborhoods.

Social workers also can play a significant role in preventing youth violence. Social workers who service at-risk youth can help youth develop skills to nonviolently resolve disputes and to provide therapeutic services that would help change beliefs about the acceptability of violence. By improving youth’s skills, knowledge and abilities to effectively solve problems, control anger and impulses, as well as regulate emotions, youth’s risk for violence would decrease and their health and safety would increase (David-Ferdon & Simon, 2014). For instance, Cure Violence (formally known as CeaseFire) is an evidence-based program designed to connect trained staff with at-risk youth to provide conflict mediation, make service referrals, and change beliefs regarding the acceptability of violence. This program has been found to effectively interrupt violence, particularly shootings, and alter social norms about the acceptability and inevitability of violence (David-Ferdon & Simon, 2014). Further, communities that have
implemented this program have found that it contributed to reduced shootings and killings and fewer retaliatory killings (Skogan, Hartnett, Bump, & Dubois, 2008).

Overall, efforts to prevent youth violence should include input from the youth themselves. One way to engage youth is by establishing local youth action committees where younger neighborhood residents can provide insights and suggestions regarding strategies that would help prevent them from being exposed to youth violence and lead to their healthy development. By developing a coalition that includes youth, community leaders and government officials, communities could improve intergenerational relationships between the youth and the elders in the community. In addition to having older residents serve as mentors, formerly incarcerated youth can serve as outreach workers and act as mentors to at-risk youth by coaching them on strategies on how to avoid criminal lifestyles.

**Study Strengths and Limitations**

This study has several strengths. The *Denver Child Study* used dyads and triads to capture in-depth accounts of how different neighborhood contexts influence youth violence. By conducting separate dyadic interviews, this data provided two accounts of each story which enabled me to compare both stories for accuracy and congruence. Separate dyadic interviews also provided additional details regarding similar incidents and allowed each partner to tell their study from their own perspective without being interrupted or influenced by their partner. Another strength of this study is the use of qualitative methods to elicit youths’ and their primary caregivers’ perceptions of the influence of neighborhood contexts. The use of semi-structured, in-depth interviews allowed the participants to speak freely about their experiences and provided details to
help further identify the underlining processes associated with neighborhood contextual effects on youth violence. Overall, using an interview format provided a more nuanced explanation of how the neighborhood contexts influence youth violence.

There are several limitations associated with this study as well. First, the findings and analysis in this study are based on a limited number of residents ($N = 79$) and hence, similar to other qualitative studies, should not be generalized to other urban populations elsewhere. Since the sample was drawn from a larger sample, the study findings are representative of the population from which the sample was drawn. Generalizations from this study are partial, conditional and situated in a specific time, space and setting (Charmaz, 2014, p. 236).

Second, retrospective interview data are subject to recall bias and social desirability bias. Recall bias may occur as participants may forget certain details of their past (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). Young adults and their caregivers are asked to recollect how the neighborhood influenced their behavior during different stages throughout childhood; their responses rely on imperfect memory. Social desirability bias can occur if participants negotiate their identity by disclosing certain information and not mentioning other information. For instance, a caregiver may be aware that their child is involved in a gang but would not mention that to the interviewer because gang participation is not socially desirable or legal.

Third, as an analyst using secondary data, I could not return to the study participants to confirm my study findings to ensure that the point of views expressed and the theory constructed from the data were endorsed by the study participants. However, memo writing and open coding techniques were conducted throughout the coding process
to serve as an audit trail and to stay close to the words, language and expressions used by study participants. Fourth, the data used in this study did not capture the individual-level and family-level influences associated with youth violence. Although previous literature has noted the association between family and individual influences on youth violence, this study primarily focused on neighborhood-level influences and did not directly capture these other factors.

**Meeting the Criteria of a Grounded Theory Approach**

The use of constructivist grounded theory approach was only undertaken after examining the existing literature on neighborhood effects and youth violence. A review of the literature showed that existing theoretical models did not completely explain the social processes by which neighborhood contextual factors influence youth violence. It became immediately evident that there was a need for a qualitative study that examined resident perceptions of their neighborhoods and their understanding of how these neighborhood contexts influenced youth violence (van Ham & Manley, 2012). Therefore, an inductive coding process was selected to shed light on residents’ interpretation of neighborhood mechanisms.

According to Charmaz (2006, 2014) constructive grounded theory stories should aim to exemplify credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness. The criterion of credibility seeks to assess whether the study measures or tests what it is actually intended to study (Shenton, 2004). The criterion looks to see if there are logical links between the empirical data, the objective of the study and the analysis. The objective of this study was to further explain how the neighborhood contexts influence youth violence. Hence, this study used secondary data from in-depth qualitative interviews with approximately 80
residents (youth and their primary caregivers) who lived in low-income housing throughout Denver, Colorado. Listening to residents recount stories about their experience living in these neighborhoods and how social and structural factors in their neighborhood influenced their exposure to youth violence provided a unique perspective regarding how these neighborhood mechanisms operate. Throughout the analysis, open and focused codes were developed from the interview data. Focused codes were further developed into categories which formed the basis of the grounded theory.

The second criteria, originality, assesses whether the categories developed in the study provide new insights or refine current ideas, concepts and practices in this area of research. In regards to the criteria of originality, this study provides a significant theoretical contribution to this area of research by further explaining how neighborhood mechanisms operate. The finding that youth are not necessarily pressured into participating in violence but are attracted to engage in these activities provides another interpretation to the concept of social contagion. In addition, in current neighborhood effects discourse the mechanism exposure to violence has been associated with youth violence by way of exposing youth to a certain lifestyle, which may influence them to participate in these same activities later in life. However, findings from this study provided an alternative approach to understanding how exposure to violence influences youth perpetration of violence. This study found that neighborhood exposure to violence influenced youth to carry a weapon in order to protect themselves from becoming a victim of violence. Therefore the categories and linkages developed in this study offer a more nuanced understanding of how certain neighborhood mechanisms operate.
The criterion of resonance assesses whether grounded theory categories developed from the data portray the fullness of their studied experiences and if the analysis offer deeper insights about their lives and worlds. The findings from this story helped to depict a more nuanced understanding of how the neighborhood contexts influence youth violence. Categories were created from focused codes that were salient across multiple interviews. These categories further developed by scrutinizing each transcript to identify similarities and differences in respect to the particular category. Once the category was identified, all of the participants input was used to shape the category. For instance, many participants identified local institutional resources as having an association with exposure to youth violence. Several participants described these resources as having a protective effect on their children. However, some participants articulated how the absence of these programs affected youth in the neighborhood. Although relatively few participants mentioned this perspective, it was still used in developing the category because it provided a unique perspective and a deeper understanding of the influence local institutional resources have on exposure to youth violence.

The final criteria, usefulness, evaluates whether the analysis can inspire further research in other substantive areas and if the findings offer practical suggestions that people can use in their everyday lives. The purpose of using a grounded theory approach to studying this research question was to understand youth and their primary caregiver’s perceptions of their neighborhood contexts and to learn how these contexts influenced exposure to youth violence. These study presented a set of substantive-level theoretical frameworks that seek to explain how neighborhood mechanisms operated and presented
some suggestions for translating these study findings into policy or programmatic changes.

**Conclusion**

This study builds upon important previous research that has documented the relationship between neighborhood-level factors and youth violence (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2002; Sampson et al., 1997) by illustrating *how* and *why* certain neighborhood contextual factors influence exposure to youth violence. Using qualitative data from the *Denver Child Study*, this study utilized a constructivist grounded theory approach to explain in detail how local institutional resources, deviant peer affiliation, exposure to violence, and formal social control influenced youth violence. These findings suggest the following: deviant peers influenced youth to engage physical fights, join a gang, or carry a weapon; the lack of formal social control placed youth at greater risk of being exposed to youth violence; exposure to community and youth violence enticed youth to further engage in youth violence; and access to local institutional resources limited youth’s exposure to and involvement in youth violence. Overall, primary caregivers and their young adult children share similar perceptions of the neighborhood and the social processes that link neighborhoods to youth violence.

Collectively, this study has developed a conceptual model that integrates key theoretical premises into one central framework. Overall in violent communities where formal social control efforts are weak; recreational and mentoring programs are unavailable; interaction with positive role models in and outside the family are limited; and children are constantly exposed to violence in the neighborhood and socialize with deviant peers, youth will learn to resolve conflict with violence and turn to violent
subcultures (e.g., gangs and deviant peer groups) for resources and rewards (e.g., status, monetary gains, etc.)

**Future Research**

This study provided a basis for understanding how neighborhood mechanisms operate using the perception of youth and their primary caregivers. Future studies could build upon these findings by examining the role that home environment plays in mediating the relationship between neighborhoods and youth violence. For instance, parenting styles and practices may influence youth exposure to their neighborhood and hence their exposure to youth violence (Ary et al., 1999; Jarrett, 1997, 1999). Understanding how parenting styles and practices influence this relationship would be a key area to more fully explore. In addition, it also would be useful to understand the home environment of the teen, including the presence of domestic violence, substance abuse, or mental health issues in the home. These factors can play a role in shaping the teen’s social context and can influence the way they interpret and navigate their neighborhood environment, including the use of violence.

Future studies could also focus on the community assets that protected youth from being exposed to violence and created an atmosphere for positive youth development. Traditional neighborhood effects studies have employed a deficits-based approach to studying neighborhoods, a disposition that has been used since the inception of the social disorganization perspective. By using this framework, researchers tend to focus on the factors in the neighborhood that lead to poor youth outcomes. However, a focus on the neighborhood strengths and assets can inform policies and practices that can support the creation of positively stimulating environment for youth growing up in low-income
communities. In conclusion, youth violence can be prevented but it will require concerted efforts from community members, local leaders and the investment from the government.
### Appendix A
Charmaz’s Criteria for Developing Categories  
(2014, p. 190)

#### Utilization of local institutional resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Community-based resources that provide recreational, educational or mentoring services to youth in the community.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Properties</td>
<td>Easily accessible (e.g., located in the neighborhood); Provided activities during after-school hours, weekends and summers; Affordable; Recreational programs; Educational services; Churches; Mentoring programs;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions that produce, maintain or change</td>
<td>“Bad neighborhoods” (e.g., violent neighborhoods); Communities with a lot of violence; Communities with negative peer groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences</td>
<td>Mentorship programs gave the youth a sense of purpose; Kept them busy in a constructive manner; Place to go to keep off the streets; Helped teen to keep out of trouble; Helped teen stay focused; Positive outlet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to other categories</td>
<td>Higher levels of exposure to youth violence; Less involvement in perpetrating violent activities;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Deviant Peer Affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Relationships with peers that engage in youth violence influence another teen’s involvement in and exposure to youth violence.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Properties</td>
<td>Friends from the neighborhood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Conditions that produce, maintain or change | Peer pressure  
Hang with the wrong crowd  
Admiration; its “cool”  
Desire to fit in  
Desire to try new things; experimenting |
| Consequences | Fighting  
Getting arrested/ going to jail  
Joining a gang  
Carrying a weapon |
<p>| Relationship to other categories | Higher levels of youth violence perpetration |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Exposure to Community Violence</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition</strong></td>
<td>The witnessing or experiencing of violence within the neighborhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Properties</strong></td>
<td>Frequent sightings of fighting among youth, drug deals, and other forms of illegal activities; Hearing gun shots; Presence of gang members;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conditions that produce, maintain or change</strong></td>
<td>Unsupervised youth;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consequences</strong></td>
<td>Feelings of fear The need to protect yourself Normalization of youth violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship to other categories</strong></td>
<td>Perpetration of youth violence Carry a weapon Physical fighting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Lack of Formal Social Control</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition</strong></td>
<td>The inability of police to control or restrict crime in an area due to their absence or disconnect from the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Properties</strong></td>
<td>Delayed response times; Lack of presence in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conditions that produce, maintain or change</strong></td>
<td>Impoverished communities with high crime level and low tax base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consequences</strong></td>
<td>No control over the level of violence in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Categories related to other categories</strong></td>
<td>Higher levels of exposure to youth violence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix B

#### Code List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Supporting Dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Youth Behaviors Displayed**     | Arguing  
Argo theft  
Anger management classes  
Behavior changed or got worse  
Disrespect/disobedient/rude to parents  
Well behaved  
Played sports  |
| **Avoiding Exposure to Youth Violence** | Avoiding bad influences  
Avoiding drugs  
Avoiding fights  
Avoiding trouble  
Did not get into trouble  
Did not join gang  |
| **Avoiding the Neighborhood (NH)** | Did not participant in NH or NH resources  
Did not spend a lot of time in NH  
Stayed at school a lot  |
| **Youth Risky Behavior**          | Drinking alcohol  
Ditching school  
Smoking  
Sneaking out the house  |
| **Types of Youth Violence**       | Bullying  
Doing graffiti  
Fighting  
Fighting- self defense  
Getting arrested  
Going to court  
Got into trouble  
Joined a gang  
Probation  
Selling drugs  
Shoplifting  
Used drugs  
Carried a weapon  |
| **Feelings toward neighborhood**  | Being scared  
Not being scared  
Felt safe  |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposure to Violence</th>
<th>Felt unsafe</th>
<th>Worried</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Witnessing violence</td>
<td>Bullets</td>
<td>Crimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drugs in neighborhood</td>
<td>Fighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gang presence</td>
<td>Heard about violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heard gunshots/shootings</td>
<td>Murders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Witness shooting in NH</td>
<td>Burglary/Robbery/Breaking and Entering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of youth violence</td>
<td>Beat up/picked on/ bullied/jumped on/threatened</td>
<td>Sibling victimized by violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stranger got killed</td>
<td>Stranger was shot and killed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stabbed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Institutional Resources</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>After-school program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Programs</td>
<td>Big Brother Big Sister</td>
<td>Bold Leaders Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys and Girls Club</td>
<td>Colorado Uplift Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colorado Youth at Risk Program</td>
<td>Denver Area Kids Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girl Scouts</td>
<td>Gang Prevention Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job Corp</td>
<td>Neighborhood program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentoring program</td>
<td>Parks and playgrounds in NH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rec Center</td>
<td>Save Our Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Save Our Youth</td>
<td>United Way Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upward Bound Program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Characteristics</td>
<td>Programs were expensive</td>
<td>Helped youth stay focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive influence</td>
<td>Not a lot of people used it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood Characteristics</td>
<td>No violence in NH</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prostitution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult role models</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult supervision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad neighborhood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close-knit neighborhood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not get to know neighbors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not get along well with neighbors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family member lived in neighborhood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghetto/Projects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good neighborhood/ Calm neighborhood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a lot of families lived in NH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No adult role models</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood kids are violent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a lot of young kids in NH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No adult supervision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor quality parenting among neighbors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of informal social control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-social friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed friends on a pedestal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spent a lot of time in NH/hung with NH kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling gang member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangs were cool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood watch out for my kids</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of the Police</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absence or disconnect from community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Cops do not care”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistrust the police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police harassment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gang Units</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood Influence/Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood contributed to behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No influence/no impact/”No big deal to me”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NH made him/her stronger/taught life lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product of environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapting to NH violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Just blocked it out”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No impact/ family influence is more important</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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