Understanding Adolescent Violence
An Ethnographic Approach

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Beyond the Headlines

Adolescent violence is a recurring subject of public concern. In the 1920s and again in the 1950s, urban youth gangs made headlines. In the 1980s, crack-related homicides among young people soared. The 1990s saw mass shootings in suburban schools and yet another cyclical upsurge in youth gang activity. Yet these sensational events—the ones that focus media attention and generate pressure for solutions—often fail to reflect the everyday reality of young people's lives, or the ways they deal with aggression and violence.

In 1995, against a backdrop of mounting concern about violent teenagers, Vera launched a major ethnographic study of adolescent violence. Rather than focusing on the most extreme events or the broad trends reflected in official statistics, the Vera study sought to examine in depth the ordinary, daily lives of adolescents and the ways they encounter and deal with violence. To this end, Vera researchers set out to answer some fundamental questions: how often violence occurs, what forms it takes, where it happens, how effectively adults respond, and how teenagers actually cope. By providing a clearer understanding of the nature and context of adolescent violence, these findings can shed light on which measures might be most effective in preventing and controlling it.

Data collection for the study has now ended, and a final report will be available in the fall of 2000. This paper presents highlights of some key findings that emerged.

Getting in Close

The study assigned three ethnographers to three New York City middle schools in different neighborhoods beginning in September 1995. Each ethnographer tracked 25 students for three years, from seventh grade through their transition to high school. There were roughly equal numbers of boys and girls in each sample. Since schools and communities vary widely in rates of adolescent violence, the study was designed to be comparative, examining similarities and differences across communities in patterns of violence and systems for preventing and controlling it.

Early adolescence is a stage when many young people are on their own for the first time, and this new freedom can increase their exposure to violence. It is also a period that leads into the middle-adolescent years, when serious violent behavior is most likely to emerge as a stable pattern. Early adolescence is thus thought to be a key developmental period for intervention and prevention.

The researchers got to know the students and their families by observing them in school, at home, and in their neighborhoods. They also conducted detailed life-history

interviews with the young people and their parents and guardians. In addition, all three ethnographers participated in the life of the schools. One coached in an after-school basketball league, another helped with the school chorus, and the third worked with a class on a video history of its neighborhood.

This immersion in the students' lives gives the study a richness of detail that often escapes more quantitative research. In addition, it builds trust between researcher and subject. Because many of the behaviors that researchers were interested in are illegal (for instance, violent acts and weapons possession), this trust was critical in fostering honest reporting. Ethnographic research is also especially useful for studying the social contexts of behavior, in addition to factors such as psychological functioning or family background, which vary from individual to individual within the social contexts of neighborhoods and schools.

Three schools and neighborhoods could not possibly represent the full diversity of New York City, or urban America more generally. But the study tried to encompass some of that variation by choosing areas with very different socioeconomic and cultural characteristics and kinds of schools. This strategy allowed Vera's researchers to address questions about what difference context makes for adolescent safety.

The fictionalized names of the three communities studied are Fairhaven, Soulville, and El Dorado.

Fairhaven

Fairhaven is a racially and economically diverse neighborhood that has been in transition in recent years. Although the population of the neighborhood has long been predominantly white and middle class, the balance is shifting. For instance, some local housing projects are inhabited mostly by poor African-American families. In addition, an increasing number of students, mainly African-American and Afro-Caribbean, have been bused in from surrounding areas suffering from school overcrowding. Fairhaven's middle school is a traditional New York City public school, with students grouped in classes according to a strict tracking system. It is neither an honors nor a magnet school, nor one of the system's troubled lower-tier schools with high rates of academic failure and disorder. Today, as a result of changes in the neighborhood and school feeder patterns, a little over half the school's students are black or Latino, though the school staff and parents' association are mostly white.

Soulville

Soulville is a poor neighborhood that is physically and socially isolated from the rest of the city. Rates of crime and violence are high. Most residents are African–American; a few are Latino. While the area does have some good resources for young people, in the form of athletic and recreational programs, the neighborhood school is extremely disorganized, physically deteriorated, and overcrowded. In fact, in many ways it is

emblematic of the problems of the city's lower-tier schools. The school offers only basic academic classes and negligible extracurricular activities. Fights are frequent. The school has a reputation as a dumping ground, a place to which troublesome students and inferior teachers are transferred when other places do not want them. Staff turnover is extremely high.

El Dorado

El Dorado is a poor neighborhood, most of whose families have emigrated from the Dominican Republic. It has experienced acute crime and violence, including violent confrontations between adult drug traffickers and gang fights among young people from different blocks. The school Vera studied there has an unusual structure: that it operates in partnership with a community organization to provide a rich variety of after-school programs and other services to both students and the surrounding community. About half the school's students participate in after-school programs at the school itself, an extraordinary rate in New York City. The school also explicitly recognizes community involvement as part of its mandate and offers special programs for parents. Students are not tracked in the traditional way, but are divided into five smaller subschools in an attempt to create smaller communities of learning and greater contact between teachers and students. The school's staff also deal directly with problems of violence: they invite local police officers into the school to be educated by students about Dominican culture, work closely with the police to monitor local gangs, and involve gang members in carefully supervised after-school recreational activities.

A Kid's-Eye View: Common Findings Across the Neighborhoods

While fighting was common, it was generally not serious

At all three sites, adolescents reported frequent exposure to violence, as offenders, victims, or witnesses. The level and seriousness of this exposure, however, varied considerably. For example, sixty percent, one hundred percent, and ninety percent of the Fairhaven, El Dorado, and Soulville sample members, respectively, had hit someone on at least one occasion. Much lower percentages, however, had engaged in violence that might be characterized by the police as aggravated assault (Fairhaven, two percent; El Dorado, zero percent; and Soulville, 24 percent). Over half the Fairhaven students had been hit by someone; at Soulville the figure was 86 percent, at El Dorado one hundred percent. As these figures indicate, Fairhaven was a generally safer environment, as might be expected of a more middle-class school and area. Still, even in Fairhaven, most students had fought at least once.

The higher levels of community violence in Soulville and El Dorado come through even more strikingly in the students' reports of witnessing violence. Over half the students from these two areas had witnessed a serious violent injury or knew someone

well who had been the victim of such an injury, compared with about a quarter of those in Fairhaven.

While fighting was frequent, however, most of it was not severe. Guns were rarely involved in confrontations among these young adolescents. When fighting became serious, it generally involved gang beatings or weapons such as bats, garbage can lids, and other nearby blunt objects. A small number of incidents like these led to at least one case of hospitalization at each of the sites during the study period.

Although young people rarely used weapons, several did report carrying them. About a quarter of the overall sample said they carried a weapon, generally a knife or boxcutter, some of the time. Almost the same number said they had been threatened by one. Reports of carrying guns began to surface near the end of the research period, after entry into high school, but even then in only a few cases.

Both girls and boys fought

In the younger grades, girls fought as much as boys did, although often over different issues. Girls fought with other girls they knew, frequently about disparaging remarks or gossip. Boys fought for these reasons too, but were more likely to fight with strangers over turf or to take money or possessions by force. Many of the boys reported incidents of forcible theft of bicycles. As the girls grew older, however, they tended to fight less than they had in middle school. By ninth grade, they fought considerably less than the boys did.

To cope with violence, students relied first on their peers

Several terms cropped up among students at all three sites. "Herb," for instance, indicates someone who does not fight back when challenged, or who runs to adults for help. It is an extremely derisive label, which students universally seek to avoid. Once tagged with it, they are subject to teasing, theft, and intimidation.

Vera researchers found that students who were not herbs did fight back, but usually not alone. Instead, they reported relying on their peers for "backup." Students needed backup when they passed through others' territories, and they recruited it to avenge real or perceived injuries or disrespect. They also spoke often of "representing," a term that means having pride in oneself, as well as representing something larger than oneself. The common use of these terms is illustrated in a conversation reported by Pedro Mateu-Gelabert, the ethnographer in El Dorado:

> Francisco explained to me how he was walking around the school on Freshman Friday. This is an annual ritual in which older students harass and punch freshmen, but the freshmen know this and are capable of ganging up and hitting back. I asked him if the freshmen fight back. "Yes, they beat the herbs, people that don't represent," Francisco said. "Did they beat you?" I asked. "Not us. We

represent," said Francisco, looking at his friends. "Who do you represent?" I asked. "I represent myself. I'm Dominican. I represent Murphy Street."[*]

The case of Miguel, another El Dorado student, shows what can happen when young people do not represent. When confronted by a group of others boys who demanded to know whom he represented, Miguel answered only himself—a grave mistake that contributed to his being beaten and, eventually, leaving the school.

Students often actively avoided relying on adults to help them cope with violence
Students' reliance on peers was closely related to believing that adults would be unable to help them. In many ways, this lack of faith was justified, because the adults in their lives were often unaware of the extent of the violence they faced or unable to provide effective protection. Many parents at all three sites reported teaching their children to avoid fights if possible but not to back down when openly challenged.

Even when adults were available, however, many adolescents feared that relying on them would project an image of weakness. Joe Richardson, the Soulville ethnographer, observed the following vivid example of how young people teach each other to avoid seeking help from adults:

> At lunch I stood by the girls' entrance. One of the girls was getting teased by other girls, who were telling her she had lice in her hair. The girl was on the brink of crying. A couple of the other girls were screaming "you don't have no lice. . .so stop crying." Another girl in the eighth grade, Juanita, told her, "If they saying something about you, you should just say something about them that's all. . .fuck them bitches, I wouldn't let them just talk about me like that." Another girl added, "Don't tell Ms. S. [a school aide] either. Don't tell no older people. Just handle your own business that's all." Ms. S., who was standing nearby, overheard their conversation and asked what they were talking about. The girls said, "Nothing."

Sometimes adults bought into this view. Fairhaven ethnographer Barbara Miller reports that when Larry moved to the community, he got into several fights. One day, his aunt, with whom he lived, was seen at the school, trying to persuade other boys to become Larry's backup.

Many adolescents coped with violence by altering how they lived their lives
Adolescence, even in the safest communities, is a time of change, growth, and experimentation. The Vera study found that exposure to violence, whether as victim, offender, or witness, often contributed directly or indirectly to changes in young people's

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[*] All the names of the individuals in this report are fictional, as are the names of the neighborhoods studied.

lives, including their daily routines, peer relationships, and self-images. These adaptations ranged from relatively minor alterations to radical changes. A number of changes helped young people avoid violence. These included switching from one program within a large school to another; changing patterns of using schoolyards, hallways, and cafeterias; starting or stopping participation in after-school programs; and altering transportation routes to and from school.

Other changes were likely to increase exposure to violence, such as actively seeking out adolescent "hot spots" associated with various kinds of thrills, including fights, and joining gangs. In Fairhaven, for example, young people liked to hang out at a local commercial center and in a particular park. While most of their activities were appropriate, these popular leisure areas were also places where confrontations sometimes erupted. Most adolescent violence is public activity, for which the presence of an audience is a key ingredient. As a result, unsupervised and popular spaces are the most likely places for fights.

Perhaps because adolescence is a time of transitions anyway, a frequent response to serious problems was for the young person to make a new start in a new environment. Vera researchers found that school officials and parents, as well as students themselves, often turned to this solution. A number of families, especially the immigrant families coping for the first time with the high levels of urban community violence in El Dorado, moved or sent their children to live with relatives elsewhere. In Fairhaven, a case of extortion in the school lunchroom resulted in both the victim, Nathaniel, and the victimizer, Darnell, transferring to different schools.

Sometimes this works. The transition to high school, for example, provided an opportunity for several study participants to put frequent fighting during their middle school years behind them. Unless these changes are accompanied by other kinds of support, however, the young person may simply confront the need to establish a reputation in a new environment. That, in turn, can mean facing new tests and challenges, including physical challenges to fight.

Around age 14, many children who were involved in fights begin to settle down
A shift occurred at the end of the developmental period under study: fighting became less prevalent, but, for those who continued, the violence was more severe.

Wendy, from El Dorado, exemplified the pattern of decreasing violence. In seventh grade, she began fighting, growing progressively tougher and visibly relishing her ability to intimidate other students, boys as well as girls. The next year, after Wendy told a neighbor her stepfather had hit her, an investigation began; around the same time, she was sexually assaulted by an older boy. Her mother sent her to live with relatives in Puerto Rico, where she continued to get into trouble. After several months she returned to New York City, where her aggressive behavior resumed.

Then Wendy moved to high school, eventually attending a school outside her own neighborhood. She spent less time on her own block and got into less trouble. She improved her relationship with her mother and became more interested in issues of social justice. As a result of moving out of her old peer group and into a new setting, she was able to escape old patterns and establish a new identity. This process of experimenting with different identities is common during adolescence. Physical confrontations are very common at the beginning, before young people find other ways to assert themselves.

Unlike Wendy, Soulville's Dion became progressively more violent as he grew older. When first contacted, he was fighting a lot with some of his peers, but he also had positive relationships with others. But after they had a serious fight, his father had him arrested and locked up overnight. At that point, Dion lost all ties to conformity. He randomly attacked people whenever he was released, dropped friendships with nondelinquent boys, and became progressively committed to a violent lifestyle.

These contrasting stories suggest some answers to persistent questions about the high rates of inaccuracy in attempts to predict future violence and delinquency at the individual level. We know a great deal about risk factors that predict in the aggregate, but these factors do not predict well for individuals, perhaps because it is the interrelationships among risk factors at the individual level that make the difference. For Wendy, things started to work better for her both at school and at home. Perhaps even more important, there was a connection between the two. She found that many of the positive things her mother believed in were also important to the teachers she liked at school. For Dion, it worked the other way. Conflicts with his peers and with his father reinforced each other, until he became unable to make an impression on the world in ways other than violence. Additional ethnographic research like Vera's would explore these connections in greater depth, and in ways unavailable to traditional survey research. It would help unravel some of the longstanding puzzles in research on youth violence.

Varying Community Responses

Vera designed its research as a comparative study for the explicit purpose of being able to look at the ways patterns of adolescent violence and responses to violence vary in different social contexts. While the three areas studied could not possibly represent all neighborhoods in the city or the country, it was important to look at local variations in order to capture at least some of the range of similarities and dissimilarities in a social problem that is all too often represented in monolithic terms. Adolescent violence is a broad category encompassing both the sensational and the mundane: drive-by shootings and school slayings along with minor scuffles and fistfights. Looking at variations between and within communities is one way to get a more realistic picture of what is going on.

While the study found high levels of at least minor violence in all three communities and schools, it also found that the context, amount, and patterns of violence, as well as the ways schools and communities responded, varied a great deal. One particularly interesting variation concerned whether adults communicated and cooperated with one another in addressing the problem, or were unable to do so.

Fairhaven: A diverse and changing community avoids the issue of violence

The Fairhaven community and its middle school benefited from a significant middle-class population base. While there were pockets of poverty both near the school and in the more distant feeder areas, crime rates throughout the district were relatively low. The community was changing, however, and the school had begun to serve a much more racially and economically diverse population. While violence in the neighborhood and the school remained low compared with the rest of the city, there was a perception among some members of the school staff, as well as nearby residents, that fights and violence were increasing. In this situation, there was a tendency to try to protect the reputation of both community and school, sometimes by ignoring or denying the problems that did exist.

In one instance, a group of local merchants became concerned after a noisy confrontation between two groups of youths on a commercial strip was portrayed in the newspaper as a "gang fight," despite the fact that the incident involved very little actual physical aggression. At an ensuing meeting of community leaders, including middle and high school representatives, local police, and some of the merchants, some people demanded that the police make sure that students from the more distant neighborhoods were bused home immediately after school. As the local police representative pointed out, such action would have violated the students' civil rights. In addition, the proposal ignored the fact that some of the youths involved lived right in the area. Attributing the situation to outsiders, however, was a way for some local residents to try to protect what they perceived as the safety and reputation of their neighborhood.

Similarly, staff at the middle school tended to apply an "out of sight, out of mind" approach to violence. A case in point occurred with Tony, a seventh grader who was beaten on the way to school. Tony claimed a teacher had witnessed his victimization but done nothing. Tony's mother met with school staff and asked them to address the situation, but she was told that the school was not responsible for a fight off school grounds.

An incident involving two other students, Arnie and Larry, suggested that this attitude about the limits of school responsiblity was explicitly communicated to students, who understood that when they fought, they should "take it outside"—that is, off school grounds. Barbara Miller reports a conversation with Arnie:

> Arnie told me he didn't fight Larry in the schoolyard because he doesn't want to get suspended again. . . .He says teachers have told him to wait to have a fight until he's off school property. When Ms. T. [the guidance counselor] talked to Arnie about it, he said, "But it didn't happen in school" with a surprised voice, as if he didn't think she would have heard about it.

While this attitude is probably common in many places, it appeared to be particularly salient here as a result of anxiety among staff over losing a generally deserved reputation for having a good and safe school. As a result, by failing to confront the problem, the staff might have allowed it to become worse.

When students did take it outside, they sometimes found that the local police were not much help either. Arnie described an incident in which boys from another neighborhood stole his friend's bicycle:

> We called the cops, the cops did nothing. . . .The kid goes, "That's my bike". . . the cop goes, "Do you have proof?" He goes, "Yeah that's my bike," he's like, "You could ask my mother or my father." The cop goes, "Well that ain't enough proof" and just pulled away. And the kids were going to beat him up for trying to rat 'em out and he had to run all the way home.

These incidents illustrate how adolescents can get stranded when the adults around them shift responsibility back and forth. When community leaders and school staff are more concerned about a school's reputation than dealing with problems, and when police are reluctant to deal with "kid stuff," young people may feel they have to devise their own solutions. By ignoring these problems, adults make it more likely that they will escalate.

Soulville: A neglected school adds to the problems of a poor neighborhood
The Soulville community has a long history of poverty, crime, and related social problems, as well as family and community efforts to foster resilience in the face of adversity. Unfortunately, official institutions have not always supported these community-based efforts. In the part of Soulville included in this study, adolescents got more social support from their families and from some established community organizations than from their local school or police. The local school, in particular, had a reputation as a dumping ground for problem students who could not get along in other schools in the district. The concentration of troubled students, coupled with high staff turnover, contributed to high levels of disorder inside the school. This turnover sometimes spilled over into the surrounding community.

As at Fairhaven, staff in this school tended to communicate that students should "take it outside" when trouble started. Joe Richardson describes the general attitude toward fights as an "understood rule: If it's gonna go down its gonna go down, just don't do it

around here." He reports a school security guard's response to a brewing fight: "If y'all wanna fight, then fight, but take that shit around the corner, down the street somewhere—don't do it around the school."

Nevertheless, this practice had not prevented the school itself from being dangerous. Richardson reports several incidents of serious violence. In one case, in response to an earlier lunchroom altercation, a student called Barton entered a classroom, where he smashed a glass pitcher in the face of another student, Gary, opening a large gash that sent him to the hospital. The school was so disorganized that Barton soon returned, after supposedly having been suspended. None of the staff even appeared to be aware of the fact, despite the clear danger of a reprisal. In another case, after a boy and a girl fought in a classroom, a teacher—instead of intervening—yelled loudly in the middle of a crowded hallway, "That bitch deserves it, she's been asking for it all week."

The unwillingness of many adults to engage in active prevention of adolescent violence before it got out of hand again extended to the local police. Richardson describes another incident in which more than two hundred students gathered after school as two boys walked up the street intending to fight. Everyone knew what was happening. School officials called the police, but when the officers arrived, they simply followed the crowd and waited for the fight to start. At that point, they pounced and sprayed mace, injuring bystanders.

While adolescent violence in Soulville had its roots in urban poverty, unresponsive institutions undercut the ability of adults to respond effectively. Institutional reforms did begin in Soulville during the research period, but they had not penetrated to the local level by the end of the research. In the meantime, adolescents continued to rely on each other, their families, and after-school programs provided by community organizations for social support.

El Dorado: A community committed to outreach and engagement

El Dorado is a poor, immigrant community with high rates of crime and violence. But we found an unusual partnership there between a school and a community group that provided coordinated adult support for adolescents not available in most poor areas. The alliance with the community group provided resources that allowed the school to offer a wide range of recreational and other programs. Beyond just having these resources, however, the school used them in the service of an explicit philosophy of community outreach and engagement. School staff acknowledged community problems and took steps to prevent violence and delinquency. The following conversation between Pedro Mateu-Gelabert and a teacher illustrates this attitude:

> I talked to Ms. F. about her warning to her students about the Redwood boys. She warns her students about them not only because they take money away from the students, but they also ask them to run drugs for them for five dollars. She

described the conditions under which the students live: "These students live under siege. These are warlike conditions."

This attitude of frank acknowledgement of problems in the local area was not merely fatalistic. Rather, it was linked to active problem solving within the school and in partnership with others in the community. Staff knew about and took steps to deal with fights involving students wherever those fights might occur. Security guards actively patrolled the school's perimeter, a danger zone in this and many other schools. Mateu-Gelabert even observed guards intervening in fights that occurred off school grounds, something that would have been highly unlikely at the other two sites.

The most important mechanism for preventing violence, however, appeared to be the simple fact of trust between adults and students. Teachers and staff often knew when fights were going to happen, and they took steps to prevent them, such as releasing a rumored victim to go home early, calling in families for conferences, and actively planning gang control strategies with the local police.

As a result, these middle school students, unlike their peers in the other two schools, had multiple, coordinated sources of support from different contexts—not just their peer backup, but caring adults working together. Even though the outside neighborhood had levels of violence comparable to Soulville's, middle school students here had a school that worked actively to reduce the effects of violence on their lives.

An example of this approach occurred in the response to a revenge attack following a "hooky" party. Sylvia, an eighth grader, told her older brother that another student, Jorge, had raped her at the party. What actually happened is not clear, but Sylvia's brother believed her and went looking for Jorge with a knife. Jorge was tipped off and recruited backup. A gang fight almost erupted near the school, but school safety officers intervened and dispersed the group. However, this was not the end of the school's involvement. The principal called in both families to discuss what had happened and plan ways to resolve the situation peacefully.

The school's active engagement with the local police also exemplified the practice of effective community policing and community crime prevention in action. Throughout the research period, the school grappled with the local gang problem in a number of ways. It engaged in gang prevention efforts with its own students. Representatives of the school and its community partner reached out to gang members who lived nearby but were not students there to participate, as individuals, in supervised after-school activities. School staff also worked directly with the police to monitor and respond to gang activities. As a result, when the school did call for direct enforcement responses, the arrests were made efficiently and without undue trauma for bystanders.

Supporting Kids, Preventing Violence

At a time of heightened public concern about adolescent violence, this research provides a perspective on the nature of the problem grounded in the everyday experience of early adolescents in three very different urban neighborhoods. The findings show that violence is a real problem for many young people, though not always or even usually in the form of the sensational incidents that tend to dominate the headlines and create pressure for solutions.

The years from middle school through the transition into high school are a period when young people must learn to do things by themselves. As a result, they are exposed to new levels of danger and physical challenge. Fighting is prevalent, even statistically normal, in the sense that most urban adolescents have some kind of physical confrontation before entering high school. At the same time, most of this fighting is relatively minor, not involving weapons or lethal force. That does not mean, however, that routine violence can or should be ignored. Sometimes it does threaten to become serious. Even if it does not show signs of escalating, violence can hinder educational achievement and personal development.

Many young people who engage in violence grow out of it by the time they reach high school. But those who do not are often headed for increasingly serious trouble. Learning to stand up for oneself intelligently in the face of physical challenges can be an important developmental accomplishment, especially in a tough urban environment. Establishing a personal identity based on the ability to physically intimidate others, however, is fraught with peril. Gaining a reputation as a herb is an equal and opposite problem.

To a remarkable extent, the young people in this study faced these developmental challenges by themselves, as individuals or as members of adolescent peer groups. While learning to choose reliable peers is undeniably effective in many cases, it can also increase danger by creating situations in which teenagers are obliged to fight with and for others. Adults in these teenagers' lives—parents, teachers, police officers—were often unaware of what they were going through until problems became serious. An additional problem was that even when adults did become aware (usually because of a crisis), they were often unable to respond effectively. Ignoring problems, avoiding responsibility, and placing blame on others undercut adults' ability to work together to address the problem.

The comparative design of this study illustrates some of the many local variations on these themes. The barriers and opportunities affecting how responsible adults work together to support adolescents as they confront issues of danger and identity vary between communities and institutions. One example, the community partnerships in El Dorado, shows that interventions to bring adults together can be effective, even in a dangerous environment. In this case, a school and a community organization have come together to provide a platform for initiative and planning. In other communities, different

institutions, such as community-oriented police departments or parents' groups, might take the lead in bringing people together to create safer environments for adolescents.

Vera's research suggests that, while there are improvements to be made in school and community security, the most important way to reduce youth violence is to give young people consistent and coordinated adult support. Many adolescents fight at some point, but the vast majority never engage in serious violence. If we panic and push poorly thought-out responses based solely on treating young people more harshly, we may make them even more isolated than they already are. Instead, we need to find better ways to respond appropriately before violence escalates. We also need to bring communities together to provide positive activities—during and after school—that offer young people ways to gain respect without using force.