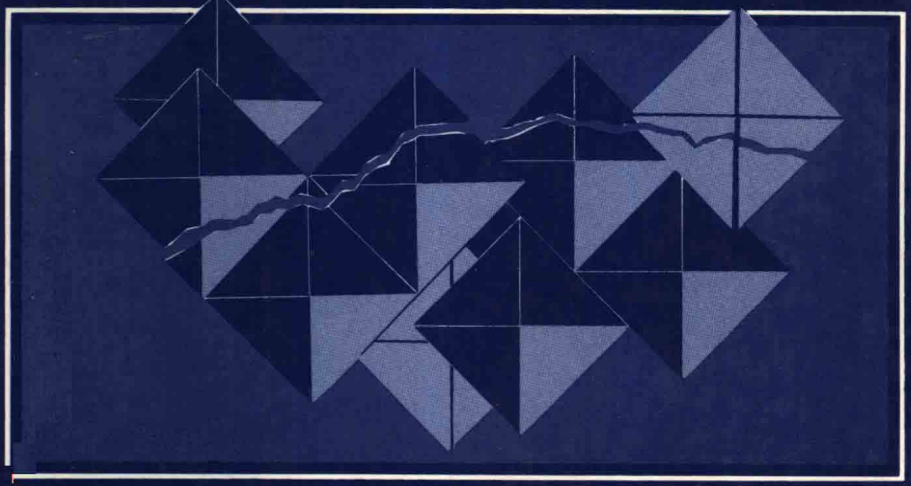
VIOLENT CRIME, VIOLENT CRIMINALS

Edited by

Neil Alan Weiner
and Marvin E. Wolfgang



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NEIL ALAN WEINER

MARVIN E. WOLFGANG

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Introduction

In 1982, the volume *Criminal Violence* was published as part of the ongoing research program of the Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Criminal Violence, established as one of five multiyear Research Agreements Programs (RAPS) launched in the nation by the National Institute of Justice. In the introduction of that volume, we emphasized that one of the chief concerns of the Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Criminal Violence was "to integrate the state of our knowledge about criminal violence as a way to provide an informed departure point for future research in the area. Realizing this objective involves selecting for comprehensive review important substantive areas and major perspectives that incorporate an interdisciplinary orientation into theoretical formulations."

That objective remains as compelling today as it was then. Our continuing work at the Violence Center has persuaded us that we have only scratched the surface of significant and widely useful topics on criminal violence and related matters. This conclusion has been reinforced by substantial feedback from our colleagues both about the utility of *Criminal Violence* in research, academic, and public policy settings and about other topics whose coverage would also be beneficial in these same diverse settings.

Since the historic, comprehensive report on violence presented to the American people in 1969 by the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (hereinafter, the Violence Commission), there have been few parallel efforts, even on more modest scales, to examine anew and systematize the burgeoning and often fragmented literature in the many areas covered by the Violence Commission and others that have developed since the dissolution of the commission. This impoverishment, especially when considering the gravity of the legally infractious behaviors of concern—ranging from lethal confrontations to less aggravated but nonetheless serious assaults—has also motivated the preparation of this and a companion volume.

The two volumes evolved from our collaborative exchanges: As editors we initially proposed a single volume as a continuation of our earlier publication, *Criminal Violence*. The size of the manuscripts we requested exceeded our expectations, and the substance of these presentations merited their inclusion in full. We and the publisher

agreed that the selections could be divided meaningfully between those that were empirically descriptive of violence and those that were more etiologically oriented.

The result was to offer two separate volumes. Hence, *Violent Crime, Violent Criminals* is offered as an updated set of essays of the current research on the measurement and correlates of criminal violence. Measuring violent behavior, race, gender, street gang violence, and violent criminal careers is part of this ensemble.

But in the process of assembling significant research on violence, we recognized another theme, namely, causative claims that gave explanatory meaning to the empirical descriptions: drugs, alcohol, sexual violence, mental disorder, violence breeding violence, and the effects of criminal violence on victims. The dichotomy between descriptions of violent crime and criminals, on the one hand, and the paths that led to such behavior and to such offenders, on the other, became clearer and more compelling as a principle by which to partition the cogent literature. *Pathways to Criminal Violence* became the theme of the roots to *Violent Crime, Violent Criminals.* Each volume has its own intellectual integrity; each contributes to the other.

The impetus to review, assess, and press beyond the research and theoretical accomplishments of the last two decades is not unique to the study of criminal violence. Criminology more generally appears to be experiencing theoretical and research *angst*—manifesting as a disquiet over the pace and overall payoff in these two enterprises. There is a growing sense that the intensity of and the insights yielded by theory-building and research have diminished and require fresh thinking to ignite new productive activity. This volume is intended in part as a vehicle for reviewing prior advancements and accumulations in criminal violence research and theory in order to stimulate renewed dialogue about how we might most beneficially continue or redirect our research, theoretical, and policy efforts. We expect that one important byproduct of this reflective process will involve reconciling and interweaving often disparate conceptual and research strands. As a consequence of this close scrutiny, perhaps the least supported of these strands will be diminished and those that are most solidly established will be elevated and pursued more vigorously.

To stimulate insightful work in the study of criminal violence, we need to know critically the state of the art in key topical areas. These areas include, among others, the social settings in which criminal violence occurs and the many personal and interpersonal pathways by

which these settings are entered and violent behaviors are initiated. To explore these important concerns, street gang violence, offender race and gender characteristics, substance abuse, sexual behavior, mental illness, and intergenerational dynamics are examined in both this volume and a companion volume, *Pathways to Criminal Violence*, that will follow. Methodological issues and proposals for the systematic investigation of criminal violence over life spans are also explored in chapters on measuring violent behavior and on individual violent criminal careers. The impact of violence on victims is reviewed in a selection focusing on the relationship between victims and the criminal justice system, and the manifold consequences that interpersonal violence has for those who are so victimized.

The range of methodological and substantive topics that make up this volume provides wide coverage from many theoretical and research perspectives of the interior and exterior topography of criminal violence and of related prevention and control strategies and their implementation. We do not presume, however, to have covered the full sweep and compass of pertinent material. The exploration of further territory must await future volumes. With these volumes and those that are planned, we can construct more clearly and definitively an integral latticework of up-to-date knowledge and, based on that structure, identify those central interstices that remain to be filled.

For these many reasons, then, the present volume has been assembled. Colleagues who have worked at the forefront in their respective areas of criminal violence research have graciously and enthusiastically agreed to share their comprehensive knowledge.

In "Measuring Violent Behavior: Effects of Study Design on Reported Correlates of Violence," George S. Bridges and Joseph G. Weis examine in critical detail the degree to which discrepant study findings reported between 1945 and 1983 on selected correlates of criminal violence—gender, social class, and race—are, in part, artifacts of methodological differences in study design characteristics. These study characteristics include the definition of criminal violence that is used, the sampling population that is targeted and its composition, the source of information on violence that is employed (e.g., official; self-reports; victim surveys), the study period under examination, and the statistical techniques used for data analysis. Isolating the effects of substantive relationships on criminal violence from various biasing influences of the research design are crucial to being able to confirm empirical generalizations and, based on these validated research facts,

to establish firmly grounded theories of criminal violence and equally well-grounded public policies to control and halt this violence.

To explore the effects of the study design on the study findings, Bridges and Weis treated both the study design and study findings as data enmeshed in a multivariate relationship: Study findings (correlational measures) relating to race, gender, and social class constituted the dependent measures; study design characteristics constituted the independent measures. The research supports the presence of several study design features that must be taken into account when assessing the effects of social and other correlates of criminal violence. The authors conclude their chapter with recommendations about research strategies that can offset the effects of the research design on study findings.

"Violent Criminal Careers and 'Violent Career Criminals': An Overview of the Research Literature," by Neil Alan Weiner, examines the criminal life spans of violent offenders from the perspective of "individual criminal career analysis." This perspective, which has developed at an accelerating pace over the last decade, involves the construction of dynamic statistical profiles of individual violent criminal careers, of their stochastic behavioral pathways and outcomes. Research on individual violent criminal careers begins by distinguishing two related, basic components of the "violent crime rate": (1) the proportion of the population that commits violent crimes and (2) the character and extent of the violent infractions by those people who are actively involved in these crimes. This elemental analytical distinction unfolds into related ones pertaining to several structural and dynamic features of the individual violent criminal career, including the individual violent crime rate, specialization and escalation of violence, the age at initiation of the individual violent criminal career, violent recidivism and desistence probabilities, the total and residual individual violent criminal career length, the age variation in the occurrence of violent crimes, and chronic violent criminal careers. Weiner reviews study findings pertaining to each of these aspects of the individual violent criminal career.

The individual violent criminal career approach has the analytical benefit of facilitating the systematic study of violent criminal behavior as an integrated, dynamic probabilistic structure of sequential unlawful acts that advances within a wider context of causal and correlative influences. Factors that influence, for example, the initiation of the individual violent criminal career may be quite different from those factors that influence the frequency of violent offending once the violent

criminal career has begun. These latter factors, in turn, may be quite different from those factors that facilitate the termination of the violent criminal career. Weiner investigates the ways in which the individual violent criminal career approach can be used to focus theory and public policy on discrete components of the individual violent criminal career, how such information can be used in formulating more systematic public policies, the potential pitfalls of such an approach, and operational and ethical issues relating to public policies that might be based on the individual violent criminal career approach. Recommendations for future research in this area are also detailed.

Lynn A. Curtis focuses, in "Race and Violent Crime: Toward a New Policy," on the role of race in producing violent criminal activity and, based on this relationship, on the most feasible and effective policy strategies that can be mounted to intervene in and reshape the complex influences of race on violent crime. Curtis agrees with the conclusions concerning the connection between race and violent crime drawn in the 1960s by two prominent commissions, the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence and the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders: The racial disadvantage that produces disproportionately high rates of violent crimes is, in the main, a social and economic disadvantage, most currently represented by the "underclass." Evidence of the social, economic, and political origins of the race-based underclass are marshaled in critique of flawed biological and constitutional explanations of race and violent crime, explanations that confuse substantive correlations with substantive causes and that, apparently, rely upon the selective use of research findings.

Curtis assesses traditional approaches to the reduction of criminal violence—the triad of deterrence, rehabilitation, and incapacitation. The litigations of these approaches—their huge costs and expected and actual modest benefits—lead Curtis to advocate a tripartite approach to violent-crime reduction that involves overcoming economic deprivation and racial discrimination: neighborhood development, education, and employment. The philosophies and concomitant organizational structures and beneficial outcomes of three exemplary community-based and supported programs ("bubble-up" as opposed to "top-down" programs, as Curtis refers to them) are detailed—the Argus Community, Centro Isolina Ferre, and the House of Umoja. These programs provide the occupational, cognitive, and emotional skills required to make the transition from nonsecure employment sectors of the labor market to secondary and then to primary employment sectors. The

cost-effectiveness and political feasibility of these programs; their relationship to traditional criminal justice system structures and strategies; and the kinds of national leadership and resolve, and private-public partnerships that will be necessary to consolidate and widen this approach are discussed in depth.

In "Gender and Violent Crime," Rita J. Simon and Sandra Baxter examine within a cross-national context the often-noted substantial discrepancies between the extent of male and female participation in criminally violent acts. In general, the authors investigate whether women are becoming increasingly involved in these acts as some social scientists and theoretical frameworks predict. In particular, the authors examined four related issues: (1) whether there have been substantial increases in female participation in criminal activity generally, (2) whether these increases, if any, are concentrated in violent criminal offenses, (3) whether increased participation by women in violent crime has occurred in certain types of societies or across all societies, and (4) whether any observed changes in female participation in violent crime are associated with women's changing educational and occupational statuses.

The authors point out that, for the most part, theories of crime and delinquency are special theories of unlawful male behavior. "Liberation theory," "role convergence," and "role validation" theories, among others, have been proposed as "objectivist" (social structural) and "subjectivist" (psychological) explanations of female criminality. Dimensions of these theories are assessed with cross-national statistics on crime and arrest rates from 31 countries for a 19-year time period. Interwoven with an analysis of the magnitudes, patterns, and trends in violent female criminality is an examination of selected societal correlates of these rates, including the percentages of women in the labor force and in institutions of higher learning and measures of industrialization and economic opportunity. The authors found little evidence in support of expected increases in rates of female violent crime. Inconclusive results were reported with respect to the relationships between societal indices and time trends and cross-national patterns in female violent crime. Suggestions are presented to improve future research along these lines.

In the final chapter, "Street Gang Violence," Malcolm W. Klein and Cheryl L. Maxson discuss at length some of the continuities and major changes that have occurred over the last two decades with respect to street gangs and street gang violence, what can be known about these

social forms and their assaultive activities, and street gang programs. The authors observe a recent decline in research on street gangs at a time when street gang activity appears to have changed in shape and substance (e.g., age structure, ethnicity, geographical location). Contemporary changes in research paradigms and in the political climate appear to account for this research impoverishment. The combination of political conservatism and a burgeoning interest in controlling street gangs—specifically, the violent activities—through criminal justice interventions has resulted in the police being the major repository in most cities of gang information and research opportunities. (Police sources of information have led to difficulties in conducting cross-jurisdictional research because of varying data collection procedures and classification schemes.) Recent information on street gangs has not yet been integrated into either existing or new theoretical approaches to explaining this social phenomenon, resulting in a conceptualization that has been unable to explain diverse street gang activity over the last 20 years. The authors stress that what is known in this area has yet to be translated successfully into programs to control and reduce street gang-related crime and violence.

Klein and Maxson emphasize the relevance of street gang research in understanding the social (group or companionate) and cultural origins of violent activity. Definitional issues are prominently explored in this chapter: For example, one needs to know what constitutes a "gang" and, by virtue of this, how to designate "gang-related activities" in order to set the foundation for a theoretically and empirically grounded explanation of street gang violence. The authors review some recent, emergent patterns of street gang composition and the kinds of violent criminal activities engaged in by these gangs. Some new theoretical formulations are also discussed as are some current public policies, which are mostly social control and deterrent in their focus. The promise and pitfalls of these policies are also investigated, as is the ineffectiveness of policies that fail to exploit the wide store of accumulating information about street gangs and their violent activities.

—Neil Alan Weiner
—Marvin E. Wolfgang

1

Measuring Violent Behavior

Effects of Study Design on Reported Correlates of Violence

GEORGE S. BRIDGES
JOSEPH G. WEIS

The Study of Violence

Of increasing importance in the study of crime and criminality are the correlates of violent behavior. Over the past three decades, a voluminous literature on violence and its correlates has developed, with researchers publishing over a thousand articles and books on criminal violence between 1945 and 1972 (Wolfgang et al., 1978) and another thousand articles and books on domestic violence between 1972 and 1980 (Wolfgang et al., 1981). But despite the burgeoning size of this literature, empirical studies disagree about the precise correlates of violent behavior. Whereas some studies suggest that the highest rates of violence are found among black males (see, for example, Gil, 1970; Hamparian et al., 1978; Hindelang, 1978; Thornberry and Farnworth, 1982; Wolfgang et al., 1972), other studies suggest that discrepancies in violent offense rates between blacks and whites are relatively low (Elliott and Ageton, 1980; Hindelang et al., 1981). Similarly, some studies suggest that social class is one of the factors most closely related to violence (Monahan, 1981), while others find very weak relationships between criminal and domestic violence and measures of social class

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(Hindelang et al., 1981; Smith and Visher, 1979; Straus et al., 1980; Tittle et al., 1979).

Contributing to this uncertainty are differences among studies in research design and measurement (Bridges and Weis, 1985; Weis and Bridges, 1983).[1] Studies using different designs and measures—for example, different sources of information on violent behavior or different definitions of violence—may often reach discrepant conclusions about the amount and correlates of violence (Bridges and Weis, 1985; Hindelang et al., 1979, 1981). The concern of this chapter is whether the apparent discrepancies among studies are related to differences in design and measurement. It is possible that methodological differences between studies "create the illusion of discrepancy when, in general, no such discrepancy has been demonstrated" (Hindelang et al., 1979: 996). If methodological differences are strongly related to study findings, then the discrepancies may be attributable to major differences in methods and methodological distortion. However, if divergent methods observe the same correlates of violence, we can be more confident that the correlations are free of distortion. This chapter explores the relationship between methodological characteristics of studies and study findings using information on the measurement and correlates of violence reported in research published between 1945 and 1983.

Differences in Studies of Violence

Owing perhaps to the multidisciplinary character of crime and violence research, empirical studies of violent behavior vary dramatically in methodology and design. They focus on different types of violent behavior and use different sources of information on violence, different sampling units, and different analytic techniques. For example, studies of crime and criminal violence published between 1945 and 1972 varied in many aspects of design—whether they tested formal hypotheses about the causes of crime and violence, whether they conducted multivariate analyses, and whether they used "hard" empirical data (Wolfgang et al., 1978).

Studies using different designs and measures of violent behavior appear to yield different findings. These discrepancies undermine efforts to generalize about the correlates of violent behavior. For example, studies using official records or victim surveys for information about violent behavior consistently find higher rates of violence among blacks

than do studies using self-report surveys (see Hindelang et al., 1978, 1979; Thornberry and Farnworth, 1982). Similarly, studies on official samples of violent families suggest that violence occurs disproportionately among families that live in poverty or near-poverty circumstances (Gil, 1970; Levinger, 1966; Pelton, 1978). But self-reports of domestic and criminal violence typically find a weak relationship between social class and involvement in interpersonal violence. The most recent self-report surveys have indicated that social class may be important only in explaining violent acts among adults and blacks (Hindelang et al., 1981; Thornberry and Farnworth, 1982).

The differences between studies may be partly attributable to shortcomings in the self-report method. Reporting accuracy in self-reports of violence has been shown to vary by race, with blacks underreporting their involvement and whites overreporting theirs (Bridges, 1987; Hindelang et al., 1981). Also, smaller race differences between blacks and whites may occur in self-report surveys because these surveys typically employ scales that are unable to discriminate frequent, chronic offenders from all others. If blacks are more likely than whites to be high-frequency offenders, then self-report surveys may be unable to detect black/white differences in frequent violent behavior.

Two elements of design are thought to foster dramatic differences in research findings. The first is *measures of violent behavior*. Over the past decade, research on the prevalence and correlates of violence has used the self-report method of measurement, owing primarily to concerns about the inaccuracy of other sources of information (Gelles, 1980; Weis and Bridges, 1983). A dominant view among violence researchers is that information from other sources, particularly officially defined populations of violent persons or victims of violence, is the product of selective practices of law enforcement and the administration of social services (Gelles, 1980; Schur, 1973). As a result, the findings of studies using samples of officially defined populations are thought to be seriously biased.

An example illustrates this perspective. Many studies using official measures of domestic violence find a stronger relationship between social class and violent behavior than do studies using self-report surveys. Critics of official measures interpret this discrepancy as the direct result of class biases in official data. Stronger class/violence correlations occur because violent acts among poor families are more likely to be recorded in law enforcement statistics or data maintained by social service agencies than are the violent acts occurring among families in higher social classes. The critics point to the difficulty of separating