Understanding Blameworthiness and Treating Juvenile Violence

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<u>God Gave Me a Good Life</u>
Thankful to God that He gave me a good life.
Everything went good, when I got stuck with a knife.
Almost got murdered, but that almost made me stronger.
The only thing that changed was I wanted to live longer.
Made a promise to myself, I'll never be a victim.
All the ninjas I rode with, was 'cause I picked 'em.
Did everything I could to keep on striving.
Turned a lil heartless to keep on surviving.
My head has always been up toward the damn sky.
Sometimes filled with bullshhh, but I take a hit and fly.
- Grims

Introduction

In 2013 I began leading creative writing workshops with incarcerated juveniles in Michigan. The more participants wrote about their pasts, the more I noticed a pattern of experiences with violence. A majority of the juveniles in my workshops wrote about violence in their homes or neighborhoods. Many wrote about losing loved ones to gun violence, seeing people shot, or having near death experiences. I began to wonder if these experiences with violence may contribute in some way to the participants eventually ending up in detention facilities, and what that would mean for how violent juveniles should be treated. I decided to study cases of juvenile violence because most of my work has been with juveniles, and violent crimes, unlike nonviolent drug crimes, can often illicit harsher reactions from courts such as adult sentencing for juveniles and, until recently, mandatory life sentences (Liptak & Bronner, 2012). Through a philosophical, psychological, and sociological investigation of moral evaluation and juvenile violence, I conclude that some juveniles who have committed violent crime are not as blameworthy as we think, and they deserve less harsh treatment from the juvenile justice system.

In order to reach this conclusion, I begin by proposing a two-part framework of moral evaluation including moral responsibility and blameworthiness. While moral responsibility

depends upon the existence of alternative actions that an agent can do, blameworthiness depends upon what is reasonable for an agent to believe given her experiences and circumstances. Separating the two types of moral evaluations allows moral evaluators to acknowledge a juvenile's lack of blame without implying a complete lack of moral responsibility or agency. Once this distinction is drawn, I will argue that an agent who is largely blameless for an act of violence should be treated in a way that aims to change her behavior, but that her treatment should not center around harsh sanctions or punishment.

After setting up this framework of moral evaluation, my research dives into what circumstances may decrease a violent juvenile's degree of blameworthiness. In other words, what experiential factors make a juvenile's use of violence "reasonable." I explore two beliefs which would make the use of violence reasonable: high perception of threat and high legitimization of violence. Psychologist, James Garbarino, coins the term "war zone mentality" as the mental state of an individual who holds both of these beliefs (Garbarino, 2015). A combination of experiences and psychological biases including exposure to violence, desire for respect, externalized and internalized trauma, and lack of parental presence may lead juveniles to reasonably subscribe to the war zone mentality. This decrease in blameworthiness should affect how the juvenile justice system responds to the violent action. I also address concerns about the place that resilience and morality have in my framework.

In the final chapter of my thesis, I outline a style of treatment, Multisystemic Therapy (MST), which effectively decreases violent and serious criminal juvenile behavior without leaning on harsh punishment or detention. I draw several connections between the process of MST and the decreasing of war zone mentality, concluding that MST is a more effective treatment for juveniles who are blameless to a high degree. Because some violent juveniles are

largely blameless due to reasonable beliefs which they have gained from their experiences, the justice system should respond with less harsh punishment and more effective treatment aimed at behavioral change.

Chapter 1: An Account of Moral Responsibility and Blameworthiness

A legal ruling has two components: the trial phase, in which a defendant is found innocent or guilty, and the sentencing phase, in which mitigating factors are considered, and a sentence is determined. In this chapter, I will detail a framework of moral evaluation in which there are two parallel components: first, an assessment of moral responsibility, which is all-or-nothing, and second, an assessment of blameworthiness, which exists in degrees. Just as a juvenile offender is found either innocent or guilty with no gradient in between, an agent is either fully morally responsible or not at all. However, when we consider the circumstances of a specific event, we may find that our attitudes towards an offender vary along a gradient. This gradient of attitudes can be representative of an agent's degree of blameworthiness. Because this thesis will apply the framework to cases of juvenile violence, I will focus my discussion of moral responsibility and blameworthiness on cases of the morality of action rather than of belief.

I will first present the account of moral responsibility and blameworthiness that I use throughout this thesis, including what internal and external factors make an agent morally responsible and blameworthy. I define moral responsibility as follows: an agent is morally responsible for an action if and only if she is an appropriate candidate for praise or blame. After assessing a candidate's praise- or blameworthiness, one can determine how to respond to a morally responsible agent. The fact that a person is morally responsible signifies that there must be a response directed at the agent. How the response looks, however, is dependent on an agent's

degree of blameworthiness. This may seem counterintuitive – how can there be cases in which an agent is both morally responsible *and* blameless? Examining the framework of moral evaluation that I detail throughout this chapter demonstrates that moral responsibility and blameworthiness depend upon different factors and elicit different reactions. Moral responsibility depends upon the existence of alternate possibilities in an agent's immediate circumstances, and blameworthiness depends upon the beliefs that an agent has learned through her previous experiences. Furthermore, moral responsibility demands that we respond to an action, and blameworthiness dictates what that response looks like. I will explain this distinction in more detail throughout this chapter.

Principle for Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility

The account of moral responsibility which I will outline and defend is the Principle of Alternate Possibilities (PAP). PAP states that an agent is morally responsible for a certain action if and only if she could have done other than that action (Frankfurt, 1969). This intuitive account of moral responsibility went unquestioned for many years. For most, it seems obvious that if an individual has no ability to do something different than what she does, she cannot be responsible for what she does. We may imagine an agent who cannot do other than what she does as one controlled by insanity, a drug she was tricked into consuming, or some physical constraints that are outside of her control. If we imagine one of these scenarios in more detail, we can see that PAP caries both intuitive and theoretical weight.

Imagine an extremely attentive bus driver who follows all traffic laws and checks all of the necessary blind-spots. She is secretly given a drug to slow her reflexes, and she could not have avoided taking the drug because she did not know that someone had put it into her water bottle. Because of the reflex-slowing drug, she hits and kills a pedestrian who runs into the street.

Is she morally responsible for this action? Clearly this example is not likely to occur in the real world, but it demonstrates a case in which an agent has a complete lack of moral responsibility. The driver lacked all control over the outcome because she could not have avoided taking the drug which led her to kill the pedestrians. Intuitively, most of us do not find her morally responsible. Some people, however, may think that the bus driver was morally at fault because she was the one driving the bus. Theoretically, if this were reason enough to assign her moral responsibility, then we would have to find many people morally responsible for events over which they have no control. For example, we could hold a farmer morally responsible for not producing enough food when it does not rain. This farmer would have just as little control over the rain as the bus driver had over consuming the hidden drug. Doing a specific action only implies moral responsibility if the agent could have avoided doing the action.

On the other hand, if a second bus driver chooses to drive under the influence of a reflex-slowing drug, she would be morally responsible for this action. She would be an appropriate candidate for blame because she had the conscious alternative action open to her of not taking the drug. Regardless of how blameworthy we find the second bus driver, her confirmed status of moral responsibility calls for a different type of reaction. In the first case, because the driver is not morally responsible for taking the reflex-slowing drug, a response to the incident should not be aimed at the specific driver, but rather at the process of hydration which allowed her to be drugged. An appropriate reaction may be to change the location that all bus drivers keep their water bottles. In the case of the second bus driver, however, a response should not be aimed at the system of hydration, but rather at the driver as an individual because the driver has moral responsibility. Exactly what that response looks like is determined, in part, by her level of blameworthiness.

Before moving into my outline of blameworthiness, I will briefly defend PAP against the strongest counterargument posed to it. In 1969, Harry Frankfurt published a counterexample to PAP in which an agent appears to have no alternatives, and yet, he is still morally responsible. This would imply that PAP is not an adequate account of moral responsibility. Frankfurt's counterexample begins with three men, Jones, Smith, and Black (1969).

Jones plans to perform some action, M. We can attach any action to M; for the sake of this paper, we will say that M stands for murdering Smith. Black wants Jones to M. Black is an expert at judging whether or not Jones will go through with doing M. If Black judges that Jones will M, then he (Black) will not intervene. Unknown to Jones, if Black judges that Jones is *not* going to M, then Black will step in and force Jones to M by any means necessary. Jones decides to M without ever knowing about Black's plan, and Black never intervenes. Jones appears to have moral responsibility for M even though he could not have avoided doing M (Frankfurt, 1969).

This situation appears to provide a convincing counterexample to PAP because Jones had no alternative to M, but he does it without ever knowing that Black wants him to and without Black intervening. It seems that Jones is just as morally responsible as someone who did have available alternatives. Upon closer inspection, however, due to Frankfurt's lack of specificity with regards to time, his example fails to actually undermine PAP (Ginet, 1996). Frankfurt argues that because Black's unknown presence played no role in Jones' action, his presence should also play no role in how we assign Jones moral responsibility. This would demonstrate that a simple lack of alternatives is not a sufficient condition for moral responsibility. A lack of

alternatives to M would absolve an agent from moral responsibility only if she did M *because* of the lack of alternate possibilities, and this was not the case in Jones' doing M. Therefore, PAP cannot stand alone as a full account of moral responsibility.

In defense of PAP, Carl Ginet argues that Frankfurt's counterexample did not undermine PAP because Jones did have alternative actions available to him. Frankfurt overlooked these alternatives because of his lack of specificity with time (Ginet, 1996). In order to discover where Jones had alternatives to M, we can look at the specific times of the sequence of events in Frankfurt's counterexample. Specifically, Ginet investigates what it is that signals to Black that Jones will or will not M. While it is true that in the full picture, Jones could not avoid killing Smith, he did have alternatives to killing Smith at specific points in time. As outlined in the chart below, at the first point in time, t_1, Jones can either M or not M. At t_2, Black checks to see if Jones has done M. If he has, Black does nothing. If Jones has not done M at t_3, then Black forces Jones to M without Jones' knowledge. I have outlined this sequence in the chart below:

	t_1	t_2	t_3
Track 1:	Jones does M.	Black checks if Jones has done M, and sees that he has.	
Track 2:	Jones does not do M.	Black checks if Jones has done M, and sees that he has not done M.	Black forces Jones to M.

If Jones does M at t_1 without Black's intervention, then he had the alternative to not M available to him, and he is morally responsible for the action. Only when Black intervenes at t_3 does Jones lose his alternatives, so if he does M at t_3, then that is when he would not be morally responsible for M. With these specifications, we see that PAP stands because Jones is

responsible for M at t_1 because he does have alternate possibilities available to him. He is not responsible for M at t_3 because there are no alternate possibilities available.

While there are some other objections to PAP, having demonstrated both the satisfaction of PAP in Frankfurt's counterexample through specifying time, and the intuitive and theoretical strength of PAP, I will leave the discussion here. An account of moral responsibility, however, does not give a complete picture of moral evaluation. For example, it does not explain why we intuitively feel differently if we find out that Jones was raised in poverty with absent parents and frequent abuse versus if he were raised by two loving parents in a town with a great public school system. In the next section, I will outline an account of blameworthiness which serves as the other significant measure of moral evaluation which moderates our attitudes towards "wrongdoers."

Blameworthiness

There are many cases of serious juvenile violence in which an agent could have done otherwise, and yet, due to some facts about the offender's past experiences or motivation for acting, we do not feel the same visceral disgust which we may feel towards other offenders who have done the same action. These cases demonstrate how our reactions depend on the degree of blameworthiness that we assign to an agent. Imagine, for example, you hear about a teenager who is involved in a particularly brutal fight which leaves the victim in the hospital. You are filled with blame and disgust. You then find out that the teenager has grown up in a poor neighborhood where fights and gun violence are prevalent, his parents are absent, and he has been jumped multiple times in his life. What is more, the teenager started the fight in order to get back his stolen winter jacket. Many people believe that this teenager no longer warrants as much as blame as he did before we knew about his absent parents, his unsafe neighborhood, and his

stolen winter jacket. The juvenile is morally responsible for the harm he caused because he did have the alternative of not fighting available to him, but our reaction to his violence may be tempered to some degree by what he has experienced growing up. In this section, I will expand upon Sarah Buss' account of blameworthiness while maintaining her same aims of better understanding "the moral status of 'deprived' wrongdoers who as children suffered abuse, neglect, and/or constant exposure to violence" (Buss, 1997, p 337).

Buss writes that "an agent's blameworthiness is a function of what he can reasonably be expected to know" (Buss, 1997, p 338). I agree with Buss, but I take her definition in a slightly different direction. Sometimes a person may think that he knows something which is not true. He may have evidence behind his "knowledge," but if the idea is ultimately incorrect, we would say that instead of knowledge, he has a *belief*. I will argue that blameworthiness is a function of what a person can reasonably be expected to believe. Although a person's belief may be wrong, it may be just as reasonable and appropriate as a piece of knowledge.

Imagine, for example, an abused individual, X, and an abuser, Y. Y goes through the same pattern every time he abuses X. He first yells at and insults X, and then he punches him. After 5 times through this pattern, Y begins yelling at X, and in response, X punches Y. X did this based on his knowledge that each time Y has begun yelling, he has followed it up with physical abuse (adapted from Buss, 1997, p 345). This knowledge was then translated into a belief that each time Y yells at and insults X, he will abuse X. My question at present is not whether or not it was moral to punch Y, but whether or not it was reasonable to believe that Y was going to strike. Humans use induction to defend many beliefs – how engaging or boring we expect classes to be, how our friends will react when they see us. It seems reasonable, based on his past experience, for X to believe that Y will punch X any time he yells insults at him.

In this case, "reasonable" is not too contentious a word. Anyone in X's shoes would believe that Y was going to punch again; it was a clear pattern. However, most, if not all, cases of violence in the real world are unclear and open to debate. For example, perhaps one day, Y's brother, Z, starts yelling at and insulting X in the same way that Y always does before punching X. X punches Z (adapted from Buss, 1997). Although X does not *know* that Z will punch him, having come from the same family and having used a similar style, it seems reasonable that X would fear that that would be what Z was going to do, but not everyone would have made the same connection.

Finally, we may imagine a case like the last one Buss presents in which "the vast majority of people with whom X came in contact as a child either beat him, supported those who beat him, or completely ignored his misery. The beatings were usually preceded by [yelling and insults]." When Y insults X, X punches Y (Buss, 1997, p 345). As the examples go on, there may be less and less agreement over whether X's beliefs that he was in danger were reasonable. The next chapter of this thesis will address whether or not it was reasonable for X to believe that Y was going to harm him, as well as addressing the next relevant question which is whether or not it was reasonable for X to believe that he should respond to the threat by punching Y.

 It may seem dangerous to use a word like "reasonable" in a framework of moral evaluation. It appears impossible to measure, and may lead to inconsistent and unfair outcomes. It is important to note that the juvenile justice system does take into account loose terms like "reasonable." Through the trial process, courts acknowledge that every instance of deviant behavior requires attention to the case's particular circumstances. Part of viewing an action as reasonable is being able to understand how a sequence of events or environmental factors contribute to a specific belief which informs the action, and even acknowledging that you may

have believed and subsequently done the same thing in the given circumstances. This requires

some humility because reasonable action does not signify ideal action. In addition to external

circumstances, humans are also subject to psychological biases which make us irrational. I argue

that these human biases which make us irrational may still be "reasonable." I will detail some of

these biases in chapter two.

It is also important to discuss the use of the word "reasonable" that I employ in my thesis.

While there are different ways that we use the word reasonable in the English language, I will be

referring to reasonable beliefs. A belief upon which an individual bases an action can be

reasonable or unreasonable to hold. If I want to get coffee, and my friend told me that there is

coffee in the kitchen, it is reasonable for me to believe that coffee is in the kitchen because my

experience tells me that that is usually where it is and that my friend is telling the truth. It may

not be as reasonable for me to believe that my friend was lying and believe that the coffee is in

the living room. Without more information, it appears to be reasonable to believe that the coffee

is in the kitchen. This use of reasonableness in regards to beliefs is the context of the word that I

will use most in the subsequent chapters, and it is slightly different from a reasonable action. For

an action to be reasonable, the action must be in accordance with one's reasonable beliefs. For

example, if I want coffee, and I believe that there is coffee in the kitchen, but I walk to the living

room, then that is not a reasonable action. Walking to the kitchen to get coffee would be a

reasonable action because my belief is reasonable *and* my action is logically aligned to my

belief. In my exploration of cases of blameworthiness for acts of juvenile violence, I will explore

the reasonable beliefs of juvenile offenders, investigating cases in which reasonable but morally

impermissible beliefs inform juvenile acts of violence.

As Buss writes, "wrongdoers" who have reasonable beliefs which promote violence are

not less capable of acting in morally permissible ways, but rather they have "reasons for wrongdoing which are not shared by their privileged counterparts" (Buss, 1997, p 339). The reasonableness of one's beliefs thus affect an agent's blameworthiness because they pave the way for agents to act in ways that either are or are not perceived as morally permissible. This is not to say that just because a child sees one case of violence it becomes okay for her to act violently. Instead, there are degrees of blameworthiness which may be increased or decreased based on what an agent has learned. In the following chapter, I will detail factors in the lives of many urban youth which may impact their beliefs about violence.

Understanding an agent's blameworthiness, or the reasonableness of her actions, is an essential step in responding to an action because it informs how the juvenile justice system should respond. There are three central categories of response: punishment, reward, and rehabilitation. All three of these responses are based in a desire for a specific behavior. Punishment, for example, is meant to discourage a specific behavior through harsh treatment. Reward incentivizes behavior through praise or positive treatment. And rehabilitation, as I will use it, strives to change a behavior without emphasizing punishment. When individuals are blameless for an action to a high degree, punishment should not be the dominant response. As I have demonstrated theoretically and as the next chapter will demonstrate empirically for cases of violent juvenile offending, a lack of blameworthiness is largely due to external factors in the life of an agent. Punishment in these cases, such as detention, solitary confinement, and expulsion from school may target an individual without effectively changing her behavior. Effective rehabilitation responds to an agent by acknowledging the process by which she developed beliefs condoning violence. In chapter three, I will detail a rehabilitation method which effectively works with serious juvenile offenders within their homes in order to adapt their environments to

facilitate behavioral change. This method, Multisystemic Therapy, addresses many of the missions of incarceration, including decreasing immediate and future violence and rehabilitating juveniles, without the emphasis on punishment.

In the coming chapter, I will use psychological and sociological evidence to argue that in the lives of some disadvantaged juveniles, they may have had experiences which reasonably led them to conclude that there is a threat to their safety and that violence is the proper action to take. The dominant question that I will be addressing is not whether it is morally right or wrong to react to certain situations with violence, but rather, whether it is reasonable to believe that it is what one should do. Although we can assume that juveniles who shoot at others know the danger of their action, and they are morally responsible for this action, they are also blameless to the degree that the action was based on reasonable beliefs. In the upcoming chapter, I will detail what these reasonable beliefs may look like and how they may be acquired through experiences and psychological biases.
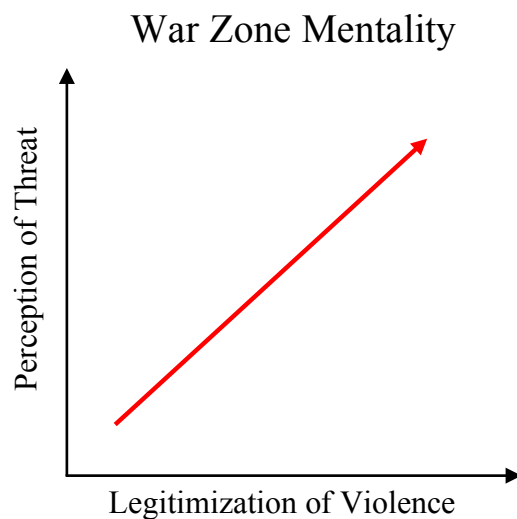
Chapter 2: Degrees of Blameworthiness

This chapter will discuss what circumstances and experiences may impact a juvenile's degree of blameworthiness for violent actions. In order to do this, I will investigate what types of beliefs it would be reasonable for some juveniles to have that would direct their use of violence. I will focus attention on agents who understand their actions and the consequences of them and still act violently, rather than also including cases of accidents, ignorance, and legal insanity.

There are many connections that psychologists and sociologists study between juvenile experiences and violence perpetration– community violence exposure (CVE), beliefs of self worth, characteristics of home life, experiences of physical and sexual abuse, and interactions

with parents and peers. Much of the psychology literature regarding an offender's previous experiences refer to these factors as risk factors and protective factors. A risk factor, such as exposure to violence, is a life experience that is statistically linked to negative psychological and behavioral outcomes. A protective factor, on the other hand, such as supportive parents or a safe school environment, is an experience which has been found to mitigate the negative effects of risk factors or which positively correlates to positive social outcomes.

I have structured many of these factors using a framework of "war zone mentality," as outlined by James Garbarino. Garbarino uses this framework to demonstrate how an accumulation of risk factors and a lack of protective factors may affect the beliefs of violent juvenile offenders. He depicts it as a graph with two axes. Along the vertical axis of the graph, Garbarino placed perception of threat and along the horizontal axis, legitimization of violence. A juvenile who is high on both axes has a belief structure which promotes violent action. I have included a rough sketch below:

War Zone Mentality

(adapted from Garbarino, 2011, p 95)

Relating this framework to my account of blameworthiness from the previous chapter, a juvenile who perceives a high risk of violence against himself and who believes that he has a

high justification for the use of violence would be blameless to the degree that the beliefs which influence his action are reasonable for him to hold. This chapter will include three main sections: one which explores why juveniles might reasonably believe that they are in danger of being victims of violence, a second which explores if and when a juvenile may have a reasonable belief that using violence is justifiable, and a third which responds to potential concerns about the framework.

Perception of Threat

If you think back to when you were a child, you may remember some of your irrational fears: monsters under the bed, boogey men in the closet, ghosts haunting the basement. You may have also had fears about real, but unlikely villains such as kidnappers or mafia members. Many youth perceive threat where there is low risk or none, but what happens to the youth whose fears are confirmed around them on a regular basis, directly or witnessed? Many of America's youth, especially those growing up in inner-cities, are exposed to violence in their households, schools and communities.

Studies which investigate youth exposure to violence typically measure direct and indirect victimization where victimization refers to an action by another person whose goal is to cause harm. When most studies survey youth for exposure to violence, the violent actions that they investigate are beating, chasing or stalking, robbing or mugging, shooting or stabbing, and killing. Direct victimization occurs when an individual is on the receiving end of some such action (Buka et al., 2001). Indirect victimization typically refers to witnessing this type of action, but the definition of "witnessed victimization" depends on the study. Some authors measure only what a person has seen directly, others include what a person has heard from a violent event taking place, and still others include learning about a violent event after the fact or even viewing

one on television. In this thesis, witnessed violence will refer only to violence seen directly by youth unless otherwise specified.

Many American youth are at high risk for community exposure to violence, especially youth growing up in America's urban communities. Gorman-Smith et al. cite that "between 50% and 96% of urban children have witnessed community violence in their lifetime" (2004, p 439). One study which sampled urban youth as they came in for a routine doctor's appointment found that 79% of urban youth between 9 and 12 years old had witnessed at least one violent act and 49% had been direct victims of violence (Purugganan et al., 2000). These findings are consistent with other studies that Gorman-Smith et al. cite such as a study of high risk boys in New York which found that "35% reported witnessing a stabbing, 33% had seen someone shot…and 25% had seen someone killed" (Miller et al., 1999). Studies also find that youth exposed to one instance or type of violence are more likely to experience more (Finkelhor et al. 2009; Lambert et al., 2010). A sample of all American youth found that 64.5% children who reported one experience of direct victimization reported two or more instances of it (Finkelhor et al. 2009). In other words, not only are many youth at a high risk for direct victimization, but also, for many youth who have one violent experience, their fear is likely to be confirmed.

Humans quickly adjust to consider their experiences normal (Kahneman, 2011, p 72-3). As Kahneman explains, there are two main types of expectations – passive ones and active ones. A passive expectation makes an event that should be shocking less surprising while an active expectation implies that an individual is waiting for an event to happen. One experience of a shocking event will influence our passive expectations and make a similar occurrence less shocking the next time. The first time a person experiences violence, for example, may be particularly shocking, but the second experience will already be less unexpected. Kahneman

writes that "under certain conditions, passive expectations quickly turn active" to where we are

consciously waiting for a specific event to happen (2011, p 72). When individuals begin actively

expecting violence due to a normal psychological occurrence, we can reasonably expect their

perception of threat to jump higher. In the case of juveniles exposed to one or multiple

occurrences of CVE, it is a reasonable human experience to expect more violence.

Finkelhor et al. found that youth reports of one type of victimization was a good predictor

of exposure to other types. Over a child's lifetime, depending on what type of exposure (physical

assault, sexual victimization, or child maltreatment) the chances of victimization either doubled

or tripled (2009). These juveniles would be likely to not only fear one type of violence, but to

fear violence on multiple fronts. In a focus group study by Hansen et al., researcher asked urban

adolescents from New Haven, Connecticut about their experiences with and expectations of

violence. Participants expressed a strong awareness about risks to their safety in the community.

One participant said, "every time somebody comes around you, you think they are going to hit

you" (Hansen et al., 2014). Most often, there is no specific sign that violence is coming, so the

active expectation of violence is constant and reasonable.

In a related study conducted in London, researchers compared the brain activity of

juveniles exposed to family violence, soldiers exposed to combat, and children without histories

of violence exposure. Participants were asked to identify the gender of faces that they were

shown. Unbeknownst to the participants, some of the faces were "angry" faces and others were

neutral. The children exposed to family violence and the soldiers exposed to combat exhibited

significantly higher amounts of brain activity in two areas of the brain related to threat detection,

the amygdala and anterior insula, when the angry faces showed up, demonstrating that they had a

heightened awareness of threat (McCrory et al., 2011). Many people would readily accept that

soldiers have reason to expect violence. What McCrory et al.'s research demonstrates is that some American juveniles grow up in their own form of war zone where it is reasonable to readily perceive threat. In a study with similar results, Dodge et al. found that 4-6 year-olds who had suffered physical abuse were more likely to perceive of hostile intent in a series of made-up stories than their counterparts who had not suffered physical abuse (1990). These studies suggest that youth exposed to and victimized by violence can reasonably be expected to perceive higher amounts of threat.

There are some psychological processes that are common amongst humans which also augment perception of threat in the minds of juveniles exposed to high levels of violence. The availability heuristic and confirmation bias are two psychological biases which could increase perception of threat for exposed juveniles. In Kahneman's word, the availability heuristic is "the process of judging frequency [of an event] by the ease with which instances come to mind" (2011, p 129). Illustrating this idea, Lichtenstein et al. found that participants tended to overestimate the frequency of various lethal events when cases of the specific event were easier to recall (1978). Memories may be easier to recall due to frequency, attention given to an event, recentness, or vividness of memory. If anxiety or fear of violence are often on a youth's mind, it is reasonable that violent events will be thought of as more frequent than they actually are, and they may already be quite frequent.

Another mental bias called confirmation bias may further augment this perception of threat. Confirmation bias is the result of the process by which humans look for evidence to reinforce what they already believe (Kahneman, 2011; Garbarino, 2015). Because juveniles who are exposed to one kind of violence are likely to experience more violence and are 2-3 times more likely to experience multiple types of violence (Lambert et al., 2010; Buka et al., 2001),

their experiences confirm their feelings of threat. These direct experiences are coupled by what they may witness on the streets, see in the news, and hear from their peers.

In addition to an accumulation of risk factors, juveniles may also perceive high levels of threat due to an absence of protective factors. One factor in children's lives which can prevent some of the negative effects of exposure to violence is a strong relationship with one's family. Multiple studies have found that a strong relationship with parents can decrease both exposure to CVE as well as some of the negative internalized effects such as anxiety and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Garbarino, 1995; Hagan et al., 2015; Buka et al., 2001). One study of young adolescent boys in inner-city Chicago found that youth from households deemed "exceptionally functioning" (characterized by high levels of parenting and structure, emotional enrichment, and strong beliefs about the importance of family) were exposed to significantly less community violence than youth from "struggling" households (characterized by low scores in "discipline, monitoring, structure, cohesion, and beliefs about the family over time") (Gorman-Smith et al., 2004, p 444). This data was found controlling for neighborhood violence. In other words, high functioning families were positively correlated with lower exposure to violence and low functioning families were positively correlated to higher exposure to violence, regardless of the level of violence in the neighborhood (Gorman-Smith et al., 2004). Findings from Buka et al. supported this correlation, suggesting that antisocial responses to CVE in juveniles including PTSD and distress has a negative correlation to family support (2001).

One potential reason for this pattern may be that youth without strong family structures do not have adults to guide them through the coping process after they are exposed to violence. A majority of adults in violent neighborhoods have violence-related trauma themselves, and this trauma carries internalized effects such as anxiety and depression which may result in acts of

child neglect (Garbarino, 1995). Garbarino finds that in the American projects, half of mothers suffer from depression (1995). Without adult guidance, it is reasonable that children may not find ways to cope with their fear. The treatment that I will detail in chapter three centers around the family unit in an effort to support juveniles and their families in healthy coping practices.

With the accumulation of these risk factors including community violence exposure and violent victimization and the absence of important protective factors such as family quality, it may be reasonable for some juveniles in urban America to perceive a high threat of violence. Many are directly exposed to more than one type of violence without adult support or guidance on how to cope.

Legitimization of Violence

While perception of threat may not encourage violent behavior alone, when perception of threat is coupled with beliefs which justify the use of violence, violent action becomes reasonable. In this section, I will examine the other axis of the war zone mentality by exploring psychological and situational factors which may lead juveniles to reasonably conclude that violence is an effective and reasonable action to take. It is important to note that my aim is not to excuse violence or murder, but rather to try to understand the factors that lead many of America's youth to turn to violence. I will investigate what may be reasonable for a juvenile to believe given his[1] experiences and circumstances, not what is morally appropriate or "correct." Often, violent juvenile offenders have a strong sense of what is right and what is wrong, but they are put in situations and forced to make choices that most privileged Americans will never have to make (Bronfenbrenner, 2015). In the previous section of this chapter, I outlined some of the internal effects of Community Violence Exposure (CVE) – perception of threat and anxiety. In

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[1] For the rest of the thesis, I will be using mostly masculine pronouns because juvenile males are the population most effected by the issues which I discuss.

this section, I investigate why a juvenile who reasonably perceives threat in his life would react with violence, and if there is ever a case in which a juvenile is reasonable in his belief that violence is the best response.

There are several factors which impact a juvenile's reaction to threat: externalized effects of CVE, beliefs about adults, a violent code of conduct, the availability of firearms, and dissociation are just a few (Gorman-Smith, 2014; Dodge,1990; Baskin & Sommers, 2015; Hagan et al., 2015; Buka et al., 2001). In a focus group study done with 30 youth from New Haven, Connecticut, youth outlined the constant conflict they feel surrounding respect, their safety, and acting violently. Through focus group interviews, researchers concluded that youth pursue respect, in part, as a means to achieve personal safety, and the respect can be gained through violent action. Youth recognize the prevalence of guns and the danger that they are in in becoming a part of that cycle, but they express conflict and frustration in their search for other ways to gain respect and maintain their personal safety (Hansen et al., 2014).

These youth express that violence as self protection is not always in response to an immediate threat. Sometimes, violence serves to maintain a certain status or reputation so that they have future safety (Hansen et al., 2014). Even if violence may be "reasonable" in the sense that there is *some* reason to use it, I will attempt to further demonstrate, through social and psychological evidence, that some juveniles reasonably believe that violence is not just one option, but rather the very best option available to them.

Before moving forward, it is important to address a concern that some readers may have about the presence of adults. Some may wonder why these juveniles would not seek or receive help from adults instead of acting violently. This seems to be a better option than violence since violence not only risks the lives of the victims and the perpetrators, but it also puts the

perpetrator at risk of incarceration. One factor in a juvenile's legitimization of violence may be a juvenile's learned beliefs about the aid of adults. Many adults in these violent neighborhoods are dealing with trauma of their own, and traumatized parents tend to be less emotionally available for children coping with trauma. Parents in violent neighborhoods often express the same fears and beliefs about violence as their children. In an interview conducted in a Chicago public housing development, one mother expressed that "if they know you're scared, you're beat" (Garbarino, 1989). This mother had once hit two men who were threatening her children. She did not call the police for fear that the gangs may find out that she had called and retaliate, putting her family at greater risk (Garbarino, 1989). In a study done of adults working at Head Start in Chicago, a child-care program for low-income children, Garbarino found that 60% of employees had experienced at least one violent, traumatic event (1995). These adults are tasked with creating a "safe zone" in the school, and their experiences with trauma may impede this effort (Garbarino, 1995). As I detailed earlier, Garbarino also found that around half of mothers in American public housing developments may suffer from depression resulting in child neglect (1995).

Police in inner-cities may also be viewed not as bastions of safety but rather as aggressive and unhelpful, even violent (Rios, 2011). One inner-city boy interviewed by Garbarino expressed his beliefs about how to stay safe, saying "if I join a gang I will be 50% safe, but if I don't I will be 0% safe" (Garbarino, 1995, p 4). This quote speaks volumes. First, the police, parents, teachers, and other adults in this child's life do little or nothing to make him feel safer. Second, the one thing that makes him slightly safer, he knows, or reasonably believes, is a risk in itself (Dmitrieva et al., 2014). If juveniles don't believe that adults can help them stay safe, then the task falls onto themselves and their peers.

According to a five-month field study at Harper High School in Englewood, Chicago conducted by reporters Linda Lutton, Alex Kotlowitz and Ben Calhoun, gang culture is pervasive, and many youth growing up in inner-cities feel that the violence is thrust upon them and they must join the gangs to stay alive (Glass, 2013). Gang membership depends predominantly on what block an individual lives on, and it is hard to avoid any time one is out of the house whether walking to school, at school, or hanging out after school. Gangs may provide youth with a feeling of security when they are outside of their homes. One aspect of gang membership is the prevalence of firearms. When the reporters interviewed a group of students at Harper High School, each one knew where he could get a gun, and many could get one for free, if they needed it (Glass, 2013). Studies show that possession of a weapon significantly increases instances of violence (Zagar, 2009). Furthermore, children exposed to violence are four times more likely to carry weapons (Buka et al., 2001). Although it may seem obvious, what may begin as buying a weapon for a feeling of protection can quickly turn into using a weapon. For Americans who do not feel the need to own a firearm for protection and do not own one, the threat of using one is zero.

Not all beliefs around violence involve personal safety. Another factor that may lead to gang membership or violence is a juvenile's perception of gains and losses. CVE is negatively correlated to achievement motivation and beliefs about the future in youth (Butler-Barns et al., 2011; Hansen, 2014). Many young men growing up in urban areas see their peers and role models incarcerated, dead, or stuck on the streets. One 18 year-old said, ''The streets change a whole kid's mind…Coming up in the street life and it's not easy. You get caught up… A lot of people really think the streets is life… .and when you is caught up being around [them], it's like you just don't move'' (Hansen, 2014). When humans frame decisions in terms of gains, we are

risk averse; we play it safe. However, when humans frame decisions in terms losses, we are risk seeking (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). For example, when two groups of participants were given one of two identically risky options, one which expressed what participants could gain and one which expressed what participants could lose, participants risked more when the option was framed in terms of what they could lose. Similarly, if kids don't think that they will live to adulthood without dying, going to prison, or moving off of the streets, they may evaluate their decisions in terms of what they have to lose by not acting, and they may be more likely to risk jail time or their lives by joining a gang or acting violently. Gangs often lead to more violence although most juveniles see them as a way to stay safe because of their beliefs that adults cannot keep them safe (Dmitrieva et al., 2014).

In addition to increasing perception of threat, community violence exposure can develop internalized and externalized behaviors that contribute to the legitimization of violence perpetration such as increased aggression, decreased problem solving, and dissociation. One study found a positive correlation between early physical abuse and aggressive behavior in 4-6 year-olds. Researchers found that in the children who had been physically abused, teachers who were blind to the information rated the youth's aggression an average of 93% higher than youth who had not suffered physical abuse (Dodge et al., 1990). Although this study is not directly about community violence, the effects are consistent with other studies of direct and witnessed CVE (Garbarino, 1995; Halliday-Boykins & Graham, 2001). Another limitation of this study is that it was conducted with 4-6 year-olds without longitudinal data, but again, other studies have found consistent patterns of behavior extending through adolescence (Lambert et al., 2010; Baskin & Sommers, 2015). These studies find that youth with higher exposure to violence do exhibit higher levels of aggression and impulsive behavior.

Youth growing up in inner-city neighborhoods may also display aggressive behavior and act violently as part of a learned code of conduct. In a study conducted by Dodge et al. on physically abused children, researchers found through imagination exercises with the participants that the abused youth were less likely to generate competent solutions to problems than their counterparts who had not suffered physical abuse (Dodge et al., 1990). In addition to a propensity towards aggression, one reason for the less competent solutions could be that juveniles who have experienced violence in the form of physical abuse may be more likely to call on it as their own problem-solving strategy. Just as, in studies of the availability heuristic, participants rate the likelihoods of certain causes of death higher when they can call upon examples of them easier, children may utilize problem-solving measures that they can call upon most easily (Kahneman, 2011). Even if they are not exposed to violence every single day, the instances of violence may be more vivid memories and they may be paid more attention. What is more, acting nonviolently can be perceived as more dangerous than acting violently (Canada, 2010). If a juvenile hasn't learned how to peacefully react to violence in a way that they feel safe, then it be reasonable to hold beliefs which justify violence.

One friend asked me, "Don't these kids have sympathy? How could anyone kill someone knowing about the pain that the family would suffer or beat someone knowing about the pain that the victim would suffer?" It is an important question to address and to try and understand why a person may commit murder without writing him off as a monster. One internalized effect of CVE in the lives of traumatized youth that I have not yet mentioned is dissociation. Dissociation is a psychological "disruption in the usually integrated functions of consciousness, memory, identity or perception of the environment" (Hagan et al., 2015). A traumatized youth may begin to distance himself from his experiences and identity, distancing himself from his

own actions in the process. Youth growing up in violent neighborhoods experience loss and fear

in a way that the majority of Americans do not, and they are forced to make choices that most

Americans do not have to make (Bronfenbrenner, 2015). Dissociation is the mind's way of

coping with trauma, and it is much more common in children than in adults. When juries look at

"cold, hard killers," one thing that they are seeing is traumatized, untreated youth

(Bronfenbrenner, 2015). Like other responses to CVE, dissociation is moderated by strong

relationships with caregivers (Hagan et al., 2015; Garbarino, 2015).

Another psychological factor that may lead to the use of violence is a phenomenon

coined by Baumeister as "ego depletion" (1998). Researchers "use the term ego depletion to

refer to a temporary reduction in the self's capacity or willingness to engage in volitional action"

in which a person must use their will to control their self or their environment or to make choices

(Baumeister et al., 1998, p 1253). This research found that there was a depletion in volition after

exercising self-restraint or extreme focus in an unrelated task. In the field research at Harper

High School, one boy was quoted multiple times expressing fear that he wouldn't be able to stop

himself from hurting someone if another traumatizing event happened. This boy had lost

multiple friends to gun violence. In the most recent case, he had been standing with a friend

when she was fatally shot. In reference to his desire to retaliate, he said to the school social

worker, "if [another tragedy] happens again, I don't think I could stop it" (Glass, 2013). This is

one example of how an individual's self-restraint may wear down. One danger of this returns to

the prevalence of guns and violence in urban neighborhoods. When many Americans reach the

end of our patience or our self-control with someone who has been bothering us or hurting us, we

may snap at him or her. This is a miniscule version of the same thing, but for many Americans,

our relationship with violence is not so normal and our access to guns is not so open.

To augment this volitional fatigue is the fact that juveniles are still learning how to regulate their emotions (Casey, 2014). Different regions of the brain develop at different rates, and during adolescence there is a fuller development of fear, desire and rage than there is of regulating behavior such as impulse control (Casey, 2014). Adolescents also give into peer pressure more readily than younger children and adults. Gardner and Steinberg measured risks that adolescents would take when driving through a yellow light simulation in comparison to older youth and adults. When no peers were present, all three group drove through the yellow light at consistent rates. However, when peers were present, adolescent risk taking with regards to driving through yellow lights rose significantly above adults and youth (2005). This observation of peer pressure can affect adolescent decision-making around violence, especially when adolescents are part of a gang or associated with deviant peers.

For juveniles growing up in America's most violent areas, an accumulation of risk factors and often a lack of protective factors in conjunction with age contribute to beliefs that violence is a proper action to take. We also must understand that these kids are asked to make decisions that most of us do not have to make: should I retaliate against a person who disrespected me? Should I carry a firearm as protection or not? Should I get involved in a gang that may make me feel safer while also putting me at greater risk? As Sarah Buss argues, acknowledging some degree of blamelessness does not insinuate that these disadvantaged agents are less capable of acting in a morally permissible way. Instead, it demonstrates how some disadvantaged agents have more *reason* to act in a morally impermissible way (Buss, 1997, p 339). For juveniles with a significant accumulation of risk factors and a significant lack of protective factors, it is reasonable that many would hold beliefs which legitimize violent action, even if it is not seen by mainstream society as morally permissible. Successful treatment would need to modify these

beliefs in order to result in behavioral changes.

Discussion of Counter Arguments

Before moving into my recommendation on how to better treat violent juveniles who lack a significant amount of blameworthiness, I will acknowledge some alternative or conflicting views of juvenile blameworthiness. Readers may be hesitant to adopt this framework for multiple reasons. Many proponents of harsh juvenile sentencing demand resilience from juveniles, arguing that humans are resilient and violent juveniles are responsible for not having this quality. Some readers may be concerned that the loose use of the word "reasonable" in my framework of blameworthiness could be used to release any offender from being held morally responsible including privileged juvenile offenders. Finally, some readers may feel that "reasonableness" of an action should not outweigh the morality of an action. While these three arguments are important to address, upon further investigation, they do not pose any real threat to my account of blameworthiness for juveniles with war zone mentality.

Humans have an amazing capacity for resilience, overcoming internal and external obstacles to move on to better lives or impressive accomplishments (Jain et al., 2012). People can find many uplifting examples of resilience in the face of hardship and use them to condemn juveniles who do not thrive under the same conditions. Geoffrey Canada, President of the Harlem Children Zone, is one example of a successful individual who grew up in a violent and poor area of New York City in a single-mother household, and who owned a gun for a period of time, but never committed a serious violent crime or got arrested (Canada, 1995). Or people may look at the 50-70% of youth from violent environments who don't act violently (Werner & Smith as cited in Jain et al., 2012) and ask why those kids didn't commit violent crimes.

It is important to note that just because some, or even most, of the juveniles who grow up in the same neighborhood do not commit violent crimes, it does not mean that acting violently is unreasonable. Individual differences in resilience could be attributed to many differences in an individual or his experiences including differences in exposure, protective factors, risk factors, or genetic and characteristic differences which are not discussed in the present thesis. A longitudinal study conducted by Jain et al. found that emotional resilience in youth was affected by exposure to community violence as well as by the protective factors of family and peer relationships (2012). Jain et al. used data from the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods to measure the effects of protective factors on youth resilience. Participants were analyzed in three groups: juveniles that had been direct victims of violence, juveniles that had directly witnessed violence, and juveniles that had not been exposed to violence but may have heard of violent occurrences. The researchers found that while positive peers, family support, other adult support, and positive peer influence increased resilience, victims and witnesses of violence were still significantly less likely to be resilient than unexposed youth (Jain et al., 2012). This is not to say that differences in exposure to violence are the only distinguishing factor between juveniles who act violently and those who don't. Instead, these findings suggest that a lack of resilience is not necessarily a moral flaw, but rather a factor which is influenced by an individual's experiences and personal characteristics.

Here, it may be important to note as I did in my discussion of psychological biases, that a "reasonable" belief is not necessarily an ideal belief or a belief which leads to an ideal action. Therefore, although resilience may be an ideal quality in humans, that does not make it reasonable in all circumstances. Instead, a reasonable belief is one that is understandable to hold based on individual experiences and characteristics. Importantly, the juvenile justice system is

set up to take an individual's background and circumstances into consideration. The trial process exists in order to evaluate each case's unique factors. For example, the court agrees that if two black 16 year-olds react in two different ways to a perceived threat, it does not necessarily mean that one reacted reasonably and one did not. Instead, the trial process could be used to investigate what differences in backgrounds led to a specific belief or action and to determine whether or not it was reasonable. Furthermore, on this account, a reasonable belief is not necessarily demonstrated by a majority of people reacting in the same way. Therefore, even if 50-70% of youth do not react violently to their circumstances, this fact alone does not make the 30-50% that do react violently more blameworthy.

Some people may worry that this general use of "reasonableness" could be used to support the blamelessness of any violent offender. One example of this fear may be Ethan Couch's case of "affluenza" in Texas. In 2013, a court ruled that Couch would not be sentenced to time in a correctional facility after killing four people in a drunk-driving incident "because he suffered from too much privilege stemming from his family's wealth" (Fernandez & Schwartz, 2013; Victor, 2016). In adopting my proposed framework for blameworthiness, one may fear that cases such as this one would be more frequent. This fear can be addressed with specific measurements of risk *and* protective factors. Some research done has found a negative correlation between lists of protective factors and juvenile violence (www.search-institute.org; Garbarino, 2001). The research referred to protective factors as "developmental assets" and included factors such as family support and communication, perception of safety, extracurricular programming, and self-esteem (www.search-institute.org/). They found that only 6% of youth who had 31 to 40 assets were classified as violent ("having engaged in three or more acts of hitting, fighting, injuring a person, carrying a weapon, or threatening physical harm in the last 12

months" (Garbarino, 2001)). Of the kids who had 21 to 30 assets, 16% were in the violent category. Of the kids who had 11 to 20 assets, 35% were in the violent category. And of the kids with 0 to 10 of these assets, 61% were in the violent category. This study demonstrates that not only the accumulation of risk factors, but also the accumulated absence of protective factors contributes to juvenile violent behavior. The issue may not be *which* assets a juvenile has, but rather how many assets she has.

In the case of "affluenza," Couch may have been lacking some factors, but the presence of others may have made it unreasonable to assume that he was blameless to such a high degree, or perhaps he did have a large accumulation of risk factors coupled by an absence of protective factors. The first step in using this information is to measure risk factors and protective factors. Because a lot of research has been done on the topics, measurements have already been established. For example, courts could begin measuring CVE, family abuse, and the characteristics of a juvenile's family and home life.

Finally, even if an opponent agrees that this framework can be used by the courts, one may feel that this system removes the morality from a framework of moral evaluation. Even if juveniles reasonably perceive high levels of danger and even if violence may be perceived as the most effective or reasonable solution, one may argue that juveniles should still know that violence, especially murder, is morally wrong, and that the punishment should reflect this. In this case, it is important to first note that finding an agent has a minimal degree of blameworthiness does not remove any of the moral responsibility an agent may have. Instead, it acknowledges that an agent may not have the luxury of grounding an action right and wrong, but rather acts based on learned behavior in extreme circumstances in which most Americans never find themselves. For example, findings that carrying a weapon is positively correlated to violent crime may seem

obvious. However, what is less frequently thought about is why some children have to make the decision of whether or not to carry a gun. Many Americans do not need to carry a gun to feel safe, and so they never make the decision. Because they do not carry a gun, they also never need to make the decision (consciously or not) of whether or not to shoot it. While moral responsibility does take into account the morality of a violent action, and demands that a response be made, this framework for blameworthiness acknowledges that morality may come in second place to reason or learned behavior in extreme environments.

The important next step is to apply this framework of moral evaluation to the lives of disadvantaged juveniles. By understanding where juveniles have reasonable beliefs which are not aligned with the law, the juvenile justice system can better treat them. More effective treatment would also lead to shorter sentences and less recidivism. The next, and last, chapter of this thesis investigates one treatment tactic which has been effective in treating violent juvenile offenders.

Chapter 3: Treatment of Juveniles with War Zone Mentality

In cases where violent juveniles are morally responsible, but minimally blameworthy, our treatment must reflect these circumstances. While the juvenile justice system should respond to a violent crime and do what it can to remove immediate threat and prevent future harm, it must do this under the umbrella of rehabilitation rather than punishment. In chapter 1, I outlined why a lack of blame also moves our response to offenders away from punishment and onto rehabilitation. As the juvenile justice system operates now, rehabilitation is the stated mission, but high rates of recidivism (re-offending) and long sentences indicate that rehabilitation is not always occurring (Klietz, Borduin, & Schaeffer, 2010). I have outlined one framework, war zone mentality, under which violent juveniles may perceive violence as morally reasonable due to

their experiences and beliefs. If the juvenile justice system can influence the beliefs of juveniles, diminishing the war zone mentality by decreasing perception of threat and legitimization of violence, then it can better decrease the likelihood of more juvenile violent crime. This section will detail one type of treatment, Multisystemic Therapy (MST) which has been one of the most effective treatments at decreasing violent juvenile reoffending in number of offenses and severity of offenses (Henggeler et al., 1992, 2009; Tate et al., 1995; Borduin et al., 1995; Schaeffer & Borduin, 2005).

Multisystemic Therapy is a unique and flexible form of therapy which directs treatment at changing the home and community environments of juvenile offenders that contribute to their violent action. These environments include juveniles' homes, schools, and neighborhoods. Unlike other rehabilitation techniques which often address only an individual's beliefs and behaviors, MST works to adapt the individual's environment to better support desired changes in beliefs and behaviors (Henggeler et al., 2009). The effectiveness of MST has been empirically supported through randomized and longitudinal studies, and a significant decrease in crime rates and crime seriousness has been found in follow up surveys that take place over 13 years after the completion of the therapy (Schaeffer & Borduin, 2005). Although some of the factors that contribute to war zone mentality can be attributed to internal psychology such as the availability heuristic and anxiety, the central causes of the war zone mentality belief system are often external factors such as exposure to violence, family dynamic, and relations with gangs or deviant peers as I have detailed in chapter 2. In holding sessions in clients' homes and neighborhoods, MST therapists can address both axes of war zone mentality, perception of threat and legitimization of violence, in the actual environments in which the belief structure is developed.

While MST is carried out slightly differently for each individual, the process is standardized so as to maintain treatment integrity. Courts can recommend juvenile offenders for the treatment who they judge do not pose as an immediate threat for the communities. MST therapists work in teams of 2-4 with a supervisor available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, and the teams meet monthly to discuss the goals and progress of the client. Each therapist in the team works with 4-6 families, and is available to the families 24/7, meeting only in the client's home and community environments. Treatments last 3-5 months, often with over 60 hours of direct contact between the therapist and the client in the client's neighborhood. Treatment is focused first towards the home environment and then towards the school and community with individual and family therapy sessions throughout. Through the MST process, therapists teach quality parenting practices in order to give healthy disciplinary control to caregivers, so that they can help sustain positive change after the treatment period ends. Examples of quality parenting include increased supervision, clear consequence structure, and low conflict. These actions directly address factors in juveniles' lives which contribute to war zone mentality (Henggeler et al., 2009).

Increased family cohesion and improved parenting practices decrease war zone mentality in a number of significant ways. Youth from exceptional families, characterized by strong beliefs about the importance of family, high levels of cohesion and an investment in the child's development, are exposed to significantly lower levels of community violence (Gorman-Smith et al., 2004). Furthermore, for youth exposed to high levels of violence, exceptionally functioning families significantly decreased the effects of CVE including anxiety, PTSD, and increased levels of aggression and violence perpetration (Buka et al., 2001; Gorman-Smith et al., 2004). The significant effects of MST on improving family cohesion and parenting practices directly

address both the exposure to and the effects of community violence exposure. This serves to decrease youth perception of threat and aggressive beliefs by aiding juveniles in coping with what they have already experienced and limiting the probability of future exposure. Part of the coping process that families can assist youth in is helping youth learn that traumatic events are not ordinary and helping children feel safe (Garbarino & Dubrow, 1989).

Therapists also work with the client and caregivers to determine goals such as decreased violent behavior, increased grades, or decreased time with deviant peers and to map out what factors currently hinder those goals. Then, therapists work with clients and families to create action plans which help clients achieve their behavioral goals. These actions might include joining more extracurricular activities in the community, coming home after school, or switching tracks at school to a more suitable schedule of classes. Therapists then follow through on these actions by contacting schools, working with parents and checking in with the juveniles (Henggeler et al., 2009).

These action plans address several components of the war zone mentality, especially along the "Legitimization of Violence" axis. More community involvement can help juveniles become more risk averse if they feel like they have more to gain by staying out of trouble. It can also address ego-depletion if they spend less time with deviant peers and in dangerous situations, and more time enjoying activities. Less time on the streets also leads to less exposure to violence which could, if sustained, help decrease some of the active expectation of violence. The juveniles also learn about how to create more competent solutions by making the action plans with the therapists. As detailed earlier, children who suffered abuse were less able to generate competent solutions (Dodge et al., 1990). MST helps juveniles learn how to solve problems in their daily environment rather than only in a highly monitored detention facility.

In 1995, Borduin et al. ran an empirical study of juveniles with serious criminal histories who received either Multisystemic Therapy or individual therapy (the standard response to high-risk juveniles in the county). The individual therapy focused on similar issues to the MST group such as familial, academic, and personal issues, and both individual and multisystemic therapists had supervisor check ins (Borduin et al., 1995). However, out of the topics, "individual, marital, family, peer, and school," researchers found that over 90% of participants in individual therapy worked on only one factor (individual) while "all MST cases received interventions in two or more systems" (Borduin et al., 2005, p 447). The youth in the study averaged more than 4 previous arrests, and the "mean severity of the most recent arrest was 8.8" on a scale from 1(truancy) to 17(murder) with 8 being assault/battery (Borduin et al., 1995, p 570; scale from Hanson et al., 1984). Almost half of participants had been convicted of at least one violent crime (Borduin et al., 2005). MST providers spent a mean of 24 hours in direct contact with the client and a maximum of 49 hours (Borduin et al., 1995).

Borduin et al. measured the client's behavior and social maturity, family functioning, peer relations and criminal activity, and they found significant positive results. Researchers saw a decrease in behavioral problems for the MST group and an increase for the IT group based on mothers' reports, and they also saw increased supportiveness and decreased conflict and hostility between the client and his parents and the parents themselves (1995, p 573). Researchers did not see a significant affect on peer relations including "emotional bonding, aggression, and social maturity" as rated by teachers and mothers (1995, p 572). However, this lack of significance may be due to a systematic error in measurement because violence and crime were significantly lower for juveniles in the MST group. Four years after the treatment concluded, "71.4% of the youths in the [individual therapy] group had been arrested at least once, compared with 26.1% of the

youths in the MST group" (1995, p 573). Those who did reoffend from the MST group were less likely to commit violent offenses, and they were convicted of less serious crimes (1995, p 576). These results were not significantly impacted by the juvenile's arrest history or social identity (race, gender, SES).

Consistent results were also found in a study conducted by Henggeler et al. in which MST treated juveniles were compared to a control group who received the usual Department of Youth Services (DYS) probation treatment which included restrictions like a mandated curfew, academic success, or individual therapy with external agencies (1992). Participants had an average of "3.5 previous arrests and…54% of the youth had at least one arrest for a violent crime" (Henggeler, 1992, p 954). For each youth assigned to MST, one youth was assigned to the standard DYS treatment as a control. MST treatment spanned an average of 13.4 weeks with 33 hours of contact with the psychologists. Researchers tracked the effects for just over one year and found encouraging results. Just over one year after juveniles were referred by DYS, "youths who received MST spent an average of 73 fewer days incarcerated in DYS facilities than did their usual-services counterparts" (Henggeler et al., 1992, p 956). In addition, "80% (vs. 32%) of MST youths were not incarcerated," and 58% of juveniles who received MST avoided re-arrest completely compared to 38% of juveniles who received standard DYS treatment. Measurements of family benefits were also positive as MST families reported significantly more cohesion. Peer-rated aggression also decreased for MST youth, but remained the same for the control group (Henggeler et al., 1992, p 956).

A follow up study done 13 years after Borduin's study found that the MST group had maintained a significant difference in criminal activity (Borduin et al., 2005). Follow ups done an average of 13 year later found that "81% of the participants in the IT group had been arrested

at least once, compared with 50% of the participants in the MST group" (Borduin et al., 2005, p

448). Authors attribute success to the multisystemic approach, but do not dig deeper into *how* the

family cohesion and the separation from deviant peers influenced juvenile beliefs and actions. As

we saw in chapter 2, family character and peer association are correlated to anxiety and

perception of threat as well as a legitimization of violence. In other words, effective

multisystemic therapy may decrease a juvenile offender's level of war zone mentality.

While the findings are consistent with decreasing war zone mentality, participants were

not asked directly about their perception of threat or their beliefs about violence as part of the

studies. Therefore, there is no data on the treatment's direct relation to war zone mentality. A

promising area for future research would be to survey youth on their beliefs about violence, and

their perception of threat in order to test directly if MST is effective because of a decrease in war

zone mentality. Researchers attribute the treatment's success to its systematic approach, but they

do not get more specific (Henggeler et al., 1992). Future studies may include surveys measuring

agreement with statements such as: *I am safe in my neighborhood, I need a weapon to be safe,*

"aggression is legitimate, aggression increases self-esteem, victims deserve aggression," or, *I*

often relive violent memories (statements on aggression from Guerra & Slaby, 1990, p 271).

There are some possible threats to the efficacy of MST. Perhaps the most pressing

question is whether the integrity of a flexible treatment plan can be maintained. Social work is

notorious for heavy case loads and demanding work. For MST to continue to be successful, it

requires the well-thought-out and individualized plans that the therapists were able to conduct in

the empirical studies. Researchers stress this commitment to low case loads in training and in the

literature (Henggeler et al., 2009). One reason to stick to it is the ultimate cost-effectiveness of

the treatment compared to the cost of holding a juvenile in detention. Governments would do

well to hire more therapists and maintain the integrity of the treatment rather than dilute the

treatment and spend more on higher re-incarceration rates, not to mention what crime does to a

community (MST Services, 2015).

Another limitation to my using MST is that it does not deal exclusively with violent

offenders. About half of the participants in the studies which I included committed serious, but

non-violent crimes (ie. grand larceny, breaking and entering, drug distribution). Often, the

categories "serious" and "violent" offenders are grouped together because they hold the similar

weight or similar dread. However, both Boduin et al. and Henggeler et al. found no significant

difference in outcome success based on pre-arrest history, suggesting that violent and serious but

non-violent juvenile offenders had statistically equal success rates after treatment. Juveniles

treated with MST were less likely than juveniles treated with individual therapy to commit

violent offenses, regardless of their previous offenses. For juveniles who are morally responsible,

yet blameless to a high degree, MST is an effective form of rehabilitation through which

juveniles can remain at home and learn how to better operate within America's legal code.

Some may be concerned that using MST as opposed to detention fails to uphold another

important goal of punishment which is deterrence. The idea behind deterrence is that some

people may refrain from committing a crime if they fear the harsh consequences of getting

caught. This would increase the safety of other citizens by decreasing serious crime. While there

may be other ways to effectively deter crime, severity of sentences do not impact an area's rate

of crime (Paternoster, 2010, p 818; Doob & Webster, 2003). Some studies find a marginal

negative correlation between the risk of incarceration and crime rates, however the review of

literature was done on adult crime (Paternoster, 2010). This could suggest that detention would

do more to deter crime than MST, but the results are not guaranteed. There is, however, a strong

significance between completing MST and not reoffending, and for juveniles who are influenced so heavily by their environments, a treatment which helps restructure their environment to be more conducive to nonviolent behavior should be taken advantage of. Due to the high rates of success of MST compared to standard practice, MST appears to be an effective rehabilitation technique for juveniles who have developed the war zone mentality.

<div align="center">
<u>Freestyling</u>
I been down in the halls. / Nobody worried 'bout me
But my mom and my sister / And all my family.
I'm going to switch my life / So I don't end up like the other.
Every time I went down / It made me look like my brother.
I'm going to placement / Switch my life up quick
So I don't be stupid / Hangin' out with another click
I'm a catch up on my credits / So I got an education.
Not posting on the block / Where my time gone' be wasted...
I'm an educated kid / Doing what I got to do.
-Lil Nitro
</div>

Conclusion

By understanding how juveniles in violent American neighborhoods may develop beliefs which encourage the use of violence, my hope is that readers begin to understand the type of rehabilitative treatment that these juveniles deserve. Rather than punishment and incarceration, these juveniles deserve effective and sustainable treatment which helps mold their environment to promote nonviolent action as well as to help them cope with past experiences. Environmental factors in the lives of juveniles such as witnessing or being victimized by community violence and struggling family dynamics may lead them to reasonably perceive a high level of threat and to adopt beliefs supporting violence. These beliefs, which may be reasonable to hold due to a juvenile's past, make some juveniles less blameworthy than we may at first suppose. By understanding how some violent juveniles are less blameworthy than we may have thought, we can begin to explore rehabilitation techniques, such as multisystemic therapy, which avoid harsh punishment and detention. It is our juvenile justice system's responsibility to treat these kids effectively because without effective treatment, violent, traumatized juveniles become violent traumatized adults (Bronfenbrenner, 2015). The youth that I have worked with often write about violent experiences, but they also write about hopes and about love. Denying them effective treatment is denying them their rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

This thesis emphasized experiences such as CVE, family dynamics and psychological biases, but there are other factors which can and do play a role in the war zone mentality. Race, for example, and socio-economic status certainly have a place in this topic, and a positive direction for future research would be to explore how minority and poor Americans specifically are affected by prejudices which may contribute the war zone mentality. Drug abuse by both youth and their families can also influence their beliefs and actions, and is another potential area for future research.

While understanding how factors that are outside of the control of urban youth can negatively affect their beliefs carries a message of responsibility to America's systems, it also carries a message of hope. If environmental factors can change beliefs and influence behaviors in a negative way, opposing environmental factors may be able to change beliefs and result in positive behavioral change. Effective, environment-focused rehabilitation can give previously afraid, angry and desperate juveniles the power to lead their lives without constantly fearing the next attack and without the belief that violence is the most effective response to a problem. One individual I worked with in a workshop wrote about power:

<div align="center">

Power

Power,
It could be negative,
It could be positive...

Power,
It's feeling lies deep within the layers of your skin,
And into the marrow of your bones.
It has everyone's adrenaline rushing,
and pulsing through your bloodstream...
It has your blood boiling,
Like a scorching pot of hot water,
Pumping and pulsing through your heart.

</div>

Yeah,
I feel it.
It feels real good...
-MadStories

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