Street Code Adherence, Callous-Unemotional Traits and the Capacity of Violent Offending versus Non-Offending Urban Youth to Mentalize About Disrespect Murder

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Street Code Adherence, Callous-Unemotional Traits and the Capacity of Violent Offending versus Non-Offending Urban Youth to Mentalize About Disrespect Murder

by

Zoë A. Berko

A dissertation proposal submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Clinical Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

STREET CODE ADHERENCE, CALLOUS-UNEMOTIONAL TRAITS AND THE CAPACITY OF VIOLENT OFFENDING VERSUS NON-OFFENDING URBAN YOUTH TO MENTALIZE ABOUT DISRESPECT MURDER

By Zoë A. Berko

Advisor: Steven Tuber, Ph.D.

National statistics are not available on the proportion of violent juvenile offenses driven by the experience of being disrespected. However, the New York Police Department estimates that about 40% of the city’s shootings involve members of violent crews of 12 to 20 year olds with most of this gun violence driven by incidents of disrespect. Mentalization, defined as the ability to envision mental states (i.e., feelings, beliefs and intentions) in oneself and others, is viewed as underlying affect regulation, impulse control, self-monitoring, and the experience of self-agency, all of which are implicated in interpersonal violence (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2002). From a developmental psychodynamic perspective, the capacity to mentalize is seen as developing within the context of secure early attachment relationships via the process of caregiver affect attunement (Fonagy et al., 2002; Stern, 1985; Winnicott, 1963) with further scaffolding optimally provided by secure social contexts such as school and the wider socio-cultural environment (Twemlow, 2003).

This mixed-methods pilot study investigated the extent and nature of breakdowns in mentalization in the context of street violence in a community sample (N = 18) of violent offending versus non-offending male adolescents from low-income New York City neighborhoods and the degree to which these breakdowns are shaped by level of street code
adherence and callous-unemotional (CU) traits. Secondary analyses examined the relationship of CU traits with street code adherence and with the capacity to mentalize in the context of attachment relationships given the limited investigation of social-cultural and relational factors that may shape the development of CU traits. Self-report measures assessed participants' level of street code adherence, CU traits and the capacity to mentalize in attachment relationships. Mentalizing capacity in the context of street violence was assessed through a semi-structured interview using movie clips of disrespect murders involving teenaged perpetrators that was coded for level of reflective function by an independent rater as well as analyzed qualitatively.

Violent offenders presented with significantly lower overall mentalizing capacities ($M = 3.30, SD = .67$) than controls ($M = 4.19, SD = .88$), $t (df) = -2.41, p = .03$) in the context of street violence. Qualitatively, violent offenders exhibited more frequent and extensive breakdowns than controls when called upon to mentalize both the perpetrators’ and victims’ experiences ranging from a more limited affective repertoire to the complete collapse of mentalization and greater defensive distancing (e.g., yawning). A higher level of street code adherence was found to be moderately related to a lower capacity to mentalize in the context of street violence. A medium effect size was found for the relationship between higher levels of CU traits and lower capacity to mentalize the victim’s (though not the perpetrators) experience. While this latter finding was not statistically significant it is suggested that with a larger sample size this effect may be statistically significant. Lower mentalizing capacities in the context of attachment relationships were found to be associated with higher levels of street code adherence. From this perspective, individuals whose early attachment related experiences did not support the acquisition of adequate mentalizing capacities may be more drawn to the predictable yet organizing framework for interpersonal interactions provided by street code. Finally, a case
study of one of the violent offender participants is presented to demonstrate how impoverished emotional responses among high CU and high street-code adhering youth may, in part, represent a “turning off” of emotions secondary to the trauma of community violence. Implications for the adaption of mentalization-based therapy for street code-invested violent youth are discussed.

Key Words: Mentalization, Disrespect Murder, Street Culture, Callous-unemotional traits, Juvenile Offenders.
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Chapter I: Introduction

The FBI Uniform Crime Reports show that, during 2013\(^1\), 492 youth under the age of 18 were arrested in the United States for homicide,\(^2\) 12,340 for robbery and 19,351 for aggravated assault. National statistics are not available on the proportion of violent juvenile offenses driven by the experience of being disrespected. However, the 2012\(^3\) NYPD Homicide Report classified 42% of the 419 homicides committed in New York City that year (by both juvenile and adult perpetrators) as related to dispute or revenge-seeking motives.\(^4\) Furthermore, the NYPD estimates that violent crews of 12 to 20 year-olds are responsible for about 40% of the city’s shootings with most of this gun violence driven by incidents of disrespect.\(^5\) In contrast to larger traditional street gangs such as the Bloods, Crips and Latin Kings, the membership of these comparatively younger crews or sets is organized around residence on a specific block or housing project. The violence perpetrated by the estimated 300 crews in New York City is described by NYPD Gang Division Commander Inspector Kevin Catalina as follows: “A lot of it is driven by nothing: A dispute over a girl or a wrong look or a perceived slight” (Pearson & Pelz, 2014, p.1). Furthermore, despite record recent overall decreases in violent crime in New York City crew-related violence continues leading to the creation of the 2012 NYPD initiative Operation Crew Cut to target this violence (Pearson & Pelz, 2014).

Current therapeutic interventions for juvenile offenders such as the Power Source Group Program (Casarjian & Casarjian, 2003) target the youth’s ability to manage intense emotions in situations in which his physical and/or psychological integrity is challenged (i.e., the experience of feeling disrespected).

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\(^1\) The most recent available FBI Uniform Crime Reports are for 2013.
\(^2\) The above-cited homicide statistics likely underestimate the annual number of homicides committed by juvenile offenders and young adults given that nationally 36% of the homicide cases committed during 2012 were not cleared.
\(^3\) The most recent available annual NYPD Homicide Report is for 2012.
\(^4\) These statistics are based on 419 deaths in New York City that were classified as homicides during 2012 with 14 of these deaths either resulting from assaults sustained in previous years or involving deaths that occurred in previous years but were only ruled a homicide in 2012.
However, these interventions place limited emphasis on the specific socio-cultural contexts in which youth violence occurs. This current study, which evolves out of my clinical work with violent juvenile offenders, investigates the degree to which street code adherence shapes the capacities of violent versus non-offending urban minority youth to mentalize (namely, contemplate the intentions and feelings of victims) about street violence. Drawing on literature from the fields of urban ethnography, sociology, forensic psychology and psychoanalysis, this interdisciplinary study has the potential to address a critical gap through contributing to the development of more culturally informed preventative interventions for at-risk and juvenile offenders with consequent implications for public safety.

Mentalization is defined as “the process by which we implicitly and explicitly interpret the actions of ourselves and others as meaningful based on intentional mental states (e.g., desires, needs, feelings, beliefs, and reasons)” (Bateman & Fonagy, 2008, p.181). As such, mentalization represents both a self and interpersonal reflective capacity. Mentalization involves the inference of mental states from numerous sources including verbal, vocal and facial cues and knowledge about the opponent’s beliefs and perspectives (Hooker, Verosky, Germine, Knight, & D’Esposito, 2008). Related constructs include empathy, perspective taking, social cognition, emotional intelligence and reflective functioning (Vrouva & Fonagy, 2008).

Mentalization “arguably underlies the capacities for affect regulation, impulse control, self-monitoring, and the experience of self-agency” (Fonagy et al., 2002, p. 25), all of which are implicated in the commission of violent behavior. Indeed, mentalization is characterized as “a profoundly social construct in the sense that we are attentive to the mental states of those we are with, physically or psychologically. Equally we can temporarily lose awareness of them as ‘minds’ and even momentarily treat them as physical objects” (Bateman & Fonagy, 2006, p.3).
From a developmental psychodynamic perspective, the capacity to mentalize is seen as developing within the context of secure early attachment relationships via the process of caregiver affect attunement (Fonagy et al., 2002; Stern, 1985; Winnicott, 1963) with further scaffolding optimally provided by secure social contexts such as school and the wider socio-cultural environment (Twemlow, 2003). Indeed, Twemlow, Fonagy, & Sacco (2005) emphasize that, “how well and with what biases an individual is able to understand the motivational and ideational world of the other will depend on the quality of the “mind-mindedness” that surrounds him or her” (p.267).

Despite well-received ethnographic accounts of inner city violence (e.g., Anderson, 1999), street culture, embodied in street code, has yet to be investigated as a specific social context that may shape the capacity to mentalize about violence. Street code is defined as:

- a set of informal rules governing interpersonal public behavior, particularly violence.
- The rules prescribe both proper comportment and the proper way to respond if challenged. They regulate the use of violence and so supply a rationale allowing those who are inclined to aggression to precipitate violent encounters in an approved way. (Anderson, 1999, p.33)

Respect and social identity are core interrelated features of street code. Respect, a hard-won and easily lost external entity, is defined as “being treated ‘right’ or being granted one’s ‘props’ (or proper due) or the deference one deserves” (Anderson, 1999, p.33). As prescribed by the code, respect is acquired and maintained through the projection of a violent social identity, “campaigns for respect” (e.g., acquisitive violence or the initiation of street fights), violent retaliation in response to being disrespected and active resistance during assaults to one’s person (Anderson, 1999). Street code can thus be seen as constraining mentalization about public interpersonal
conflicts through its prescription of violent responses to threats to one’s physical and psychological integrity as well as inhibiting empathy for victims who violate street code principles.

Identity vulnerability is viewed as a critical determinant of code adherence (e.g., Anderson, 1999; Brach, 2000; Fagan & Wilkinson, 1998). Indeed, Brezina, Agnew, Cullen, & Wright (2004) emphasize that street code investment “is not simply a reflection of corrupt values or deviant socialization. Rather it represents, in part, an adaptation to status insecurity and to the persistent threat of violence that is present in some urban communities” (p.304). Anderson (1999) observes, and this is consistent with my clinical experience with this population, that “Many inner-city young men in particular crave respect to such a degree that they will risk their lives to attain and maintain it” (p.76). The projection of a violent social identity and the commission of violence thus provide status in social contexts with limited alternative forms of social capital.

Callous-unemotional (CU) traits refer to a distinct affective (e.g., impoverished display of emotions, absence of guilt and remorse) and interpersonal style (e.g., lack of empathic responsiveness, the callous disregard for others who are used for one’s personal gratification and gain) (Frick & White, 2008). These traits are a consistent dimension of most conceptualizations of psychopathy (e.g., Cleckley, 1941/1976; Cooke & Michie, 2001; Hare, 1993) and are thus considered a childhood precursor of psychopathy (Frick, 2009). Among anti-social youth, the presence of CU traits has emerged as a critical dimension that delineates a subgroup of delinquent youth with childhood-onset conduct problems who exhibit a stable pattern of severe and aggressive anti-social behavior and distinct emotional and social-cognitive processes (Frick, 2009; Frick & White, 2008). The capacity to mentalize about street violence rests on the ability
to infer mental states from numerous sources including verbal, vocal and facial cues as well as knowledge about the opponent’s beliefs and perspectives. However, high CU youth show deficits in their processing of cues of emotional distress including facial expressions (Blair, Colledge, Murray, & Mitchell, 2001; Stevens, Charman, & Blair, 2001), vocal tones (Blair, Budhani, College, & Scott, 2005; Stevens et al., 2001), and, negative emotional words (Loney, Frick, Clements, Ellis, & Kerlin, 2003). Additionally, high CU traits have been found to be associated with reduced concern for victim suffering despite intact ability to anticipate the degree to which their aggressive behavior will cause harm and the endorsement of social goals related to interpersonal dominance, forced respect and revenge (Pardini, 2011) – goals that are consistent with street code principles.

The few studies investigating emotional processing among more ethnically diverse samples of CU youth and psychopathic adults have found a weaker relationship between emotional processing deficits and CU/psychopathic traits than that found in Caucasian samples (e.g., Kimonis, Frick, Fazekas, & Loney, 2006; Kosson, Smith, & Newman, 1990; Lorenz & Newman, 2002). Kimonis, Frick, Muñoz, & Aucoin (2008) posit that, “Ethnic differences in the various processes underlying psychopathy may be explained by social factors related to living in a threatening environment, which are more likely experienced by African-American individuals living in urban areas (Skeem, Edens, Sanford, & Hauser, 2004)” (p. 571). Thus far there has been only limited investigation of the contextual factors that may shape the development of CU traits (Howard, Kimonis, Muñoz, & Frick, 2012). Therefore, there is a need for further examination of emotional processing among minority CU youth with a focus on how these capacities may be shaped by social-cultural contextual factors.
As stated above, the primary purpose of this current study is to investigate the extent and nature of context specific breakdowns in mentalization among violent offending versus non-offending urban minority youth in response to the experience of being disrespected and the extent to which these breakdowns are shaped by level of street code adherence. Given the empirical research on the emotional and social-cognitive correlates of high CU traits, secondary analyses will examine participants’ level of callous-unemotional traits to assess the relationship of these traits with street code adherence and their impact on the capacity to mentalize about episodes of street violence.

Part one of the literature review will present Fonagy et al.’s (2002) developmental psychodynamic theory on (1) the developmental roots of a mentalizing self-organization within the secure early attachment relationship; (2) the biological vulnerabilities and early attachment related experiences that compromise the acquisition of the capacity to mentalize; and, (3) the mechanisms through which inadequate mentalizing capacities (due to structural defects and temporary defensive breakdowns in this capacity) are theorized to promote interpersonal violence. In addition, empirical literature from the field of forensic psychology on the role of empathy deficits in offending behavior will be presented given its applicability to the capacity to mentalize the victim’s experience. Finally, given the adoption of Fonagy et al.’s (2002) model as the theoretical model for this study, the limited empirical literature investigating offenders’ mentalizing and empathic capacities from the perspective of their early attachment experiences will be presented (e.g., Barb, 2005; Goldstein & Higgins D’Alessandro, 2001; Levinson & Fonagy, 2004).

Part two of the literature review will discuss the following: First, the social scaffolding of mentalization, specifically, how the coercive power dynamics that characterize inner city
neighborhoods are theorized to produce reactive non-mentalizing individuals and community systems (Twemlow et al., 2005). Second, Anderson’s (1999) sub-cultural thesis of inner city violence, based upon his ethnographic study of two inner city neighborhoods in Philadelphia, and the empirical studies that support the generalizability of Anderson’s thesis (e.g., Agnew, 1994; Baron, Kennedy, & Forde, 2001; Brezina et al., 2004; Heimer, 1997; Markowitz & Felson, 1998; Stewart, Simons, & Conger, 2002) will be presented. Finally, sociological and psychoanalytical writings emphasizing identity vulnerability as a critical determinant of code adherence and the commission of violent behavior in response to challenges to the aggressor’s physical and/or psychological integrity (e.g., Bracher, 2000; Fagan & Wilkinson, 1998; Fonagy & Target, 1995; Glasser, 1998; Mitchell, 1993) will be discussed.

Part three of the literature review will address the following: First, CU traits as a developmental precursor to psychopathy and thus a promising method for disaggregating the recognized heterogeneity of anti-social and aggressive behavior in youth with implications for the development of treatments tailored to the specific needs of these youth (Frick, 2009). Second, the empirical research on the emotional processing and social-cognitive correlates of CU traits among anti-social youth will be presented. Finally, the limited empirical research on the role of contextual factors, namely, attachment related experiences (e.g., Dadds, Jambrak, Pasalich, Hawes, & Brennan, 2011; Pasalich, Dadds, Hawes, & Brennan, 2012) and exposure to community violence (e.g., Howard et al., 2012; Kimonis et al., 2008) in the development of CU traits will be discussed.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Mentalization and Related Constructs

As outlined in the introduction, mentalization is “the process by which we implicitly and explicitly interpret the actions of ourselves and others as meaningful based on intentional mental states (e.g., desires, needs, feelings, beliefs, and reasons)” (Bateman & Fonagy, 2008, p.181). Mentalization involves “inferring mental and emotional states from multiple sources, including non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions and gaze direction, as well as knowledge about the other person’s perspective and beliefs (Baron-Cohen, 1995; Frith & Frith, 2005; Frith & Frith, 2006a)” (Hooker, Verosky, Germine, Knight, & D’Esposito, 2008, p. 204). As both a self and interpersonal reflective capacity, mentalization “ideally provides the individual with a well-developed capacity to distinguish inner from outer reality, pretend from ‘real’ modes of functioning, and intra-personal mental and emotional processes from interpersonal communications” (Fonagy et al., 2002, p.25). Mentalization is viewed as a context specific capacity with breakdowns in mentalizing capacities occurring in the context of particular relationships (i.e., with one’s attachment figure), thoughts, feelings and situations (Fonagy et al., 2002).

Related constructs include reflective functioning (RF); mind-reading, affective mentalizing, emotional intelligence, social cognition, perspective taking and empathy (Vrouva & Fonagy, 2008). Reflective functioning (RF) is defined as the “operationalization of the psychological processes underlying the capacity to mentalize” (Fonagy et al., 2002, p.25). Other related constructs are defined as follows: Mind-reading (Baron-Cohen, 1995) refers to the largely automatic and unconscious capacity to mentalize about our own and others’ mental states. Affective mentalizing or affective TOM is defined as “mentalizing about someone’s emotional
state” (Hooker et al., 2008, p.204). This construct involves the inference of others’ future emotional responses and thus is of particular relevance for the inhibition of interpersonal violence. The relatively recent construct of Emotional Intelligence (EI) is defined by Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2008) as comprising four interconnected abilities, namely, (1) the accurate perception of emotions in oneself and others; (2) the comprehension of emotions and emotional language; (3) the use of emotions in problem solving and thinking; and, (4) the regulation of one’s emotions to facilitate goal directed behavior (Visser, Bay, Cook, & Myburgh, 2010). Definitions and models of empathy will be presented in greater detail later in this paper given the applicability of the empirical research on empathy deficits as a mediator of violent offending behavior to this study.

*Development of Mentalization Within Early Attachment Relationships*

The development of mentalization can be considered from both neurological and relational perspectives. Neurological models view the child as an “isolated processor of information” with theory of mind constructed “...using an innate (learning) mechanism with a specific location in the brain (e.g., Baron-Cohen, 1995; Leslie, 1994; Segal, 1996)” (Fonagy et al., 2002, p.29). For Baron-Cohen (1995), mentalization or what he terms “mind-reading” is maintained by the neural circuitry of the Theory of Mind Mechanism (TOMM) that implicates the superior temporal sulcus, the orbito-frontal cortex, and the amygdale. More recent brain imaging studies have identified the distinct areas activated in mentalizing tasks that involve the identification of emotional states (e.g., Adolphs, 2003) versus the identification of belief states (Frith & Frith, 2005, 2006b; Amodio & Frith, 2006). These neurological models of mentalization “have an expectable failure rate when the child’s endowment is less than optimal” (Fonagy et al., 2002, p.30). For instance, Baron-Cohen’s (1995) work on mind-reading focuses
on his contention that neurological deficits cause the impaired social communications characteristic of autistic children.

From a developmental psychodynamic perspective, the development of a mentalizing self organization is seen as developing within the context of early secure attachment relationships via the process of caregiver affect mirroring (e.g., Fonagy et al., 2002; Slade, 2005; Stern, 1985; Winnicott, 1963). However, Fonagy et al.’s model views early attachment experiences as shaping brain architecture (Hofer, 2004) and recognizes that biological vulnerabilities such as hyperactivity, poor impulse control and attention deficits (which are prevalent in at-risk and juvenile offender samples) compromise the acquisition of mentalizing capacities. Fonagy et al.’s model thus acknowledges both the neurological and relational bases of mentalization.

The child’s eventual ability to contemplate the mind of the other which emerges around three and one half to four years old and is demonstrated in false belief tasks (e.g., Wimmer & Perner, 1983), is seen as growing out of the progressive discovery of his own mind through his experience of being known by his caregiver. Sadler, Slade, & Mayes, (2006) describe how for Fonagy et al. (1995):

The ability to contemplate one’s internal experience, and that of the other, evolves within the context of a safe and containing relationship. Ideally, this process first happens in infancy, when child begins to experience herself as an intentional being, held in mind by her caregiver as feeling, desiring or believing. (p.277)

This experience of being known rests on the caregiver’s ability to keep their child in mind “physically, emotionally and developmentally” (Sadler et al., 2006, p.271).
The capacity to represent self and others’ mental states is fostered through care-giver affect mirroring (Gergely & Watson, 1999). Fonagy et al (2002) describe this process of representational mapping as follows using the example of anxiety:

When the mother reflects, or mirrors the child’s anxiety, this perception organizes the child’s experience and he now “knows” what he is feeling. The mother’s representation of the infant’s affect is represented by the child and is mapped onto the representation of its self-state. The discrepancy between these is helpful insofar as it provides organization for the self-state, and thus the caregiver’s mirroring can become the higher-order representation of the child’s experience. (p.35)

The caregiver’s ability to mentalize her child’s affective displays thus supports the development of a mentalizing self-organization. The experience of secure infants within the attachment relationship and their resultant emerging capacity to mentalize is described as follows:

Secure infants’ behavior is based on the experience of well-coordinated, sensitive interactions where the caregiver is rarely overarousing and is able to restabilize the child’s disorganizing emotional responses. Therefore, they remain relatively organized in stressful situations. Negative emotions feel less threatening and can be experienced as meaningful and communicative. (p.38)

The caregiver’s ability to mentalize her child’s affective display is underpinned by the caregiver’s secure attachment to his or her own parent. Secure attachment is thus transmitted intergenerationally through the caregiver’s accurate and contingent mentalization of his or her infant (Sharp & Fonagy, 2008).
Fonagy et al. (2002) distinguish two primary prementalistic modes of organizing subjective experience, namely, psychic equivalent and pretend modes. When not engaged in play, the child equates his internal world with external reality (psychic equivalent mode). In contrast, when engaged in play the child understands that his internal state does not necessarily reflect external reality and thus has no implications for it (pretend mode). A third prementalistic mode (teleological mode) is a precursor of the psychic equivalent and pretend modes and is characterized by “the primacy of the physical” where “experience is only felt to be valid when its consequences are apparent to all” (Bateman & Fonagy, 2008, p.183). In normal development, the capacity to mentalize is brought about through the integration of the psychic equivalent and pretend modes via playful interactions with one’s caregiver. This integration enables the linking of internal and external reality and the understanding that mental states are representations (Fonagy et al., 2002).

In contrast, the failure to “fully establish the other as a psychological entity whose inner experiences can be contemplated” is attributed to breakdowns in the parental reflective process during infancy and early childhood (p.191). For some parents, their own suboptimal early attachment experiences and/or current emotional conflicts compromise their ability to contemplate the mind of their infant. As a result, these parents struggle to accurately mentalize their infant’s affective displays. Fonagy et al. (2002) explain:

Within this model, mirroring would be expected to fail if it is either too close to the infant’s experience or too remote from it. If the mirroring is too accurate, the perception itself can become a source of fear, and it loses its symbolic potential. If it is absent, not readily forthcoming, or contaminated with the mother’s own preoccupation, the process of self-development is profoundly contaminated. (p.35)
Consequently, the anxiety the child experiences about the content of the caregiver’s mind may cause him to avoid contemplating the other’s subjective experience (Fonagy, 2003). In addition, as discussed later in the context of false-self organizations the inability of the caregiver to accurately mentalize the child divests the child of the foundation of his subjective self (Winnicott, 1960).

Fonagy et al. (2002) describe the mentalizing capacities and deficits that are characteristic of different attachment classifications as follows:

The secure infant feels safe in making attributions of mental states to account for the behavior of the caregiver. In contrast the avoidant child shuns to some degree the mental state of the other, while the resistant child focuses on its own state of distress, to the exclusion of close intersubjective exchanges. Disorganized infants may represent a special category: hypervigilant of the caregiver’s behavior, they use all cues available for prediction; they may be acutely sensitized to intentional states and thus may be more ready to construct a mentalized account of the caregiver’s behavior (...). In contrast, what the disorganized child is scanning for so intently is not the representation of his own mental states in the mind of the other, but the mental states of that other that threaten to undermine his own self. (p.55)

They further suggest that disorganized infants exhibit poor self-reflective capacities despite their overdeveloped interpersonal reflective capacities. In contrast to secure infants, mentalization capacities are not incorporated into the self-organizations of disorganized infants.

*Empathy as a Component of Mentalization*

There is currently a paucity of empirical research on mentalization as a mediator of offending behavior (e.g., Levinson & Fonagy, 2004). In contrast, a significant body of related
empirical research in the field of forensic psychology investigates the role of empathy deficits in offending behavior. Consequently, definitions and models of empathy will be reviewed prior to presenting applicable empirical research on empathy. Empathy is defined as:

1: The imaginative projection of a subjective state whether affective, conative, or cognitive into an object so that the object appears infused with it; 2: The capacity for participating in or a vicarious experiencing of another’s feelings, volitions or ideas and sometimes another’s movements to the point of executing bodily movements resembling his. (Webster 3rd International Dictionary, 1971)

The above definition highlights the multi-faceted nature of empathy, referencing its affective, conative and cognitive components as well as its conscious, explicit (i.e., another individual’s ideas) and unconscious, implicit dimensions (i.e., emotion sharing; imitation of another’s body postures; and, autonomic system activation). In addition, empathy is seen as a multi-level construct ranging from simple emotional contagion to more complex cognitive perspective taking. For Singer (2006), these various levels of empathetic responses reflect different phases of neurological development in ontogeny and phylogeny.  

Some theorists define empathy uniquely in affective terms. Early affective theories of empathy (Hume, 1888; Nietzsche, 1885) include direct perception theories that envision empathy as a form of emotional contagion. More recent affective theories (e.g., Bryant, 1982) define empathy as “a vicarious emotional response to the perceived emotional experiences of others” and (e.g., Bateson, 1991) “other-oriented feelings of concern and compassion which result from witnessing another person suffer” (e.g., Bateson, 1991) (Palmeri Sams & Truscott, 2004, p.35). Alternate conceptualizations view empathy as implicating higher-level cognitive processes such as...  

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6 Neurological models of empathy include the Mirror neuron system (Gallese & Goldman, 1998) and, the Perception Action Model that implicates the amygdala, insular cortex and the ACC (rostal anterior cingulate cortex) (Preston & DeWaal, 2002).
as projection and imagination. For instance, Kohler (1929) was the first to conceive of empathy in strictly cognitive terms, defining empathy as the understanding, but not the sharing, of another’s feelings. Piaget’s (1932) developmental theory of empathy emphasizes overcoming one’s egocentricity to experience another’s perspective.

Contemporary conceptualizations of empathy (e.g., Davies, 1983; Decety & Jackson, 2004; Feshbach, 1978; Hoffman, 1987; Marshall, Hudson, Jones, & Fernandez, 1995; Moore, 1990) largely incorporate both affective and cognitive components. Feshbach’s (1978) three-component model of empathy necessitates: (1) the ability to recognize the other’s affective cues; (2) the ability to take the other’s perspective; and, (3) the ability to experience a concordant affective response. Davies’s (1980) four-component model of empathy involves perspective taking, fantasy, empathic concern and personal distress. However, this model has been critiqued for its lack of clarity regarding the interaction of these components in the production of an empathic response (Marshall, 2002a).

Hoffman (1987) proposed a four-stage developmental model of empathy in which higher levels of empathic responding are supported by the child’s progressive cognitive development, specifically, self-other differentiation and the recognition that others have independent thoughts and feelings. Lack of self-other differentiation during the first year of life (stage one) leads the child to respond to the other’s distress with personal distress and self-soothing behaviors. The emergence of self-other differentiation at around eighteen months (stage two) sees the toddler’s early efforts at soothing the distressed other. For instance, Hoffman describes how children in stage two of the model may bring their own mothers to comfort a distressed peer despite the presence of the peer’s mother. The emergence of perspective taking abilities during the third year of life (stage three), namely, the recognition that others have independent thoughts and
feelings, supports the capacity to respond empathically to a distressed individual even in their absence. Finally, the growing recognition during late childhood (stage four) that others have distinct experiences and identities serves to support the child’s empathic responsiveness to an individual’s ongoing distress, for example, distress caused by poverty or disability (Marshall, 2002b).

Marshall et al. (1995) propose a four-stage model of empathy in which the enactment of a behavioral response to alleviate the other’s distress is dependent on the preceding stages of the model. This model implicates:

First, the ability to accurately perceive the emotional state of the another person (emotional recognition); second, the ability to see things as the other person sees them (perspective taking); third, the capacity to respond emotionally to the other’s distress (empathic responding); and, finally, the enactment of some compassionate response (sympathy). (Marshall, 2000a, p.14)

The clinical utility of this model lies in the framework it offers for the assessment of stage-specific empathy deficits (Marshall, 2000a). However, Pithers (1999) critiqued this model on the basis that certain compassionate responses are enacted with an immediacy that circumvents earlier sequential stages in Marshall’s model. More recently, Decety and Jackson (2004) have extended affective-cognitive models of empathy to incorporate affect regulation and self-awareness components. Although contemporary researchers largely espouse combined affective and cognitive models of empathy, the debate over the phenomenology and measurement of empathy continues (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2004).

As noted above, contemporary conceptualizations of empathy largely incorporate both affective and cognitive components. As such, mentalization, which involves the inference of
emotional and mental states, can be seen to incorporate empathy. However, scholars disagree as to whether mentalization incorporates the affective resonance involved in affective empathy. For instance, Hooker et al. (2008) observe that, “Although both mentalizing and empathy require an understanding of someone else’s mental and emotional state, empathy additionally requires sharing the emotional experience of the other person” (p.205). Indeed, Singer regards empathy and theory of mind as distinct capacities maintained by different neuro-cognitive circuitry. Bateman and Fonagy (2006) view empathy as a distinct capacity from mentalization. For Gallese et al. (2004) empathy is “mediated by a specific neural mirror mechanism that allows us to directly understand the meaning of others’ actions and emotions by internally replicating these” (p.4). According to this model of empathy, “we have a direct experiential grasp of the mind of others and do not have to infer their self-states through conceptual reasoning” (p.4). Bateman and Fonagy (2006) thus see empathy (as conceptualized by Gallese et al., 2004) as distinct from mentalization in that empathy “specifically precludes a reflective or conceptual phase and emphasizes an immediate preconceptual awareness of correspondence” (p.5). In contrast, other scholars (e.g., Brown, 2008; Slade, 2007) conceptualize mentalization as incorporating the affective resonance with another person and thus views empathy as a component of mentalization. For instance, Brown (2008) specifies that mentalization “is to feel not only what the other feels, but to grasp the complex mental states that led to those feelings” (p. 32). The working definition adopted in this dissertation is that empathy is a component of mentalization.

7 Empathy and theory of mind are noted to be frequently used interchangeably with mentalization in the neurobiological literature (Fonagy et al., 2002).
Mentalization as a Mediator of Violent Offending Behavior.

Models of aggression have traditionally tended to conceptualize interpersonal violence as “acquired through learning, rehearsal, and reinforcement” (Levinson & Fonagy, 2004, p.226). However, contemporary developmental theory comports with the classical psychoanalytic (e.g., Freud, 1930) conceptualization of aggression as an innate drive (Levinson & Fonagy, 2004). For Fonagy (2003), the evolutionary function of the attachment relationship is to socialize innate aggression through the development of a theory of mind. Thus, the occurrence of violence “signals the failure of normal developmental processes to deal with something that occurs naturally” (p.190). Within this theoretical framework, “Biological predisposition and social influence do not create destructiveness, but rather compromise the social processes that normally regulate and tame it” (p.190).

Fonagy (2003/2004) outlines three mechanisms through which inadequate mentalizing capacities may promote interpersonal violence. First, interpersonal violence is viewed as “largely incompatible with a simultaneous representation of the subjective state of the other” (Fonagy, 2003, p.191). Consequently, structural defects in mentalizing as well as temporary defensive inhibitions of mentalizing capacities, have the effect of loosening this constitutional “violence inhibiting mechanism” (Blair, 1995; Blair et al., 1997, Blair et al, 1999). Second, the inaccurate reading of others’ mental states may increase the likelihood that others’ benign intentions will be interpreted as hostile (e.g., Dodge & Crick, 1990). Finally, violence is promoted through the “alternate strategies [that] emerge in place of mentalization, namely the externalization of affect, psychic equivalence and a sense of self which is not capable of experiencing ownership of action” (Fonagy, 2004, p.34).
These alternate strategies are theorized to promote violence in the following ways: First, the pre-reflective or physical self (defined as the “immediate observer of life”), is posited to replace the reflective or psychological self (defined as the “internal observer of mental life”) in individuals with inadequate mentalizing capacities (Fonagy, Moran, & Target, 1993). The pre-reflective or physical self fosters the externalization of affect since “not being able to feel themselves from within they are forced to experience the self from without” (Fonagy, 2001, p.1).

Second, regression to the psychic equivalence mode leads to violence in the following manner: Psychic equivalence, a prementalistic mode of organizing subjective experience, is defined as the equation of the internal with the external. Fonagy (2004) explains that, “Violence is normally triggered when an idea, a feeling, a prejudice, a suspicion, is mistaken for physical reality. The act of violence reflects the complementary confusion – the erroneous belief that a physical act can eradicate a mental one” (p.28). Finally, Bateman and Fonagy (2006) observe that:

The implicit mentalization of one’s actions is an emotional state (Damasio, 2003) characterized by a sense of oneself as an agent (Marcel, 2003). In general, awareness of our behavior as driven by mental states gives us the sense of continuity and control that generates the subjective experience of agency or “I-ness” which is at the very core of a sense of identity (…) Allen (2006) concludes that mentalizing implicitly entails a prereflective sense of connectedness to the agentive self: “one has a sense of oneself as an emotional, engaged agent.” (p.4)

In contrast, for individuals who commit acts of violence, “the possibility of disconnnecting internal state and action will lead to actions that are not curtailed by mentalization of their implications” (Fonagy, 2004, p.36) and that are experienced as “agentless” (p.36).
Antisocial youth are both developmentally and characterologically vulnerable to breakdowns in mentalization. Indeed, breakdowns in mentalization are viewed as characteristic of the developmental process of adolescence:

The entire developmental process is fluid and dynamic, with enhanced cognitive capacity generating enriched mentalizing, which, in turn, leads to anxiety and/or preoccupation. As this state undermines abstract thought, the adolescent may-in addition to sometimes switching off into really mindless activity-regress in apparent relief to a thoughtless, socially insensitive state. (p.323)

Drawing on their clinical work, Bateman and Fonagy (2008) describe the re-emergence of the psychic equivalent and pretend modes during temporary collapses of mentalizing capacities in antisocial and borderline patients:

As soon as emotional states are aroused in the context of an interpersonal interaction, ASPD/BPD patients become vulnerable to loss of mentalizing because stimulation of the attachment system actually inhibits mentalizing itself (Fonagy & Bateman, 2006). The consequence of the inhibition of mentalizing itself is a reemergence of modes of experiencing internal reality that antedate the development emergence of mentalization, namely, psychic equivalence, pretend mode, and teleological thinking. Nevertheless, in addition, there is a constant pressure for projective identification – the reexternalization of the self-destructive alien self (Fonagy & Bateman, 2007). (Bateman & Fonagy, 2008, p.183)

Indeed, severely personality disordered children and adults are described as “try[ing] to provoke behavior consistent with a part of the self-representation experienced as “alien,” which they feel forced to externalize in order to achieve a coherent perception of the residual self” (Fonagy &
Target, 1995) (Fonagy et al., 2002, p.44). The afore-described collapse of mentalizing capacities in the context of affectively charged conflictual interpersonal exchanges “gives the appearance of rigidity to the person’s behavior, as if only a singular pattern of response were accessible” (Fonagy et al., 2002, p.63).

Empathy as a Mediator of Violent Offending Behavior

It is well settled that aggressive, anti-social and psychopathic individuals are characterized by empathy deficits (e.g., Cleckley, 1941/1976; Hare, 1996; Meloy, 1988). For instance, Farrington (1998a) observes that offenders are:

callous with low empathy. They are relatively poor at role-taking and perspective taking and may misinterpret other people’s intentions. This lack of awareness or sensitivity to other people’s thoughts and feelings impairs their ability...to appreciate the effects of their behavior on other people. (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2004, p. 257)

A significant body of empirical research investigates empathy as a mediator of offending behavior. However, these studies are plagued by conceptual and methodological problems (Cohen & Strayer, 1996; Lovett & Sheffield, 2007). These include: (1) different operationalizations of empathy (i.e., empathy as a cognitive, affective or combined cognitive-affective construct); (2) its measurement (i.e., the frequent use of self-report dispositional questionnaires rather than skills based tasks that are vulnerable to socially desirable responding by offenders); (3) heterogeneous target populations (i.e., the broad legal category of delinquency versus the more circumscribed diagnostic category of conduct disorder) (Cohen & Strayer, 1996; Lovett & Sheffield, 2007); and, (4) the frequent failure to control for potential mediating variables in spite of the established co-morbidity of aggression with behavioral and psychiatric disorders (Angold & Costello, 2001).
Naturally, these variations in construct operationalization, measurement and target populations hinder cross-study comparison. However, even studies that employ the same construct operationalization have yielded inconsistent results with regard to the empathy-offending relationship (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2004). For instance, while some studies with adolescent populations have found significantly lower levels of empathy in aggressive, delinquent adolescents in comparison to non-delinquent controls (e.g., Alexsic, 1976; Ellis, 1982), other studies report no significant differences in the empathy levels of these two groups (e.g., Kaplan & Arbuthnot, 1985; Kendall, Deardorff, & Finch, 1977; Lee & Prentice, 1988).

Inconsistent findings in the empathy-offending behavior relationship in both adolescent and adult samples prompted Jolliffe and Farrington (2004) to undertake the first meta-analysis of the relation between empathy and offending behavior. The authors confined their review to studies utilizing self-report measures of empathy and participant selection criteria of “official or reported criminal offenses rather than more ‘trivial’ anti-social behaviors such as truancy or reports on aggressiveness questionnaires” (p.445). 35 studies with both adult and juvenile offender samples were reviewed. 21 of these studies investigated cognitive empathy and 14 investigated affective empathy.

Overall, Jolliffe and Farrington (2004) found empathy and offending to be negatively related. However, cognitive empathy was found to have a stronger negative relationship with offending behavior than affective empathy. The authors note that this latter finding was not due to the age group of samples, socioeconomic status (SES), offense type or intelligence level. Rather, the authors posit that this finding may stem from the differing construct validity of cognitive and affective measures of empathy. However, the authors found that controlling for intelligence reduced the differences in cognitive empathy observed in mixed group studies (i.e.,
violent versus non-violent offenders). The precise role of intelligence as a mediator in the empathy-offending relationship remains unclear. However, the authors offer three potential explanations, namely: (1) low intelligence leads to both offending and to low empathy but empathy has no relationship to offending; (2) empathy is causally related to intelligence, with low intelligence causing low empathy which then leads to offending; and, (3) low empathy, low intelligence and offending are all underpinned by deficits in executive functioning. In addition, the authors found that controlling for SES in these mixed offender group studies caused the differences in cognitive empathy between violent and non-violent offenders to disappear. The authors posit that the association of low SES, low empathy and offending behavior may relate to the relative deprivation, reduced quality of family life and poor parenting they view as characteristic of lower SES backgrounds. However, they do not elaborate on how these factors may impede the development of empathy.

Lovett and Sheffield (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of 17 studies investigating the relation between deficits in affective empathy and aggression in children and adolescents. Their review differed from 2 prior reviews of the empathy-aggression relationship (Davies, 1994; Miller & Eisenberg, 1988) in that it focused uniquely on studies examining (1) children and adolescent subjects; (2) deficits in affective empathy (as measured by both self-report and behavioral measures); and, (3) clinically significant aggression. Lovett and Sheffield chose to focus their review on affective empathy since, unlike cognitive empathy, differences in affective empathy between aggressive and non-aggressive youth are less likely to be underpinned by the overall lower cognitive abilities that characterize aggressive youth.

The authors examined the eight existing studies of affective empathy with adolescent participants, specifically, two studies that utilized behavioral measures of affective empathy
(e.g., Cohen & Strayer, 1996; Kaplan & Arbuthnot, 1985) and six studies that utilized self-report measures of affective empathy (e.g., Burke, 2001; Cohen & Strayer, 1996; Endresen & Olweus, 2002; Kaplan & Arbuthnot, 1985, Lee & Prentice, 1988; LeSure-Lester, 2001). Despite inconsistent findings in the affective empathy-aggression relationship in studies with both child and adolescent samples, Lovett and Sheffield highlight three major findings of their review. First, a negative relationship between affective empathy and aggression was more reliably found in adolescent rather than child samples. The authors attribute this finding to the more frequent use in studies with child samples of measures that incorporate the assessment of personal distress. More specifically, they suggest that empathy measures incorporating personal distress will not likely yield a negative relationship with aggression given the negative correlation of personal distress and self-regulation, the positive correlation of pro-social behavior and self-regulation and the prevalence of self-regulation difficulties in aggressive youth.

Second, studies with adolescent samples that utilized skills based tasks (i.e., novel stimuli such as vignettes or video clips) rather than self-report measures yielded a more robust empathy-aggression relationship. Third, recent studies more commonly found a negative relationship between affective empathy and aggression. The authors attributed this finding to the tendency of recent studies to employ standardized measures of aggression rather than dichotomous group categories (i.e., delinquent versus non delinquent) that may mask significant within-group differences.

A number of questions remain with regard to the conceptualization of empathy that complicate its investigation. First, for any given individual, is empathic responding impaired by deficits in emotional recognition, perspective taking, and/or affect regulation? Second, is empathic responding impaired by deficits in general or victim-specific empathy? (Hansen &
Scott, 1995). In fact, recent research with sex offenders indicates that these offenders exhibit victim-specific (for instance, pre-pubescent boys) rather than general empathy deficits (Webster et al., 2005). These victim-specific empathy deficits are seen as analogous to cognitive distortions (Marshall, Anderson, & Fernandez, 1999). Third, does the ability to respond empathically reflect a stable dispositional trait or is it situationally determined? (Marshall, 2002a). Situational factors include intoxication, negative affect (for instance, anger), sexual arousal (Hansen & Scott, 1995) and the activation of one’s attachment system (Bateman & Fonagy, 2008). As will be discussed later, inner city street culture is described to operate as a contextual factor that inhibits victim empathy (Anderson, 1999). Dispositional factors that have been noted to impede empathic responding include the offender’s indifference to or even arousal by the perception of distress induced in his victim (Hansen & Scott, 1995), the emotional numbing characteristic of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Palmeri Sams & Truscott, 2004) and self-focused distress (Cohen & Strayer, 1996).

Palmeri Sams and Truscott (2004) investigated the relationship between empathy, use of violence and exposure to community violence in a sample of inner-city adolescent males ($N = 41$) who had been suspended or disciplined for violent or potentially violent behavior at school in the year preceding the study. The authors found that while low empathy alone is not a significant predictor of violence, low empathy combined with high levels of exposure to community violence is. The preliminary findings of this study suggest that the emotional numbing that characterizes Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (and which is prevalent in highly traumatized inner city juvenile delinquent samples) may impede affective responding to another’s distress.
Empathic responsiveness may also be impeded by self-focused distress. Indeed, Bateson, Fultz, and Schoenrade (1987) describe that for some individuals “observing another person’s discomfort may, under certain conditions, generate such excessive personal distress in the viewer that he/she may become entirely self-focused. When these distressing responses occur (...), the viewer may be motivated to reduce his/her own distress rather than generate a sympathetic response” (Marshall, 2002a, p.11). This self-focused distress may result in “non-constructive responses” such as escape and anger to decrease personal discomfort (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987).

The inhibition of empathy by self-focused distress would seem to be supported by Cohen and Strayer’s (1996) finding that conduct disordered youth ($N = 32$) reported higher levels of personal distress than non-conduct disordered controls ($N = 30$). Cohen and Strayer interpret this finding as:

suggesting the possibility that CD youth may be more egocentrically distressed when involved in emotional situations. This self-focused emotion may compete with empathy with another person’s emotions and needs (Bateson et al., 1987). This affective locus may also interfere with their cognitive processing, especially in situations eliciting negative emotions (e.g., sadness, fear), which may then elicit personal needs outweighing the other person’s needs. (p.995)

Thus, the perception of another person’s distress variously serves to inhibit aggression due to sharing the other’s affective state, provoke a “non-constructive response” such as escape or anger due to excessive self-focused distress or increase aggression due to arousal at the victim’s distress. This highlights the complexity of the relationship between empathy and aggression.
Empirical Research on Offenders’ Mentalizing & Empathic Capacities from the Perspective of Attachment Theory

As highlighted above, there is currently a paucity of empirical research on offenders’ mentalizing and empathic capacities from the perspective of their early attachment experiences despite the apparent utility of Fonagy et al.’s (2002) theoretical model. Levinson and Fonagy (2004) investigated the mentalizing capacities and attachment classifications of 22 psychiatrically disordered adult male prisoners matched with 22 non-forensic personality disordered patients and 22 normal controls. They found that the prison group and personality-disordered group were significantly more likely to be classified as insecure\(^8\) in comparison to the non-clinical control group. More specifically, prisoners were more liable to be classified as insecure-dismissive and, in particular, the extreme DSI\(^9\) category than matched controls with the same personality disorder. Additionally, prisoners reported higher levels of abuse than their personality disordered counterparts. Finally, the prison group exhibited significantly lower levels of reflective functioning\(^10\) (as assessed by the Reflective Function (RF) Scale, Fonagy, Steele, Steele, & Target, 1997) than the personality-disordered patient group whose own reflective functioning was lower than the normal controls. Significantly, prisoners who had committed violent offenses were found to exhibit the lowest level of reflective functioning. This pattern of results led the authors to note that:

The observation that offenders were more likely to be coded as dismissive (particularly the extreme DSI category) supports Bowlby’s hypothesis that offending is a consequence of the disruption of early attachment relationships leading to an affectionless character pathology. We suggest that this dismissive

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\(^8\) As assessed by the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI, George et al., 1985).

\(^9\) DSI is defined as “...represent[ing] the extreme end of dismissive category, characterized by idealization and a failure to acknowledge attachment-related difficulties” (Levinson & Fonagy, 2004, p.239).

\(^10\) As assessed by the Reflective Function (RF) Scale (Fonagy, Steele, Steele, & Target, 1997).
style emerges in these cases as one form of defense against adverse attachment experiences, in particular neglect and severe physical abuse (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). (Levinson & Fonagy, 2004, p.240)

Goldstein and Higgins D’Alessandro (2001) investigated empathy and attachment in relation to violent versus non-violent offending in a sample of adult male \(N = 119\) and female \(N = 67\) inmates. These authors found no relationship between self-reported affective empathic responsiveness (as assessed by the Interpersonal Reactivity Index; Davies, 1983) and history of attachment (as assessed by the Parental Bonding Instrument, Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979) in both the male and female samples.

Barb (2005) examined the relations between psychopathic personality traits, attachment and level of empathic responsiveness and socio-moral reasoning in a sample of juvenile delinquents \(N = 29\) residing in a group home. Level of attachment to parents and peers (as assessed by the Inventory of Parental and Peer Attachment, IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987)\(^{11}\) was not found to be a significant predictor of juveniles’ level of self-reported empathic responsiveness (as assessed by the Index of Empathy for Children and Adolescents, Bryant, 1982).

The findings of the latter two studies run counter to Fonagy et al.’s (2002) postulate that attachment security promotes the development of mentalizing capacities. Barb (2005) posits that her finding may relate to the self-report format of the attachment measure utilized in her study. Drawing on her forensic evaluations of approximately 400 juvenile offenders, Thompson (2002) observes of their attachment styles that, “The youngsters whose mothers have not rejected them appear to have an idealized attachment to her that prevents their expressions of anger toward her

\(^{11}\) The IPPA-Mother (1987) is comprised of three separate scales that assess attachment to mother, father and peers. However, Barb (2007) does not publish the data for the three scales separately but rather reports participants overall “level of attachment.”
These youngsters cannot express the despair they seem to feel at the loss of their primary caregiver. That is, despite the caregiver’s absence, they maintained an internal working model of the mother as a caregiver and have rejected any alteration in that internal model” (p.278). Thompson further notes that, “It is often quite difficult to get these youngsters to talk about their relationships with their mothers because speaking badly of one’s mother is not socially acceptable in their community” (p.277). Self-report attachment measures (such as the IPPA used in Barb’s 2005 study) may thus be unable to detect the idealization of inadequate attachment figures that characterize a dismissing attachment style or are reflective of a cultural imperative.

Two related studies (e.g., Flight & Forth, 2007; Kossen, Cyterski, Steuerwald, Neumann, & Walker-Matthews, 2002) investigated the relation between psychopathy (which is characterized by empathy deficits) and attachment in juvenile offenders. Kossen et al., (2002) found psychopathy (as assessed by the PCL-YV [Psychopathy Checklist-Youth Version; Forth et al., 2003]) to be strongly negatively correlated with a lack of self-reported current attachment to mother and father (as assessed by the IPPA) in a community sample of male adolescents ($N = 115$) who had been adjudicated delinquent.

Flight and Forth (2007) investigated the relations between attachment, psychopathic personality traits, empathy and motivations for violence (instrumental versus reactive) in a sample of incarcerated violent juvenile offenders ($N = 51$). Unfortunately the authors do not publish the correlations between self-reported empathy (as assessed by the Davies Interpersonal Reactivity Index [IRI, Davies, 1980]) and self-reported current attachment to parents and peers (as assessed by the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment, IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). However, the authors found self-reported current attachment to father (but not to mother or peers) to be negatively correlated with total PCL-YV psychopathy scores. Flight and Forth
also found that violent classification groups (i.e., levels of instrumental versus reactive aggression) were not differentiated by self-reported mother, father and peer attachment despite the theorized association between absent emotional bond with attachment figures and the commission of instrumental violence in adult psychopaths (Williamson, Hare, & Wong, 1987). In light of their findings, Flight and Forth call for further investigation into the role that father-attachment may play in the development of psychopathic and offending behavior, noting that, “perhaps what holds greater value for examining the precise role attachment plays in violent behavior is a measure of childhood attachment and its link to later adolescent violence or taking into account the different attachment styles, such as secure, avoidant and ambivalent (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978)” (Flight & Forth, 2007, p. 749).

Empirical studies that examine the attachment representations of adult offenders will also briefly be reviewed in light of the theoretical postulate that attachment security promotes the development of mentalizing capacities. These studies note the overrepresentation of insecure attachment styles, particularly, dismissing (D) and unresolved (U)/cannot classify (CC) in psychiatrically disordered adult male prisoners (Levinson & Fonagy, 2004); violent civilly committed adult male forensic patients (Van Ijzendoorn, Feldbrugge, Derks, De Ruiter, Verhages, Philipe, Van de Staak, & Riksen-Walraven, 1997); and, female forensic patients diagnosed with Munchausen by Proxy Syndrome who have mistreated their children (Adshead & Blugras, 2004). Individuals with dismissing attachment representations (D) tend to dismiss the significance of attachment-related experiences and to maintain idealized representations of suboptimal attachment figures. Individuals whose attachment representations are classed as

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12 Reactive aggression is defined as impulsive/defensive aggression in response to a perceived provocation or threat and instrumental aggression is defined as premeditated aggression in the attainment of a social or financial goal.
unresolved or cannot classify are unresolved with regard to trauma and loss (U) or have
attachment related narratives that cannot be classified in a particular direction (CC).

Adshead (2004) discusses how empathy deficits in offender populations are underpinned
by dismissive attachment styles:

Since a dismissing style is associated with attempts to negate or ignore
affective distress in self or others, it is perhaps not surprising to find this
pattern of attachment common in a group of people who have behaviorally
demonstrated a capacity to ignore distress. It is likely that a dismissing state
of mind is linked with a developmental failure of empathy, which implies some
degree of self-reflective function; it is hard to imagine the feelings of others if
there is diminished capacity to think about one’s own feelings. (p.152)

Van Ijzendoorn et al. (1997) highlight the prevalence of institutional care in the childhood
backgrounds of the violent civilly committed adult male offenders in their study who were
classified as Cannot Classify (CC). This finding is consistent with the clinical literature (e.g.,
Bowlby, 1944; Winnicott, 1956) that describes delinquent behavior as rooted in suboptimal early
attachment experiences, specifically, disrupted attachment relationships and emotional
deprivation within the attachment relationship. However, Van Ijzendoorn et al. found that the
distribution of attachment classifications in their sample, namely, a strong overrepresentation of
the unresolved/cannot classify (U/CC) category (53%) and a strong under-representation of
autonomous (F) category (5%) in comparison to non-clinical samples, did not deviate markedly
from a clinical non-offender sample. As a result, they conclude that, “Insecure attachment may
be a general mental health risk factor, rather than a specific determinant of criminal behavior”
(p.457).
The Social Scaffolding of Mentalization

As outlined above, Fonagy et al.’s (2002) theory views the development of a mentalizing self organization as rooted in the secure early attachment relationship. Empirical studies demonstrate the role of the family and immediate social environment in further mediating the acquisition of mentalizing capacities, for example, through joint pretend play (e.g., Astington & Jenkins, 1995; Slade, 1994; Taylor, Gerow, & Carlson, 1993; Young-Blade & Dunn, 1995); conversations about affects and the mental states underlying peoples’ actions (e.g., Brown, Donelan-McCall, & Dunn, 1996; Dunn & Brown, 1993); and, sibling interactions (e.g., Brown et al., 1996; Lewis et al., 1996).

Further scaffolding of the capacity to mentalize is provided by healthy social systems such as schools and the wider community that operate like securely attached families (Twemlow, 2003; Twemlow, Fonagy & Sacco, 2007; Twemlow & Sacco, 1999;). Indeed, Twemlow et al. (2005) emphasize that, “how well and with what biases an individual is able to understand the motivational and ideational world of the other will depend on the quality of the “mind-mindedness” that surrounds him or her” (p.267).

Twemlow et al. (2005) observe that social systems that are economically and structurally damaged are liable to become coercive and violent. Indeed, they note that, “social forces that may be culturally and politically determined can also affect the capacity to mentalize even in individuals brought up in ideally healthy, securely attached mentalizing homes” (p.269). These authors assert that the coercive power dynamics and associated experience of humiliation that characterize inner city neighborhoods produce what the authors term reactive non-mentalizing individuals and community systems. The resultant “coercive mindset” is characterized by “loss of an accurate perception of others and situations and a loss of the humanization of the other; that
is, coercion results in a retreat to a self-absorbed state in which only one’s own needs are seen in relation to the environment” (p.270).

As discussed above, the child’s eventual ability to contemplate his own mind and the mind of the other is rooted in the caregiver’s sensitive mirroring of his self-states. However, the inner city caregiver’s ability to hold her child in mind may be compromised by the narrowed focus of a survival mindset arising from the experience of coercion (Twemlow et al., 2005). Accordingly, the authors warn that, “the obliteration of this recognition through coercion has the propensity to create a new generation of individuals whose capacity to mentalize is too weak to withstand the corrosive influence of bullying and victimization and who will consequently adapt by taking on the values of legitimated aggression and unbridled coercion” (p.270). Caregivers from this highly traumatized population may find their ability to accurately mentalize child’s affective display compromised by their exposure to community violence.13 Fonagy (2001) discusses the role that trauma plays in the psychogenesis of violence through its derailment of the developmental acquisition of mentalizing capacities:

Evidence of this can be seen in severely abused children: (a) the persistence of a psychic equivalent mode of experiencing internal reality; (b) in their propensity to continue to shift into pretend mode (dissociation); (c) a partial inability to reflect on one’s own mental states and those of one’s objects. We are suggesting that these ways of thinking persist into adulthood, and play vital role in acts of enraged violence (p.2).

*Code of the Streets*

The “code of the streets” forms the basis for Anderson’s (1994/1999) sub-cultural account of inner city youth violence that is based upon his ethnographic study of two inner city African-American neighborhoods in Philadelphia. The code is defined as a:

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13 For instance, Wohlgemuth-Levy’s (2003) high-risk sample of cocaine using inner city mothers struggling with single parenthood and poverty is characterized by a cluster of low reflective functioning.
set of informal rules governing interpersonal public behavior, particularly violence. The rules prescribe both proper comportment and the proper way to respond if challenged. They regulate the use of violence and so supply a rationale allowing those who are inclined to aggression to precipitate violent encounters in an approved way. (Anderson, 1999, p.33)

Respect and social identity are core interrelated features of the street code. Respect is defined as “being treated ‘right’ or being granted one’s ‘props’ (or proper due) or the deference one deserves” (p.33). Having respect ensures protection against threats to one’s physical and psychological integrity and thereby forms the cornerstone of an inner city youth’s self esteem and identity. As will be discussed later, the code of the street can be equated with a culturally sanctioned psychic equivalent mode.

The rules of the code govern the negotiation of respect. Respect is acquired through (1) one’s self-presentation; (2) actively “campaigning for respect;” (3) one’s behavior during incidents of victimization on the streets; and, (4) retaliatory violence. Self-presentation, through one’s facial expressions, body language, manner of interacting, and physical appearance (including material possessions\textsuperscript{14}) aims to communicate what Anderson terms “the display of a certain predisposition to violence” (p.72). Indeed, he observes that, “A person’s public bearing must send the unmistakable message that one is capable of violence, and possibly mayhem, when the situation requires it, that one can take care of oneself” (p.72). Inner city youth whose demeanor does not command sufficient respect on the streets are obligated to actively “campaign” for it. Respect is won through impugning others’ honor with verbal insults, physically dominating others in fights and stealing their material possessions. Finally, the code

\textsuperscript{14}For example, wearing expensive name-brand clothing and/or gold jewelry communicates one’s readiness to defend oneself against attempts to steal these coveted items (Anderson, 1999).
also promotes active resistance during physical assaults driven by the “campaign” for respect and
prescribes retaliatory violence. Indeed, Anderson observes that for inner city youth, “Their very
identity, their self-respect, and their honor are often intricately tied up with the way they perform
on the streets during and after such encounters” (p.76).

The code’s prescription of retaliatory violence has the effect of inhibiting empathy for
victims of this form of aggression. In addition, given that the rules of the code are available to
everyone in the community, victims who act “wrong” during street crimes are seen by code
adherents as provoking their own injury or death. Examples of acting “wrong” include looking
one’s assailant in the eye or not exhibiting sufficient deference to an assailant during a mugging
(Anderson, 1999). Accordingly, perpetrators may not experience victim empathy or remorse for
acts viewed as justifiable under code principles (Anderson, 1999).

Brezina et al. (2004) emphasize that investment in the code “is not simply a reflection of
corrupt values or deviant socialization. Rather it represents in part an adaptation to status
insecurity and to the persistent threat of violence that is present in some urban communities”
(p.304). More specifically, the emergence of street culture is attributed to the concentration of
social-structural inequalities in inner city neighborhoods such as poverty, high unemployment,
social isolation and alienation from mainstream institutions that contribute to social
disorganization (Sampson & Wilson, 1995) and violence in these communities (e.g., Anderson,
social, economic and political forces that have created these social-structural inequalities include
globalization and deindustrialization, residential segregation, punitive criminal justice policy
and, a legacy of slavery and discrimination (Hawkins, 1985; Keyes, 2002; Massey & Denton,
1993; Rose, 1994, Tonry, 1995; Wadsworth, 2004; Wilson, 1996). Together these forces lead to
a “concentrated disadvantage found in many urban African-American communities [that] is not paralleled in predominantly white neighborhoods” (Kubrin, 2005, p.362). The projection of a violent social identity and the use of violence as prescribed by the code thus represents an ecologically necessary form of social control and self-defense “in contexts where formal social control is seen as oppressive (i.e., serving an external dominant class) or illegitimate” (Fagan & Wilkinson, 1998) or ineffective (Anderson, 1999).

Anderson (1999) distinguishes between “street” and “decent” oriented families in the inner city, terms, he notes that were coined by the subjects in his study. He describes how street oriented families “may aggressively socialize their children into it (the code) in a normative way” (p.45). Parental messages such as “might makes right” are strengthened through experiences of play-fighting with other children on the streets. Indeed, Anderson writes that, “As the violent resolution of disputes – the hitting and cursing gains social reinforcement, the child is more completely initiated into a world that provides a strong rationale for physically campaigning for self-respect” (p.69/70).

By adolescence, Anderson notes, street-oriented youth have internalized the code. Although decent oriented families in the inner city shun the use of violence to regulate interpersonal conflicts they too are obligated to school their children in the principles of the code to ensure their ability to safely negotiate social interactions on the street. Consequently, in contrast to street-oriented youth, decent youth are more able to flexibly “code switch” according to the demands of the setting and situation. However, Anderson describes the process of “social shuffling” that takes place during adolescence with the normative loosening of parent-child ties and increased investment in peer relations (Levy-Warren, 1996) that exposes decent youths to greater investment in street culture.
Empirical Research on the Code of the Streets

The validity of Anderson’s (1999) subcultural thesis of youth violence and its generalizability beyond the two Philadelphia neighborhoods upon which it is based is supported by Brezina et al.’s (2004) review of a series of (mainly qualitative) studies (e.g., Agnew, 1994; Baron, Kennedy, & Forde, 2001; Heimer, 1997; Markowitz & Felson, 1998; Stewart, Simons, & Conger, 2002) as well as their own quantitative study on the social processes that shape the acquisition of code-related beliefs, their demographic and psycho-social correlates, and the extent to which code related beliefs mediate the effects of other relevant variables on youth violence.

Heimer (1997) proposed a developmental model of adolescent violence that incorporates both social-economic stratification and cultural factors and is based on longitudinal data from a 1976 national probability sample of youths aged 11 to 17 years old. Heimer’s model posits that youth violence results from the acquisition of code-related beliefs (termed “definitions favorable to violence” by Heimer), which, in turn, is fostered directly and indirectly by association with aggressive peers, socioeconomic status, power assertive disciplining practices by parents, and, previous violent behavior.

Stewart, Simons and Conger (2002) found a significant relationship between investment in code-related beliefs and engagement in violence after controlling for other variables implicated in violence behavior in a sample of 10 to 12 year old African-American children ($N=867$) from diverse socio-economic family backgrounds and neighborhoods in Georgia and Iowa. More specifically, Stewart et al. found that the level of childhood violence increased as parental violence, association with violent peers and investment in code related beliefs increased.
Baron, Kennedy and Forde (2001) investigated the psycho-social processes that foster the acquisition of definitions favorable to violence in a sample of homeless urban male street youths in a Midwestern Canadian city ($N = 125$). Consistent with previous research (e.g., Agnew, 1994; Heimer, 1997), significant positive correlations were found between adherence to code-related beliefs and prior engagement in violent behavior. In addition, Baron et al. investigated the extent to which investment in code related beliefs shapes the escalation of disputes as assessed by participants’ scenario-based intentions to resort to violence to resolve verbal disputes. Investment in code-related beliefs was found to mediate the effects of power-assertive parenting, victimization, anger, peer aggression and prior violence on participants’ scenario based intentions to resolve disputes with violence. Indeed, Baron et al. (2001) observe that:

It is these subcultural attitudes that are important in predicting the transformation of disputes. In our study, youth who held attitudes favorable to violence were more likely to perceive some sort of harm during a dispute, to demand reparation from the harmdoer, and to persevere, move on to aggression and to use force to settle the dispute. (p.781/2)

In order to examine the role of contextual factors on the escalation of disputes, Baron et al. manipulated the structural position of the participant and harmdoer (i.e., same or different age, gender or social class); the target of the attack (participant/harmdoer); the intensity of conflict (low versus high); and, the presence of bystanders (alone or in the presence of bystanders) in the vignettes presented to participants. Conflict intensity, level of perceived harm and a male harmdoer were identified as contextual factors that increase the likelihood of the dispute escalating into violence for youth who adhere to the street code.
While the studies presented above support the generalizability of Anderson’s (1999) subcultural account of inner city violence, the findings of Stewart, Schreck, and Simons’s (2006) dispute Anderson’s assertion street code has the function of ensuring adherent’s personal safety. Rather, Stewart et al. (2001) found that adherence to street code was associated with greater rates of victimization in their sample of 738 African-American male and female adolescents in Georgia and Iowa interviewed at a two-year interval.

Identity Vulnerability as a Critical Determinant of Code Adherence and Youth Violence

Identity vulnerability is identified in psychoanalytical and sociological writings as a critical determinant of code adherence and the violence it prescribes (e.g., Anderson, 1999; Bracher, 2000; Fagan & Wilkinson, 1998; Fonagy & Target, 1995; Glasser, 1998; Mitchell, 1993/1998). Bracher (2000) highlights that recent psychoanalytic theory on violence concurs that, “not only overt violence but all forms of aggression are fundamentally a response to a perceived threat to the self” (p.10). For instance, Mitchell (1993), views aggression as a “response to a subjectively perceived endangerment” (p.370). Indeed, for Mitchell, “If there is aggression, there is by definition, threat” (p.371). He specifies that, “Endangerment does not concern just the threat of physical harm but a subjective sense of endangerment to the self as well. Threats to the integrity of the self, as subjectively defined, tend to generate powerful, deeply aggressive reactions” (p.366). From this perspective, aggression is viewed as a “bolstering device” to a “brittle self” or a “relatively ad hoc, transitory reaction, like a discharge, which serves to reestablish a self whose equilibrium has been undermined by narcissistic injury or threat” (p.376).

Similarly, Glasser (1998) views “aggression and violence as aroused by anything that constitutes a threat to the physical or psychological self” (p.889). Glasser distinguishes two
forms of violence, namely, self-preservative and sado-masochistic. For Glasser, one or a combination of these two forms of violence is implicated in any violent act. Self-preservative violence is triggered by perceived threats to the individual’s physical or psychological survival that the resultant violence aims to counteract. These threats may be external such as “an insult to one’s self or an ideal to which one is attached” or an internal threat externalized such as “a loss of identity through inner confusion, feelings of disintegration, the domination by an annihilative internal object, a remorseless castigation by a tyrannical, sadistic superego, and so on” (p.889). Sado-masochistic violence is the characterological manifestation of libidinized self-preservative violence. Mitchell (1998) explains that “with such people, the aggression and sadism have developed way beyond their points of origin into a complex version of the self, but it is a version of the self that is embedded in and sustained by an enduring sense of internal and external danger” (p.26). For Glasser, self-preservative (S-P) and sado-masochistic (S-M) violence are differentiated by their relation to the object. He writes:

In the case of S-P violence, at the time the violent act is carried out, the object holds no personal significance other than his/her dangerousness: it is carried out in the interests of self-preservation and any other considerations have no relevance. The response of the object in any other respect is of no interest. In the case of S-M violence, the response of the object is essential: the object must be seen to suffer. (p.890)

The identity vulnerability that is seen as fueling code adherence and subsequent violence is shaped by suboptimal early attachment related experiences, the developmental processes of adolescence as well as the specific social context of the inner city. Bracher (2000) proposes an integrative theory of youth violence that emphasizes identity vulnerability as a critical determinant of violence. Empirically demonstrated risk factors for adolescent violence are
conceptualized within this theory as “rendering identity vulnerable and thus producing the need for identity-defending and supporting behavior, for which violence may be the most promising means available” (p.8). Bracher views identity, which he defines as “the sense of oneself as a relatively consistent and coherent force that matters in the world” (p.161), as rooted in early experiences of interpersonal connectedness. The attainment of respect, status and interpersonal dominance through violence are seen by Bracher as providing support for vulnerable identities through their operation as a proxy for the “gleam in the mother’s eye” (Kohut, 1968, p.95). Indeed, Bracher asserts that:

Each of these substitutes can be seen as an attempt to meet the fundamental need for cherishment that was met for most people, in one way or another, by affective attunement and resonance that early caregivers provided through the mirroring of the infant’s expressions, vocalizations, and movements. When violent behavior seeks to establish physical dominance, it is aiming to recapture in the realm of the immediate, physical, person-to-person relations the infant’s primal sense of being the most important thing in the (still very circumscribed, dyadic) world. (p.17)

Accordingly, adolescents with suboptimal early attachment experiences would appear to be most inclined to resort to the identity-defending tenets of the code of the streets.

The identity vulnerability that fuels youth violence is also seen as shaped by the developmental processes of adolescence (Fagan & Wilkinson, 1998). Middle adolescence (from roughly age 15 to 18) is characterized by the adolescent beginning to fill out his identity against the backdrop of establishing his place amongst his peers (Levy-Warren, 1996). For Noam (1999), the central theme of adolescence is the heightened need to belong to one’s peer group. This need can be placed in the context of the adolescent’s progressive intra-psychic and external
disengagement from his parents (Blos, 1967; A. Freud, 1958). In light of this developmentally normal preoccupation Noam proposes the mutual-inclusive self, a collective interpersonal identity (or “wego”) that contrasts with Erikson’s (1965) and Blos’s (1967) more individualistic self-determined identity (ego). The adolescent’s “constant fear of losing the relationship base...which defines the self” (p.61) heightens the need to maintain the respect of one’s peers and, thus, attraction to the respect and social identity provided by code of the street principles. Indeed, writing about youth violence from a sociological perspective, Fagan and Wilkinson (1998) observe that, “The establishment and perpetuation of the sense of self and of one’s personal image in the minds of others are the goals of much violence” (p.65). Similarly, Bracher (2000) notes that, “And insofar as violence functions to achieve respect or status, or maintain honor, it is supporting the perpetrators identity through recognition in the social-symbolic order (p.17).

As highlighted above, adherence to the code of the streets “represents in part an adaptation to status insecurity and to the persistent threat of violence that is present in some urban communities” (Brezina et al., 2004, p.304). In the context of the inner city with few legitimate forms of social capital available, the projection of a violent identity and/or the commission of violence as prescribed by the code ensures the respect of one’s peers through its provision of “both functional (i.e., status and identity), material15, and symbolic meaning (i.e., power and control) (Fagan & Wilkinson, 1998, p.84). Similarly, Wilkinson (2001) notes that, “In short, violence is thought to be the single most critical resource for achieving status among those who participate in street culture” (as cited in Kubin, 2005, p.363). Likewise, Anderson (1999) observes, and this is consistent with my clinical experience with this population, that, “Many inner-city young men in particular crave respect to such a degree that they will risk their lives to

15 Through acquisitive violence in the form of robbery or mugging.
attain and maintain it” (p.76). However, the ecological necessity to adopt the “exaggerated macho identity stances” (Cunningham & Meunier, 2004) prescribed by the code results in many urban adolescent males feeling “missed, dissed and pissed” (Stevenson, 2004, p.61). Indeed, Anderson observes that, “By enforcing conformity to such external displays of manhood, the oppositional culture [embodied in the street code] ravages the individuality of those who fall victim to it” (p.288). Anderson describes street-oriented youths’ extreme sensitivity towards assaults on their physical and/or psychological selves. This is consistent with Winnicott’s (1960) observation that individuals with false self organizations (like street-oriented youth who are forced to project a violent social identity out of ecological necessity) have a “need to collect impingements from external reality so that the living time of the individual can be filled with reactions to these impingements (p.150).

*Code of the Street as a Culturally Sanctioned Psychic Equivalent Mode*

In psychodynamic language, the code of the streets can be equated with a culturally sanctioned psychic equivalent mode (Slade, personal communication, December 16th, 2010), a pre-mentalistic mode of organizing subjective experience in which the internal world is equated with external reality. The organization of subjective reality through the psychic equivalent mode in the context of threats to one’s physical and/or psychological integrity is posited to lead to violence in the following way: “Violence is normally triggered when an idea, a feeling, a prejudice, a suspicion, is mistaken for physical reality. The act of violence reflects the complementary confusion – the erroneous belief that a physical act can eradicate a mental one” (Fonagy, 2004, p.28). Challenges to the physical and/or psychological integrity of street oriented youth can spark “a fleeting thought of unacceptability or inadequacy [that] can become “as if” it
was objective reality” (Bateman & Fonagy, 2006, p.71. The physical response prescribed by the
code serves to preserve the fragile self-organization of these youth.

The principles of street code provide a framework that organizes adherents’
understanding of interpersonal encounters, constraining mentalization about adversaries’
emotional and intentional mental states, inhibiting empathy for victims who respond “wrong”
during street crimes and prescribing violent responses to threats to one’s physical and
psychological integrity. Indeed, Fagan and Wilkinson (1998) observe that, “Street codes, born in
contexts of social isolation, largely determine the procedural scripts children acquire for handling
interpersonal conflicts and identity formation” (p.80). A script, “learned and reinforced within
specific social contexts” (p.78) is defined as “a cognitive structure or framework that organizes a
person’s understanding of typical situations, allowing the person to have expectations and to
make conclusions about the potential results of a set of events (p.77). Empirical research (e.g.,
Abelson, 1981; Tedeschi & Felson, 1994) demonstrates that “scripted behavior may become
automatic without too much thought or weighing of consequences” (p.78). Anderson (1999)
oberves that for code adherents “People and situations are best approached as objects of
exploitation and as challenges possibly ‘having a trick to them,’ and in most situations their goal
is to avoid being ‘caught up in the trick bag’ (p.36/37).

Callous-Unemotional Traits as a Childhood Precursor of Psychopathy

Callous-unemotional (CU) traits refer to a distinct affective (e.g., impoverished display of
emotions, absence of guilt and remorse) and interpersonal style (e.g., lack of empathic
responsiveness, the callous disregard for others who are used for one’s personal gratification and
gain) (Frick & White, 2008). These traits are considered a critical dimension of most
conceptualizations of psychopathy (Cleckley, 1941/1976; Cooke & Michie, 2001; Hare, 1993) where they are termed the “affective factor” (Hare, 1993) or “deficient affective experience” (Cooke, Michie, & Hart, 2006). Factor models of psychopathy (e.g., Cooke & Michie, 2001) consistently identify at least 3 dimensions, namely, (1) Grandiose-Manipulative (dishonest charm, grandiosity, lying and manipulation); (2) Callous-Unemotional (callousness, unemotionality, remorselessness); and, (3) Impulsive-Irresponsible (impulsivity, thrill-seeking, and irresponsibility). As in studies with adult samples, these 3 personality dimensions of psychopathy have also consistently been identified with samples of community and clinic-referred youth (Frick, 2009).

Among anti-social youth, the presence of CU traits has emerged as a critical dimension that delineates a subgroup of delinquent youth with childhood-onset conduct problems who exhibit a stable pattern of severe and aggressive anti-social behavior with unique etiological origins (Frick, 2009; Frick & Dickens, 2006; Frick & White, 2008).\(^{16}\) Behaviorally, high CU traits (as compared to low CU traits) among anti-social youth have been found to be associated with patterns of violence comprising both reactive (i.e., impulsive/defensive aggression in response to a perceived provocation or threat) and instrumental aggression (i.e., premeditated aggression in the attainment of a social or financial goal) as well as violent sadistic acts (Kruh, Frick, & Clements, 2005) and violent sexual offending (Caputo, Frick, & Brodsky, 1999). Research suggests that the anti-social behavior exhibited by high CU youth shows a greater

\(^{16}\) The reader is referred to reviews of published studies on the stability and predictive validity of CU traits by Frick and Dickens (2006) and by Frick and White (2008). Frick and Dickens (2006) reviewed 24 published studies with 22 independent samples from community, clinic-referred and forensic settings with samples ranging in age from 4 to 20 years old. Ten studies report a concurrent association between the presence of CU traits and severity of aggressive and anti-social behavior. Fourteen studies show the predictive validity of CU traits at follow-up periods of 6 months to 10 years. Frick and White (2008) reviewed 11 subsequent studies (eight concurrent and three longitudinal) that report a relationship between the presence of CU traits and severity of anti-social behavior.
influence by genetic versus environmental factors (Kimonis, Frick, Cauffman, Goldweber, & Skeem, 2012\(^{17}\)).

Additionally, high CU anti-social youth have been found to exhibit specific personality traits and emotional and social-cognitive correlates reminiscent of adult psychopaths that differentiate them from other anti-social youth (Frick, 2009). In terms of personality correlates, high CU traits among anti-social youth have been found to be positively associated with fearlessness (Frick, Lilienfeld, Ellis, Loney, & Silverhorn, 1999; Pardini, 2006); greater sensation seeking (Frick et al., 1999); a heightened orientation towards rewards over punishments (O’Brien & Frick, 1996); and, negatively associated with trait anxiety (Frick et al., 1999). High CU youth, like adult psychopaths, have been found to exhibit specific patterns of response to cues of emotional distress (Frick & White, 2008) as well as distinct social-cognitive styles in the context of interpersonal conflict such as the endorsement of social goals related to interpersonal dominance, forced respect and revenge (Pardini, 2011) and increased focus on positively appraised outcomes of aggression (e.g., maintenance of social status) versus punitive sanctions (Pardini, Lochman, & Frick, 2003). Empirical research on the emotional and social-cognitive correlates of high CU traits will be presented in detail in subsequent sections of this literature review given its relevance to the aims of this current study.

On the basis of this expanding body of research on the behavioral, personality, neuro-psychological, emotional and social-cognitive correlates of CU traits, Frick (2009) proposes that high CU youth exhibit a specific early temperamental style characterized by:

- a lack of responsivity to negative stimuli (especially distress in others), abnormalities in responsivity to rewards and punishment, and a preference for novel and dangerous

\(^{17}\) Kimonis et al. (2012) cite 6 studies note that suggest that antisocial behavior among high CU anti-social youth shows a greater influence by genetic than environmental (namely, parenting) factors.
activities. Such a temperamental style can influence the child’s development of appropriate levels of guilt and empathy by making the child less sensitive to the effects of their behaviors on others or by leading the child to less responsive to typical (although not all) parental socialization practices. (p.809)

In contrast, anti-social children without CU traits are described as:

appear[ing] to be distressed by the effects of their behavior on others and they seem to show poorly regulated emotions that lead to high levels of anger and irritability. Also, such children are more likely to show deficits in verbal intelligence and others problems in executive functioning that can lead to problems anticipating the consequences of their behavior. These dispositional vulnerabilities likely interact with problematic rearing environments that lead to failures in the child’s ability to develop appropriate emotional and regulation strategies. (p.809)

In sum, research on the correlates of CU traits in anti-social youth suggests a distinct developmental pathway for high CU anti-social youth (compared to anti-social youth without CU traits) with consequent implications for causal models of severe and persistent anti-social behavior and the development of evidence-based treatments tailored to the specific needs of these youth (Frick & White, 2008).

The presence of CU traits thus appears a promising method for disaggregating the recognized heterogeneity of antisocial and aggressive behavior in youth (Frick, 2009). Subtyping delinquent/criminal behavior by the legally charged crime has limited prognostic value (Schlesinger & Revitch, 2004).18 Previous efforts to subtype anti-social and aggressive youth

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18 Indeed, Schlesinger & Revitch (2004) argue that the legal system of classifying criminal behavior focuses uniquely on the category of conduct (i.e., murder) and level of intentionality (first degree, second degree etc.) rather than on the underlying motivational dynamics that differentiate offenders committing the same legally charged
include: (1) childhood versus adolescent onset of anti-social/aggressive behavior; (2) co-morbid ADHD and conduct disorder; and, (3) reactive versus instrumental aggression (Frick, Cornell, Barry, Bodin, & Dane, 2003). However, none of these proposed methods of sub-typing anti-social and aggressive youth has been widely accepted in research studies or clinical practice due the limitations outlined below (Frick et al., 2003; Frick, 2009).

The distinction between childhood and adolescent onset of anti-social behavior has considerable empirical support with the former associated with a more severe and persistent course of offending behavior, namely, more severe aggression during adolescence and increased risk of adult criminal behavior (Moffitt, 1993; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1998). However, as proposed above, more recent research suggests that children within the childhood onset group can be differentiated by their temperamental styles related to the distinct neuro-psychological, emotional and cognitive correlates associated with the presence or absence of CU traits (Frick, 2009). Co-morbid ADHD (with its hallmark impulsive, inattentive and hyperactive symptoms) and Conduct Disorder have likewise been found to be associated with a more severe pattern of anti-social and aggressive behavior than for conduct disorder alone (e.g., Lilienfeld, Waldman, & Israel, 1990; Waschbusch, 2002). However, this method of sub-typing anti-social youth has been critiqued given the high rates of co-morbidity of these diagnoses that thus renders it difficult to identify a distinct subgroup within the wider childhood onset group (Frick, 2009).

Relatedly, the DSM-IV (2000) diagnostic category of conduct disorder with its emphasis on anti-social behavior (rather than personality traits) and resultant high prevalence among juvenile offenders has limited discriminant validity within this population. The established distinction crime and allow for the evaluation of future dangerousness. Compare, for instance, an environmentally stimulated gang murder about territory versus a compulsively driven sexual homicide of a stranger. Indeed, based on a review of multiple sources of data, Kazdin (2000) estimates the prevalence of Conduct Disorder to range from 41 to 90% in delinquent samples compared to 2 to 10% in community samples.
between reactive and instrumental aggression with their distinct physiological and behavioral responses to provocation has been called into question by recent research with anti-social youth (e.g., Frick et al., 2003; Muñoz, Frick, Kimonis, & Aucoin, 2008). For instance, Muñoz et al. (2008) report that the male adolescents aged 13 to 18 (N = 85) in their detained sample could be classified into three subgroups, namely, (1) reactive aggression only; (2) mixed reactive and instrumental aggression; and, (3) relatively low aggressive group. In addition, Frick (2009) highlights the evident practical challenges of using the reactive versus instrumental typology to dependably classify offense behavior. Consequently, the presence of CU traits with its distinct pattern of behavioral, neuro-psychological, emotional and cognitive correlates appears a promising method of sub-typing anti-social and aggressive youth. The clinical utility of this method of sub-typing anti-social and aggressive youth is evidenced by the inclusion of the “callous-unemotional Conduct Disorder” specifier in the new DSM-V (2013).

The construct of psychopathy has been shown to identify a specific subgroup of anti-social and aggressive adults (Frick, 2009). Indeed, psychopathy has been characterized as a “socially devastating disorder,” (Hare, 1996, p.25) as although the prevalence of psychopathy is only 1% in the general population (rising to 15 to 25% in prison populations), as a group psychopaths are responsible for a disproportionate amount of serious crime, violence and social distress. Psychopathy has been demonstrated to be associated to numerous outcome variables of relevance to correctional management and criminal justice policy makers. Among adult offenders, psychopathy has been found to be related to recidivism in general (Hart, Kropp, & Hare, 1988), violent recidivism in particular (Harris, Rice, Cormier, 1991; Serin, 1991) as well

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20 The reader is referred to Salekin, Rogers, & Sewell (1996) for a meta-analytic review of these studies.
institutional violence (Hare & McPherson, 1984).\textsuperscript{21} Indeed, a recent New York Times article (Kahn, 2012) cites an estimate by Kent Kiehl, a neuroscientist whose research focuses on psychopathy, that psychopaths cost the US approximately $460 each year (ten times greater than depression) due to their repeated processing through and incarceration within the criminal justice system. The assessment of psychopathy thus has a variety of legal and therapeutic applications such as the assessment of risk of recidivism in the context of parole hearings and hearings to determine the post-sentence civil commitment of psychopathic sexual offenders\textsuperscript{22} as well as the identification of a subgroup of offenders with unique treatment needs.

Given the similar neuro-psychological, emotional and social-cognitive correlates of CU traits among anti-social youth and of psychopathy among adult offenders, the presence of CU traits has been proposed a childhood precursor to adult psychopathy (Frick, 2009). However, the downward extension of the psychopathy construct to juvenile offenders has aroused considerable debate (e.g., Petrila & Skeem, 2003; Salekin & Frick, 2005; Seagrave & Grisso, 2002). Petrilla & Skeem (2003) identify the following three areas of debate: (i) the developmental validity of the juvenile psychopathy construct; (ii) the malleability (i.e., treatability) of psychopathic traits in youth; and, (iii) ethical considerations and practical consequences of assessing juvenile psychopathy. First, concern is expressed about the questionable stability of psychopathic traits in adolescents as well as the presence of normative, transient adolescent characteristics (e.g., egocentrism with seeming insensitivity to other’s emotions and perspective with a sense of themselves as “special”) that parallel the interpersonal-affective traits of psychopathy (e.g., lack of empathy, remorse and grandiosity) and thus increase risk of false positives in the assessment

\textsuperscript{21} Studies cited in Salekin et al. (1996).

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Kansas v Hendricks}, 521 U.S. 346 (1997) established that post-sentence civil commitment hearings may be initiated against individuals who are assessed to be likely to engage in “predatory acts of sexual violence” due to a “mental abnormality” or “personality disorder” (i.e., psychopathy)
of juvenile psychopathy (Seagrave & Grisso, 2002). With regard to the stability of psychopathic traits during adolescence, Salekin & Frick (2005) counter that, “most measures of personality and psychopathology show more modest levels of stability in childhood and adolescence than they do in adulthood (e.g., Roberts & DelVelcchio, 2000) and this does not mean that these constructs are not important for understanding psychopathology in youth” (p.405). Second, given that effective evidence-based treatments for anti-social youth with high CU traits remain in their relative infancy (e.g., Caldwall, Skeem, Salekin, & Van Rybroek, 2006; Kolko & Pardini, 2010) and given the widely held belief that adult psychopaths are “untreatable,” there is concern that juvenile psychopathy may be equated with untreatability (Petrila & Skeem, 2003). Finally, Petrilla & Skeem (2003) express concerns about the potential harm that may be engendered by the label “psychopath” that may “drive decision making in the legal setting in a punitive direction” (p.691) and “may have a collateral impact throughout his or her life (due to) its presence in legal and medical records that will follow the adolescent” (p.691).

Empirical Research on CU Traits and the Processing of Emotional Stimuli

Studies investigating the emotional correlates of CU traits among anti-social youth suggest that high CU youth (like adult psychopaths) exhibit distinct patterns of processing emotional stimuli (Frick & White, 2008). More specifically, high CU youth show deficits in their processing of different forms of emotional stimuli such as negative emotional words (Loney, Frick, Clements, Ellis, & Kerlin, 2003), distressing pictures (Kimonis et al., 2006), distressed facial expressions (Blair & Coles, 2000; Blair, Colledge, Murray, & Mitchell, 2001; Stevens, Charman, & Blair, 2001), and distressed vocal tones (Blair, Budhani, College, & Scott, 2005; Stevens et al., 2001). Furthermore, they pay less attention to pictorial stimuli depicting emotional distress (Kimonis, Frick, Fazekas, & Loney, 2006) and during emotion focused
discussions with attachment figures (Dadds, Jambrak, Pasalic, Hawes, & Brennan, 2011). In addition, children with high levels of overall psychopathic traits (rather than CU traits specifically) have been found to show reduced autonomic arousal to cues of emotional distress such as slides of a crying child (Blair, 1999). Certain of the above-cited studies on the processing of cues of emotional distress will be presented in greater detail given that this current study utilizes movie clips of homicides to investigate the capacity of urban youth to mentalize about street violence, a capacity that rests on participants’ ability to process the protagonists’ verbal, facial and vocal cues of emotional distress.

Loney et al. (2003) used a computer-based lexical decision paradigm to investigate emotional reactivity in a sample of male juvenile offenders (N = 65) aged 12 to 18 (M = 16.04) referred to a day treatment diversion program. Consistent with findings in prior studies with adult psychopaths, these authors found high CU traits to be associated with slower processing of emotionally negative words (such as “bomb”). Interestingly, faster reaction times to emotionally negative words were associated with the presence of impulsive symptoms. The authors conclude that distinct patterns of emotional reactivity may characterize different types of anti-social youth, namely, high CU youth versus impulsive youth corresponding to 2 of the 3 dimensions in Cooke & Michie’s (2001) model of the psychopathy construct.

Kimonis et al. (2006) investigated psychopathy, aggression and the processing of emotional stimuli in a community sample of non-referred male (N= 27) and female (N = 23) children with a mean age of 9.30 years. Reactivity to emotional stimuli was assessed through the emotional pictures dot-probe task in which participants are presented with picture pairs of different emotional content, namely, distress (e.g., child crying), threat (e.g., attack by vicious dog), positive emotion (e.g., kittens), and neutral emotions (e.g., book). The authors found that
psychopathic children\(^{23}\) (as assessed by the parent and child ratings on the Anti-Social Process Device, Frick & Hare, 2001) with high levels of reported aggression exhibited reduced responsiveness to pictures of emotional distress. In contrast, children with low levels of psychopathic traits but high levels of reported aggression exhibited a heightened response to pictures of emotional distress. These findings are proposed to support the presence or absence of psychopathic traits as delineating subgroups of aggressive youth with the aggressive behavior of non-psychopathic youth driven by difficulties regulating their heightened emotional arousal in response to cues of distress. As discussed later, this is consistent with findings by Pardini et al. (2003). However, the authors caution that the emotional pictures dot-probe task is not a direct measure of emotional reactivity since it relies on motoric skills with regard to locating the dot.

Blair et al.’s (2001) study on the processing of facial expressions with a sample of 20 psychopathic children replicated previous research findings (e.g., Blair & Coles, 2000, Stevens et al., 2001) that adults and children with psychopathic traits exhibit selective impairments in the processing of sad and fearful facial expressions compared to 31 non-psychopathic controls. Additionally, this study, through its use of an expression sensitivity task (namely, the progressive morphing of slides into prototypical expressions of happiness, surprise, fear, sadness, disgust and anger) expanded upon prior research to demonstrate that children with psychopathic traits were significantly more likely than controls to misidentify fearful facial expressions even at their fullest intensity and needed sad stimuli to be at a greater intensity than controls for accurate recognition.

In a study entitled “Deafness to fear in boys with psychopathic tendencies” Blair et al. (2005) investigated the ability of 22 male children aged 12 to 15 ($M = 13.15$) with psychopathic

\(^{23}\) As assessed by the parent and child ratings on the Anti-Social Process Device (Frick & Hare, 2001)
traits to identify the emotion of the speaker (i.e., happy, fearful, angry, sad) based on the prosody of neutral content words. In contrast to the non-psychopathic control group ($n = 21$), children with psychopathic traits, like adult psychopaths (e.g., Blair, Mitchell, Richell, Kelly, Leonard, Newman, & Scott, 2002) exhibited selective impairments in the processing of fearful vocal tones but intact recognition of happy, angry and disgusted vocal tones. Contrary to the study hypotheses (and in contrast to the findings by Stevens et al.’s 2001 study with a sample size of just 9 subjects and 9 controls), children with psychopathic traits did not exhibit deficits in the processing of sad vocal tones compared to controls. The authors thus call for further research to determine whether children with psychopathic traits show selective impairment for both fearful and sad vocal tones or fearful vocal tones alone.

These selective impairments in the processing of sad and fearful facial expressions and vocal tones among psychopathic youth are interpreted in accordance with Blair’s (1999) Violence Inhibition Mechanism (VIM) Model and seen as serving to “strengthen claims that psychopathy is a neuro-cognitive disorder that is apparent across the lifespan” (Blair et al., 2005, p. 334). Blair’s VIM model integrates the two major current positions on the interpersonal/affective dimension of psychopathy. These positions, both underpinned by amygdala dysfunction, are: (1) the “fear” position, referring to sensation-seeking traits and decreased sensitivity to punishment (Lykken, 1995; Patrick, 1994); and, (2) the “empathy position,” referring to the decreased sensitivity to emotional stimuli exhibited by others, specifically, sadness and fear (Blair, 1995; Blair & Frith, 2000). Influenced by ethological research on the display of submission cues by social animals under attack (for instance, a dog exposing its throat) (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1970; Lorenz, 1981), Blair et al. (2001) view the VIM model as having its “evolutionary roots in the control of con-specific aggression; in this sense, sad facial affects
(i.e., distress cues) function as a human submission response” (p. 492). Blair (1999) outlines that, “In normal developing individuals, the activation of this system by the display of distress cues is thought to result in autonomic arousal and the interruption/inhibition of on-going behavior” (p.136). However, “a deficit within, or a failure to develop this mechanism might, under certain environmental conditions, result in the development of psychopathic behavior; the individual without this mechanism would not inhibit his behavior subsequent to a victim displaying distress cues” (p.136).

Contrary to Blair’s (2001) finding of selective impairments for the recognition of fearful facial expression among psychopathic youth, Woodworth and Waschbusch (2007) found that high CU children \((n = 24)\) participating in a summer day treatment program for youth with disruptive behavior problems aged 7 to 12 showed greater accuracy than fellow camp controls without Conduct Problems \((n = 17)\) and camp controls with conduct problems only but not CU traits \((n = 32)\) in identifying fearful facial expressions presented in the form of photographs. Woodworth and Waschbusch interpret this finding within the framework of the VIM model noting that:

Individuals high in CU may not have a deficit in the recognition of a fearful expression, but rather a deficit in using fearful expressions as submissive cues to signal a decrease in their aggressive behavior. In fact, for individuals with higher psychopathy scores, fearful cues may actually signal an increased vulnerability and susceptibility to be preyed upon that may actually facilitate their aggressive behavior (p.240).

Urban youth who adhere to street code principles have been described to respond to the display of submissive cues by victims of street violence as a signal to unleash greater physical violence
Given that identity vulnerability is viewed as a critical determinant of street code adherence (e.g., Bracher, 2000, Fagan & Wilkinson, 1998), the display of physical and psychological vulnerability by the victim is theorized to bring forth within the perpetrator the desire to kill off this vulnerable part of self the mirrored by the victim’s submissive behavior.

This ability to recognize fear in others can be placed in the context of empirical research (e.g., Blair, 2005) that shows adult psychopaths, famously described to “know the words but not the music” (Johns & Quay, 1962, p.217), to exhibit a disconnect between intact cognitive empathy or perspective taking skills but deficient affective empathy. Similarly, writing about “the misuse of mentalization,” Bateman & Fonagy (2006) note that:

A substantial number of individuals with severe personality disorder appear to have an almost excessive capacity to mentalize. (…..) However, in these individuals the reading of the mind of another person is often at the expense of the capacity to represent their own mental state. There is a massive imbalance between the capacity to mentalize others and see oneself accurately. A further imbalance may be observed between the ability to be sensitive to epistemic states (thoughts, beliefs, knowledge), and emotional states and affective experiences. (…..) At the extreme there are anti-social individuals who use knowledge of others’ feelings in a sadistic way. This kind of manipulation is characteristic of so-called psychopaths who may use mentalizing capacities to engender trust in order to be able an interpersonal relationship fully. (p.79/81)

From a developmental standpoint, Dadds, Hawes, Frost, Vassallo, Bunn, Hunter, & Merz (2009) describe how the adolescent males with psychopathic traits in their cross-sectional study

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24 Shelby Morgan is a former corrections officer and juvenile counselor in secure juvenile detention with over twenty years professional experience in these settings.
appeared to “overcome” or “compensate” for the deficits in cognitive empathy exhibited by the child participants with high levels of psychopathic traits in the study. On the basis of this data, these authors concluded that over the course of childhood psychopathic adolescents, despite continued deficits in affective empathy, “appear to learn to talk the talk about others emotions” (p. 606).

Van Baardewijk, Stegge, Bushman, & Vermeiren (2009) utilized a competitive computer-based game to investigate whether the salience of a fictitious peer opponent’s distress would decrease participants’ level of aggression (measured by degree of noise they chose to blast through the fictitious opponent’s headphones including noise levels they were informed would inflict pain) in a community sample of 228 elementary-aged children ($M = 10.81$). The authors found that overall children with high levels of psychopathic traits (as assessed by the Youth Psychopathic Inventory-Child Version, Van Baardewijk et al., 2008), exhibited more aggression. However, children with high levels of psychopathic traits were found to exhibit decreased levels of aggression in the context of salient (versus absent) cues of victim. On the basis of these findings, the authors conclude that aggressive behavior exhibited by psychopathic children is dynamic and can be weakened through exposure to the victim’s salient cues of distress. However, the applicability of these findings to real-world interpersonal conflicts with a physically present victim whose distress cues are communicated verbally and facially (rather than in written form as in this study) appears minimal.

*Empirical Research on CU Traits and Social Cognition*

As noted above, the empirical research on the social-cognitive processes of high CU youth in the context of interpersonal conflicts is of particular relevance to the research questions investigated in this current study. Social cognition, defined as the processes through which “individuals encode, interpret and respond to social stimuli” is viewed as a critical paradigm for
the study of interpersonal aggression (Waschbusch, Walsh, Andrade, King, & Carrey, 2007, p.294). Street code can be seen as prescribing both reactive (i.e., defensive responses to perceived direct and indirect physical threats and challenges to one’s psychological integrity) and instrumental aggression (i.e., “campaigns” for respect such as starting street fights and acquisitive violence to maintain one’s social status). The association of both reactive and instrumental forms of aggression with what the literature terms “deviant” social cognitive styles (with reactive aggression driven by hostile attributional bias\(^{25}\) and instrumental aggression driven by the expectation of social and monetary rewards) is well-established (e.g., Crick & Dodge, 1994; Lochman, Wayland, & White, 1993; Dodge, Lochman, Harnish, Bates, & Pettit, 1997). However, there is only limited research, with some seemingly inconsistent results, on CU traits as a mediating factor in the relationship between social-cognitive processes and aggression in anti-social youth (e.g., Frick et al., 2003; Muñoz et al., 2008; Pardini, 2011; Pardini et al., 2003; Waschbusch et al., 2007).

Pardini et al. (2003) investigated social-cognitive processes, psychopathic traits and empathy in a sample of 169 detained adjudicated male \((n = 97)\) and female \((n = 72)\) juvenile offenders \((M = 15.81)\). The study utilized written scenarios of incidents of reactive and instrumental aggression involving an aggressor of the same-gender as the participant to assess expected outcomes of the use of aggression and value placed on these expected outcomes. These authors found that higher CU traits (as assessed by the Antisocial Process Screening Device) were associated with increased expectations of positively appraised outcomes of aggression (e.g., interpersonal dominance and concrete rewards such as monetary gain) and decreased focus on negative outcomes (e.g., punishment of aggression) after controlling for demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, age, racial background), intellectual ability and severity of criminal

\(^{25}\)Hostile attributional bias is defined as the inaccurate attribution of hostile intent (Crick & Dodge, 1994).
conduct (i.e., number of prior charges, duration of incarceration, gang association). In addition, high CU traits were found to be associated with deficits in affective and cognitive empathy (as assessed by the Interpersonal Reactivity Index, Davies, 1983). The finding of decreased focus on the negative consequences of violence is consistent with the developmental model of a callous-unemotional interpersonal style outlined above (Frick et al., 2003; Frick & White, 2008) in which temperamentally fearless high CU children are hypothesized to be less likely to experience transgression-related fear and thus fail to encode cues that would modulate aggressive behavior.

Frick et al. (2003a) investigated responses to peer provocation in a sample of 98 non-referred male and female children ($M = 12.36$) with and without CU traits. A stratified random sampling procedure was employed to recruit children into the following four groups: (1) Conduct Problems Only ($n = 23$); (2) CU only ($n = 25$); (3) Combined Conduct Problems and CU traits ($n = 25$); and, (4) Controls ($n = 25$) with group assignment based on behavioral scale ratings completed by participants’ parents and teachers. Responses to peer provocation were assessed by the Why Kids Do Things measure (Crick, 1995). This measure is comprised of 10 hypothetical stories in which the peer’s intent is ambiguous. These stories describe both instrumental provocation (e.g., peer breaks the participant’s new radio while the participant has left the room) and relational provocation (e.g., participant overhears two peers discussing a birthday party to which s/he has not received an invitation). After each story, participants select one of four presented reasons for the peer’s behavior reflecting both hostile and benign intents (e.g., “the child did not want me to attend his party” versus “the child has not yet had the chance to invite me”), state whether the peer’s intention reflected hostile or benign intent (was “mean” or “not mean”) and finally, self-report their level of anger “if the things in the story had really
happened.” In contrast to the findings by Pardini et al. (2003), Frick et al. (2003a) found that CU traits were associated with less maladaptive patterns of social-cognitive processing. Specifically, and contrary to the study hypothesis, they found that high CU children made fewer hostile attributions and that hostile attributional biases were associated with conduct problems (but only in male CP children) without CU traits.

Waschbusch et al. (2007) examined social-problem solving, conduct problems and CU traits in a sample ($N = 53$, comprised of 40 boys and 13 girls) summer day treatment camp participants (40 days and 13 girls) aged 7 to 12 ($M = 9.77$). Pictures of same-gendered protagonists were employed as a stimulus to evaluate the relevance, flexibility, and pro-social versus covertly anti-social versus overtly anti-social strategies to obtain a desired item from a peer. The diagnostic categories of the sample is reported as follows: A total of 30 children met diagnostic criteria for Conduct Disorder (CD; $n = 12$) or Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD; $n = 18$). Of these 30 children, 28 also met criteria for ADHD-combined type. Of the remaining 23 children who did not meet diagnostic criteria for CD or ODD, 6 were diagnosed with ADHD. Contrary to study hypotheses and consistent with the findings of Frick et al.’s (2003) study, the authors found that deviant social problem solving (i.e., less relevant, flexible and pro-social problem solving strategies) was associated with low CU/CP children but not with high CU/CP children.26

Waschbush et al. (2007) propose that the seemingly inconsistent findings of the three studies presented above on the role of CU traits as a mediating factor in the established association of deviant social-cognitive processes and interpersonal violence may be accounted for by the different components of social cognition that these studies examine, namely, expected outcomes of the use of violence and value placed on these outcomes; attributions and responses

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26 CU traits were assessed by the Antisocial Process Screening Device (Frick & Hare, 2001) in this study.
to provocation; and, social problem solving strategies. Indeed, Waschbusch et al. suggest that taken together the results of these three studies depict the following specific pattern of social-cognitive processing in high CU/CP youth:

These children (a) accurately interpret their peers’ actions (Frick et al., 2003), (b) are not especially angry in response to peer provocation (Frick et al., 2003), (c) are capable of generating appropriate solutions to social problems (as demonstrated in the present study), but (d) they do not have empathy for their peers (Pardini et al., 2003), and (e) they place higher value on and expect more gain from anti-social responses to social situations (Pardini et al., 2003). (p. 302)

More recently, Pardini (2011) investigated the association of CU traits and perceptions of peer conflicts in a sample of 156 detained adjudicated juvenile offenders (N = 156, comprised of 84 males and 72 females) aged 11 to 18 (M = 15.83). Perceptions of peer conflict were assessed via participants’ rating of social goals, expected outcomes and values with regard to victim suffering in response to hypothetical vignettes of “benign” conflict situations involving “relatively minor provocation from a same sex peer” (p.251). Pardini (2011) found that high CU traits (as assessed by the Antisocial Process Screening Device) were associated with the endorsement of social goals related to overall conflict escalation, revenge, interpersonal dominance and forced respect in the context of hypothetical peer conflicts. These social goals of forced respect, interpersonal dominance and revenge are consistent with the goals of street code. Furthermore, high CU traits were associated with decreased focus on the avoidance of

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27 The hypothetical peer conflicts employed in Pardini’s (2011) study included provocations such as a peer laughing in response to the participant accidentally tripping over. However, such provocations would arguably not be considered “minor” or “benign” through the lens of urban street code.

28 Additionally, interpersonal dominance is consistent with the organizing preoccupation of psychopathic personality. While psychopathy is most immediately associated with violent criminal behavior, its varying behavioral manifestations have long been recognized beginning with Cleckley’s (1941/1976) distinction between the
conflict and attempts to build relationships in the context of peer conflicts. Finally, high CU traits were not associated with expectations of victim suffering. Indeed, high CU traits were found to be related to decreased concern about impact of the use of aggression on the victim. This latter finding is consistent with the finding by Jones, Happé, Gilbert, Burnett, & Viding (2010) that male youth with psychopathic traits aged 9 to 16 (n = 21) showed less empathy for victims in hypothetical scenarios (for instance, teasing a peer and causing them to cry) than controls, namely youth with conduct problems only (n = 23), autism spectrum disorder (n = 21) and comparison youth (n = 31). On the basis of his findings, Pardini, whose subtitle to this article is “You’re going to pay. It’s going to hurt, but I don’t care” concludes that, “one of the core deficits in adjudicated juveniles with CU traits is that they care very little about the suffering of others, not that they have difficulty anticipating the extent to which their aggression will cause others to suffer” (p. 253).

The above-cited studies establish CU traits as a mediating factor in the relationship between what the authors term “deficits in social cognition”\(^{29}\) or “maladaptive social information processing”\(^{30}\) and aggressive behavior in anti-social youth. For instance, Muñoz et al. (2008) relate reactive aggression among anti-social youth:

- to a failure in the cognitive processing of social information at myriad levels of decision making…[that is] potentially mediated by deficits in the orbital and medial frontal cortex

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\(^{29}\) Muñoz et al. (2008), p.25.

that can lead to a dysregulation in a person’s response to perceived threats (Blair, 2005).” (p.15)

However, the development of the specific patterns of social-cognitive processing among high CU anti-social youth (identified by these studies and described above) is not considered by these researchers through a social-environmental lens. Viewed through the lens of street culture these “deficits in social cognition” may “represent rather an adaptation to status insecurity and to the persistent threat of violence that is present in some urban communities” (Brezina et al, 2004, p.304).

**Early Relational and Environmental Factors in the Development of CU Traits**

Empirical research on CU traits in anti-social youth has thus far largely centered on biological-temperamental correlates with limited investigation of the contextual factors that may shape the development of these traits (Howard et al., 2012). Indeed, to my knowledge only two studies have investigated the role of environmental factors in the development of CU traits with both of these studies examining exposure to violence (Howard et al., 2012; Kimonis et al., 2008). Similarly, the quality of early attachment relationships and CU traits has only recently become a focus of investigation (e.g., Dadds et al., 2011; Pasalich et al., 2012). The above-cited studies on the quality of attachment relationships and violence exposure in the development of CU traits are presented below given their relevance to the theoretical lens of this dissertation, namely, Fonagy et al.’s (2002) model of a mentalizing self-organization as rooted in the secure early attachment relationship with further scaffolding optimally provided by secure social contexts such as the wider socio-cultural environment (Twemlow, 2003).

Dadds et al. (2011) investigated impaired attention to the eyes of attachment figures as a developmental precursor to CU traits in a sample of 92 male children aged 5 to 16 ($M = 8.93$) referred to outpatient treatment and subsequently diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Disorder or Conduct Disorder.
A number of studies have found high CU children to be less sensitive to the parental influence (e.g., Wootton, Frick, Shelton, & Silverthorn, 1997; Hawes & Dadds, 2005). Dadds et al. suggest that:

Much of this insensitivity could derive from a lack of attention to critical aspects of parents’ communications. We hypothesize that eye contact with attachment figures would represent perhaps the most important example of this. Eye contact is critical to understanding the emotional state of the other, and is critical for the healthy development of conscience, empathy, and social competence (Skuse, 2003). We hypothesize that a failure to make eye contact with attachment figures during early development will not only reduce the influence of parenting, but lead to a series of cascading errors affecting the development of empathy and social functioning. (p. 238/9)

As discussed above, studies of anti-social youth with high CU traits and of adult psychopaths have found deficits in the recognition of emotionally distressing stimuli (such as fear) among these populations to be associated with reduced attention to these stimuli (e.g., Marsh & Blair, 2008). However, prior studies have largely employed computer-based measures of recognition and attention to emotional stimuli (e.g., photographs depicting the facial expressions of strangers) rather examining these processes in the context of actual interactions with attachment figures. Dadds et al.’s study is thus the first to investigate the potential occurrence of this attentional impairment towards emotional stimuli (assessed by the frequency of direct eye contact between child and his mother and father) in the context of naturalistic interactions with attachment figures, specifically, during free play and emotion focused discussion as a family.

Dadds et al. (2011) found that children and adolescents with high CU traits (as assessed by the Antisocial Process Screening Device) exhibited impaired eye contact with their parents. Additionally, fathers (but not mothers) of high CU youth were found to exhibit similar impairments as their sons. Finally, impaired level of eye contact among high CU youth was found to be associated with deficits in the recognition of fearful facial expressions (as assessed by their performance on the computer-based UNSW
Facial Emotion Task). Reduced frequency of mother to son, son to father, and father to son eye contact was also found to be significantly associated with lower levels of trait affective and cognitive empathy (assessed by mothers’ ratings on the Griffith Empathy Measure). On the basis of their findings, Dadds et al. (2011) conclude that:

At a minimum, this shows that eye contact with attachment figures is a convergent measure of the general deficit in empathy seen in psychopathic traits. More contentiously, we hypothesize that these results are consistent with the idea that eye contact with attachment figures is an early driver of the general developmental system that spans low-level processes of paying attention to emotionally salient stimuli, up to higher-order human traits of empathic concern (Skuse, 2003). (p.243)

However, while this study provides the first evidence that impaired eye contact with attachment figures is a characteristics of high CU youth, the authors do not speculate on the relational factors that may underpin this finding. As outlined earlier, such factors may include the child’s anxiety about the content of the attachment figure’s mind subsequent to earlier experiences of affective mirroring that was “absent”, “not readily forthcoming” or “contaminated by the mother’s own preoccupations” that may lead the child to avoid contemplating the other’s subjective experience (Fonagy, 2003) with resultant reduced attentional focus towards their facial expressions. The finding of impaired eye contact towards attachment figures in high CU youth seems to provide some empirical support for Bracher’s (2000) conceptualization of the attainment of respect, status and interpersonal dominance through violence as operating as proxy for the “gleam in the mother’s eye” (Kohut, 1968, p.95). Indeed, this recalls my therapeutic work with a juvenile offender admitted to detention on a robbery charge who described the look of terror in his victim’s eyes.

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31 Likewise, in his commentary on this paper, Blair (2011) highlights the quasi-impossibility of determining whether impaired eye contact is a cause or consequence of the emotion dysfunction seen in high CU youth before interpreting this finding from a purely neurological perspective.
32 Fonagy et al. (2002), p.35.
when held up at gunpoint as evoking his own feelings of “feeling like I’m his mom.” Additionally, the attainment of respect and status through violence can perhaps be conceptualized as forcing the recognition of a proxy for the often physically absent, or if present, functionally blind father (as seen in Dadds et al.’s 2011 study).

Pasalich et al. (2012) investigated the relationship between high CU traits and attachment representations in a sample of 60 male children aged 3 to 9 ($M = 6.31$) referred to a university clinic and subsequently diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Disorder and/or Conduct Disorder. The authors found that the presence of high CU traits (as assessed by the Antisocial Process Screening Device) was associated with disorganized but not (in contrast to expectations) avoidant attachment representations (as assessed by the Manchester Child Attachment Story Task, Green et al., 2000).

Pasalich et al. (2012) highlight the likelihood of “reciprocal forces operating between CU traits (and its correlates) and attachment across critical stages of child development” (p.842). Specifically, they identify the following three factors that contribute to the development of CU traits. First, disturbed early attachment relationships impairing a child’s ability to consider and act respond in accordance with others’ affective states (Fonagy, 2003; Van Ijzendoorn, 1997). Second, neuro-cognitive impairments that underpin emotion dysfunction (Blair, 1999) (i.e., decreased attention and reduced sensitivity to cues of emotional distress and impaired eye contact that “could interfere with attachment processes at the dyadic (e.g., by disrupting emotional reciprocity between children and their caregivers), and representational levels (e.g., by influencing children’s processing of attachment-related information)” (Blair, 2011, p.842). Third, disturbed early attachment relationships “might amplify negative effects of temperamental fearlessness on socialization processes implicated in the development of CU traits (Barker, Oliver, Viding, Salekin, & Maughan, 2011; Saltaris, 2002).” (p. 843). Pasalich et al. conclude by noting the dearth of research on
attachment-related experiences in high CU youth and in particular, the need for longitudinal research investigating the high prevalence of disorganized attachments in these children.

Howard et al. (2012) examined violence exposure as a potential mediating factor in the established relationship between CU traits and violent delinquency in a sample of primarily minority, incarcerated male adolescents (N = 88) aged 13 to 18 (M = 15.57). The authors found that self-reported witnessed violence (i.e., the physical assault of a stranger) but not the direct experience of violent victimization (i.e., being assaulted, being shot) fully mediated the relationship between high CU traits (as assessed by the Inventory of Callous-Unemotional Traits, ICU, Frick, 2004) and violent delinquency.\(^33\) Howard et al. posit that the finding that direct violent victimization was not a significant mediator may be explained by the experience of victimization serving to inhibit aggression through a “more personal understanding of its negative impact” (p.1241). On the basis of their findings, Howard et al. (2012) conclude that: “the well-established link between CU traits and violence may be attributed to high rates of witnessed violence among this subpopulation” (p.1237).\(^34\) This study expanded upon the findings of a prior study (Kimonis et al., 2008) that found a significant, positive association between CU traits and deficits in the emotional processing of distress cues in a sample of 88 ethnically diverse detained male adolescents aged 13 to 18 (M = 15.57) with high rates of exposure to community violence\(^35\) and self-reported aggressive behavior.

The finding that the relationship between CU traits and violent delinquency among male, minority youth (i.e., the population of this current study) is mediated by witnessed violence can be placed in the context of the literature on primary (i.e., congenital) versus secondary (i.e., acquired subsequent to relational and environmental trauma) variants of juvenile psychopathy.

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\(^33\) Howard et al. (2012) note that the violence exposure measure utilized in their study did not discriminate between community versus domestic violence or whether self-reported witnessed violence was perpetrated by the study participant or another individual.

\(^34\) Namely, male, primarily minority adolescents.

\(^35\) However, the violence exposure measure utilized in this study did not discriminate between witnessed violence or direct victimization.
Kimonis et al. (2008; Kimonis et al., 2012). Kimonis et al. (2008) conceptualize the CU traits of secondary psychopaths as:

an adaptive emotional response to harsh environmental conditions, including parental rejection and abuse (Skeem et al., 2003), rather than the result of a temporal emotional deficit that interferes with normative conditioning processes during early moral development.\footnote{I.e., primary psychopathy}

Equally viable is the possibility that effectively adapting to chronic and severe trauma in childhood could involve learning to “turn off” emotions through a desensitization process (Porter, 1996), resulting in emotional deficits at a more basic level of processing (e.g., changing the pattern of emotional reactivity). (p.572)

This “turning off” of emotions is consistent with the findings of Pameri Sams & Truscott’s (2004) investigation of empathy, use of violence and exposure to violence in sample of inner city adolescent males who posit that emotional numbing (characteristic of PTSD and highly prevalent in traumatized inner city samples) may impede affective responding to others’ distress with this self-protective mechanism resembling a callous-interpersonal style.

Kimonis et al. (2012) investigated the patterns of emotional processing in a sample of 165 incarcerated juvenile offenders aged 14 to 17 ($M = 16.42$). The emotional pictures dot-probe task with slides of distressing (i.e., child crying), positive and neutral stimuli was used as an indirect measure of emotional reactivity. The authors report that primary versus secondary variants of juvenile psychopathy (with the same high levels of CU traits\footnote{As assessed by the Youth Psychopathic Traits Inventory (YPI; Andershed et al., 2002)} but differentiated by low versus high anxiety) exhibit distinct patterns of emotional processing. More specifically, compared with the primary variant (low anxiety), the secondary variant (high anxiety) were more engaged with emotionally distressing stimuli though the authors highlight that these observed

\footnote{I.e., primary psychopathy}
\footnote{As assessed by the Youth Psychopathic Traits Inventory (YPI; Andershed et al., 2002)}
differences cannot be termed relative “deficits” and “enhanced” abilities. On the basis of their findings, the authors theorize that high CU youth can be further disaggregated into two subgroups, namely primary psychopaths who have a “dispositional deficit in the person’s emotional responsiveness to others” with “less responsiveness to negative emotional cues that makes them less sensitive to distress cues and to cues for punishment (Cleckley, 1976) and secondary psychopaths whose “experience of maltreatment and related trauma (…) has been linked with heightened emotional sensitivity to negative emotional stimuli” (p.1093). In sum, it appears that the specific patterns of emotional and social-cognitive processing exhibited by high CU urban youth may, in part, represent an adaptation to relational and environmental conditions. Indeed, Kimonis et al. (2008) conclude that, “Ethnic differences in the various processes underlying psychopathy may be explained by social factors related to living in a threatening environment, which are more likely experienced by African-American individuals living in urban areas (Skeem, Edens, Sanford, & Hauser, 2004)” (p. 571).
Chapter III: Method

Research Question

The specific aims of the current pilot study were to: (1) describe the capacity of violent offending versus non-offending urban youth to mentalize about disrespect murder; (2) investigate whether the hypothesized poorer mentalizing capacity of violent offenders compared to the non-offending controls in the context of street violence is shaped by level of street code adherence and CU traits; and, (3) compare participants’ mentalizing capacities across the contexts of attachment relationships and street violence. To examine these questions, a semi-structured interview structured around three movie clips of street violence, each of which is driven by a challenge to a teenaged aggressor’s physical or psychological integrity (i.e., the experience of being “disrespected”), was developed for this study. In addition, participants completed a brief demographic and social history questionnaire as well as self-report questionnaires assessing level of street code adherence, CU traits and mentalizing capacity in the context of attachment relationships and level of CU traits.

Sample

Subjects were included if they met the following criteria: (a) male; (b) 15 to 19 years of age; (c) self-reported residence in a low-income New York City neighborhood; and, (d) self-reported history of arrest for a violent crime (Violent Offender Group) or no history of arrest (Non-Offending Control Group). Exclusion criteria were: (a) developmentally delayed; (b) psychotic; and, (c) current intoxication due to concerns about psychological vulnerability. Additionally, adolescents for whom English was a second language were excluded from the study due to concerns about their ability to comprehend the linguistic nuances of the movie clips, item content of self-report questionnaires and participate in a semi-structured interview.
Procedures

Study procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board of the City University of New York (CUNY IRB 5, Project # 333106).

Recruitment

Participants were recruited by the principal investigator via study flyers posted in the community. A snowballing sample technique was then used to recruit subsequent participants with participants who had completed study measures provided with additional copies of the study flyer and asked to refer interested peers to the principal investigator. Baron et al., (2001) note that this mode of recruitment “is often employed in field research on little-known or hard-to-reach subjects (Inciardi et al., 1991; Maxfield and Babbie 1995), particularly in criminal justice research on active criminals or deviants (Fagan, 1989; Johnson et al., 1985; Wright & Decker 1994)” (p767/768).

Data Collection

Street code adhering youth are considered in the literature to be hard-to-reach research subjects (e.g., Baron et al., 2001) and described as alienated from mainstream society and its institutions (e.g., Anderson, 1999). As a result, data collection took place in various diners and cafes located in a heavily trafficked downtown commercial area rather than requiring participants to travel to a campus research laboratory.

The consenting process took place in the same location as data collection. The principal investigator explained the study and procedure to youth eligible to participate in the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants aged 18 and above. Assent was gained from all minor participants. Parental permission was obtained for minor participants in the non-offending control groups whose parents were required to accompany them to the location of data
collection for this purpose though not to remain there during data collection. A waiver of parental permission was granted by the IRB for minor participants in the violent offender group on the rational that without this waiver the research could not practically be carried out given the frequent decreased parental involvement among this population.

Participants completed the measures instruments in the order listed: (1) Demographics and Social History Questionnaire; (2) Impression Management (IM) Scale of the Paulhus Deception Scale (Paulhus, 1999) (3) Adherence to Code Related Beliefs (Stewart, Schreck, & Simons, 2006); (4) Reflective Functioning Questionnaire for Youth (RFQ-Y; Sharp, Williams, Baumgardner, Michonski, Seals, Patel, Bleiberg, & Fonagy, 2009); (5) Mentalizing About Street Violence Interview (MASVI, Berko, 2013); and, (6) Youth Psychopathic Inventory (YPI; Andershed, Kerr, Stattin, & Levander, 2002). To minimize problems with poor reading abilities that are frequently found among juvenile justice involved populations (Pardini, 2011), the principal investigator offered to read out items on the self-report measures while participants marked their responses on the answer sheet. Completion of all study measures took approximately one hour and a half. Grant funds were utilized to compensate participants for their time. Participants were offered their choice of $20 dollars of gift certificates for Target, Regal Movie Theaters or McDonalds upon completion of all study measures. Upon completion of study measures each participant was provided with additional study flyers for peers who may be interested in participating in the study and provided with a list of age-appropriate counseling resources located in New York City should he wish to meet with a counselor regarding his experience of street violence following participation in the study or at a later stage.
Measures

(1) Demographics & Social History Questionnaire

Participants’ demographic information regarding age, race, neighborhood and history of
arrest and/or conviction for a violent offense was collected through a questionnaire.

(2) Impression Management (IM) Scale of Paulhus Deception Scale (Paulhus, 1999)

The Impression Management (IM) scale of the Paulhus Deception Scale (PDS; Paulhus,
1999) was utilized in this study to assess the validity of participants’ responses to the self-report
instruments in this study, and, specifically, their tendency “to appear socially and morally
favorable to the expected audience of their responses” (p.41, PDS Users Manual, 1999). The
PDS, formerly known as the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding, is a 40-item multi-
dimensional self-report questionnaire that assesses socially desirable responding both as a
situational response set and as a trait response style. The PDS is composed of two 20-item scales
that measure two types of socially desirable responding, namely, Self-Deceptive Enhancement
and Impression Management. Items are presented as statements and respondents are asked to
rate on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (not true) to 5 (very true) the extent to which each statement
describes them. The PDS takes approximately 5 to 7 minutes to complete and requires a fifth
grade reading level.

The IM scale has been employed as a measure of socially desirable responding in studies
of adult (Kroner & Weekes, 1996, as cited in Flight & Forth, 2007) and juvenile offenders
(Flight & Forth, 2007; Hemphill and Howell, 2000). Although developed for use with
respondents aged 16 and above, the IM scale has been utilized with juvenile offenders aged 12 to
18 (Hemphill & Howell, 2000) and thus appears suitable for the age range of participants in the

38 Copies of all of the measures are included in the appendix with the exception of the YPI that can be obtained
through contacting its author, Dr. Hendrik Andershed at Örebro University, Sweden (henrik.andershed@oru.se).
present study. Paulhus (1999) reported internal consistencies of .80 in undergraduates and .84 in adult inmates for the IM scale (Flight & Forth, 2007). Sample IM items include: “I have said something bad about a friend behind his/her back” (Item 7) and “I never swear” (Item 4).

(3) Adherence to Code Related Beliefs (Stewart et al., 2006)

The Adherence to Code Related Beliefs questionnaire assesses the degree to which respondents hold street code beliefs, specifically, that is advantageous or justifiable to use violence. This 7 item measure utilizes a 4-point Likert scale (from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree) and yields a total score (ranging from 7 to 28) that indicates the degree to which respondents espouse street code beliefs. Sample items include: “When someone disrespects you, it is important that you use physical force or aggression to teach him or her not to disrespect you” (Item 1) and “It is important to show others that you cannot be intimidated” (Item 6). The measure has been used by its authors in a sample of 720 African-American adolescents from varied economic backgrounds (poor to middle class).

(4) Reflective Functioning Questionnaire Youth Version (RFQ-Y; Sharp et al., 2009)

The RFQ-Y is a 46 item self-report measure that assesses mentalizing capacity in adolescents in the context of attachment relationships. The measure is an adaptation of the adult version of Reflective Functioning Questionnaire (Fonagy & Ghinai, unpublished manuscript) that was developed to assess mentalizing capacity in the context of attachment security. RFQ-Y items are rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Agree to 6 = Strongly Disagree). Item scores are then summed and divided by the total number of items to yield an overall total RFQ-Y score ranging from a possible 2 to 12 where 12 is the maximum optimal reflective function score. Sample RFQ-Y items include: “I am a good mind reader” (Item 16) and “I’m often curious about the meaning behind others’ actions” (Item 41). Ha, Sharp, Ensink, Fonagy,
Cirino (2013) examined the construct validity of the RFQ-Y and found significant positive correlations with an interview-based measure of child reflective function.

(5) Mentalizing About Street Violence Interview (MASVI, Berko, 2013)

The MASVI is a semi-structured interview that was designed specifically for this study and uses movie clips to assess participants’ capacity to mentalize about disrespect murder. This skills-based interview aims to address the limitations of existing (primarily dispositional) self-report and written scenario-based measures of mentalization and the conceptually related construct of empathy. Each of the 3 clips portrays a murder that is driven by a challenge to a teenaged aggressor’s physical safety and/or psychological integrity (i.e., the experience of being “disrespected”). Each clip portrays a distinct form of disrespect, namely, (1) physical threat/intimidation in front of a rival crew/gang precipitated by belief that the aggressor has snitched to the police implicating the eventual victim in a homicide of a peer (Juice); (2) verbal disrespect in the form of a “I feel sorry for your momma” comment by a storekeeper in the context of the aggressor being racially profiled as a shoplifter due to his race and street presentation (Menace II Society); and, (3) the humiliating defeat by a much younger opponent in a basketball game (Fresh) in front of the aggressor’s teammates and teenaged spectators.

Narrative descriptions of the 3 movie clips are as follows:

(1) Juice (1992)

Scene: Riverside Motherfucker

Length: 1.52 minutes

Characters: Bishop (Shooter/Aggressor); Radames (Victim, gang leader of Latino crew/gang); Q and Steel (Bishop’s friends who witness the interaction but fail to come to his defense)

Description: A Latino crew/gang come across Bishop when he is alone on the streets. Radames accuses Bishop of snitching to the police, implicating him in the murder of Raheem. Bishop and Radames trade verbal insults. Bishop calls Radames a “punk ‘spic.”’ Radames tells Bishop that
“Raheem (Bishop’s deceased friend) ain’t here to protect you no-more” implying that Bishop needs the physical protection of others and tugs on Bishop’s face as he talks to him like a baby. After stating that Bishop has been asking for “an ass-kicking for a long time,” Radames then puts a knife up to Bishop’s throat. With the knife at his throat, Bishop spies his friends Q and Steele who happen to round the corner at that moment but leave the scene and do not come to Bishop’s defense. Bishop and Radames begin to physically fight with both characters pushed to the floor at different points of the scuffle. On the ground Bishop is seen to attempt to reach for the gun strapped to his ankle. A police siren signaling the arrival of the police causes the crew/gang members to scatter from the scene. Bishop chases Radames and corners him in a back alley. Affirming his allegiance to his own neighborhood, Bishops shouts “Riverside, motherfucker” as he fatally shot Radames at close range.

(2) Menace II Society (1993)

Scene: Opening scene of movie

Length: 3.32 minutes

Characters: O-Dog (Aggressor); Caine (Peer); Male and female (presumably husband and wife) storekeepers (Victims)

Description: The film opens in the Watts neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles. Two African-American male teens, Caine and O-Dog, enter a store to buy liquor for a party they are attending that evening. They head to the refrigerators at the back of the store. The female Korean storekeeper, pretending to be cleaning, trails them in the belief they intend to shoplift given their race and street presentation. O-Dog opens a bottle of malt liquor and begins to drink from it. The male Korean storekeeper instructs him, “You notta drink beer in store” to which O-Dog asserts his intention to pay and reiterates to the female storekeeper that it is not necessary to follow him around the store, adding, “You gettin’ on my nerves!” The female storekeeper responds, “Hurry up and buy” communicating her anxiety about the potential escalation of the situation to which O-Dog responds, “Shut the fuck up.” The male storekeeper then responds, “Just pay and leave” and then “hurry up and go” communicating his own anxiety about the potential for escalation and desire to bring the interaction to a close. O-Dog challenges the male storekeeper about his failure to give Caine his change. As the storekeeper opens the cash register, he comments, “I feel sorry for you mother.” O-Dog demands he repeat this comment. The storekeeper reiterates, “I don’t want no trouble. Just get out.” O-Dog fatally shoots the male storekeeper in front of his wife who begins screaming hysterically as she is dragged by O-Dog into the backroom. O-Dog instructs Caine to empty the cash register. Off camera, O-Dog is heard demanding the female storekeeper eject the video-surveillance tape, threatening to kill her if she does not comply. Two shots are then heard. O-Dog then returns to the front of the store to find that Caine has not emptied the register. Finding he is unable to open the register, O-Dog searches the deceased male storekeeper’s body taking six dollars from his person. Caine comments, “This don’t make no dam sense.” Fleeing the scene, O-Dog comments, “See you ain’t gonna talk shit now.” The scene concludes with the voiceover by Caine: “Went into the store just to get a beer. Came out an accessory to murder and armed robbery. It’s funny like that in the
‘hood sometime. You never knew what was gonna happen or when. After that, I knew it was gonna be a long summer.”

(3) Fresh (1994)

Scene: Shooting Hoops (DVD chapter 8)

Length: 3.42 minutes

Characters: Jake (Aggressor); Curtis (Victim); Unnamed teenaged girl (Bystander Victim); B and Fresh (Witnesses).

Description: Friends B and Fresh are at the basketball court watching a game including Jake (older teen/young man) and Curtis (younger teen). B teases Fresh that a young teenage girl, seen jumping rope, has a crush on Fresh and is walking over to talk with him. Curtis demonstrates his superior skills on the court as he dribbles the ball in circles around Jake, humiliating Jake in front of his teammates and female spectators. Fresh’s awareness of the challenge this poses to Jake’s sense of his manhood and consequent need to readdress this disrespect is conveyed in Fresh’s comment, “Curtis be busting out those moves, as long as I ain’t playing that nigger.” Curtis attempts to restore Jake’s self-esteem by backing down somewhat to him (“Just forget about it, your ball”). Jakes momentarily leaves the court to get his gun, fatally shooting Curtis and the teenaged girl as the other teens flee the court. Jake warns that he will come after anyone who snitches on him to the police, kicking the deceased Curtis’s leg as he leaves the court. The camera pans over Curtis, over a squashed basketball and then over to the teenaged bystander victim girl who is whimpering and whose foot is scraping the concrete as she clasps her hands around her bleeding neck. Fresh puts his hands around her neck. A moment later her foot stops moving signaling that she has died.

Movie clips are viewed on an 8 inch portable DVD player in the presence of the principal investigator with the audio-track played over headphones. After viewing each clip, the participant is engaged in a discussion about the clip that takes the same three-part format for each clip, namely, (1) an initial, open-ended permit question (How would you describe to a friend what happens between the characters in this scene?); (2) demand questions that focus on the aggressor’s experience of being challenged (e.g., What thoughts and feelings did the shooter have when (cite the CHALLENGE participant sees as pivotal in scene?)), his commission of the

39 Permit questions are defined as questions that “permit the speaker to demonstrate their reflective-self capacities” while demand questions “demand from speakers a demonstration of their capacity for reflective -self function (Fonagy et al., 1998, p.32). This first open-ended question contrasts with the more focused demand questions and follow-up probes later in the MASVI that pull for mentalizing responses.
homicide (e.g., *What do you think (name of aggressor) feels in that moment what he gets the gun out of his pocket, points it at (name of victim), pulls the trigger and shoots. What thoughts are going through his mind at that point?*); and, reconstructed past looking back at the interaction a few months later (e.g., *What thoughts and feelings do you think the shooter has a few months later as he looks back at the scene?*); and, (3) demand questions that focus on the victim’s experience of the interaction and specifically, the moment when the gun is pointed at them, (e.g., *What is (name of victim) thinking and feeling in that moment when s/he sees (perpetrator) pointing the gun pointed at him/her and pulling the trigger to shoot at him/her?*) and in the case of the third clip, the bystander victim’s realization that she has been fatally shot.

The MASVI was audiotaped and transcribed for qualitative analysis with all personal identifying information removed. Given the use of this newly developed measure, the MASVI was first administered to 2 participants with the goal of testing its viability. Following the collection of this preliminary data, the administration of the MASVI was amended. Specifically, subsequent participants in the research phase of the study (n=18) watched each movie clip once (rather than three times as in the original administration of the MASVI) to enable the assessment of the capacity to mentalize in a manner that more closely replicates the one-time real world unfolding of interpersonal conflicts. In order to maintain the integrity of the data and prevent interviewer bias, it was not known how participants score on the code related beliefs questionnaire prior to giving the interview. The YPI was administered after the MASVI so as not to cue participants into the MASVI’s investigation of callous-unemotional traits.

The MASVI was assessed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The MASVI was assessed quantitatively by an independent rater who coded for overall level of reflective function (RF) and RF regarding the perpetrator’s and victim’s perspectives using Fonagy et al.’s 1998 RF
scoring manual. RF scores on the MASVI range from a possible -1, corresponding to negative RF, namely, “distinctly anti-RF or bizarre/inappropriate” to 9, corresponding to full or exceptional RF. The rater was blind to the study aims and to the participants’ status as a violent offender or non-offending control as well as participants’ scores on the self-report measures. Personal material disclosed by participants during the MASVI (e.g., reference to being arrested, incarcerated e.t.c,) that was relevatory of the participant’s offender or control status was deleted from the interviews given to the coder to protect the integrity of blind coding.

Given that the RF scale has not previously been applied to the MASVI, a Scoring Manual was developed for and amended in collaboration with the rater. This manual (see appendix E) includes descriptions of the clips, scoring procedures and a sample MASVI RF coding sheet. Since the RF scale has not previously been used to code reflective function outside of the context of attachment relationships, the independent rater first scored two interviews using the MASVI Coding Form developed by the principal investigator. The MASVI Coding Form was then amended at the suggestion of the coder to include RF regarding the perpetrators’ and victims’ perspectives alongside overall level of RF.

Qualitative analysis of the MASVI by the principal investigator focused on four areas, namely, (1) the experience of challenges to one’s physical and/or psychological integrity; (2) spontaneous capacity for mentalization about street violence; (3) quality of mentalization of the perpetrator’s experience during his commission of the homicide; and (4) quality of mentalization of the victim’s experience during the interaction.

Participants’ experience of challenges to one’s physical safety and/or psychological integrity (i.e., the experience of being disrespected in the streets) was examined through

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41 A key to RF scores detailing their respective qualitative descriptions is included in the MASVI Scoring Manual in Appendix E.
participant responses to the following MASVI question for each of the 3 clips: *What thoughts and feelings did the (name of perpetrator) have when (CHALLENGE/S identified as pivotal by participant)?*

The capacity for spontaneous mentalization was assessed through the examination of participant responses to the first MASVI question for each of the three clips, namely, (Q1) *How would you describe to a friend what happens between the characters in the scene?* This first open-ended permit question aims to assess participants’ initial emotional reactions to the clip; primary identification with the perpetrator, victim or bystander; ability to construct a narrative about the scene, specifically, to provide “accurate and plausible links between (protagonists’) mental states and behaviors” (Fonagy et al., 1999, p.19); and, to identify the intra-psychic and social-cultural situational factors seen to drive the unfolding conflict. In addition, mean word count for each participant across these 3 responses to MASVI question one was calculated as part of the analysis of the complexity of participants’ initial narratives.

The quality of participants’ mentalization of the perpetrators’ experiences during the homicides was assessed through examination of responses to the following MASVI question for the three movie clips: *What do you think (name of aggressor) feels in that moment what he gets the gun out of his pocket, points it at (name of victim), pulls the trigger and shoots. What thoughts are going through his mind at that point?*

The quality of participants’ mentalization of the victims’ experiences was assessed through examination of responses to the following questions in Part III (Victim’s Experience) of the MASVI: *What is (name of victim) thinking and feeling in that moment when s/he sees (perpetrator) pointing the gun pointed at him/her and pulling the trigger to shoot at him/her? In*
the case of the bystander girl victim in the *Fresh* clip who is not killed instantaneously, participants are asked, *What is she thinking and feeling as she is lying on the ground?* The analysis of these responses includes both process (i.e., laugher and yawning when called upon to contemplate the victim’s experience) and content (i.e., presence and quality of references to the victim; degree of self-focus versus focus on victim’s experience; relative focus on victim’s affective versus cognitive experience; and, use of callous language).

Participants’ processing of victims’ verbal, vocal and facial cues of emotional distress was assessed through the analysis of responses to MASVI questions 9 and 10 for the *Menace II Society* clip, namely, (Q9) *What is your sense of what the female storekeeper is thinking and feeling in that moment when she says, “Hurry up and buy”?* and, (Q10) *What is your sense of what the male storekeeper is thinking and feeling in that moment when he says, “I don’t want no trouble, I don’t want no trouble?”* Analysis focused on the *Menace II Society clip* due to the longer interaction between perpetrator and victims compared to *Juice* and *Fresh*.

Level of remorse attributed to the perpetrator was investigated through calling upon participants to contemplate the perpetrator’s mental states a few months after the homicide with the following question in Part II (Perpetrator’s Experience) of the MASVI: *What about a few months later as (perpetrator) thinks back over the scene and what happened. What kind of feelings and thoughts do you think he's going to have as he looks back at the scene?* Responses were coded for level of remorse as follows: (1) self-focused concerns with no or minimal reference to perpetrator’s level of remorse; (2) specific reference to perpetrator’s remorselessness; (3) uncertainty about perpetrator’s level of remorse; (4) attribution of positive affects (i.e., “joy”) to perpetrator versus guilt and remorse; and, (5) attribution of remorse and guilt to perpetrator.
(6) *Youth Psychopathic Inventory (YPI; Andershed et al., 2002)*

The YPI is a 50-item self-report measure that was developed to assess psychopathy personality traits in non-referred youth aged 12 and above. The YPI’s focus on the core interpersonal/affective features of psychopathic personality to the exclusion of deviant/criminal behavior believed to develop secondary to these traits is consistent with research by Frick and colleagues on CU traits as delineating a subgroup of delinquent youth with childhood-onset conduct problems who exhibit a stable pattern of severe and aggressive anti-social behavior and distinct emotional and social-cognitive processes (e.g., Frick, 2009).

The YPI takes approximately 15 minutes to complete. To reduce the likelihood of social desirability, YPI items are framed as neutral or appealing qualities. Items are rated on a 4-point scale with higher scores indicating a greater degree of psychopathic characteristics, namely, 1 (*does not apply at all*), 2 (*does not apply well*), 3 (*applies fairly well*) and 4 (*applies very well*). The YPI yields a total score (ranging from 50 to 200) and 10 trait subscale scores (ranging from 5 to 20). The 10 YPI trait subscales form three higher dimensions that correspond to Cooke and Michie’s (2001) three-factor model of the Psychopathy Checklist –Revised (Hare, 1991). These dimensions (and their trait subscales) are as follows: (1) Grandiose-Manipulative (Dishonest Charm, Grandiosity, Lying and Manipulation subscales), (2) Callous-Unemotional (Callousness, Unemotionality, and Remorseless subscales); and, (3) Impulsive-Irresponsible (Impulsivity, Thrill-Seeking, and Irresponsibility subscales). Scores in these dimensions range from 20 to 80 for the Grandiose-Manipulative dimension and from 15 to 60 for the Callous-Unemotional and Impulsive Irresponsible dimensions. The YPI does not have established cut-off scores identifying psychopathic youth. Sample CU trait items are as follows: Remorselessness (*To feel guilty and remorseful about things you have done that have hurt other people is a sign of weakness*);
Unemotionality (*I usually feel calm when other people are scared*); and, Callousness (*I often become sad or moved by watching sad things on TV or film*” (reverse scored).

The properties of the YPI have been examined in non-referred community (Andershed et al., 2002), clinical (Andershed, Hodgins, & Tengstrom, 2007), community juvenile justice diversion (Poythress, Dembo, Wareham, & Greenbaum, 2006) and incarcerated juvenile offender samples (Cauffman, Kimonis, Dmitrieva, & Monhan, 2009; Dolan & Rennie, 2006; Kimonis et al., 2012; Skeem & Cauffman, 2003; Kimonis et al., 2012). Among justice-involved samples, the YPI has been found to correlate with age of first arrest and number of violent charges (Dolan & Rennie, 2006), be as effective as the PCL-YV (Forth et al., 2003) at predicting short-term recidivism but with which its scores are only moderately correlated (Cauffman et al., 2009).

**Statement of Hypotheses**

Given the paucity of literature examining the relationships between street code adherence, CU traits and the capacity to mentalize in the context of street violence and attachment relationships, a mixed-methods study was conducted to investigate the nature of the relationships between these variables. This study will investigate the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1**: Violent Offending youth will exhibit poorer mentalizing capacities in the context of street violence than non-offending controls from similar low-income urban neighborhoods as evidenced by both quantitative and qualitative findings.

**Hypothesis 2**: Participants with higher levels of street code adherence will exhibit poorer capacities to mentalize about street violence.

**Hypothesis 3**: Participants with higher levels of overall psychopathic traits, and callous-unemotional traits in particular, will exhibit poorer capacities to mentalize about street violence.
Hypothesis 4: The capacity to mentalize in the context of street violence will be positively correlated with the capacity to mentalize in the context of attachment relationships.
Chapter IV: Quantitative Results

The primary goal of the current study was to investigate the extent and nature of context specific breakdowns in mentalization among violent offending versus non-offending inner city minority youth in response to the experience of being disrespected and the extent to which these breakdowns are shaped by level of street code adherence. Secondary analyses examine the relationship of CU traits with street code adherence and with reflective functioning in the context of attachment relationships given the limited investigation of social-cultural and relational contextual factors that may shape the development of CU traits. This chapter will present the demographic characteristics of the sample, descriptive statistics for all measures including frequencies, means, skew and kurtosis and results bearing upon the four quantitatively examined hypotheses. All analyses within this section used an alpha level of .05 and two-tailed tests unless otherwise stated.

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Eighteen male adolescents identifying as African-American or Latino and self-reporting residence in a low-income New York City neighborhood participated in the current study. All participants were English native speakers or English-Spanish bilingual. Violent offender participants \((n = 10)\) were 10 African-American youth who ranged in age from 16 to 19 years old \((M = 17.70; SD = .95)\) with a self-reported history of court-involvement for a violent offense, namely, assault, robbery and/or weapons possession.\(^43\) Fifty percent of violent offenders self-reported arrest for one criminal offense, 40% for two offenses and 10% for three offenses. Non-

\(^{43}\) Participant # 2 self-reported having been arrested for a Weapons Possession Case. In New York State, simple possession of a firearm is classified as an E felony under Penal Law section 265.01(b), and is not classified as a violent crime. However, # 2’s data was included in the analysis given that the VO versus NOC categories aimed to create sampling groups characterized by high versus low street code adherence and given that # 2’s level of street code adherence (namely COS = 22, out of possible 7 to 28) was above the sample mean \((M = 18.44, SD = 4.91)\).
offending controls \((n = 8)\) were African-American and Latino youth also ranging in age from 15 to 19 years old \((M = 17.38; SD = 1.30)\) with no self-reported history of court-involvement.

Frequency distributions for demographic variables including age, race and offense history are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Variable</th>
<th>Violent Offenders (VO)</th>
<th>Non-Offending Controls (NOC)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Age (Years)</td>
<td>17.70 ((SD = .95))</td>
<td>17.38 ((SD = 1.30))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>10 (100.00%)</td>
<td>4 (50.00%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>3 (37.50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bi-racial</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>1 (12.50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offense History:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Larceny</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapons Possession</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Outliers and Missing Values**

Data was screened by the principal investigator at the time of collection for missing information and any omitted items were then completed by the participant. Prior to data analysis data was reviewed for coding errors.

**Response Validity**

The validity of participants’ responses to the self-report measures used in this study was assessed with the IM scale of Paulhus Deception Scale (PDS, Paulhus, 1999). IM cut off scores for Invalidity Identifications are presented in Table 2. IM data (IM adjusted scores and interpretations) is presented in Table 3.
Table 2: IM Cut off Scores for Invalidity Identifications (PDS User’s Manual, Paulhus, 1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faking Good</td>
<td>&gt;12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;8</td>
<td>May be invalid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faking Bad</td>
<td>&lt;2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>Probably invalid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: PDS Data For Violent Offenders (VO) and Non-Offending Controls (NOC)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Adj IM</th>
<th>Interpretation of IM Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VO#1</td>
<td>.1</td>
<td>&lt;2 Maybe Invalid- Faking Bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO#2</td>
<td>.8</td>
<td>&gt;8 Maybe Invalid –Faking Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO#3</td>
<td>.1</td>
<td>&lt;2 Maybe Invalid Faking Bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO#4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>&gt;12 Probably Invalid- Faking Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO#5</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>VALID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO#6</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>&gt;8 Maybe Invalid-Faking Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO#7</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>VALID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO#8</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>VALID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO#9</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>VALID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO#10</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>&gt;8 Maybe Faking Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOC#11</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>&lt;2 Maybe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOC#</td>
<td>IM Score</td>
<td>Decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>&gt;12 Possibly Invalid - Faking Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>7.78</td>
<td>&gt;12 Possibly Invalid - Faking Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>VALID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>VALID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>VALID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>&gt;8 Maybe Invalid - Faking Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>VALID</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the basis of their IM scores, 4 out of the 10 (40%) VOs (#5, #7, #8 and #9) and 4 out of the 8 NOCs (#14, #15, #16 and #18) were found to have valid PDS protocols suggesting valid responses to the self-report instruments in the current study. The IM scores of the remaining VOs were as follows: 2 “maybe” invalid (faking bad) protocols (#1 and #3), 3 “maybe” invalid (faking good) protocols (#2, #6 and #10) and 1 “probably” invalid (faking good) protocol (#4). The IM scores of the remaining NOCs were as follows: 1 “maybe” invalid (faking bad) protocol (#11), 1 “maybe” invalid (faking good) protocol (#17) and 2 “probably” invalid (faking good) protocols (#12 and #13).

**Reliability**

Cronbach’s alpha was computed for the three self-report measures utilized in the study. The Adherence to Code Related Beliefs measure had a Cronbach’s alpha of .81 indicating a good
level of internal consistency. The RFQ-Y has a Cronbach’s alpha of .62 indicating a questionable level of internal consistency. An item by item analysis was conducted for the RFQ-Y. This identified that if either RFQ-Y item 21 or item 44 was deleted this would increase the level of internal consistency into the acceptable range of .7. It is therefore suggested that these RFQY items, namely, “I believe there is no RIGHT way of seeing any situation” (#21) and “How I feel can easily affect how I see someone else’s behavior” (#44) be examined for their reading level relative to other RFQY items. Finally, the YPI had a Cronbach’s alpha of .95 indicating excellent reliability.

Relationship of Demographic Variables To Outcome Measures

Pearson Correlations were used to examine potential associations between the demographic variable of age and total scores on the Adherence to Code Related Beliefs, RFQ-Y and YPI measures. As seen in Table 4, Pearson’s correlations showed no significant association between age and level of code adherence, capacity for reflective functioning in the context of attachment relationships and psychopathic traits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>$r$ (p)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Years</td>
<td>COS Total</td>
<td>RFQ Total</td>
<td>YPI Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COS Total</td>
<td>.388 (.11)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFQ Total</td>
<td>.205 (.42)</td>
<td>-.565* (.02)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPI Total</td>
<td>.101 (.69)</td>
<td>.596** (.009)</td>
<td>-.657** (.003)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Summary Statistics

Means, standard deviations, skew and kurtosis statistics are presented for the sample as a whole and by sampling group. Table 5 presents summary statistics by sampling group. Figures 1 through 7 show the distribution of scores by group for Adherence to Code Related Beliefs.
(Figure 1), RFQ-Y (Figure 2), MASVI-Overall RF (Figure 3), MASVI RF-regarding Perpetrator (Figure 4), MASVI RF-regarding Victim (Figure 5), YPI Total Score (Figure 6) and YPI Factor 2 (Callous-Unemotional Traits) (Figure 7).

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Outcome Measures for Violent Offenders (VOs) versus Non-Offending Controls (NOCs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COS Adherence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO:</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17.00</td>
<td>26.00</td>
<td>20.90</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>-.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOC:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>24.00</td>
<td>15.38</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>-.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFQY Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO:</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.09</td>
<td>6.79</td>
<td>6.40</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>-1.46</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOC:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.04</td>
<td>7.13</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>-.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPI Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO:</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>116.00</td>
<td>160.00</td>
<td>129.80</td>
<td>14.23</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOC:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>67.00</td>
<td>137.00</td>
<td>105.25</td>
<td>26.12</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPI Factor 1 (Grandiose – Manipulative)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>VO:</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>44.00</td>
<td>66.00</td>
<td>51.30</td>
<td>7.21</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.37</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOC:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23.00</td>
<td>56.00</td>
<td>42.13</td>
<td>12.47</td>
<td>-.56</td>
<td>-1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPI Factor 2 (Callous-Unemotional)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO:</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33.00</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>38.00</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>4.55</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOC:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19.00</td>
<td>37.00</td>
<td>30.50</td>
<td>6.05</td>
<td>-.95</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPI Factor 3 (Impulsive-Irresponsible)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO:</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33.00</td>
<td>52.00</td>
<td>40.50</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOC:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23.00</td>
<td>47.00</td>
<td>32.63</td>
<td>9.27</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>-1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPI-5: Remorselessness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO:</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>12.20</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOC:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>8.88</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>-1.30</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPI-6: Unemotionality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO:</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>17.00</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>2.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOC:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>11.63</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>-1.12</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPI-7: Callousness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO:</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>13.30</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>-.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOC:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>-.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MASVI-Overall RF</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO:</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>-.77</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOC:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MASVI-RF re Perpetrator</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO:</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>-1.02</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOC:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>-.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MASVI –RF re Victim</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO:</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>-.74</td>
<td>-1.64</td>
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<td>NOC:</td>
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<td>2.50</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: COS Adherence = Adherence to Code Related Beliefs; RFQ-Y = Reflective Functioning Questionnaire for Youths; YPI = Youth Psychopathic Inventory; MASVI-RF = Mentalizing About Street Violence Interview Reflective Functioning Score: Overall RF; RF regarding perpetrator’s perspective; and, RF regarding victim’s perspective.

**Street Code Adherence**

Sample mean was 18.44 (SD = 4.91) with scores ranging from 9 to 26.⁴⁴ Scores were normally distributed as evidenced by analysis of the skewness and kurtosis. Violent offenders were significantly more invested in street code principles (M = 20.9; SD = 3.25) than controls (M = 15.38, SD = 5.07) as shown by an independent samples t-test (t (df) = 2.81, p = .01). This finding is consistent with the expectation that the violent offender versus non-offending control sampling groups would be characterized by high and low street code adherence respectively. Figure 1 shows the distribution by group for Adherence to Code Related Beliefs.

---

⁴⁴ Out of a possible 7 to 28.
Mentalizing Capacity in the Context of Attachment Relationships

Sample mean total RFQ-Y was 6.55 ($SD = .38$) with scores ranging from 6.04 to 7.13. Total RFQ-Y scores were normally distributed as evidenced by analysis of skewness and kurtosis. Violent offenders presented with significantly lower mentalizing capacities in the context of attachment relationships ($M = 6.40; SD = .27$) than controls ($M = 6.75; SD = .43$) as shown by an independent samples t-test ($t(df) = -2.13, p = .049$). Figure 2 shows the distribution by group for RFQ-Y.

45 Out of a possible 2 to 12 (where the maximum optimal reflective function score for the total scale would be 12).
Prior studies have found impaired mentalizing capacities in adolescent and adult patients with Borderline Personality Disorders (Fonagy & Bateman, 2008; Fonagy & Luyten, 2009; Ha & Sharp, 2012). An independent sample t-test found no significant difference on the RFQ-Y between the violent offenders in the current study ($M = 6.40; SD = .27$) and a sample of 49 inpatient adolescents diagnosed with borderline personality disorder ($M = 6.33; SD = .59$ ($t (df) = 1.12, p = .29$) in Ha and Sharp’s 2012 study. In other words, the violent offenders in the
current study exhibited similarly impaired mentalizing capacities in the context of attachment relationships as the Borderline Personality disordered adolescents in Ha and Sharp’s (2012) sample.

*Mentalizing Capacity in the Context of Street Violence*

For the sample as a whole, mean overall RF score was 3.69 ($SD = .88$) with scores ranging from 2.00 to 5.50.$^{46}$ Overall RF score on the MASVI was normally distributed as evidenced by analysis of skewness and kurtosis. Mentalizing capacity in the context of street violence by sampling group is discussed under hypothesis 1 in the test of hypotheses later in this chapter.

$^{46}$ RF scores range from a possible -1, corresponding to negative RF, namely, “distinctly anti-RF or bizarre/inappropriate” to 9, corresponding to full or exceptional RF.
Figure 3. Distribution of MASVI-Overall RF by Group
Figure 4. Distribution of MASVI RF-regarding Perpetrator by Group
Figure 5. Distribution of MASVI RF-regarding Victim by Group

Callous-Unemotional Traits

Sample YPI Total Score mean is 118.89 (SD = 23.36) with scores ranging from 67 to 160.\(^47\) Sample YPI Factor 2 (Callous-Unemotional Dimension) mean was 34.67 (SD = 6.48) with scores ranging from 19 to 50\(^48\) (out of a possible 15 to 60). YPI was normally distributed as evidenced by analysis of skewness and kurtosis.

Violent offender participants obtained significantly higher YPI total scores (\(M = 129.80; SD = 14.23\)) than controls (\(M = 105.25; SD = 26.12\)) \(t (df) = -2.55, p = .02\). In addition, violent

\(^{47}\) out of possible 50 to 200

\(^{48}\) out of possible 15 to 60
offender participants obtained significantly higher YPI-Factor 2 (CU traits) scores ($M = 38; SD = 4.97$) than controls ($M = 30.50; SD = 6.05$) $t(df) = -2.94, p = .01$). Figures 6 and 7 show the distribution of YPI Total and YPI-Factor 2 (CU traits) scores by group.

The YPI does not have established cut-off scores for identifying psychopathic youth. However, Cauffman et al. (2009) found that a YPI total score of 121.5 corresponded to a score of 30 and above on the PCL-YV (Psychopathy Checklist: Youth Version; Forth et al., 2003) in their sample of 1,171 male juvenile offenders. A YPI total score of 121.5 or above was thus adopted in this current study as the cut-off score to identify psychopathic youth. Fifty six percent of the sample as a whole were classified as psychopathic using this cut-off score, namely, 70% of violent offender participants and 37.50% of controls.
Figure 6: YPI Total Scores by Group
Test of Hypotheses:

The relationships between street code adherence, the capacity to mentalize in the contexts of street violence and in attachment relationships, overall level of psychopathic traits and CU traits in particular, were analyzed by examining bivariate correlations between these variables.

**Hypothesis 1:** Violent Offending youth will exhibit poorer mentalizing capacities in the context of street violence than non-offending controls from similar low-income urban neighborhoods.

As predicted, an independent samples t-test showed that violent offenders participants presented with significantly lower overall mentalizing capacities in the context of street violence.
than controls ($M = 4.19; SD = .88$), $t (df) = -2.41$, $p = .03$). In addition, violent offenders presented with significantly lower mentalizing capacities regarding the perpetrators’ perspective ($M = 3.00; SD = .44$) than controls ($M = 3.69, SD = .80$), $t (df) = -2.50$, $p = .02$). Finally, violent offenders presented with significantly lower mentalizing capacities regarding the victim’s perspective ($M = 2.65; SD = .47$) than controls ($M = 3.31, SD = .52$), $t (df) = -2.50, p = .02$). However, as discussed in chapter 5 the qualitative analysis of the MASVI revealed a more complex picture of the differing capacities of the two sampling groups to mentalize the perpetrator’s and victim’s experience during the homicide.

**Hypothesis 2: Participants with higher levels of street code adherence will exhibit poorer capacities to mentalize about street violence.**

A negative correlation with a moderate effect size (albeit not statistically significant) was found between street code adherence and the overall capacity to mentalize about street violence suggesting that street code adherence might plays a moderating role in constraining mentalization about adversaries’ emotional and intentional mental states as well as inhibiting empathy for victims who respond “wrong” during street crimes. The relationship between street code adherence and the capacity to mentalize about street violence is illustrated in the scatterplot in Figure 8.
Hypothesis 3: Participants with higher levels of overall psychopathic traits, and callous-unemotional traits in particular, will exhibit poorer capacities to mentalize about street violence.

Contrary to the hypothesis, higher levels of overall psychopathic traits ($r = -.07, p = .80$) and callous-unemotional traits in particular ($r = -.15, p = .54$) were not significantly associated with a lower overall capacity to mentalize about street violence. Similarly, higher levels of overall psychopathic traits ($r = -.15, p = .56$) and callous-unemotional traits in particular ($r = -.23$, $p = .56$) were not significantly associated with a lower overall capacity to mentalize about street violence.

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49 For Figures 8-10: Violent Offenders are subjects 1-10 (represented by black circles) and Non-Offending controls are subjects 11-18 (represented by clear circles).
were not significantly associated with a lower capacity to mentalize the perpetrator’s perspective. These effect sizes were in the small to medium range. Finally, while higher levels of overall psychopathic traits were not significantly associated with a lower capacity to mentalize the victim’s perspective ($r = -.20, p = .43$, a small to medium effect size), a medium effect size was found for the relationship between higher levels of callous-unemotional traits and lower capacity to mentalize the victim’s experience ($r = -.38, p = .12$). However, while this latter finding was not statistically significant it is suggested that with a larger sample size this effect may be statistically significant. The relationship between level of Callous-Unemotional Traits and Overall Capacity to Mentalize About Street Violence is illustrated in Figure 9.
Figure 9: Relationship Between Level of Callous-Unemotional Traits and Overall Capacity to Mentalize About Street Violence.

Hypothesis 4: The capacity to mentalize in the context of street violence will be positively correlated with the capacity to mentalize in the context of attachment relationships.

A moderate (although non-statistically significant) positive correlation ($r = .40, p = .10$) was found between the capacity to mentalize in the contexts of attachment relationships and street violence which was a medium to large effect size suggesting moderate stability of mentalizing capacities across contexts. However, it is suggested that with a larger sample size this effect may be statistically significant. The relationship between the capacity to mentalize in the context of attachment relationships and street violence is illustrated by figure 10.
Post-Hoc Analyses

Post-Hoc analyses were run to examine the following relationships: (1) street code adherence and overall psychopathic traits and, CU traits in particular; (2) overall psychopathic traits and the capacity to mentalize in the context of attachment relationships; and, (3) street code adherence and mentalizing capacities within the context of attachment relationships. A higher level of street code adherence was associated with a higher level of overall psychopathic traits.
(YPI-Total score) \( r = .60, p = .01 \) and, with a higher level of CU traits in particular (YPI-Factor 2) \( r = .49, p = .04 \) at the 0.05 level. A higher level of overall psychopathic traits (YPI-Total score) was found to be significantly associated with a lower capacity to mentalize in the context of attachment relationship \( r = -.65, p = .01 \). Poorer mentalizing capacities in the context of attachment relationships were found to be significantly associated with higher levels of street code adherence.
Chapter V: Qualitative Results

This chapter first presents the results of the qualitative analysis of the MASVI, focusing on four areas, namely, (1) experience of challenges to one’s physical safety and/or psychological security; (2) participants’ spontaneous capacity for mentalization about street violence; (3) quality of mentalization of the perpetrator’s experience during his commission of the homicide; and, (4) quality of mentalization of the victim’s experience during the unfolding interaction.

Second, a case study of one of the violent offender participants will be presented to demonstrate how breakdowns in mentalizing capacity among high CU and high code adhering youth may, in part, reflect an adaptation to environmental conditions, specifically, exposure to community violence.

Experience of Challenges to one’s Physical Safety and/or Psychological Integrity

Both violent offenders and controls described the sense of power tied to respect and accorded in response to youth who project a violent social identity, carry a weapon and commit acts of retaliatory violence. Respect was described to be engendered through fear: “Because somewhere (i.e., in certain neighborhoods) that’s the only way you get respect is like if somebody fear you. Other than that, a lot of people won’t respect you.” The experience of having respect on the streets was associated with feeling “tough,” like “the top dog” and “a king.” Consequently, “Everybody wants to be a tough guy. Everybody want to play that role and be that guy, gain respect, you know.”

Conversely, being disrespected was associated by violent offenders with feeling “weak,” “helpless,” “worthless,” “soft,” “like a punk,” “embarrassed” and making one feel like “part of the common rabble.” Being disrespected was equated to the loss of one’s sense of physical safety and emotional security:
To not have pride (*i.e.*, respect), you feel like you’re not on the streets. Like you’re not part of it. If you don’t have a sense of pride, you don’t feel like you can walk outside and be a part of the streets, be outside with people who feel like they do have pride, who have confidence. ‘Cause people who don’t have pride, they just go into a depressed state of mind to where they don’t feel like they could do anything. They not too good for anything. I know some people like that. You’re just kind of trapped in and you figure if I go outside I got to deal with this, so I’d rather stay inside and know where I’m secure.

**Interviewer:** You are talking about feeling physically secure and safe? (*Interrupting*)

And then mentally and emotionally safe.

Loss of respect was likened to a form of social annihilation as seen in the following statement: “To lose your reputation, you’re nobody. Nobody acknowledge you anymore, basically. **Interviewer:** That sounds almost like a kind of death in itself. I agree.” This social annihilation and exclusion from street life in one’s neighborhood compounds the street invested adolescents’ experience of being excluded from mainstream society that views him as “a nothing from the ‘hood.” This was voiced for instance by one violent offender in his discussion of how the Korean storekeepers perceive O-Dog in *Menace II Society*:

So they looking at him like he’s nothing. He’s from the hood. **Interviewer:** And what is that like emotionally to feel like you’re nothing? You feel worthless. You feel like, damm, I’m nothing. You in the ‘hood. The ‘hoods a struggle, you know. Everywhere you go. Like to the store, for example. They think you stealing something. The way you move. People wouldn’t even want to walk around you. The way you walk, simple, people are going to think that you’re going to do something, something hot, like rob a store or go hit a person.
Given its role in ensuring both physical safety and psychological well-being, “having the juice” (i.e., respect) is seen as life defining by street code invested youth. In his analysis of Bishop’s murder of Radames in Juice, one of the violent offenders opines: “Yeah, I think that shaped his whole life. Having the juice. What you says goes. He always wants people to fear him and he gonna do whatever it takes for you to fear him.” Elaborating, he states that, “Any means necessary” are thus justified in the preservation of one’s respect: “If you let them do it once, they’ll do it again. If you don’t stop it, it’s not gonna be stopped. You gotta stop it then and there. At any means necessary.” Similarly, Jake kills Curtis in Juice to: “kill the boy so I can get back my manhood.” As discussed later in this chapter, this focus on the defense of one’s respect leads to rationalizations of violent homicidal behavior (e.g., the sense of “doing what you have to do” to survive).

Respect was conceptualized by participants as both an individual and community entity. Accordingly, retaliatory violence in response to disrespect was viewed by street invested youth as enhancing the social capital of both the individual perpetrator and his “whole block.” For example, when called upon to mentalize O-Dog’s experience as he leaves the scene of the double homicide he has committed in Menace II Society, one violent offender states:

Most likely he’s thinking, well I just did something for the neighborhood once again. (…) He does it for his reputation and the neighborhood because he does it..it ups his reputation in his neighborhood and his neighborhood enjoys seeing that (referring to O-Dog showing the video surveillance tape of the double homicide to peers in his neighborhood in a later scene in the movie). Well, where I live at, in (neighborhood), it’s like you have to put all the scared aside and take pride when it comes down to what block you live on and where you’re from because they…nowadays they just shoot you for what
block you’re from. **Interviewer**: So would you say that O-Dog’s actions make the neighborhood feel a sense of pride? Yes.

Controls described being able to hold onto the bigger picture in the face of challenges to their physical and psychological integrity, namely, the future life they aspired to build for themselves that would potentially be erased with an arrest for a violent offense. Indeed, as one control stated:

Well, me, the only reason that I would not do that is that I have respect for myself. I wanna be something in the future and I wouldn’t put it on the line to get back at somebody for one moment. Like to just shoot somebody and spend a long time in prison it’s just not worth it for that one moment. Rather just let it go. Just walk away from the situation.

Respect, as conceptualized by this participant and other controls is internally versus externally derived. In parallel to being held in mind by his attachment figures, the above quoted control participant described his ability to hold his whole current and future self in mind versus focusing only on the part that was disrespected. Anecdotally, for the 3 minor controls who required parental permission to participate in the study permission was provided by their fathers. Each reported a close relationship with his father who accompanied his son to the diner to participate in the study, referencing holding their father’s models of manhood in mind when confronted with challenges to their physical and psychological integrity.

**Assessment of Participants’ Spontaneous Capacity for Mentalization About Street Violence**

The majority of both violent offenders (90%) and controls (75%) exhibited no emotional reaction to the clips. For most violent offenders their identification with the perpetrator versus the victim was largely unclear from their initial narratives of the clips. However, in the context of
the storekeeper’s verbal disrespect of O-Dog’s mother in the *Menace II Society* clip, 30% of violent offenders (contrasting with 0% of controls) showed a loss of distance from (and thus identification with) the perpetrator’s experience. For example, “They (*O-Dog & Caine*) went into the liquor store and he (*male storekeeper*) said something about *my* mother…Because *me* I take mother jokes harshly. I be ready to rip heads off.”

Controls were more frequently clearly identified with the victim’s or bystander’s perspective. Indeed, controls were found to frequently spontaneously incorporate and even adopt the perspective of the bystander in their initial narratives of the scenes. This is illustrated by the following responses to MASVI question 1 from one control participant:

**Juice:** (….) That’s why at the end of the scene they (*Q and Steele*) was like, “do you think he saw us?” and the other guy (*Q*) was like, “yeah he saw us”. So he (*Q*) felt kind of guilty for not helping him (*Bishop*).

**Menace II Society:** (….) and the other kid (*Caine*) was just drinking his beer. Like nothing. But then he just heard a gunshot and he got scared. He was paranoid after that. He heard the gunshot. He dropped his beer. He was surprised. He was like. **What the hell?** And the other guy (*O-Dog*) was just shooting and shooting and shooting. (….) He (*O-Dog*) tells the other guy (*Caine*) to get the money from the register. But he didn’t do it because he was shocked he was scared. He was like *(thinking)* why would he do that. He was just buying beer. That’s it.

**Fresh:** (….) And the two kids was like..(*asks for clarification of names of Fresh and B characters*) let’s go play over there. Yeah, Fresh was the kid I was talking about. Fresh was looking at the girl. It looked like he liked her. And his other friend (*B*) was annoying him. He said the “B” (i.e., Bitch) word about girls. He disrespected her by saying the “B”
word about her. He (*Fresh*) actually got angry. He like, don’t be disrespecting her.

Because he look like a good kid. So Fresh continues to look at the girl. And the other kid (*B*) sees that there is another court open and he’s gonna go play over there. And he’s (*Fresh*) like, Nah. And the other kid (*B*) with Fresh tells Fresh to leave too but Fresh is shocked. Fresh didn’t leave and then he stayed. And he sees the girl got shoot too, in the throat. And she’s in pain too, holding it. Moving her legs and everything. And he doesn’t say anything. He just walks. He grabs her hand and puts his hand on top of her hands. He don’t know what to do. He trying to make sure..I don’t know. The police came. And that’s messed up for him. He is shocked. That probably gonna effect his (*Fresh’s*) future. He probably gonna have nightmares. And then the police came, put their hands on him like, “come on son.”

None of the violent offenders spontaneously referenced the bystander’s perspective.

Violent offenders were found to present with significantly lower mean word count for the narratives they constructed in response to MASVI question 1 (*M* = 80.75; *SD* = 51.94) compared to controls (*M* = 168.50, *SD* = 111.27). While higher word count is not always an indicator of superior mentalizing capacities, the brief initial narratives of the violent offenders were often limited to purely behavioral descriptions of the protagonists’ actions with no reference to underlying mental states. For instance:

*Juice:* They tried to jump him, then the cops came and scared everybody away and then he got him alone and shot him, that’s how I explain it. That’s basically what happened… *(trailing off) (31 words)*

*Menace II Society:* They went into get a beer…that’s it. The lady kept following them. *(13 words).*
As seen in this latter response, 60% of violent offenders (compared to 25% of controls) omitted reference to the occurrence of a homicide in one or more of their initial narratives about the clips suggesting a greater denial of reality. For the most part, controls cited specific intra-psychic, external contextual and even wider contemporary societal factors as shaping the protagonists’ mental states and related behavioral responses. In contrast, violent offenders more frequently described homicidal acts as driven by a vague internal “turmoil” and/or interpersonal “tension” as illustrated below:

   Juice: Alright, it was tension. It was tension. The boys…cops ran up on them. It was tension and tension brings turmoil so he ends up following them and following them and he had a gun so he ends up killing them because the tension got that..because the tension was that thick. So he got rid of the problem before the problem got rid of him. Yeah.

These homicidal acts that “end up” happening and in which victims “wound up being hurt” are seen as detached from their contexts. Both violent offenders and controls rarely spontaneously referenced street code principles as contextual factors in their initial narratives of the clips.

Violent offenders and controls varied widely, both between and within groups, in their capacity to spontaneously mentalize the experiences of the perpetrators, victims and bystanders. Fifty percent of violent offenders spontaneously identified no or few underlying mental states of the perpetrators and victims. Violent offenders who did engage with the protagonists’ underlying mental states showed a greater focus on the mental states of the perpetrators versus victims. Both violent offenders and controls rarely identified the victim’s affective states when held at gunpoint or when dying. Instead, as highlighted above, 62.5% of controls adopted the bystander’s (versus the victim’s) perspective in 1 or more of the clips elaborating on their mental states as they witnessed the scene. Among violent offenders, both the perpetrators’ and victim’s
thought processes were described as focused on the other as a significant threat. However, controls more frequently referenced the perpetrator’s affective state alongside his focus on the victim as a significant threat to be neutralized.

**Mentalization of the Perpetrator’s Experience During the Commission of the Homicide**

The hypothesis that violent offenders would exhibit poorer capacities than controls in terms of mentalizing the perpetrator’s experience during the homicide was borne out by the qualitative analysis of relevant MASVI questions.

**(i) Violent Offenders**

Compared to controls, violent offenders presented with more frequent and extensive breakdowns in their capacity to mentalize the perpetrator’s experience during the commission of the homicide. This ranged from a more restricted engagement with the perpetrator’s affective states to attempts to bypass contemplating his experience during the homicide to the complete collapse of mentalization epitomized by describing the perpetrator’s mind as “going blank.” These varying degrees of breakdown were mirrored by the participants’ own faltering speech, laughter and/or yawning reflecting defensive distancing from contemplating the homicidal act.

Violent offenders were frequently found to evidence minimal engagement with perpetrators’ affective states. Compared to controls, violent offenders less frequently identified perpetrators’ affective states despite questions and follow-up probes that called for mentalization of these experiences. Indeed, references to the perpetrator’s affective mental states were omitted from 30.77% of pertinent responses with further responses identifying that the perpetrator had “no emotions” or “empathy” for the victim. When the perpetrators’ affective states during the homicide were identified, these were largely restricted to the world of basic emotions (e.g., “angry”, “stressed” “embarrassed” “jealous” “happy” and “scared” and their synonyms) with an absence of qualifiers (e.g., “very” etc.). Forty percent of the violent offenders identified the
perpetrator’s powerful “godlike” feeling of wielding a gun and associated positive emotions of feeling “superior,” “amazing”, “happy” and the sense of being “untouchable” during the commission of the homicide. Together, this restricted repertoire of muted affective terms results in a generally stark, un-nuanced portrayal of the perpetrators’ emotions by the violent offenders.

In contrast, the perpetrators’ beliefs about the threat posed by the victim and related intentions to neutralize this threat were more fully elaborated by violent offenders. This task-oriented focus is seen in the inner monologues attributed to the perpetrators, for instance: “I killed them. Mission complete” (Fresh) and “At that moment he’s like, oh, he’s disrespecting me. I’m a clip\(^50\) him. I’m kill him. I’m kill him. No type of feelings. No type of emotions” (Juice). In fact, at times, the perpetrator’s thought processes appeared remarkably goal-oriented. This is seen, for example, in the dual practical and psychological goals (“It’s a sense of security and a sense of pride”) held in mind by Bishop as he shoots and kill Radames in Juice. In order to “take care of business” these perpetrators were seen as holding onto their minds (“it’s all mental”) in the context of a constricted or absent connection to the affective states of the self and victim. Akin to killing an enemy soldier in war, the homicidal act was rationalized by the perpetrator’s sense of “doing what I got to do.” This task-oriented focus emphasized by many of the violent offenders eschews their contemplation of the victim as a person.

Sixty percent of violent offenders attempted to bypass mentalizing the perpetrator’s experience in 1 or more of the 5 homicides across the 3 clips. Of those participants, half did this in 2 out of the 3 movie clips suggesting a habitual way of organizing and coping with a disturbing reality. This took the form of fast-forwarding from the perpetrator’s homicidal intentions to (1) the completed act (e.g., “First he like yeah, I’m a kill him. He killed him. Now he’s thinking, I just killed somebody.”); and/or, (2) post-homicide relief about threat elimination.

\(^{50}\) To clip: to kill or assassinate (urbandictionary.com)
(e.g., “I finally got him…I would say he’s thinking, I guess that’s one less person I got to worry about”) and/or the immediate practical concern of avoiding detection (e.g., “I guess at that moment he’s basically like, oh well, I already did it. Now, how I’m gonna get away with it? Finding the first way out which was a grabbing the lady, finding the tape. And they killed her because she was the witness”).

As the capacity for mentalization begins to collapse, perpetrators were described by some violent offenders as “not thinking.” As the capacity further collapses, minds become “blank,” either entirely void of emotions or hijacked by intense rage that shuts down the capacity for mentalization. Intense rage weakens inhibitory control: “I believe he got very angry very quickly, too quickly to control himself. That’s why he pulled out a gun.” Physical actions are thus seen as decoupled from mental states: “I don’t actually think he’s thinking right there…It’s (his mind) just blank and it’s like just action” and “He was unconscious of what he was doing.” These perpetrators, reminiscent of the “reactive non-mentalizing individuals” (Twemlow et al., 2005) are portrayed by violent offenders as “reacting” versus “responding” defined respectively as “you just do something without thinking” and “you think whatever you about to do through.”

Several violent offenders evoked street code principles as foreclosing mentalization both about the self and other.

Extrapolating from their own experiences of “blacking out” when committing acts of violence in the context of an affectively charged interpersonal conflict, 2 violent offenders inferred that the perpetrators likely experienced a dissociative-like “blacking out” accompanied by memory loss for the homicide. For instance, discussing O-Dog’s shooting of the male storekeeper in Menace II Society, one offender stated: “He was probably lost…he was lost. He
probably blacked out. Yeah. I think he blacked out. (…). Cause usually from experience, I blacked out sometimes and don’t remember what happened. So it probably happened to him.”

(ii) Non-Offending Controls

Controls presented with less frequent and extensive breakdowns in their capacity to mentalize the perpetrator’s experience during the homicide. This was mirrored by a lesser degree of defensive distancing than violent offenders with no instances of yawning or laughing. Fifty percent of controls attempted to bypass mentalizing the perpetrator’s experience in one or more of the five homicides across the three clips compared to 60% of violent offenders. In contrast to violent offenders, no perpetrators were described by controls as experiencing a complete collapse of mentalizing capacities during the homicide.

Overall, controls also largely saw perpetrators as holding onto their minds during the commission of the homicide. Indeed, 2 controls provided a detailed play by play of the perpetrator’s inner monologue debating whether to kill his adversary and psyching himself to kill his adversary (“because when you make up your mind you don’t just go out and do it, you have to prepare your mind for that. That’s why he kept talking to him, like, “what do you think you are doing?” That was him preparing himself. Like psyching himself up”).

Overall, controls appeared significantly more open to contemplating the perpetrator’s thought process in the context of his affective experience identifying his beliefs, thoughts and intentions alongside his affect in 59.38% of responses versus 41.03% of responses from violent offenders. In contrast to the violent offenders, controls only rarely omitted reference to the perpetrator’s affective state or specified that the perpetrator was “feeling nothing at all.” Controls exhibited a relatively greater use of qualifiers when referencing the perpetrator’s affective states, (e.g., “100% angry”; “a little foolish” and “just a little relief”) as well as affective terms with a
heightened intensity such as “rage.” Indeed, several controls provided quite sophisticated portrayals of the perpetrators’ affective states during the commission of the homicide. One control expanded upon the necessity to set aside one’s emotions to “take care of business” evoked by several violent offender participants as follows:

Juice: His feelings in that minute, his heart is like stone. He has no feeling right now (….)
He is not feeling nothing right now but to kill him. So he shows no emotion right now.
He’s just like, do what I have to do and be out. Interviewer: You said he shows no emotions but do you think he doesn’t have any feelings? I mean everybody has feelings but they just buried deep inside. I’m sure that he was feeling scared and nervous at the same time but when it comes down to action you gotta bury all that inside of you so you can take care and finish what you gotta do. Yeah, because sometimes feelings can throw you off. Interviewer: Feelings can throw you off? Could you say more about that? Because if his feelings was to kick in, his scared and nervous feelings and he walked away then like I said before, he (Radames) would catch him lacking another day and Bishop would have died instead of him.

Adherence to street code was only rarely evoked by controls as scripting the perpetrator’s homicidal response. Rather, some controls brought a wider psychological lens to their analysis of the perpetrators’ mental states. Specifically, several controls highlighted the perpetrator’s high levels of trait anger in search of an outlet. For example, Bishop in Juice is described as looking for “an opportunity to act out on his aggression”. Similarly, the male storekeeper’s verbal disrespect towards O-Dog in Menace II Society is viewed as “kind of giv[ing] him a reason to

51 Lacking: being caught off guard.
shoot because he is already trigger happy. He can’t wait to pull the trigger.” Jake in Fresh is viewed as “…not normal. At all.”

**Mentalization of the Victim’s Experiences During the Homicide**

It was predicted that violent offenders would exhibit poorer capacities in terms of mentalizing the victim’s experience in the context of street violence as compared to controls. This was borne out by the qualitative analysis of relevant MASVI questions.

**(i) Violent Offenders**

As highlighted above, the self-oriented thought process attributed to the perpetrators by many of the violent offenders appeared to obscure contemplation of the victim’s experience. Accordingly, victims were not conceptualized as “minds.” When explicitly referenced, victims were frequently reduced to their status as a threat to be eliminated. This was most salient in the context of *Menace II Society* where the perpetrator’s focus on eliminating the surviving witness obliterates her personhood as illustrated by the following:

*Menace II Society*: She was just a witness. He had to get rid of the witness. **Interviewer:** Do you have any sense of other feelings he might have had in that moment when he is killing her? I guess that was it. I guess he is just thinking about his best opportunity to get out the situation.

*Menace II Society*: No witnesses (*yawning*). No face, no case. **Do you have any sense of Bishop’s feelings in that moment?** No, not really. I killed him and I got away with it. Thank God. No face, no case. That’s it.

The dehumanization of the victims is reflected in the callous language attributed to the perpetrators by 5 of the violent offenders, 4 of whom were classified as psychopathic on the YPI:

**Juice**: So he had to terminate him.
Menace II Society: I killed them. Mission complete.

Fresh: (in voice of perpetrator addressing victim) Grab a basketball now. You can’t. You dead. There’s nothing you can do about it. I did it. But you dead. You have a no say in nothing. You are a thing of the past now.

Violent offenders exhibited varying degrees of breakdown in their capacity to mentalize the victims’ experiences. This ranged from a restricted engagement with the victim’s affective states that was frequently observed alongside the detailed elaboration of the victim’s thought processes to the bypassing and complete collapse of mentalization of the victim’s experience.

Compared to controls, violent offenders less frequently referenced victims’ affective states despite questions and follow-up probes that called for mentalization of these experiences. In fact, violent offenders omitted reference to the perpetrator’s affective mental states in 34.70% of responses with some violent offenders specifying that the victim “felt nothing.” For example, the bystander girl victim in Fresh is described as follows: “She not feeling nothing. She dying. What do you feel when you are dying? You trying to catch your breath. You not feeling nothing.”

Violent offenders employed a more limited repertoire of affective terms (14 terms) compared to controls (26 terms). The affective experiences of the victims were frequently minimally elaborated despite probing. The frequent muted intensity of affective terms employed by violent offenders (e.g., the use of “nervous” versus “terrified”) often felt incongruent to the situation. For instance, the male victim in Fresh is described as feeling: “Nervous. And curious as he (Curtis) doesn’t really understand why he is being shot at, like he doesn’t understand what he did wrong.”
Violent offenders tended to elaborate more on the victim’s thought processes at the expense or exclusion of affect with some offenders detailing the victim’s inner monologue as he or she processes his or her predicament. Other violent offenders were found to “dementalize” (Fonagy, Bateman & Luyten, 2012) the victim’s affective experience to focus exclusively on their physical experience. For instance, regarding the bystander girl victim in Fresh: “She was fighting to stay alive. Her leg keeped on twitching and it was fighting…it’s either her body went into shock and she couldn't stop moving up until like all…enough blood was drained away, or her body just went into shock and she had a seizure.”

Twenty percent of violent offenders attempted to bypass mentalizing the victim’s experience in one or more of the five homicides. For example: “Damm, I (in voice of bystander girl victim) just died because of this guy? I just died ‘cause he can’t control his emotions? Nah, it’s not good” (Fresh). One violent offender exhibited a complete collapse of mentalization when called upon to contemplate the victim’s experience. Breakdowns in the capacity to mentalize the victim’s experience were mirrored by breaks in the narrative and the defensive occurrence of yawning and laughter among violent offenders. This laughter had variously a nervous, unsettled quality (e.g., Menace II Society: “He (O-Dog) had no kind of consideration. (Nervous laugh). It’s not funny but it’s like, the people who do that is just ruthless) or a callous quality (e.g., Juice: He (Radames) dead (laughing)).

Street code principles are evoked by some violent offenders to rationalize the perpetrator’s homicidal violence towards code violators. Accordingly, victims are seen as precipitating their own deaths with a resultant absence of sense of victim empathy on the part of the perpetrator for acts seen as justifiable under code principles. Among violent offenders, the inhibited empathy attributed to perpetrators contrasts with expressions of regret and remorse for
non-code violators and innocent bystanders. Indeed, for both violent offenders and controls, identification with non-code adhering victims (namely, Curtis and the unnamed bystander girl in *Fresh*) resulted “overmentalizing” the victim’s thoughts in a manner that is incongruous to the situation. Rational incredulity overwrites pure terror as seen in the following: “I know all that’s going through my head (*from perspective of Curtis*) is...really? Because of a ball game? Like, that’s immature. That’s childish. It’s a shame” (*Fresh*).

**(ii) Non-Offending Controls**

For the most part, controls also described the perpetrator as conceptualizing the victim/s primarily as a threat to his physical or psychological integrity rather than as a “mind.” However, the rare use of callous language was in the voice of the perpetrator after explicitly de-identifying themselves from the perpetrator’s actions. Victims are thus not dehumanized to the same extent as by violent offenders.

Overall, contrasting with violent offenders, controls retained the capacity to mentalize the victim’s experience throughout the interaction, balancing the victim’s thoughts, beliefs, intentions and affect. References to victims’ affective experiences were absent in only 15% of responses from controls across the five homicides compared to 34.70% of responses from violent offenders. Furthermore, no victims were described by controls as “feeling nothing” during the homicide. As noted above, controls employed a wider repertoire of affective terms (26) versus violent offenders (14). In contrast to violent offenders, the majority of controls used qualifiers, (e.g., “scared as hell”, “pure shock”, “very helpless”) and/or language conveying heightened emotional distress (e.g., “panicking”, “frantic”). Overall, this results in a more complex rendition of victim’s shifting affective experience as the interaction unfolds. In terms of mentalizing the victim’s thought processes, the identification of non-self-focused thoughts by
controls is striking. For instance, from the perspective of the male storekeeper in *Menace II Society*:

He is probably thinking about his family. How my kids gonna survive without me? He’s probably thinking is he (*O-Dog*) gonna kill my wife also? He’s terrified because he know he gonna die…He’s almost getting prepared to die because he know he gonna die.

Paralleling their infrequent breakdowns when called upon to mentalize the perpetrators’ experience during the homicide, controls presented with only one instance of a breakdown in the capacity to mentalize victims’ experiences during the homicide. However, the victim’s experience of freezing both mentally and physically when held at gunpoint was described by 2 controls. Finally, in terms of process, and again contrasting with the violent offenders, there were no occurrences of defensive distancing through yawning or nervous laughter and significantly few instances of faltering speech among controls when called upon to contemplate the victim’s experience.

(iii) Processing of Cues of the Victim’s Escalating Emotional Distress

Contrary to expectations, violent offenders exhibited better ability than controls in the recognition of the victims’ verbal, vocal and/or facial cues of emotional distress. More specifically, violent offenders explicitly identified the victim’s emotional distress in 72.22% of their responses compared to 50% of responses among controls. Many study participants referenced their own frequent experiences of being racially profiled in the context of discussing the perpetrator-victim interactions in *Menace II Society* clip. For these participants, self-focused distress was the dominant emotional reaction. Furthermore, overall, the 7 violent offenders classified as psychopathic on the YPI showed intact (recognition of distress of both victims in
Menace) or partially intact ability (recognition of distress in one of victims in Menace) to process the cues of emotional distress presented in the clips.

(iv) Level of Remorse Attributed to Perpetrators

For both violent offenders and controls, the level of remorse attributed to perpetrators varied both within participants across the three movie clips and within groups. Street code principles were evoked by both violent offenders and controls as shaping the level of remorse attributed to the perpetrator. More specifically, some perpetrators were described as experiencing a lack of remorse for victims viewed as precipitating their own deaths through violating street code principles and conversely, more frequent attributions of remorse for the non-code driven murder of Curtis and the innocent bystander female teen in Fresh.

Case Study: Street Code Adherence and Exposure to Community Violence as Mediators of Impoverished Emotional Responsiveness and Inhibited Victim Empathy

Hassan is a 19 year-old African-American male self-reporting residence in a low-income Brooklyn neighborhood and a history of court involvement for an assault case. His investment in street culture is evidenced by his obtaining the highest score among study participants on the Adherence to Street Code Related Beliefs (Stewart et al., 2006) measure (26 out of a possible 28) as well as by his self-disclosure of his affiliation with the Crip street gang. Additionally, during the MASVI he expressed his identification with and admiration for the code-adhering O-Dog in Menace II Society: “O-Dog that’s my man. He living young and wise. Just like us. He gangster. He not scared.” Of relevance to the discussion that follows on violence exposure as a potential mediating factor in the relationship between CU traits and violent criminal behavior was his disclosure of his extensive exposure to community violence. This includes both witnessed (i.e., the murder of his best friend) and unwitnessed gun violence (i.e., the non-fatal shooting of a close friend).
In terms of his capacity for mentalizing within the context of attachment relationships, Hassan obtained a RFQ-Y score of 6.30 (where scores ranged from a possible 2 to 12 with 12 representing optimal reflective functioning). Hassan’s score is virtually identical to the mean RFQ score ($M = 6.33$, $SD = .59$) for the borderline personality disordered adolescents ($n = 80$) in Ha & Sharp’s 2012 study, a diagnosis associated with impaired reflective function in both adolescents (Ha & Sharp, 2012) and adults (Fonagy & Bateman, 2008, Fonagy & Luyten, 2009).

In terms of his capacity for reflective functioning within the context of street violence, Hassan obtained an overall RF score of 2 on the MASVI, a RF score of 2 regarding the perpetrators’ perspective and a RF score of 2 regarding the victims’ perspective as assessed by an independent rater. The coder noted the following: “Overall score is a 2 as his mentalization is not entirely absent but rather references to mental states are limited, one dimensional and too vague to qualify for anything higher” (RF Coding Form notes).

In terms of his level of psychopathic traits, Hassan was classified as psychopathic on the YPI using Cauffman et al.’s (2009) score of 121.5 or above as the cut off score to identify psychopathic youth. However, his YPI Total score of 127 (out of a possible 160) as well as his YPI-Factor 2 (CU traits) score of 33 (out of possible 60) were both slightly below the means observed in the current study for the violent offender sampling group, namely mean YPI Total score of 129.80 ($SD = 14.23$) and mean YPI-Factor 2 (CU Traits) score of 38 ($SD = 4.97$). Furthermore, when YPI data is analyzed as a continuous versus categorical variable, Hassan presents with lower levels of psychopathic traits than some of the psychopathic youth in the study whose YPI scores ranged from 123 to 160.

Hassan’s responses to the initial open-ended unstructured questions on the MASVI that assessed his capacity for spontaneous mentalization were as follows:
Juice: One killed a member of the other crew cause they got beef. So he killed the leader of the other crew. It’s what happened. (24 words)

Menace II Society: One thing, the way he was stall (inaudible on the audio-recording) and end up having to rob the people. End up doing murder and robbery, committing murder and a robbery. (26 words)

Fresh: He feel embarrassed so he ended up killing the boy because the boy liked to play basketball more than him. That's it. (22 words)

As seen above, Hassan showed no emotional reactions to the events of the clips. His brief responses (mean word count of 24 words) were characterized by no or only minimal elaboration of the protagonists’ mental states. No thoughts, feelings, intentions or needs were attributed to the characters in the Juice and Menace II Society clips. Both of these responses were given RF scores of 1 (absence of RF) with the coder noting an exclusive focus on behavioral descriptions to the exclusion of mental states. Jake in Fresh is described as “embarrassed” with this response given a RF score of 3 (questionable or low RF). He did not spontaneously identify intrapsychic factors driving these conflicts. Contextual factors were only minimally elaborated. Specifically, while Hassan related the conflict in Juice to “street beef,” the nature of which he does not clarify, he described the perpetrators in the other clips to “end up doing murder and robbery” (Menace II Society) and “to end up killing the boy because the boy liked to play basketball more than him” (Fresh). Thus, from Hassan’s perspective, the homicides were largely divorced from their relational contexts.

Analysis of Hassan’s MASVI responses shows that street code scripts his behavioral responses to interpersonal conflicts on the streets precipitated by disrespect. This is consistent with the reactive non-mentalizing stance described by Twemlow et al (2005). The prominence of
this “reflexivity of action” or “action without thinking or feeling” on this and other interviews is highlighted by the coder (RF Coding Form notes). Throughout the MASVI, Hassan cited numerous street rules, advancing these as rationalizations for the perpetrator’s commission of the homicide. These rules included: (1) “Get him before he gets you. That’s the rule”; (2) “Handle your business”; (3) “If you pull a straw\(^{52}\) you shoot. That’s the rule. You pull it out, you shoot. So shoot” (and the related “You pull out and shoot. You don’t pull out and fake. You got to shoot”); (4) “Snitches get stitches”; (5) Mind your own business…because if you snitch you’re going to have to get killed”; and, (6) “You disrespecting my mom. You have to go. It’s night, night…if somebody disrespect you, that’s a rule.” Indeed, the RF coder noted the following: “From the mentalization standpoint, scores are low. But from the street code perspective he understands and interprets the situation accurately. The rules of the street are very precise, almost black and white and the consequences for violating them are clear – you get killed” (RF Coding Form). His endorsement of the perpetrator’s violent responses to the experience of being disrespected is seen in his personal responses to the clips. For instance, in discussing the Menace II Society clip he commented that if someone verbally disrespected his mother he would “beat them half to death.” Significantly, he relates the strength and extent of one’s response to being disrespected not to the extent of one’s anger (as by some of the control participants) but to the dictates of street gang rules: “And Crip rules, you have to shoot somebody six times, that’s Crip rules. And if you lose one (i.e., fellow gang member) you have to kill two.”

Following these street rules, Hassan notes, is “the only way to survive” in his neighborhood. As the coder observes: “There is very little nuance or conflict. It’s a survivor’s mentality” (RF Coding Form). Like other study participants, Hassan describes how respect, or in his language “street credibility,” is hard won and easily lost (Anderson, 1999):

\(^{52}\) Straw: gun (urbandictionary.com)
It doesn’t matter how much street credibility you got, how many people you kill, if you lose… if you were scared of somebody to do anything one time, you lose all your street credibility. You lose everything. **Interviewer: So you could have that reputation for years but lose it in one moment?** In one moment. In one second. Just by somebody saying they came to disrespect you. You walk away. Don’t do nothing. Everybody going to know about it and you lose all your credibility.

Hassan describes the experience of losing one’s street credibility and the imperative to regain it is as follows:

You’ll be sad. You’ll be soft. You’ll feel soft. Nobody will respect your shit. Everybody be disrespecting you. They see that you’re not about nothing. (…) I’d have to get it back again. **Interviewer: You’d have to get it back again?** Smoke them. Smoke whoever disrespect you.

His readiness to risk his life to defend his street credibility is conveyed by the following sentiment: “You don’t want to die like a punk or something, die as a real man.” When questioned about what he imagines it would feel like to die like a punk he responds: “It’s like dying like you didn’t try to survive.” The disavowal of fear in the context of the perpetrator’s focus on regaining his lost status was also highlighted by the coder (RF Coding Form).

In addition to operating as a script for interpersonal conflicts on the streets, Hassan’s adherence to street code is seen to inhibit his capacity for empathic responsiveness for code-adhering victims and non-code adhering victims who are perceived to violate code principles. The association of code beliefs and accompanying emotions was also highlighted by the coder. Hassan exhibits callous-unemotional traits as he speaks in his voice during the MASVI and attributes these emotions to the perpetrators. Both participant and perpetrators were found to
present with an impoverished display of emotions. This was evidenced by a limited repertoire of affective terms (namely, “scared” ‘bad” and “sad”) when contemplating the victims’ experiences that were striking in their muted intensity and lack of elaboration. In contrast, Hassan gave a more detailed elaboration of the perpetrators’ thought processes during their commission of the homicide emphasizing the significant threat posed by the victims to the perpetrators’ physical and/or psychological integrity. For example, discussing Bishop’s experience of being confronted by Radames in *Juice*, he describes Bishop as “thinking about what might happen ‘cause the guy had a knife. He got a lot of options out there. He got options to kill him, give him a buck fifty, slice his face. He got a lot of options.” Similarly, he views Curtis in *Fresh* as intentionally seeking to humiliate Jake, namely, “trying to show off. Beat me (i.e., Jake) in street credibility” as opposed to simply being a better player. Hassan’s own preoccupation with interpersonal dominance and the restoration of this status when disrespected that he extends to the perpetrators has, though it’s self-focus, the effect of obscuring the perpetrator’s ability to contemplate the victim-other as a mind.

Hassan’s adherence to street code principles inhibits his empathy for violators of code-principles, both code-adherents who are “in the game” (e.g., Radames in *Juice*) and non-code-adherents (e.g., the storekeepers in *Menace II Society*) whom he views as having precipitated their own death. Indeed, Hassan remarked almost laughing that non-code adherents who are “not part of the game” or “who work in the hood” are expected to “know the rules”, adding that, “they gonna do a couple of mistakes and they’ll figure it out.” Hassan’s callous-disregard for code-violating victims (such as the female storekeeper), who from his perspective are reduced to their status as a threat to be neutralized, is expressed through language such as: “Like, I started it.”

53 Buck Fifty: deep-tissue stabbing slashing across requiring numerous stitches (i.e., 150) (Urban dictionary.com)
finish it” and “He (O-Dog) can tell that she gonna snitch on him so he just kill her. Smoke\(^{54}\) her. Smoke her, I mean.”

However, he expresses his disapproval of Jake’s murder of Curtis that he views as non-code driven:

I didn’t give him (Jake) no credibility for killing that little kid (Curtis). I would give him credibility that he is a killer. I respect that he kill people and he’s not scared. That’s credible. But you talking about credibility. I’m not going to give it to him. I don’t respect that.

This contrasts with his admiration of O-Dog highlighted above. However, despite his callous-unemotional responses to the murders of the code-violating victims in Juice and Menace II Society, X exhibits pockets of preserved empathic responsiveness. When first asked to contemplate the experience of the unnamed bystander girl victim, Hassan initially reverts to discussing the perpetrator’s perspective seemingly in an attempt to avoid mentalizing the victim’s experience. Analysis of both the content and process of his subsequent discussion of the victim’s experience in Fresh finds that he yawns as he evokes his own exposure to community violence in the context of this discussion:

Fresh: Yeah. She was about to die. She was close. She was close. She was unbelievably close (**yawning**). She would still have died. It looked like the bullets went through. I know one of my friends he got shot but him the bullet went in, come out of his eyes. So he only got one eye now.

Analysis of this response suggests that Hassan’s impoverished emotional response may not entirely be attributable to the early temperamental style exhibited by high CU anti-social youth

\(^{54}\) To smoke someone: to kill someone (urbandictionary.com)
described by Frick (2009). Rather, it is posited that that this may, in part, reflect the “turning off” of emotions consistent with the emotional numbing characteristic of PTSD (Pameri Sams & Truscott, 2004) corresponding in terms of its differing etiology to the secondary versus primary variant of juvenile psychopathy (Kimonis et al., 2012). However, while Hassan self-disclosed his history of exposure to severe and chronic trauma in the form of community violence, the current study did not formally assess participants’ history of exposure to community violence nor gather data on the experience of relational trauma such as parental rejection, neglect and abuse as well as the presence of CU traits during childhood. Consequently, the observation that Hassan’s impoverished emotional response may be in part an adaptation to environmental conditions remains at the level of conjecture.

After initially expressing disapproval of Jake’s homicidal response to feeling disrespected by his younger opponent on the basketball court, Hassan quietly acknowledges how he might well have responded similarly: “Like, I don't know how I would act if that was me, the kid was playing like that. I don't know how I would act. But by looking at it, yeah, I feel sad. But I don't know how I'm gonna act. I'm gonna make a quick act and then I'm going to be like, oh, damn.”

As the interview concludes Hassan discusses his aspirations for the future. Adamant that he will not bring his future son “into the game” and in the context of his articulated goals for college and legitimate employment he voices his uncertainty about the extent to which he wishes to remain “in the game” with its surrender of self-hood to street code principles.
Chapter VI: Discussion

First, quantitative results of the major hypotheses and qualitative findings of the MASVI interview will be summarized and discussed with regard to relevant theory. Second, strengths and limitations of the study as well as future directions will be outlines. Third, clinical and policy implications for the evaluation and treatment of street code invested violent offenders will be discussed.

(1) Discussion of Quantitative Findings

The study investigated the relationships among level of street code adherence, overall level of psychopathic traits, and CU traits in particular and the capacity to mentalize in the contexts of street violence and attachment relationships in a sample of minority violent offending versus non-offending male youth. Study hypotheses predicted that higher levels of street code adherence, overall psychopathic traits and specifically, CU traits, would negatively impact the capacity of adolescents in this sample to mentalize in the contexts of street violence.

As predicted, independent sample t-tests showed that violent offender participants presented with significantly lower overall mentalizing capacities in the context of street violence as well as significantly lower mentalizing capacities regarding both the perpetrators’ and victims’ perspectives than non-offending controls from similar low-income urban neighborhoods. This quantitative finding would seem to support Allen’s (2012) assertion that, while acknowledging the complex array of risk factors implicated in violent behavior, “the final common pathway for acts of violence is the momentary inhibition of mentalizing - temporary mindblindedness” (p.325). However, as discussed later in this chapter the qualitative analysis of the MASVI revealed a more complex picture of the differing capacities of violent offenders versus controls to mentalize the perpetrator’s and victim’s experience during the homicide.
A negative correlation with a moderate effect size (albeit not statistically significant) was found between street code adherence and the overall capacity to mentalize about street violence suggesting that street code adherence plays a moderating role in constraining mentalization about adversaries’ emotional and intentional mental states as well as inhibiting empathy for victims who respond “wrong” during street crimes. However, as highlighted in chapter IV with a larger sample size this effect may be statistically significant.

Contrary to the hypothesis, higher levels of overall psychopathic traits, and CU traits in particular, were not significantly associated with a lower overall capacity to mentalize about street violence. However, a medium effect size was found for the relationship between higher levels of callous-unemotional traits and lower capacity to mentalize the victim’s (though not the perpetrator’s) experience. While this latter finding was not statistically significant, it is suggested that with a larger sample size this current moderate finding may become statistically significant. As discussed later in this chapter, high CU youth may not present with deficits in their ability to mentalize the victim’s emotional distress but rather deficits in their ability to use distress cues as a signal to desist from their aggressive behavior (Woodworth & Washbusch, 2007).

Fonagy (1999) asserts that that “reflective capacity in one domain of interpersonal interaction may not generalize to others” (p.12). In the present study a moderate (although non-statistically significant) positive correlation was found between the capacity to mentalize in the contexts of attachment relationships and street violence suggesting moderate stability of mentalizing capacities across contexts. Given the small sample size and narrow range of scores on both of these instruments among study participants, this relationship should be further tested with a larger sample as well as with a control sample without exposure to street culture.
Post-hoc analyses found a higher level of street code adherence to be associated with a higher level of overall psychopathic traits (YPI-Total score) and with a higher level of CU traits in particular (YPI-Factor 2). This finding is consistent with prior empirical research (Pardini, 2011) that found high CU traits to be associated with the endorsement of social goals related to interpersonal dominance, forced respect and revenge—goals that are consistent with street code principles.

A higher level of overall psychopathic traits (YPI-Total score) was found to be associated with a lower capacity to mentalize in the context of attachment relationships. Currently, there is a paucity of empirical studies investigating mentalizing capacities among psychopathic individuals in the context of attachment relationships. However, while not assessing for level of psychopathy, Levinson and Fonagy (2004) found that the psychiatrically disordered adult male prisoners in their study who had committed violent offenses exhibited the lowest level of reflective functioning in the context of the attachment relationships (as assessed by the Adult Attachment Interview) compared to non-forensic personality disordered patients and normal controls.

Lower mentalizing capacities in the context of attachment relationships were found to be associated with higher levels of street code adherence. This finding can be interpreted in terms of Bateman & Fonagy’s (2012) clinical observation that “individuals with limited mentalization drift toward individuals with whom they can have highly predictable patterns of interaction, even if these interactions are quite limited and inflexible” (p.293). From this perspective, individuals whose early attachment related experiences did not support the acquisition of adequate mentalizing capacities in the context of attachment relationships may be more drawn to the predictable yet organizing framework for interpersonal interactions provided by street code.
(2) Discussion of Qualitative Findings

(i) Mentalization About the Perpetrator: Summary of Qualitative Findings and Relevant Theory

“Fear drives the Hood”

It was predicted that violent offenders would exhibit poorer mentalizing capacities in the context of street violence as compared to controls. This prediction was borne out by the qualitative analysis of the capacity to mentalize about the perpetrator’s experience on the MASVI. Compared to controls, perpetrators were seen by violent offenders to present with more frequent and extensive breakdowns in mentalizing capacity during their commission of the homicide. These breakdowns ranged from a generally more restricted engagement with the perpetrator’s affective states (specifically, the more frequent omission of affective states, the use of affective states of muted intensity and the more limited repertoire of affective terms) to bypassing contemplating the perpetrator’s mental states to the complete collapse of mentalization epitomized by the perpetrator’s mind described as “going blank.” These more frequent breakdowns were paralleled by the greater degree of defensive distancing (e.g., breaks in the narrative, yawning, and laughter) exhibited by violent offenders compared to controls. In the context of their generally restricted engagement with the perpetrator’s affective states, violent offenders were observed to more fully elaborate the perpetrator’s beliefs about the threat posed by the victim and related intentions to neutralize this threat. In comparison, overall controls were more able to elaborate on the perpetrator’s affects, beliefs and intentions. Finally, for the most part, controls related the protagonists’ mental states and subsequent behaviors to specific intra-psychic and external contextual factors driving the unfolding conflict. In contrast, violent offenders more frequently described the homicidal acts as driven by a vague internal “turmoil” and/or interpersonal “tension.”
The absence of paranoia is considered a characteristic of good mentalization (Fonagy & Bateman, 2006). This is defined as “not considering the thoughts of others as in themselves a significant threat and having in mind the possibility that minds can be changed” (p.68). The few studies that have investigated the mental health status of juvenile homicide offenders (JHOs) at the time of the offense (e.g., Lewis et al, 1988; Myers et al., 1995, 1998) highlight the role of paranoid ideation (in the absence of overt psychosis) in driving the homicidal act. Myers and Scott (1998) opine that, “the episodic psychotic symptoms experienced so commonly by the juvenile murderers in this study are most likely multi-factorial in nature, with constitutional, neurological, environmental, and cultural underpinnings” (p.172). Ford and Blaustein (2013) write that:

Exposure to psychological trauma, particularly in childhood while the brain and mind are rapidly developing (Steinberg, 2009) can lead to a negative cascade that begins with involuntary self-protective shifts in the brain (“survival mode,” Ford, 2009), [and] continues as a preoccupation with detecting and surviving threats (Pine, 2007). (p.667)

This hypervigilance towards “detecting and surviving” threats in the context of the constant potential for the eruption of violence is seen among study participants and in particular, highlighted by the case study presented in the preceding chapter. Indeed, Myers and Scott (1998) note that this hypervigilance creates the stress known to contribute to transient psychotic symptoms. Furthermore, Myers and Scott (1998) relate paranoid thinking among minority JHOs (who are disproportionately represented among JHO samples) to the “cultural paranoia” stemming from “the racism that minorities are exposed to in their daily lives (Grier & Cobbs, 1968)” (p.172). This resulting hypervigilance towards detecting and eliminating environmental threats is described by study participants as follows: “So like I say, you never know what can
happen in the hood at any time and any place” and “It’s the hood. You never know what’s gonna happen, how’s it going to happen. “I feel sorry for your mother” (referencing the storekeeper’s comment to O-Dog). Boom (mimicking the sound of gunfire). You never know what’s going to happen. You never know.”

Intense rage in response to challenges to the perpetrator’s physical safety and/or psychological integrity is described by violent offenders to inhibit the capacity for mentalization producing “reactive non-mentalizing individuals” (Twemlow et al., 2005). The capacity to mentalize is also seen to be inhibited by fear (Slade, personal communication, October 30th, 2010), whether expressed directly as fearful affect attributed to the perpetrator or indirectly through the perpetrator’s focus on the perceived threat posed by the victim. Indeed, at the conclusion of the interview, one violent offender surmises that aggression is “led by fear,” stating:

I guess fear drives the hood. That’s the pathway to a lot of things, I’m guessing. A whole lot of beef. A lot of wars. A lot of killings because of fear. To feel like if you don’t kill this person, they’ll kill you. Or if you don’t get to that person, they’re going to get you. I guess aggression is led by fear.

As the capacity for mentalization collapses, minds are described to become “blank” with some offenders inferring from their experience that the perpetrator experiences a dissociative-like “blacking out” accompanied by memory loss for the homicide. As one offender states with a yawn, “He was just, what’s that word? He was unconscious of what he was doing?” As Fonagy (2006) writes, for individuals who commit acts of violence, “the possibility of disconnecting internal state and action will lead to actions that are not curtailed by mentalization of their implications” (p.36) and that are experienced, as described in the afore-cited response, as
“agentless.”

Fonagy (2004) writes that, “Violence is normally triggered when an idea, a feeling, a prejudice, a suspicion, is mistaken for physical reality. The act of violence reflects the complimentary confusion – the erroneous belief that a physical act can eradicate a mental one” (p.28). Qualitative analysis of MASVI responses regarding O-Dog’s experience of the verbal disrespect of his mother in the *Menace II Society* clip found that challenges to the psychological integrity of street oriented youth can spark “a fleeting thought of unacceptability or inadequacy [that] can become “as if” it were objective reality” (Bateman & Fonagy, 2006, p.71).

Significantly, several violent offenders expressed their uncertainty about whether the male storekeeper’s “I feel sorry for your mother” comment reflected his acquaintance with O-Dog’s mother and thus reflected objective reality. Homicidal violence was conceptualized by some violent offenders as an attempt to eradicate these disturbing “as if” objective reality thoughts. This is most powerfully illustrated by an offender participant who analyses O-Dog’s homicidal response to the male storekeeper’s verbal disrespect as follows:

*Menace II Society:* Like he (*O-Dog*) actually, he have to respond to it in a way. (….) I just guess he felt like he had to shoot him (*the male storekeeper*) to just get that thought out of his head. Get that thought out of his head so he can live day to day. Even still knowing deep inside that the storekeeper was right. (….) He took them out (*i.e., killed them*) so you won't be able to, I guess, show reality. Yeah. (….) Even though consciously he still, yeah. But he won't have to see it face-to-face, but deep inside he knows.

However, as the participant acknowledges above, O-Dog’s homicidal response fails to completely eradicate this disturbing thought from his consciousness.
(ii) Mentalization About the Victim: Summary of Qualitative Findings and Relevant Theory

“There is two different types of people, the people who get or there’s the people who got get. Basically, it’s either you gonna be the victim or you gonna be the victimizer. There’s nothing else to say”

As outlined in the literature review, mentalization, as an interpersonal reflective capacity, is conceptually related to empathy. The capacity to mentalize and experience empathy for the victim’s experience rests in the ability to infer mental states (i.e., feelings, beliefs, intentions, needs) from the victim’s verbal, vocal and facial cues of distress as well as from inferred knowledge about the victim’s experience of the unfolding interaction. Qualitative findings regarding participants’ capacity to mentalize the victim’s experience are first summarized and then discussed through the dual lenses of street code adherence and CU traits.

It was predicted that violent offenders would exhibit poorer capacities in terms of mentalizing the victim’s experience in the context of street violence as compared to controls. This was borne out by the qualitative analysis of the MASVI. For the most part, both violent offenders and controls did not identify the perpetrator as contemplating his victim/s as a “mind” during his commission of the crime. Rather, references to the victim primarily conceptualized him or her as a threat to the perpetrator’s physical security and/or psychological integrity. However, controls were found to be more frequently identified with the victim and/or bystander’s perspective as evidenced by their expressions of disapproval for the perpetrator’s actions and/or elaboration of the bystander’s perspective. In contrast, violent offenders frequently reduced victims to a threat to be eliminated, dehumanizing the victim through their use of callous language.

Violent offenders exhibited varying degrees of breakdown in their capacity to mentalize
the victim’s experience. This ranged from their frequent minimal engagement with the victim’s affective states (e.g., omission of affective states and specifying that the victim “felt nothing”) that was often observed to occur alongside their elaboration of the victim’s thought processes to the bypassing and complete collapse of mentalization. In contrast, overall, controls were found to retain the capacity to mentalize the victim’s experience throughout the interaction, balancing the victim’s thoughts, intentions, beliefs and affect. Compared to violent offenders, controls were found to employ a wider repertoire of affective terms (24 versus 14). Language and qualifiers were used by controls to convey the greater intensity of the victim’s escalating distress resulting in a more nuanced portrayal of the victim’s experience.

For both violent offenders and controls, the level of remorse attributed to the perpetrator varied both within participants across the 3 clips and within the violent offender versus control sampling groups. Attributions ranged from self-focused concerns with no or minimal reference to the level of remorse, specific reference to the perpetrator’s remorselessness, attribution of positive affects experienced by the perpetrator (e.g., “joy”) to the attribution of guilt and remorse.

The perpetrator’s self versus other focus in the context of disrespect violence was emphasized by many of the violent offender participants. This was evidenced by the almost complete absence of references to the victim as a “mind” during the homicide. Accordingly, as Bateman and Fonagy (2006) explain, this “temporarily (loss of) awareness of them (i.e., victims) as ‘minds’ allows perpetrators to “momentarily treat them as physical objects” (p.3). This self-focus, specifically, on threat elimination and the restoration of a sense of physical safety and psychological integrity subsequent to being disrespected, is driven by both adherence to street code principles and CU traits, both of which are associated with the endorsement of social goals
related to interpersonal dominance, forced respect and revenge (Pardini, 2001). Consequently, the ability to contemplate the victim’s experience is frequently described by violent offenders as obscured by the perpetrator’s primary preoccupation with restoring his sense of interpersonal dominance as illustrated by the following responses:

*Juice:* I think he (*Bishop*) felt like he got his heart back. He was not scared no more. He basically got pay back. *Interviewer:* Could you say more about how that felt to get his heart back? He just felt strong like a man again. *Interviewer:* So in that moment when he’s pulling the trigger…(*interrupting*) He felt like a man.

*Menace II Society:* I guess he felt, I guess superior. Just knowing the fact that you can take somebody’s life, I guess it make you feel like, I wouldn’t say God-like but like you over somebody kinda. Like you control their fate.

*Fresh:* (…) So in his mind he (*Jake*) probably just did what he had to do to stay best.

Contrary to expectations, violent offenders exhibited better ability than controls in the recognition of the victims’ cues of emotional distress as assessed through the analysis of MASVI questions 9 and 10 for the *Menace II Society* clip. More specifically, violent offenders explicitly identified the victim’s emotional distress in 72.22% of their responses compared to 50% of responses among controls. Furthermore, overall, of the 7 violent offenders classified as psychopathic on the YPI, 3 (42.86%) showed intact\(^55\) and 3 (42.86%) showed partially intact ability\(^56\) to process the verbal, vocal and/or facial cues of emotional distress presented in the clips.

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\(^55\) Intact ability was defined as the ability to process the verbal, vocal and/or facial cues of emotional distress of both victims (male and female storekeeper) in *Menace II Society*.

\(^56\) Partially intact ability was defined as the ability to process the cues of emotional distress of one of the two victims in the clip.
This latter finding runs counter to Fonagy’s (2003) view that interpersonal violence is “largely incompatible with a simultaneous representation of the subjective state of the other” (p.191). However, as discussed in the literature review, Woodworth and Washbusch (2007) interpret the finding of deficits among high CU youth in processing cues of emotional distress as follows:

Individuals high in CU may not have a deficit in the recognition of a fearful expression, but rather a deficit in using fearful expressions as submissive cues to signal a decrease in their aggressive behavior. In fact, for individuals with higher psychopathy scores, fearful cues may actually signal an increased vulnerability and susceptibility to be preyed on that may actually facilitate their aggressive behavior. (p.240)

The recognition of the emotional distress of the storekeeper and his wife in *Menace II Society* may therefore signal their vulnerability and serve to increase the psychopathic offender’s level of aggression. This is illustrated by the following response from a violent offender participant regarding the distressed screams of the female storekeeper:

**Menace II Society:** He already told her to shut up. He told her to shut up, she’s still screaming. He’s like, now, you’re getting on my nerves now. Now I’m gonna kill you because you’re getting on my nerves.

Indeed, urban youth who adhere to street code principles have been described as responding to the display of submissive cues by victims of street violence as a signal to unleash greater physical violence. Given that identity vulnerability is viewed as a critical determinant of street code adherence (e.g., Bracher, 2000, Fagan & Wilkinson, 1998), the display of physical and psychological vulnerability by the victim is theorized to bring forth within the perpetrator the
desire to kill off this vulnerable part of the mirrored by the victim’s submissive behavior.

Although writing about male perpetrators of domestic violence, Fonagy (1999) observes, “Violent men have to establish a relationship in which their partner acts as a vehicle for intolerable self-states. They manipulate the relationship to engender the self-image in the other that they feel desperate to disown” (p.13). Fonagy’s observation of the dual function of violence, namely, “to recreate and re-experience the alien self within the other and to destroy it in the unconscious hope that it will be gone forever” (p.13) seems applicable to the code-adhering adolescent perpetrators portrayed in the clips and who participated in the current study. Fonagy (1999) describes how perpetrators of domestic violence use “oppressive jealousy” to “keep the partner captive and available to regulate self-states” (p.13). The extreme sensitivity of code-adhering violent youth towards assaults on their physical and psychological selves (Anderson, 1999) can be seen as shaped both by code adherence but also, as described by Winnicott (1960) in his paper on the false self, by “a need to collect impingements from external reality so that the living time of the individual can be filled with reactions to these impingements” (p.150). From this perspective, and consistent with the qualitative findings of this current study, victims are not “minds” but rather fulfill an interchangeable function in allowing for the externalization of the perpetrator’s alien self. Indeed, regarding the victim’s interchangeable function, one violent offender observes in his discussion of Fresh, “Curtis could have been anyone who made Jake look bad.”

As Fonagy (1999) describes, “it is only at these moments that such individuals feel coherent and real” (p.14). Indeed, the addictive quality of these moments is acknowledged by one control as follows:
**Fresh:** It's a lot of pent-up anger that needs to be dealt with. He needs an outlet. But shooting is not an outlet. Maybe it is for a second but after that he needs more. So it’s like a second of power but then he needs more of it. **Interviewer:** It sounds almost like an addiction. **Does that capture how you see this?** Yes, he’s addicted to being in control. From this perspective violent acts are described by Fonagy (1999) to provide not drive discharge but rather “the reinstatement of homeostasis” (p.14) as illustrated by the following response: “It was a sense of rejoice, a sense of relaxation. **Interviewer:** After all of that tension? Yeah. It was like he let out all the negative energy that he had held in so long.”

Still writing about perpetrators of domestic violence, Fonagy (1999) further observes: “Perceiving the terror in the eyes of the victim, they are reassured” (p.13). The qualitative findings of the current study support the extension of this clinical observation to the perpetrators of street violence with the vision of the victim’s terror restoring the code-adhering youth’s sense of respect, status and interpersonal dominance and operating, as conceptualized by Bracher (2000) as a proxy for the absent “gleam in the mother’s eye” (Kohut, 1968, p.95).

Fagan and Wilkinson (1998) define scripts as “a cognitive structure or framework that organizes a person’s understanding of typical situations (p.78). Street code was found to operate as a script for interpersonal conflicts for the code-adhering participants in the current study, scripting behavioral responses to disrespect and inhibiting empathic responsiveness both for code-adhering victims who are viewed as assuming the risk of a foreshortened life expectancy upon choosing “the game” (i.e., street life) and for non-code adhering victims who violate code principles. The reactive non-mentalizing stance (Twemlow et al., 2005) of the code-adhering perpetrators in the clips is consistent with empirical research (e.g., Abelson, 1981; Tedeschi & Felson, 1994) that demonstrates that, “scripted behavior may become automatic without too
much thought or weighing of its consequences” (p.78). The scripting and thus, constraining of behavioral responses, by street code principles is exemplified in the following comment from a violent offender participant:

If you shoot me and you my worst enemy or if you kill my best friend, I can never snitch on you. That’s the worst thing I can ever do. You can kill my mother and I know you did it and I cannot (emphatically) snitch on you. That’s the rules of the game.

The above-cited participant explains the consequences of violating code principles: “When you break that code you lose your manhood. Everywhere (emphatically).” Indeed, the street rules enumerated by some of the violent offenders (e.g., “snitches get stitches”) both script the code-adhering perpetrator’s homicidal responses towards the code-violator and retroactively provide a rationalization for their actions foreclosing victim empathy. Accordingly, code-violating victims are seen by some violent offenders as precipitating their own deaths with a resultant absence of responsibility and remorse on the part of the code-adhering perpetrator for acts rationalized as justifiable under code principles (Anderson, 1999). When asked to contemplate O-Dog’s mental states after fatally shooting the male storekeeper, specifically, at the moment O-Dog addresses his corpse with “see you ain’t gonna talk now,” one violent offender participant states O-Dog is thinking: “I killed you. Now talk!” When asked for clarification, the participant responds: “That you dead now. You should have shut up.” Similarly, another violent offender states: “I'm pretty much sure that he (O-Dog) would glorify it and think they disrespected me and so this is what I did as a result of their disrespect.” The above-cited responses are consistent with Fonagy’s (1999) observations that: “Limitations on mentalizing are likely to cause a certain fluidity within the mental representation system that can lead to liberal rationalizations. Certain violent men show a remarkable, self-serving capacity to reinterpret unacceptable conduct as acceptable”
However, violent offender participants were found to be divided in terms of the degree of shared knowledge of street code principles they attributed to the non-code adhering victims in the clips and thus the extent of responsibility non-code adherents had in precipitating their own deaths. This ranged from (1) uncertainty regarding shared knowledge of street code (e.g., “I don’t know. He probably did, he probably didn’t”; (2) assumed lack of shared knowledge of street code but expectation to refrain from giving insult (e.g., “No, he don’t know the code, the rules of the street. But certain things you don’t say”); and, (3) assumption of shared knowledge by non-code adhering individuals living and/or working in the inner city (e.g., I mean he had to know. Everyone knows. It’s calls sticking to the G-code”). For some offenders, violation of street code principles, regardless of the degree of shared code knowledge attributed to the victim, was advanced as a rationalization for the homicidal response of the disrespected code-adherent:

**Menace II Society:** Interviewer: Is it at all possible that the Asian American storekeeper didn’t know the G-Code and what happens when you violate the G-Code and verbally disrespect someone’s mother? I mean he probably didn’t. But he got left. Left? He wasn’t living too right, so he got left. You get it, you not living too right, so you get left. Right. Left. Either you gonna be in the right lane or the left lane. I see, because the storekeeper did the wrong thing according to the rules of the G-Code? Yeah and he got left.

Relatedly, although not explicitly identifying the victims as blameworthy, the attribution of expressions of regret to some of the victims seemed to imply the code-violating victim’s sense of his own culpability in bringing about his murder. Similarly, street code adherence shapes the code adhering perpetrator’s assignment of degrees of moral culpability to the different characters
in the clips. For instance, one offender participant views the male storekeeper’s verbal disrespect of O-Dog’s mother as equally egregious as O-Dog’s murder of the storekeeper:

Menace II Society: I believe the wife was the…I don't want to say innocent… Okay, from people who was actually guilty of something, it will be, well, not guilty of nothing, it will be O-Dog's friend, then the wife, then the store manager, then O-Dog. Or O-Dog and the store manager could have switched 'cause they are on the same level.

The inhibition of empathy for fellow code-adherents and non-code adherents assumed to have shared knowledge of street code principles contrasts with expressions of empathy towards innocent bystander victims attributed to the perpetrators by some of the violent offenders. This dichotomy is illustrated by the following response presented in the case study:

If you kill someone who not in the game, you feel bad. If you kill somebody that's in the game, you not feel bad. But if you kill somebody that’s not in the game, you be like, oh he not part of it. But most of the time when you kill somebody outside of the game, it’s by accident. Yeah. But when you kill an enemy, it’s not an accident.

These victim-specific deficits are analogous to cognitive distortions (Marshall et al., 1999) and occur in the context of a preserved capacity for empathic responsiveness for non-code adhering innocent bystanders.

For both violent offenders and controls, the level of remorse attributed to the perpetrator varied within participants across the 3 clips and within the offender versus control sampling groups. Attributions ranged from self-focused concerns with no or minimal reference to the level of remorse, specific reference to the perpetrator’s remorselessness, attribution of positive affects experienced by the perpetrator (e.g., “joy”) to the attribution of guilt and remorse. Street code adherence was found to inhibit experiences of remorse and guilt attributed to the code-
adhering perpetrators in the short term by participants in both groups in the current study.
Contrasting with the CU literature, the ability to experience remorse and guilt for one’s homicidal acts was conceptualized by some controls as situationally determined rather than reflecting a stable personality trait as illustrated by the following response:

If he was still in the streets he wouldn't really care about what he did. Because he gonna feel like I did it for a purpose. I'm trying to survive. I’m trying to look like I'm the shit so that people respect me so that I get what I want. So, yeah, if he still in the streets he won’t feel bad. But if he's not in the streets and he trying to do better in his life he will feel bad. He will be thinking like, damn, I really shot him for a basketball game. I feel like he would feel bad about it then.

Similarly, another control views the perpetrator’s level of remorse as tied to one’s relational field: “it depends almost on the people that he is around.”

**Strengths**

This current study is one of the first to investigate the nature of breakdowns in mentalizing capacity among urban youth in the context of challenges to one’s physical and/or psychological integrity (i.e., the experience of being disrespected) and the extent to which these breakdowns are shaped by level of adherence to street code and CU traits. Study findings are examined through the multi-disciplinary lenses of psychoanalysis, forensic psychology, sociology and urban ethnography. Additionally, through its investigation of the relationship of CU traits with street code adherence and with mentalizing capacity in the context of attachment relationships, the current study hopes to make a useful contribution to the limited empirical research on social-cultural and relational factors that may shape the development of CU traits among anti-social youth. The demographics of the current sample (namely, African-American
and Latino adolescent males from low-income, high crime New York City neighborhoods) is a further strength in the context of the existing CU literature that has primarily utilized white samples.

Another strength of the study was its use of the MASVI, an experience near, skills-based interview, designed specifically for this study to address the limitations of existing (primarily dispositional) self-report and written scenario-based measures of mentalization and the conceptually related construct of empathy. The use of movie clips in the MASVI enabled the more dynamic real-world investigation of the capacity to mentalize about street violence compared to the static visual or vocal empathy eliciting stimuli generally used to investigate the emotional and social-cognitive processing of CU youth. Furthermore, the few studies that use movie clips (e.g., de Wied, van Boxel, Matthys, & Meuss, 2011) employ empathy-eliciting stimuli of a much lesser intensity than those shown in the current study. For example, the sadness experimental condition in de Wied et al.’s (2011)’s study of high versus low CU adolescent males utilizes movie clips of a girl on house arrest or boy impeded in a cycle race. In contrast, the MASVI utilizes highly affectively charged movie clips of disrespect homicide to directly investigate mentalizing capacity in the context of criminal behavior.

Finally, the MASVI “gave voice” to the additional challenges faced by minority youth as they negotiate identity formation, one of the primary developmental tasks of adolescence. These challenges include the experience of being typecast through racial profiling (as seen in the Menace II Society clip) in what Goffman (1959) refers to as static or “presented” identities. Many of the study participants expressed welcoming the opportunity to share their experiences of these challenges and their exposure to community violence, emphasizing sentiments such as, “I mean the movie is a movie at the end of the day but coming where I’m from that’s reality” and
“That’s what I see in 3D. Real life. In both of their shoes” (i.e., victim and victimizer).

**Limitations**

Although the data are rich, there were design limitations. First, the small sample size limits the power of the statistical analyses. Indeed, as highlighted in the results section, with a larger sample size some of the non-significant findings in the current study may be significant. A larger sample size would increase the power to test the statistical significance of associations found in the study as well as the potential meditational relationships between street code adherence, CU traits and the capacity to mentalize in the contexts of attachment relationships and disrespect street violence. Future research should thus aim to recruit more participants.

Second, the questionable validity of some of the participants on the self-report measures whose data ideally would have been excluded from analysis with a larger sample size.

Third, the current study’s methodology is limited to establishing associations at a single point in time during adolescence. This cross-sectional design does not allow for the testing of models regarding the temporal ordering of key variables, namely, violent behavior, CU traits, street code adherence and mentalizing capacity in the context of attachment relationships and street violence. Future research in this area should thus aim to gather longitudinal data.

Fourth, while the YPI (Andershed et al., 2002) was developed to address limitations of existing self-report measures of juvenile psychopathy (i.e., through framing psychopathic traits as socially desirable or neutral qualities and assessing traits in a more comprehensive manner), self-report measures of psychopathy have been characterized as a method mode mismatch given the tendency for psychopathic individuals to engage in impression management. The inclusion of the PCL-YV (Psychopathy Checklist-Youth Version, Forth et al., 2003) that is based on both a clinical interview and review of chart and criminal records and is widely considered the “gold
standard for the assessment of psychopathy” may be considered for further studies.

Fifth, the current study used self-reported arrest for a violent offense as an index for participants’ violent history and as a variable to constitute the violent offender versus non-offending control sampling groups. However, this may not have accurately captured both offender and control participants’ history of violence. Therefore, future research should consider using two sources of information to index history of violent behavior, namely, self-reported arrest history along with the Self-Report of Delinquency measure (SRD; Loeber, Farrington, Strouthamer-Loeber, & Van Kammen, 1998) that includes behaviors such as gang fighting, robbery, physical assault to seriously harm or kill, and attacking school staff. Finally, as observed by the independent rater, administration of the MASVI should be more standardized with less directive interviewing by the interviewer.

**Future Directions**

The current exploratory study should be replicated with a larger sample size that would increase power to test the significance of associations found in this study as well as the potential meditational relationships between key variables. As highlighted above, future studies should attempt to gather longitudinal data to allow for the testing of models regarding the temporal ordering of violent criminal behavior, CU traits, street code adherence and the capacities to mentalize in the contexts of attachment relationships and street violence. To this end, CU traits could be assessed at time one (early childhood) and time two (adolescence) with a view to create primary (congenital) versus secondary (acquired secondary to environmental conditions) psychopathic sampling groups. Additionally, and given the theoretical orientation of this dissertation, namely, that the capacity to mentalize develops within the context of secure early attachment relationships via the process of caregiver affect attunement (Fonagy et al., 2002;
Stern, 1985; Winnicott, 1963) future studies should assess mentalizing capacity in the context of attachment relationships in early childhood, for instance, through the inclusion of the CAI (Child Attachment Interview, Target et al., 2003).

As discussed in the literature review, existing empirical research on CU traits in anti-social youth has largely centered on biological-temperamental correlates with only limited investigation of the contextual factors (e.g., exposure to community violence, nature of socio-cultural environment) that may shape the development of these traits (Howard et al., 2012). While some participants disclosed histories of exposure to community violence as witnesses and/or victims in the context of the MASVI, exposure to community violence was not formally assessed in this current study. Future replications of this study should consider including a measure of PTSD symptomatology as well as measures assessing the nature of experienced traumatic events and of overall neighborhood quality.

It is suggested that future studies include an abridged version of the MASVI. This revised MASVI would continue to utilize the 3 movie clips given their portrayal of different configurations of code-adhering and non-code adhering perpetrators, victims and bystanders that allows for the examination of victim specific empathic responsiveness. Questions investigating the capacity to mentalize the perpetrator’s and victim’s experience during the homicide would be retained including questions assessing the processing of victim’s cues of emotional distress and level of remorse attributed to perpetrator post-homicide. However, given this writer’s assessment that data saturation was reached in the current study for experience of being disrespected, challenge questions would be excluded from this revised version of the MASVI. In the current study movie clips were shown to study participants on an 8-inch portable DVD player with the audio track played through headphones. Future studies in a laboratory setting could utilize a
large high definition screen with surround sound in order to more closely replicate the real-world experience of being a bystander at the scene. Finally, a further variant of the current study would be a videotaped group administration of the MASVI to examine the group process around incidents of disrespect within violent teen crews.

**Clinical Implications**

In a 2014 New York Times editorial about *My Brother’s Keeper*, an Obama administration initiative to improve outcomes for at-risk boys and young men of color, Charles Blow writes:

> The issues facing many of these men are so complicated and layered with pain that they are incredibly daunting. There is a deficit of hope and a surplus of hurdles — familial, cultural, behavioral and structural. Programs like this usually focus on the easier part of the problem, the personal, rather than the harder part, the structural.

While acknowledging the complexity of addressing the structural hurdles, the findings of this study have implications for the development of more clinically effective interventions, namely, the application of mentalization-based therapy (MBT) to street code invested violent youth.

Current offender rehabilitation in the United States primarily focuses on anger management and patterns of offending behavior and is cognitive-behavioral in orientation, emphasizing the role of conscious cognitions on behavior (Fonagy & Bateman, 2012; Yakeley & Adshead, 2013). Such interventions do not address the offender’s wider personality difficulties and associated deficits in mentalizing (Fonagy & Bateman, 2012) exhibited by the violent offender participants in this study. Furthermore, they place limited emphasis on the socio-cultural context in which violence among code adhering youth occurs and its driving forces of
status insecurity and the reenactment of relational and/or community trauma (Allen, Fonagy, & Bateman, 2008; Bracher, 2000, Yakeley & Adshead, 2013).

MBT aims: “to create a therapeutic environment in which mental states of self and others become the focus of concern. To this extent, it may be especially suited to the abnormal processes associated with ASPD/BPD patients who need to extend their ability to maintain mentalizing when self-esteem is threatened by developing some mental functioning at a secondary level of representation” (Fonagy & Bateman, 2008, p.186). Its application to code invested violent youth is supported by the promising preliminary results of pilot studies reported by Yakeley and Adshead (2013) investigating the efficacy of MBT for adults with anti-social personality disorder (ASPD) in a high-security forensic hospital (e.g., Adshead, Moore, Humphrey, Wilson, & Tapp, 2013) following its successful application to patients with borderline personality disorder (BPD) (e.g., Bateman & Fonagy, 2008a; Bateman & Fonagy, 2008b, Bateman & Fonagy, 2012).

Yakeley and Adshead (2013) argue that MBT’s integration of psychoanalytic theory with neuro-scientific and developmental attachment research incorporates the exploration of “both conscious and unconscious processes and motivations” (p.38) thereby allowing the offender to reach an understanding of the meaning of his specific violent offense and ultimately a sense of “agency and ownership” reducing the risk of future violence (p.41). These authors write that:

We believe that understanding is fundamental to the practice of forensic psychotherapy: understanding the reasons that the offender committed his index offense; understanding why some individuals relate to others by predominantly violent means; understanding the workings of the criminal mind and how it has been shaped by early, often adverse,

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57 Yakeley and colleagues are currently conducting a pilot study of MBT with forensic patients in an outpatient setting.
experience; understanding the unconscious meaning of a person's current antisocial behavior and how it may represent a repetition of such early experience; and understanding how this behavior may be the manifestation of a mind in which negative emotions such as anxiety, humiliation, and shame become impossible to tolerate and are expressed instead by violent action toward others. This process of understanding includes attention to both conscious and unconscious processes and motivations, especially those negative emotions that in particular are often less consciously experienced as thoughts or feelings and so are less verbally accessible. (p.38)

Treatment components of MBT for anti-social individuals are as follows: (1) introductory meeting; (2) weekly group therapy; (3) monthly individual therapy; and, (4) crisis management and psychiatric review as needed (Bateman & Fonagy, 2012). This emphasis on group therapy thus offers a cost-effective therapeutic intervention for the criminal justice system in which offender rehabilitation services are primarily delivered in group format.

The initial therapeutic work in MBT for anti-social individuals focuses on mentalizing the self, and the feelings others evoke in the individual with later work focusing on the contemplation of the mental states of others. As the treatment unfolds, incidents of aggression and violence experienced by group members become the primary focus of the therapeutic work. The exploration of code-driven violence is embedded in MBT through discussion of subcultural codes of conduct evoked by patients as explanations for their violent behavior and through the group’s gradual development of a new shared code of conduct. Bateman and Fonagy (2012) outline how in these discussions about incidents of violence: “Therapists ask about any internal forewarning the patients themselves (self and affective dimensions), signals they had received and given to others (external focus), what others needed to do in response (external focus), and
any predetermined preferred response (internal focus)” (p.304). This focus promotes the gradual acquisition of a more nuanced affective language and the eventual shift from purely behavioral descriptions of reactive non-mentalizing violence towards connecting the mental states and actions of the self and other.

MBT’s exploration of the relational process between patient and therapist and of the group process facilitates insight into the function of the offender’s violent responses and into the collapse of mentalizing capacities in the context of affectively charged interactions. As observed by Fonagy (1999) in his clinical work with male perpetrators of domestic violence and as found in this study regarding victims of street violence, victims fulfill an interchangeable function in that they allow for the externalization of the perpetrator’s alien self. A key role of the psycho-dynamically trained MBT therapist working with anti-social individuals is thus “carrying an aspect of the alien self of the patient—[that] can only be explored once an atmosphere of safety has developed” (Fonagy & Bateman, 2012, p.305). Only through the exploration of this relational dynamic can the street-oriented youth attain insight into his repeated need to (in Winnicott’s language) collect external impingements (i.e., disrespect) and the function that his violent responses play in allowing for the externalization of the alien self. This function remains unelaborated with a cognitive-behavioral group leader in the role of a skills-trainer with minimal to no exploration of the relational process between patient and therapist. In terms of group process, the MBT therapist’s highlighting of instances of defensive distancing (i.e., laughter and yawning as exhibited by study participants) serves to heighten awareness among group members into defensive breakdowns in their capacity to mentalize.

In a recent interview with the APA Monitor (Chamberlin, 2014), Bryan Stevenson, JD, executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative, highlights the importance of trauma-informed
interventions for urban (though not specifically offending) youth from low-income neighborhoods, noting that these youth are “so clearly disrupted by a level of trauma and violence that it makes it impossible for them to conform to the behavioral expectations of institutions that refuse to see that disability” (p.61). Given the levels of exposure to community violence among street code adhering violent youth and the potential for re-enactments, it is proposed that the adaptation of MBT for this population incorporate components of the MBT school-based programs addressing community violence (as outlined by Allen, 2005). Such programs aim to “provide participants with a conceptual framework for understanding the relation between past exposure to traumatic events and their proclivity for ongoing traumatic re-enactments” (Allen et al., 2008, p.327) and include components such as psycho-education on emotional responses to trauma, emotion regulation strategies and the use of videotaped role plays as perpetrators, victims, rescuers and bystanders.

For juvenile-justice involved youth who are eligible for community sentencing therapeutic martial arts programs may offer an effective community-based treatment. In their paper entitled, “Embodying the mind: movement as a container for destructive aggression,” Twemlow, Sacco and Fonagy (2008) propose that martial arts can operate as linking objects (Volkan, 1981), “linking the mind of the violent individual to the memory of the body ego of childhood [that] can then be made available to work with in a psychotherapeutic context” (p.3). A number of the non-offending controls in the current study were recruited via snowball sampling from a boxing gym located in a low-income New York City neighborhood. The time I spent interacting with students, parents and instructors at the gym and interviewing students for the study allowed me to see first-hand the curative potential of traditional martial arts practice and philosophy for the treatment of street code invested youth. Twemlow and Sacco (1998)
emphasize that successful programs incorporate a “strong philosophical component” with “rehabilitation pursued through training as a “gentle warrior” (p.510). Indeed, the authors describe how the “curative aspects of the intervention arise from feeling connected to a respected instructor. This attachment creates a positive affiliation and a growing sense of goodness and control. The “bad” ethnics of the street or pathological family are slowly replaced by the “good” ethics of the teacher (p. 515). Instructors, as I saw, teach and model an alternative model of manhood from that of the streets. Rankings within the martial arts provide an alternate form of social capital to that acquired through the sense of respect on the streets gained through the commission of violence or the projection of a violent social identity. Daily training (with opportunities for academic tutoring, assistance with job applications) at the boxing gym that was embedded in a low-income Brooklyn neighborhood provided a “home” with “consistent, positive reinforcement for altruistic and focused behavior” (p.511) contrasting with the chaotic home-lives of many of the students. Finally, on a practical level, Twemlow and Sacco (1998) assert that the integration of martial arts into a treatment program with a psychologist providing ongoing supervision and consultation to instructors and direct evaluation and counseling of adolescents (as little as 2 hours per month) is “intensive enough to reach delinquent aggressive adolescents while still being affordable” (p.506).

Policy Directions

The study found that lower mentalizing capacities in the context of attachment relationships were associated with higher levels of street code adherence. This finding was interpreted in terms of Bateman and Fonagy’s (2012) clinical observation that “individuals with limited mentalization drift toward individuals (i.e., other street code adherents) with whom they can have highly predictable patterns of interaction, even if these interactions are quite limited
and inflexible” (p.293). This finding supports the more widespread provision of early interventions such as Minding the Baby® (Sadler et al., 2006), a home-visiting program for infants and young families that promotes the development of mentalizing capacities within the context of early attachment relationships.

This study proposes that the CU traits exhibited by some of the violent offenders and controls in this current study (and illustrated by the case study) may represent secondary (i.e., acquired subsequent to relational and environmental trauma) versus primary (i.e., congenital) psychopathy. This distinct developmental pathway to psychopathy is consistent with the observation cited by Kimonis et al. (2008) in their study on the processing of cues of emotional distress among detained boys with CU traits that “ethnic differences in the various processes underlying psychopathy may be explained by social factors related to living in a threatening environment, which are more likely experienced by African-American individuals living in urban areas (Skeem, Edens, Sanford, & Hauser, (2004).” (p. 571). As Petrilla and Skeem (2003) write, the application of the label “psychopath” to a juvenile offender may “drive decision making in the legal setting in a punitive direction” (p.691) and “may have a collateral impact throughout his or her life (due to) its presence in legal and medical records that will follow the adolescent” (p.691) given that psychopathy is widely equated with being untreatable. The risk that minority juvenile justice-involved youth from neighborhoods with high rates of community violence may be labelled as “psychopathic” when this may in fact be an adaptation to environmental conditions highlights the importance of psycho-legal evaluations incorporating an etiological lens into the assessment of psychopathy.

In a 2014 press conference aired on New York 1, NYPD Commissioner Bill Bratton characterized the violence perpetrated by members of teen crews as “mindless” and “about
nothing.” However, for the violent offenders in this study homicidal behavior is not driven by “nothing” but rather by the imperative for physical and psychological survival embodied in maintaining one’s respect on the streets. As stated by one control participant:

Because in the hood it is a test everyday. (….) No matter who you are or what you do, you gonna get tested. So it’s like everyday you wake up, you just waiting for someone to test you so you get used to being tested with violence every day. You don’t care if you die. You are ready to die. Every day you are ready to die. You wake up the next morning and you’re like, I wonder what my test is gonna be. I wonder if Im gonna make it out of that situation.

In addition, many of the violent offenders portray the perpetrators on the clips as holding onto their minds (albeit in the context of deficits in mentalizing their affective states) with the detailed elaboration of the perpetrator’s thought processes on the threat posed by the victim and the need to eliminate this threat. By extrapolation, the violence perpetrated by many code-adhering violent youth is thus not “mindless” but rather “mindful.” Incorporating these findings into trainings for police officers working in inner city precincts would enhance their ability to better relate to at-risk and offending youth. As Charles Blow (2014) writes: “And too many of us, in turn, see them as menaces rather than as boys struggling — often without sufficient instruction and against a tide of systemic inequity — to simply become men. In such a warped world, basic survival can become a metric of success.”
Appendix A. Demographics & Social History Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions:

1. Age: __________

2. Race:
   __________ African-American
   __________ Asian-American
   __________ American-Indian
   __________ Caucasian
   __________ Latino
   __________ Other (please specify __________)

3. Which neighborhood and borough do you live in?
   __________________________________________

4. Have you ever been arrested for a crime?
   Yes _____ No______

5. How old were you when you were first arrested?
   __________

6. Please list the offenses you have been arrested for and number of times you were arrested for each offense?
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

7. Have you ever been convicted (i.e., found or pled guilty to) a violent crime? (e.g., assault; robbery; attempted murder; murder)
   Yes _____ No______

   If yes, what crime/s? __________________________________________
Appendix B: Impression Management Scale of Paulhus Deception Scale (Paulhus, 1999)

Instructions: Read each statement, and circle the number that best describes you, from Not True to Very True about you.

1. *I sometimes tell lies if I have to.
   
   1  2  3  4  5
   Not True  Very True

2. I never cover up my mistakes.
   
   1  2  3  4  5
   Not True  Very True

3. *There have been occasions when I have taken advantage of someone.
   
   1  2  3  4  5
   Not True  Very True

4. I never swear.
   
   1  2  3  4  5
   Not True  Very True

5. *I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget
   
   1  2  3  4  5
   Not True  Very True

6. I always obey laws, even if I’m unlikely to get caught
   
   1  2  3  4  5
   Not True  Very True

7. *I have said something bad about a friend behind his/her back
   
   1  2  3  4  5
   Not True  Very True

8. When I hear people talking privately, I avoid listening
   
   1  2  3  4  5
   Not True  Very True

9. *I have received too much change from a salesperson without telling him or her.
   
   1  2  3  4  5
   Not True  Very True

10. I always declare everything at customs.
    
    1  2  3  4  5
    Not True  Very True
11. *When I was young I sometimes stole things.
   1  2  3  4  5
   Not True                                Very True

12. I have never dropped litter on the street.
   1  2  3  4  5
   Not True                                Very True

13. *I sometimes drive faster than the speed limit.
   1  2  3  4  5
   Not True                                Very True

14. I never read sexy books or magazines.
   1  2  3  4  5
   Not True                                Very True

15. *I have done things that I don’t tell other people about.
   1  2  3  4  5
   Not True                                Very True

16. I never take things that don’t belong to me.
   1  2  3  4  5
   Not True                                Very True

17. *I have taken sick-leave from work or school even though I wasn’t really sick.
   1  2  3  4  5
   Not True                                Very True

18. I have never damaged library book or store merchandise without reporting it.
   1  2  3  4  5
   Not True                                Very True

19. *I have some pretty awful habits.
   1  2  3  4  5
   Not True                                Very True

20. I don’t gossip about other people’s business.
   1  2  3  4  5
   Not True                                Very True
Impression Management (IM) Scale Scoring Instructions:
Items marked with asterisks are reverse-keyed.

**IM Cutoff Scores for Invalidity Identifications**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
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<td>&gt;12</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;8</td>
<td>may be invalid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;2</td>
<td>may be invalid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>probably invalid</td>
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</table>

(Table 3.2; p. 10, PDS Users Manual, 1999)

Following Hemphill and Howell (2000), two age inappropriate items (items 30 and 33) will be deleted from the IM scale and scoring will be prorated.
Appendix C: Adherence to Code Related Beliefs (Stewart, Schreck & Simons, 2006)

Instructions: Please read each statement and circle the one response that most closely describes what you think:

(1) “When someone disrespects you, it is important that you use physical force or aggression to teach him or her not to disrespect you”

1 2 3 4
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

(2) “If someone uses violence against you, it is important that you use violence against him or her to get even”

1 2 3 4
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

(3) “People will take advantage of you if you don’t let them know how tough you are”

1 2 3 4
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

(4) “People do not respect a person who is afraid to fight physically for his/her rights”

1 2 3 4
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

(5) “Sometimes you need to threaten people in order to get them to treat you fairly”

1 2 3 4
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

(6) “It is important to show others that you cannot be intimidated”

1 2 3 4
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

(7) “People tend to respect a person who is tough and aggressive”

1 2 3 4
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree
Appendix D: Reflective Functioning Questionnaire (RFQ) Youth Version (Sharp et al., 2009)

Instructions: Please read each statement and circle the one response that you feel describes you most clearly. Do not think too much about it - your first responses are usually the best. Thank you.

1. People’s thoughts are a secret to me
   | strongly | disagree | disagree | agree | agree | strongly | disagree | somewhat | somewhat | strongly |
   | disagree | disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree |

2. I worry a lot about what people are thinking and feeling
   | strongly | disagree | disagree | agree | agree | strongly | disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree |
   | disagree | disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree |

3. My picture of my parents changes as I change
   | strongly | disagree | disagree | agree | agree | strongly | disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree |
   | disagree | disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree |

4. I realize that I can sometimes misunderstand my best friends’ reactions
   | strongly | disagree | disagree | agree | agree | strongly | disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree |
   | disagree | disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree |

5. I believe that my parents’ behavior towards me should not be explained by how they were raised
   | strongly | disagree | disagree | agree | agree | strongly | disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree |
   | disagree | disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree |

6. Other people tell me I’m a good listener
   | strongly | disagree | disagree | agree | agree | strongly | disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree |
   | disagree | disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree |

7. I often have to force people to do what I want them to do
   | strongly | disagree | disagree | agree | agree | strongly | disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree |
   | disagree | disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree |

8. I always know what I feel
   | strongly | disagree | disagree | agree | agree | strongly | disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree |
   | disagree | disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree |

9. I feel that, if I am not careful, I could get in the way of another person’s life
   | strongly | disagree | disagree | agree | agree | strongly | disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree |
   | disagree | disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree |

10. I often get confused about what I am feeling
11. *I believe that people can see a situation very differently based on their own beliefs and experiences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

12. *I believe there’s no point trying to guess what’s on someone else’s mind*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

13. *I get confused when people talk about their feelings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

14. *I believe other people are too confusing to bother figuring out*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

15. *I find it difficult to see other people’s points of view*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

16. *I am a good mind reader*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

17. *I don’t always know why I do what I do*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

18. *I pay attention to my feelings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. *In an argument, I keep the other person’s point of view in mind*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20. *Understanding the reasons for people’s actions helps me to forgive them*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21. *I believe that there is no RIGHT way of seeing any situation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Somewhat Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat Disagree</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I get angry I say things without really knowing why I am saying them</td>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>agree</td>
<td>agree</td>
<td>agree</td>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those close to me often seem to find it difficult to understand why I do things</td>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>agree</td>
<td>agree</td>
<td>agree</td>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am better guided by reason than by my gut</td>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>agree</td>
<td>agree</td>
<td>agree</td>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I usually know exactly what other people are thinking</td>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>agree</td>
<td>agree</td>
<td>agree</td>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t remember much about when I was a child</td>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>agree</td>
<td>agree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong feelings often cloud my thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>I trust my feelings</td>
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<td>agree</td>
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<tr>
<td>When I get angry I say things that I later regret</td>
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<td>agree</td>
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<td>disagree</td>
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<tr>
<td>My feelings about a person are hardly ever wrong</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>For me actions speak louder than words</td>
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<td></td>
<td>33. <em>I predict that my feelings might change even about something I feel strongly about</em></td>
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<td>somewhat</td>
<td>agree</td>
<td>agree</td>
<td>strongly</td>
<td>agree</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

|   | 34. *I like to think about the reasons behind my actions* |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| strongly | disagree | disagree | agree | agree | strongly | disagree |
| disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree | agree | strongly | agree |

|   | 35. *If I feel unsure of myself, I can behave in ways that offend others* |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| strongly | disagree | disagree | agree | agree | strongly | disagree |
| disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree | agree | strongly | agree |

|   | 36. *Sometimes I do things without really knowing why* |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| strongly | disagree | disagree | agree | agree | strongly | disagree |
| disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree | agree | strongly | agree |

|   | 37. *I can tell how someone is feeling by looking at their eyes* |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| strongly | disagree | disagree | agree | agree | strongly | disagree |
| disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree | agree | strongly | agree |

|   | 38. *Sometimes I find myself saying things and I have no idea why I said them* |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| strongly | disagree | disagree | agree | agree | strongly | disagree |
| disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree | agree | strongly | agree |

|   | 39. *In order to know exactly how someone is feeling, I have found that I need to ask* |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| them strongly | disagree | disagree | agree | agree | strongly | disagree |
| disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree | agree | strongly | agree |

|   | 40. *I can mostly predict what someone else will do* |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| strongly | disagree | disagree | agree | agree | strongly | disagree |
| disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree | agree | strongly | agree |

|   | 41. *I’m often curious about the meaning behind others’ actions* |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| strongly | disagree | disagree | agree | agree | strongly | disagree |
| disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree | agree | strongly | agree |

|   | 42. *I have noticed that people often give advice to others that they actually wish to follow themselves* |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| strongly | disagree | disagree | agree | agree | strongly | disagree |
| disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree | agree | strongly | agree |

|   | 43. *I wonder what my dreams mean* |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| strongly | disagree | disagree | agree | agree | strongly | disagree |
| disagree | somewhat | somewhat | agree | agree | strongly | agree |
44. *How I feel can easily affect how I understand someone else’s behavior*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
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</table>

45. *I pay attention to the impact of my actions on others’ feelings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>disagree</td>
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</table>

46. *I know exactly what my close friends are thinking*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>disagree</td>
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</table>
Reflective Functioning Questionnaire Youth Version (RFQY): Scoring Key

Items are scored as follows:

**Reverse Code Items (7, 13, 14, 15, 23, 26, 32, 38) are scored as follows:**

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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>disagree somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>agree somewhat</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>strongly agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. I often have to force people to do what I want them to do  
13. I get confused when people talk about their feelings  
14. I believe other people are too confusing to bother figuring out  
15. I find it difficult to see other people’s points of view  
23. Those close to me often seem to find it difficult to understand why I do things  
26. I can’t remember much about when I was a child  
32. I frequently feel that my mind is empty  
38. Sometimes I find myself saying things and I have no idea why I said them

**Items: 3, 4, 6, 11, 18, 19, 20, 21, 34, 39, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45 are scored as follows:**

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>strongly agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. My picture of my parents changes as I change  
4. I realize that I can sometimes misunderstand my best friends’ reactions  
6. Other people tell me I’m a good listener  
11. I believe that people can see a situation very differently based on their own beliefs and experiences  
18. I pay attention to my feelings  
19. In an argument, I keep the other person’s point of view in mind  
20. Understanding the reasons for people’s actions helps me to forgive them  
21. I believe that there is no RIGHT way of seeing any situation  
34. I like to think about the reasons behind my actions  
39. In order to know exactly how someone is feeling, I have found that I need to ask them  
41. I’m often curious about the meaning behind others’ actions  
42. I have noticed that people often give advice to others that they actually wish to follow themselves  
43. I wonder what my dreams mean  
44. How I feel can easily affect how I understand someone else’s behavior  
45. I pay attention to the impact of my actions on others’ feelings

**Items: 1, 2, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12, 16, 17, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 35, 36, 37, 40 are scored as follows:**

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>strongly agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. People’s thoughts are a secret to me  
2. I worry a lot about what people are thinking and feeling
5. I believe that my parents’ behavior towards me should not be explained by how they were raised
8. I always know what I feel
9. I feel that, if I am not careful, I could get in the way of another person’s life
10. I often get confused about what I am feeling
12. I believe there’s no point trying to guess what’s on someone else’s mind
16. I am a good mind reader
17. I don’t always know why I do what I do
22. When I get angry I say things without really knowing why I am saying them
24. I am better guided by reason than by my gut
25. I usually know exactly what other people are thinking
27. Strong feelings often cloud my thinking
28. I trust my feelings
29. When I get angry I say things that I later regret
30. My feelings about a person are hardly ever wrong
31. For me actions speak louder than words
33. I predict that my feelings might change even about something I feel strongly about
35. If I feel unsure of myself, I can behave in ways that offend others
36. Sometimes I do things without really knowing why
37. I can tell how someone is feeling by looking at their eyes
40. I can mostly predict what someone else will do
46. I know exactly what my close friends are thinking

**RFQY Total Score**: Items were scored using the scoring keys above, summed and then divided by the total number of items (i.e., 46) to yield an overall level of reflective functioning within the context of attachment relationships.
Appendix E: Semi-Structured Interview Assessing Mentalizing About Street Violence (Berko, 2013)

Instructions: I’m going to show you three movie clips, each of which shows a scene of street violence. Then I’m going to ask you some questions about the clip. There are no right or wrong answers here. I am just interested in hearing about your sense of what goes on in each scene between the characters.

If at any point you feel uncomfortable about feelings that come up for you when you are watching or talking about the movie clips, just let me know and we do not have to continue.

Clip One (Juice Movie)

Part 1 (Open-Ended Question)

(Q1) How would you describe to a friend what happens between the characters in this scene?”

Part 2 (Focus on the Aggressor’s Experience)

Instructions: Now I’m going to ask you some questions about the thoughts and feelings the shooter has as the scene unfolds. Again, there are no right or wrong answers. I am just interested in hearing about your sense of what goes on for the shooter in this scene.

(Q2) What’s your sense of why the shooter chases after the guy who pulled the knife on him and shoots him?

Probes:58
Why do you think he acts like that?
What do you make of what happened?
Is there some other explanation?

(Q3) CHALLENGE: What thoughts and feelings did the shooter have when (cite the CHALLENGE participant sees as pivotal in scene)?

Probes:
What thoughts do you think are going through his mind?
How did (challenge) make him feel?
Why does his act like that?

(Q4) Do you think that was all that was going on in the shooter’s mind?

(Q5) HOMICIDE: What do you think the shooter feels in that moment what he gets the gun out of his pocket, points it at Radames, pulls the trigger and shoots. What thoughts are going through his mind at that point?

58 The same probes are used with the second and third clips.
Probes:
What thoughts do you think are going through his mind?
What feelings/emotions is he experiencing?
What are his intentions?

(Q6) RECONSTRUCTED PAST: What about a few months later as Bishop thinks back over the scene and what happened. What kind of feelings and thoughts do you think he's going to have as he looks back at the scene?

Part 3 (Focus on the Victim’s Experience)

Instructions: Now I’m going to ask you some questions about the thoughts and feelings of the guy who pulled a knife on the shooter and is later shot dead. Again, there are no right or wrong answers. I’m just interested in hearing about your sense of what goes on for him in the scene.

(Q7) What is your sense of why the guy who pulled the knife acts the way he does in the scene?

Probes:
Why do you think he acts like that?
What do you make of what happened?
Is there some other explanation?

(Q8) CHALLENGE: What was the guy thinking and feeling when (cite the CHALLENGE participant sees as pivotal in scene)?

(Q9) HOMICIDE: What was guy thinking and feeling as turns round in the dead-end alley and sees O-Dog pointing the gun at him/her and pulling the trigger to shoot at him?

Probes:
What thoughts do you think are going through his mind?
What feelings/emotions is he experiencing?

Clip Two (Menace II Society Movie)

Part 1 (Open-Ended Question)

(Q1) How would you describe to a friend what happens between the characters in this scene?”

Part 2 (Focus on the Aggressor’s Experience)

Instructions: Now just like with the first clip I’m going to ask you some questions about the thoughts and feelings the shooter has as the scene unfolds.
(Q2a) What’s your sense of why the shooter takes out his gun and shoots the storekeeper?

(Q2b) What’s your sense of why the shooter takes out his gun and shoots the storekeeper’s wife?

(Q3) CHALLENGE: What thoughts and feelings did the shooter have when (CHALLENGE seen as pivotal)?

(Q4) Do you think that was all that was going on in the shooter’s mind?

(Q5a) HOMICIDE: What do you think O-Dog feels in that moment what he gets the gun out of his pocket, points it at the male storekeeper, pulls the trigger and shoots. What thoughts are going through his mind at that point?

(Q5b) HOMICIDE: What do you think O-Dog feels in that moment what he gets the gun out of his pocket, points it at the female storekeeper, pulls the trigger and shoots. What thoughts are going through his mind at that point?

(Q6) What thoughts and feelings did the shooter have as he flees the store with the money?

(Q7) RECONSTRUCTED PAST: What about a few months later as O-Dog thinks back over the scene and what happened. What kind of feelings and thoughts do you think he's going to have as he looks back at the scene?

Part 3 (Focus on the Victims’ Experience)

Instructions: Now I’m going to ask you some questions about the thoughts and feelings the storekeeper and his wife have as the scene unfolds. Again, there are no right or wrong answers. I am just interested in your sense of what is happening for them in the scene.

(Q8) What is your sense of why the storekeeper and his wife act the way they do in the scene?

(Q9) What is your sense of what the female storekeeper is thinking and feeling in that moment when she says, “Hurry up and buy”?

(Q10) What is your sense of what the male storekeeper is thinking and feeling in that moment when he says, “I don’t want no trouble, I don’t want no trouble?”

(Q11a) What is the male storekeeper thinking and feeling in that moment when he sees O-Dog pointing the gun at him/her and pulling the trigger to shoot at him?

(Q11b) What is the female storekeeper thinking and feeling in that moment when she sees O-Dog pointing the gun at her and pulling the trigger to shoot at her?

Clip Three (Fresh movie)
Part 1 (Open-Ended Question)

(Q1) How would you describe to a friend what happens between the characters in this scene?

Part 2 (Focus on the Aggressor’s Experience)

Instructions: Now I’m going to ask you some questions about the thoughts and feelings the shooter has as the scene unfolds.

(Q2) What’s your sense of why the shooter takes out his gun and shoots at Curtis?

(Q3) CHALLENGE: What thoughts and feelings did the shooter have when (cite the CHALLENGE participant sees as pivotal in scene)?

(Q4) Do you think that was all that was going on the shooter’s mind?

(Q5) HOMICIDE: What do you think Jake feels in that moment what he gets the gun out of his pocket, points it at the Curtis, pulls the trigger and shoots. What thoughts are going through his mind at that point?

(Q6) What thoughts and feelings did the shooter have as he leaves the scene and sees deceased Curtis and bystander girl?

(Q7) RECONSTRUCTED PAST: What about a few months later as Jake thinks back over the scene and what happened. What kind of feelings and thoughts do you think he's going to have as he looks back at the scene?

Part 3 (Focus on the Victims’ Experience)

Instructions: Now I’m going to ask you some questions about the thoughts and feelings of the young basketball player and the girl who is shot dead as the scene unfolds

(Q8) What is your sense of why the young basketball player acts the way he does in the scene?

(Q9) What was the young basketball player thinking and feeling when he was dribbling the ball all around the shooter?

(Q10a) HOMICIDE: What is Curtus thinking and feeling in that moment when he sees Jake pointing the gun at at him and pulling the trigger to shoot at him?

(Q10b) HOMICIDE: What is the bystander girl thinking and feeling as she is lying on ground dying?
Appendix F: MASVI RF Scoring Manual (Berko, 2013)

Table of Contents:

I: Description of MASVI Measure
II: Copy of MASVI Interview
III: Scoring Procedure
IV: MASVI Coding Form

I: Description of MASVI Measure

The MASVI (Mentalizing About Street Violence Interview) is a semi-structured interview about three movie clips of homicides, each of which is driven by a challenge to a teenaged aggressor’s physical safety and/or psychological integrity (i.e., the experience of being “disrespected”). Each of the clips portrays a distinct form of disrespect, namely, (1) physical threat/intimidation in front of a rival crew/gang precipitated by belief that the aggressor has snitched to the police implicating the eventual victim in a homicide of a peer (Juice); (2) verbal disrespect in the form of a “I feel sorry for your momma” comment by a storekeeper in the context of the aggressor being racially profiled as a shoplifter due to his race and street presentation (Menace II Society); and, (3) the humiliating defeat by a much younger opponent in a basketball game (Fresh) in front of the aggressor’s teammates and teenaged spectators. This experience-near, skills-based interview was designed specifically for this study to assess participants’ capacity to mentalize about street violence and aims to address the limitations of existing (primarily dispositional) self-report and written scenario-based measures of mentalization and the conceptually related construct of empathy.

Movie clips are viewed on an 8-inch portable DVD player in the presence of the principal investigator with the audio-track played over headphones. After viewing each clip, the participant is engaged in a discussion about the clip that takes the same three-part format for each clip. This format is as follows: (1) an initial, open-ended permit question,\(^{59}\) namely, *How would you describe to a friend what happens between the characters in this scene?* that aims to access the participant’s ability to provide “accurate and plausible links between mental states and behaviors”\(^{60}\) without the structuring of subsequent demand questions as well as initial responses to the clip and primary identification with the aggressor or victim; (2) demand questions that focus on the aggressor’s experience of being challenged, commission of the homicide and reconstructed past looking back at the interaction a few months later; and, (3) demand questions that focus on the victim’s experience of the interaction and specifically, the moment when the gun is pointed at them, and in the case of the third clip, the bystander victim’s realization that she has been fatally shot.

\(^{59}\) Fonagy et al., (1998) define permit questions as questions that “permit the speaker to demonstrate their reflective-self capacities) and demand questions as questions that “demand from speakers a demonstration of their capacity for reflective–self function” (p.32).

Descriptions of the movie clips and challenges to the characters’ physical security and/or psychological integrity are as follows:

(1) Juice (1992)

**Scene:** Riverside Motherfucker  
**Length:** 1.52 minutes  
**Characters:** Bishop (Shooter/Aggressor); Radames (Victim, gang leader of Latino crew/gang); Q and Steel (Bishop’s friends who witness the interaction but fail to come to his defense)  
**Description:**  
A Latino crew/gang come across Bishop when he is alone on the streets. Radames accuses Bishop of snitching to the police, implicating him in the murder of Raheem. Bishop and Radames trade verbal insults. Bishop calls Radames a “punk ‘spic.”’ Radames tells Bishop that “Raheem (Bishop’s deceased friend) ain’t here to protect you no-more” implying that Bishop needs the physical protection of others and tugs on Bishop’s face as he talks to him like a baby. After stating that Bishop has been asking for “an ass-kicking for a long time,” Radames then puts a knife up to Bishop’s throat. With the knife at his throat, Bishop spies his friends Q and Steele who happen to round the corner at that moment but leave the scene and do not come to Bishop’s defense. Bishop and Radames begin to physically fight with both characters pushed to the floor at different points of the scuffle. On the ground Bishop is seen to attempt to reach for the gun strapped to his ankle. A police siren signaling the arrival of the police causes the crew/gang members to scatter from the scene. Bishop chases Radames and corners him in a back alley. Affirming his allegiance to his own neighborhood, Bishops shouts “Riverside, motherfucker” as he fatally shot Radames at close range.

**Challenges to Aggressor (Bishop) by the Victim (Radames):**  
(1) being accused by Radames of snitching to cops that Radames killed Raheem;  
(2) being threatened with an “asskicking” in front of the rival crew;  
(3) being told “Raheem ain’t here to protect you no more” implying he needs the physical protection of others;  
(4) having a knife out to his face;  
(5) being pushed to the ground during the fight that is only broken up by the arrival of the cops;  
(6) invasion of his physical space as Radames pushes him against the wall;  
(7) threatening tone of voice;  
(8) Radames’s use of a baby voice in talking to him and tugging on his face like talking to baby rather than a man.

**Challenges to the Victim (Radames) by the Aggressor (Bishop):**  
(1) being called a “punk spic”;  
(2) his belief that aggressor snitched on him to the police implicating him as a murder suspect;  
(3) being pushed to the floor during the fight by the aggressor.

(2) Menace II Society (1993)

**Scene:** Opening scene of movie

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*61 Bishop is played by Tupac Shakur and so is often referred to by participants as the “Tupac character.”*
Length: 3.32 minutes

Characters: O-Dog (Aggressor); Caine (Peer); Male and female (presumably husband and wife) storekeepers (Victims)

Scene Description: The film opens in the Watts neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles. Two African-American male teens, Caine and O-Dog, enter a store to buy liquor for a party they are attending that evening. They head to the refrigerators at the back of the store. The female Korean storekeeper, pretending to be cleaning, trails them in the belief they intend to shoplift given their race and street presentation. O-Dog opens a bottle of malt liquor and begins to drink from it. The male Korean storekeeper instructs him, “You notta drink beer in store” to which O-Dog asserts his intention to pay and reiterates to the female storekeeper that it is not necessary to follow him around the store, adding, “You gettin’ on my nerves!” The female storekeeper responds, “Hurry up and buy” communicating her anxiety about the potential escalation of the situation to which O-Dog responds, “Shut the fuck up.” The male storekeeper then responds, “Just pay and leave” and then “hurry up and go” communicating his own anxiety about the potential for escalation and desire to bring the interaction to a close. O-Dog challenges the male storekeeper about his failure to give Caine his change. As the storekeeper opens the cash register, he comments, “I feel sorry for you mother.” O-Dog demands he repeat this comment. The storekeeper reiterates, “I don’t want no trouble. Just get out.” O-Dog fatally shoots the male storekeeper in front of his wife who begins screaming hysterically as she is dragged by O-Dog into the backroom. O-Dog instructs Caine to empty the cash register. Off camera, O-Dog is heard demanding the female storekeeper eject the video-surveillance tape, threatening to kill her if she does not comply. Two shots are then heard. O-Dog then returns to the front of the store to find that Caine has not emptied the register. Finding he is unable to open the register, O-Dog searches the deceased male storekeeper’s body taking six dollars from his person. Caine comments, “This don’t make no dam sense.” Fleeing the scene, O-Dog is heard saying, “See you ain’t gonna talk shit now.” The scene concludes with the voiceover by Caine: “Went into the store just to get a beer. Came out an accessory to murder and armed robbery. It’s funny like that in the ‘hood sometime. You never knew what was gonna happen or when. After that, I knew it was gonna be a long summer.”

Challenges to the Aggressor: (1) Female storekeeper’s surveillance of O-Dog and Caine, racially profiling them as shoplifters on the basis of their race and street presentation; (2) male storekeeper’s failure to return Caine’s change; (3) male storekeeper’s verbal disrespectful comment of “I feel sorry for your mother”; (4) female storekeeper’s failure to comply with O-Dog’s demand that she “shut up” and stop screaming hysterically after male storekeeper is fatally shot; (5) female storekeeper’s failure to quickly eject the surveillance videotape.

(3) Fresh (1994)

Scene: Shooting Hoops (chapter 8)
Length: 3.42 minutes

Characters: Jake (Aggressor); Curtis (Victim); Unnamed teenaged girl (Bystander Victim); B and Fresh (Witnesses).

Description: Friends B and Fresh are at the basketball court watching a game including Jake (older teen/young man) and Curtis (younger teen). B teases Fresh that a young teenage girl, seen jumping rope, has a crush on Fresh and is walking over to talk with him. Curtis demonstrates his superior skills on the court as he dribbles the ball in circles around Jake, humiliating Jake in front of his teammates and female spectators. Fresh’s awareness of the challenge this poses to Jake’s sense of his manhood and consequent need to readdress this disrespect is conveyed in Fresh’s comment, “Curtis be busting out those moves, as long as I ain’t playing that nigger.” Curtis attempts to restore Jake’s self-esteem by backing down somewhat to him (“Just forget about it, your ball”). Jakes momentarily leaves the court to get his gun, fatally shooting Curtis and the teenaged girl as the other teens flee the court. Jake warns that he will come after anyone who snitches on him to the police, kicking the deceased Curtis’s leg as he leaves the court. The camera pans over Curtis, over a squashed basketball and then over to the teenaged bystander victim girl who is whimpering and whose foot is scraping the concrete as she clasps her hands around her bleeding neck. Fresh puts his hands around her neck. A moment later her foot stops moving signaling that she has died.

Challenges to the Aggressor: (1) Curtis, the younger teen dribbling the ball in circles around him in front of Jake’s male peers and female observers on the court highlighted by comment of “Why you let the motherfucker play you like that?”

II: Copy of MASVI Interview (see Appendix E)

III: Scoring Procedure:

The MASVI will be assessed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The MASVI will be coded by an independent rater for level of overall reflective functioning as well as RF regarding the perpetrators’ and victims’ perspectives using the scoring sheet in this manual. A key to the reflective function scores and their respective qualitative descriptions can be found below. The independent rater will be blind both to the study aims and to the participant’s status as a subject or control. The rater will be provided with copies of the movie clips. The rater will view each of the clips several times before beginning to code the interviews for RF to ensure familiarity with the nuances of the aggressor-victim interactions depicted in the clips. The rater will be able to re-watch the clips as needed throughout the coding process. In addition, the rater will be provided with a copy of this manual that includes narrative descriptions of the scenes, and lists of the challenges to the aggressor’s physical safety/psychological security.
Key to Reflective Function Scores Used by Independent Rater

Fonagy, Target, Steele & Steele (1998). Reflective functioning manual. Version 5. For application to the adult attachment interview (pp.41-43)

-1 Negative RF

Response must:
1) be distinctly anti-reflective (i.e., hostile or actively evasive, usually because question is perceived as an assault or attack)  
or  
bizarre (impossible to understand without making the assumption of irrationality on the part of the subject)  
or  
inappropriate in the context of the interview (i.e., complete non-sequitors overfamiliarity, gross assumptions about the interviewer).

1 Absent but not repudiated RF

Response must:
1) be given in response to a demand question.  
2) be passively rather than actively evasive.  
3) be accompanied by little or no hostility.  
4) contain no evidence of:  
a) awareness of the nature of mental states;  
b) explicit effort to tease out mental states underlying behavior;  
c) recognition of the developmental aspects of mental states;  
d) interaction indicative of the awareness of the interviewer’s mental state  
5) leave the interviewer no better off in terms of knowledge of the mental states of the subject, caregiver or other having read the passage than he/she was before reading it  
Response may include:  
1) concrete explanations of behavior in terms avoiding reference to mental states (i.e., explanations may be sociological, excessively general, or framed in terms of external, physical circumstances, etc.).  
or  
2) self-serving distortion (recollections which are highly egocentric, self-aggrandizing and/or contain extraordinarily arrogant claims to insight).  
Note: The self-serving quality must be such that it leads the subject to make attributions that are clearly inaccurate and not simply biased or incomplete. Inaccurate efforts to tease out mental states underlying behavior are not sufficient to get a ‘1’ rating unless they are also grossly self-serving.

3 Questionable or low RF

Response must:
1) contain some suggestion of mentalizing efforts on the part of the subject which is
nevertheless,
2) devoid of any element that makes reflective functioning explicit (i.e., it never reflects mixed emotions, conflict or uncertainty about beliefs and feelings of others).
Response may frequently:
1) make use of mental state language without making clear or explicit that the subject genuine understands the implications of their statement.
2) appear somewhat clichéd, banal, superficial or ‘canned.’
3) be excessively deep and detailed yet unconvincing and/or irrelevant to the task.

5 **Definite or ordinary RF**

Response must:
1) contain some feature which makes reflection explicit (i.e., explicit reference to the nature or properties of mental states, how mental states relate to behavior, or mental states in relation to the interviewer).
2) not be a cliché (though it does not need to reflect sophistication).
Response may:
1) show evidence of one of the six features (listed below) for assigning a rating of ‘7’ in the context of a very simple observation of mental states which would otherwise rate only a ‘3.’

7 **Marked RF**

Response must:
1) contain some feature which makes reflection explicit (i.e., explicit reference to the nature or properties of mental states, how mental states relate to behavior, or mental states in relation to the interviewer).
2) meet at least one of the following. The passage:
   _ is sophisticated (meeting at least 2 categories of qualities which suggest moderate to high RF).
   _ is unusual or surprising, casting an original perspective (which is none-the-less readily understandable).
   _ is complex or elaborate, described in unusual detail with indication that multiple mental states attributed to a person are considered in relation to one another.
   _ places mental states within a causal sequence. Subject considers how the mental states arose, how they influenced behavior and what impact they have on subsequent perceptions, beliefs and desires.
   _ provides evidence of an interactional perspective (outlining interactions of mental states between two people or within one person’s mind).
   _ contains an acknowledgment of a particularly painful situation, with appropriate thoughts and feelings.

9 **Full or exceptional RF**

Response must:
1) show the above features of ‘7 - marked RF’ to an usually high degree (i.e., this response would be in the top 10% or less)

or

be given for a particularly charged and emotionally difficult subject in which maintaining even ordinary levels of reflective functioning could be considered exceptional.

2) have a strikingly personal character; it should enable the rater to feel confident that it is experienced as personally significant and meaningful.

Response may frequently:

1) demonstrate full awareness of important aspects of all protagonists within an interaction, such that the protagonists are placed in relation to one another in terms of their feelings and beliefs and these are sufficiently complex and elaborate to convince the rater of their accuracy.

Qualitative analysis of the MASVI by the principal investigator will focus on four areas, namely, (1) the experience of challenges to one’s physical and/or psychological integrity; (2) spontaneous capacity for mentalization about street violence; (3) quality of mentalization of the perpetrator’s experience during his commission of the homicide; and (4) quality of mentalization of the victim’s experience during the interaction. In addition, following Bateman & Fonagy’s (2006) Clinical Assessment of Mentalization Checklist (p. 171-172), the principal investigator will note evidence of the absence (and conversely presence) of paranoia (with absence of paranoia defined as “…not considering the thoughts of others as in themselves as a significant threat and having in mind having in mind the possibility that minds can be changed”, p.68) in her own analysis of the interviews.

IV: MASVI Coding Form

MASVI Coding Form

RF CODING FORM FOR MASVI

DATE:
Subject number of interview: Participant #

Coder: Olga Poznansky

General notes and comments on interview and scoring:

Overall RF:
RF re Aggressor:
RF re Victim):

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<td><strong>Aggressor’s Experience</strong></td>
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<td>Shooter’s actions (Q2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thoughts/feelings evoked in aggressor by challenge (Q3+4)</td>
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<td>At moment of shooting (Q5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Looking back (Q6)</td>
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<td>Thoughts/feelings evoked by challenge</td>
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<td>At moment of shooting of male storekeeper (Q5a)</td>
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Appendix G: Sample Checklist for Assessment of Capacity for Spontaneous Mentalization on MASVI

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References


