

January 2021

## Fight Navigator: Exploring the Feasibility of a Retaliatory Violence Prevention Program to Help Youth Manage the Code of the Street

James Barrett  
*Cambridge Health Alliance*

William Pollack

Elizabeth Janopaul-Naylor

Marvin So  
*Independent Investigator*

Vincenzo Teran

*See next page for additional authors*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/nyar>

---

### Recommended Citation

Barrett, J., Pollack, W., Janopaul-Naylor, E., So, M., Teran, V., & Stilwell, E. (2021). Fight Navigator: Exploring the Feasibility of a Retaliatory Violence Prevention Program to Help Youth Manage the Code of the Street. *National Youth-At-Risk Journal*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.20429/nyarj.2021.040202>

This research article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in National Youth-At-Risk Journal by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu).

---

# Fight Navigator: Exploring the Feasibility of a Retaliatory Violence Prevention Program to Help Youth Manage the Code of the Street

## Abstract

Violence remains the leading cause of injury and death for people between the ages of 15 and 24 and presents a challenge for communities of color. Better understanding of the context surrounding violence is critical in order to develop effective prevention interventions. We conducted a two-phase, qualitative, feasibility study to develop and initially evaluate a retaliatory violence program, Fight Navigator. Focus groups (n=20) and semi-structured case vignette interviews (n=20) were conducted with the target population that were analyzed using a consensual qualitative research approach. Findings suggest that participants were more likely to believe that conflicts could be resolved without violence and were better able to identify specific face-saving techniques to respond to threats after participating in the intervention. Our results demonstrate the value of incorporating youth perspectives into violence prevention efforts and pave the pathway for future research and practice.

## Keywords

youth, retaliatory violence, prevention, qualitative

## Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

## Cover Page Footnote

Acknowledgments: The authors would like to acknowledge the Cambridge Police Department, Cambridge Public Schools and Health and Human Services for their support in this project.

## Authors

James Barrett, William Pollack, Elizabeth Janopaul-Naylor, Marvin So, Vincenzo Teran, and Elizabeth Stilwell

## Introduction

Despite considerable prevention efforts over the past few decades, violence continues to be the leading cause of injury and death for people between the ages of 15 and 24 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015; Margolin, Youga, & Ballou, 2002). While the media often focuses on acts of antisocial or targeted violence, the majority of violent incidents among young people involve retaliatory violence (Copeland-Linder, Johnson, Haynie, Chung, & Cheng, 2012). Retaliatory violence is an aggressive reaction to threats against a person's physical, self-perceptual, emotional, and social stability (Frey, Pearson, & Cohen, 2015). Retaliation may serve to sustain a level of pride and social status while preventing any future wrongdoings within one's immediate context (Richardson, Vandenberg, & Humphries, 1986; Wilkinson, 2009). In order to foster more effective prevention strategies and ultimately reduce violence-associated morbidity and mortality, interventions must take into account the context in which violence occurs (Herrenkohl, et al., 2010).

Elijah Anderson's *The Code of the Street* (1999), describes how violence can be used to establish a social hierarchy within communities, particularly those that are disadvantaged. Children and adolescents growing up in this social climate internalize the notion that violence is an acceptable and encouraged means to ensure their own survival and the protection of loved ones (Farrell et al., 2008; Johnson, Burke, & Gielen 2012). This effect can be particularly true for boys, who are socialized to never show weakness by backing down from a fight (Kimmel, 1996; Pollack, 1998). As a result, many young people find themselves in a situation where they may not want to fight but feel that it is their only option in order to defend themselves and their sense of self-worth.

Previous qualitative research with youth of color has explored this concept. Sheehan and colleagues (2004) captured this tension in their qualitative study of urban youth's perspectives on violence in Chicago, finding that none of the participants in the study felt it was acceptable to be the aggressor in violence, but most believed that violence was justifiable for self-defense or if someone threatened a friend or family member. Farrell and colleagues (2011) interviewed urban, African American middle school students to examine factors associated with fighting. They observed that the perceptions on fighting held by the youth's community, school, parents and friends greatly shaped whether or not they would consider engaging in violent behaviors. Similarly, as Rich and Stone (1994) described, adolescent males report a prevailing perception that if they failed to respond violently to an injury or threat that they are placing themselves at risk of further victimization and being labeled a "sucker" (i.e., someone who fails to fight back or retaliate when being challenged, disrespected, or hurt). In this paradigm, respect is viewed as something obtained by one's actions and failure to act may lead to disapproval from peers, loss of status, and a decrease in self-esteem.

### Existing Violence Prevention Interventions

There are several empirically-supported violence prevention interventions that help adolescents manage and modulate strong emotional states (e.g., rage, anger). For example, anger management interventions aim to help adolescents identify environmental stimuli generating the anger response (Beck & Fernandez, 1998; O'Connell, Boat, & Warner, 2009) and then regulate affect and use skills to de-escalate (Goldstein, Glick, & Gibbs, 1998). There are also interventions that aim to increase effectiveness at recognizing when youth may be mistaking neutral social cues for hostile ones (Dodge & Coie, 1987; Feindler & Engel, 2011). For

example, a boy who perceives a peer staring at him in the hallway as a threat when in actuality the peer was staring because he mistook the boy for one of his friends.

These interventions focus primarily on improving a young person's capacity to regulate affect and improve social-processing capacity. There tends to be less of a focus on addressing the cultural norms that dictate that the only acceptable response to a situation is to fight (Chen, Flores, & Shetgiri, 2016; Heller et al., 2016). Further, the expected outcome of many violence prevention efforts is that the young person will walk away from a potential conflict (Blake & Hamrin, 2007). Yet, in some contexts, violence may be viewed as the only viable option. Indeed, it has been shown that those involved in these situations do not feel inclined to suppress feelings of anger or aggression. Instead they feel this affect is necessary to defend either themselves or their sense of pride (Farrell et al., 2008; Felson, 1978; 2002).

### **Youth Voice in Violence Prevention**

A major criticism of prevention efforts with disadvantaged and minority youth is that they typically do not explicitly address power differentials (Baron, 2006; Leff, et al., 2010). Often the intervention is delivered by an instructor who is in a position of privilege giving admonitions about avoiding violence when that instructor may have never had to encounter the realities of the code of the street. A young person may tune out instructors if the message they provide runs counter to what the youth knows to be true in his or her lived experience. Consequently, if a program suggests dissolving protective, albeit questionably maladaptive, attitudes or behaviors to thwart violence, without offering contextually viable alternative responses it is unlikely youth will perceive such interventions as helpful (Barrett & Kallivayalil, 2015; Farrell et al., 2008; Frey, Pearson, & Cohen, 2015). Many researchers have noted that violence prevention programs with minimal consideration of cultural context (e.g., Allison, Edmonds, Wilson, Pope and Farrell, 2011; Barrett & Kallivayalil, 2015) or tailoring to individual youth's specific needs (e.g., Blake & Hamrin, 2007) often fail to yield behavioral change. Moreover, others have attempted to identify beliefs and perceptions that make youth more or less likely to engage in violent behavior (Bettencourt & Farrell, 2013; Leff et al., 2014; Stoddard, Zimmerman, & Bauermeister, 2012). The conceptualization and development of these interventions often neglect to include the voice of the youth themselves. It stands to reason that the young people who face these threats in their daily lives know what techniques and strategies work to avoid a potential fight but also allow them to save face. Such an approach aligns with the robust body of literature employing community-based participatory research principles (Leff, et al., 2011).

There are some interventions that meaningfully integrate the experiences of youth who struggle with the code of the street into preventative violence interventions. The *Becoming a Man (B.A.M.)* program is one example that is showing promising results in Chicago (Heller, et al. 2016). B.A.M. focuses on mentoring, role-playing and group exercises to help students improve impulse control and emotional self-regulation. B.A.M. works to foster positive development in young men by emphasizing Six Core Values: Integrity, Accountability, Positive Anger-Expression, Self-Determination, Respect for Womanhood, and Visionary Goal-Setting. Randomized evaluations of B.A.M. among young men of color demonstrate improvements in long-term academic, violent-crime arrest, and readmission outcomes, along with encouraging cost-benefit (Heller et al., 2016).

Building upon efforts to develop creative, culturally-relevant ways to help young people stay safe, this paper describes the development and initial evaluation of a retaliatory violence prevention curriculum, *Fight Navigator (FN)*. We describe a two-phase, qualitative study

involving young people who navigate these threats in their daily lives. First, focus groups informed the development of the FN curriculum that teaches young people how to navigate retaliatory violence. Second, we conducted semi-structured interviews with youth before and after participating in the FN curriculum in order to authentically infuse youth perspective into program improvements. We contend that this approach aligns with larger trends in developmental psychology and violence prevention to genuinely infuse the voice of youth not only in the development of prevention efforts, but also in the understanding of the potential impact of interventions (Arnett, 2005; Leff et al., 2010; Mason et al., 2013).

### **Methods**

The present study constitutes the first stage of a stage-based model of behavioral treatment research to translate clinical innovations into routine clinical practice (Rounsaville, Carroll, Onken, 2001; Onken, Blaine, Battjes, 1997). In this framework, the first phase involves intervention conceptual development and manual writing, followed by a phase to test a near-final version of the program to explore feasibility and acceptance by the target population. Later stages to more rigorously evaluate interventions for clinically significant outcomes and test generalizability cannot conceivably begin until the initial stage is complete and the intervention is refined (e.g., length, session content, group vs. individual format).

To operationalize this first stage, we conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) examining how young people conceptualize violence, likely risk factors, and potential strategies to avoid violence to develop the FN program content and structure. Then, we used semi-structured case vignette interviews with the target audience assessing perceptions of violence before and after participating in the FN. Qualitative methods were emphasized for their utility in the development of youth and family-focused behavioral health interventions (Dumka, et al., 1998), and given the exploratory nature of this project. This approach was consistent with a mixed-methods exploratory sequential design (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003) in which one phase of data collection and analysis informs the next, thereby strengthening the credibility and transferability of our findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

### **Setting and Research Team**

Youth focus groups, curriculum development, and initial testing were conducted through the Cambridge Safety Net Collaborative (hereafter referred to as Safety Net). The Safety Net is a coalition of professionals from the Cambridge Police Department Youth & Family Services Unit, Health Alliance, Department of Human Service Programs, and Public Schools. The Safety Net aims to foster positive youth development, promote mental health, and limit youth involvement in the juvenile justice system through prevention, early intervention, and diversion strategies in the school system (Barrett & Janopaul-Naylor, 2016). The study team consisted of members both experienced and new to qualitative research, and included two doctoral-level psychologists, one psychiatry resident, one psychology fellow and a graduate student in public health. The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Cambridge Health Alliance institutional review board (IRB).

### **Curriculum Development**

**Literature review.** To develop FN's conceptual foundation and enhance theoretical sensitivity, three research team members (JGB, WSP, ES) conducted a state-of-the-art literature review, which sought to provide an up-to-date overview to highlight areas in need of research (Grant & Booth, 2009). The review's focus was on exploring retaliatory violence in modern culture, the social pressures that adolescent boys in urban settings specifically impression

management, existing adolescent violence prevention and anger management programs, and “in the moment” techniques to prevent retaliatory violence.

**Focus group discussions (FGDs).** The first author conducted FGDs with the aim of eliciting adolescent’s perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes regarding using physical aggression and the pressure to fight. FGDs were chosen in order to enable discussion of personal experiences, explore meanings that participants ascribed to different situations and courses of action. The goal of these focus groups was to understand (a) specific situations where boys felt pressured to fight; (b) the messages boys received from adults about what to do to avoid fighting and what has worked and what has not worked; and (c) what strategies the boys use to avoid fighting without feeling like they have “backed down.”

The authors purposively recruited 20 participants from voluntary afterschool and summer programs of 4 youth centers in Cambridge, assisted by youth center leaders from 2011-2013 (Oliver & Jupp, 2006). Each focus group consisted of 4-8 adolescent boys (age 13-18) and was ethnically diverse (see Table 1). Although qualitative studies do not mandate specific sample sizes, we sought to obtain relevant perspectives by speaking to youth for whom violence has been empirically shown to be pertinent – urban, minority youth (Sheehan, Kim, & Galvin, 2004). All interviews took place in a private setting, were audio-recorded following parents’ informed consent and participants’ written assent, and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Youth and/or their parents were free to elect not to participate in the study without any bearing on their status at the youth center. Those who declined were assigned to participate in an alternate activity during the FGDs.

Data analysis proceeded by a team-based approach guided by the Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) model (1997). First, each question asked in the focus groups served as an *a priori* domain. The responses in each domain were independently open-coded by JGB, WSP, and ES and organized into core ideas to illustrate the voice of participants. The research team then met as a group to come to consensus on core ideas within domains, over multiple sessions. Next, core ideas among domains were established to reduce redundancy and create clear categories to describe the participants’ responses. Finally, the entire process was reviewed by an external auditor with expertise in youth violence and qualitative research to check that data was consistently categorized and faithfully represented at each stage of analysis. Through this process a curriculum was created (see Figure 1 for a brief description).

### **Initial Evaluation**

A draft version of the curriculum and manual were developed with the content drawn from the literature on violence prevention with urban youth, the clinical expertise of the research team and the insights and strategies identified from the FGDs. The research team then assessed the feasibility and acceptability of the program using interview methods. Semi-structured interviews with Safety Net-involved youth were conducted both before and after participating in FN. Purposeful recruitment, setting of data collection, audio-recording, consent, and verbatim transcription procedures were consistent with those employed in the FGDs. Both male and female adolescents (age 13-18), representing a range of race/ethnicities, were included in this phase (Table 1). JGB conducted interviews with each participant before they participated in FN. Subsequently, participants received two 1.5-hour sessions of the FN curriculum in two separate sessions with 10 participants each. Following the program, JGB conducted another set of semi-structured individual interviews with each participant. Of the 20 youth who participated in the pilot FN program, 20 completed a pre-intervention interview while 18 completed a post-intervention interview; two participants were absent the day of the post-interview.

Both pre- and post- interviews were based on vignettes with case scenarios in which a hypothetical individual, relatable to the participant, was in a situation where they needed to respond to an event that could potentially escalate to physical conflict. While the vignettes described slightly different scenarios, they both depict situations in which a similar decision-making process had to be undertaken by the protagonist. The scenarios for both vignettes were adapted from actual situations that emerged from the FGDs, thus reflecting the experience of the population who received the intervention. Vignettes have been increasingly used in qualitative studies to explore diverse health topics, and have been shown to be valuable for potentially sensitive issues that may be challenging to discuss directly (e.g., violence, mental health) (Hughes, 1998; Jackson et al., 2015; Reavley & Jorm, 2012). Thus, the vignette methodology is an effective format for eliciting multi-faceted ideas, particularly from youth (Barter & Renold, 1999; Finch, 1987). Details of the vignettes used for both pre- and post-interviews are presented in Figure 2.

Semi-structured interviews elicited participants' reactions to the presented vignette via open-ended questions and probes integrated into the delivery of the vignette itself, and identical at both time points: (a) What was going through the head of the individual described in the vignette, (b) What sort of actions the individual could take to escalate or de-escalate the situation, (c) What might make it difficult for the individual to respond in the best way possible, and (d) What are the potential strategies the individual might use to diffuse the conflict while saving face? Again, CQR was the primary analytic approach with interview guide questions serving as *a priori* domains for both interview time points. MS and EJM served as primary data analysts, proceeding through the process of concurrent memo creation, independent open-coding, and convening of the larger research group to discuss coding results. A unique aspect to this phase was the use of a structured codebook to facilitate a stable, team-based analysis given that we sought to compare pre- to post-interviews (MacQueen, McLellan, Kay, & Milstein, 1998).

MS and EJM independently validated Codebook V1 against the raw text using the constant comparative method (Boeije, 2002), assigning codes to each line of the transcripts and assessing concepts that did not emerge within Codebook V1's existing conceptual framework based upon the team's original discussion. These validations were then consolidated and had a "moderate" degree of inter-rater reliability (Cohen's  $\kappa = 0.72$ ; % Agreement = 66%) (Gwet, 2014). The consolidated codebook was then discussed with the research team for consensual agreement and used to inform the development of Codebook V2. The understanding of the phenomena described in pre- and post-interviews was further refined through multiple codebook validations against the raw data following the rule of "essential sufficiency", which was then used to inform subsequent group consensus-building. The ultimate result was a final taxonomy describing the experiences (core themes) reported in both the pre- and post-interviews in a parsimonious format stable across both time points (Table 3). The final codebook held a "high" degree of inter-rater reliability (Cohen's  $\kappa = 0.89$ ; % Agreement = 87%) and was used to tabulate basic counts of themes and sub-themes represented in pre- and post-interviews. Although generally discouraged in the qualitative paradigm, this approach is justified when used to facilitate identification of patterns within data, as in the present study (Silverman, 2005). We do not place any presumption of representativeness or statistical inference from these counts, though they did serve to understand the relative frequency of concepts from before to after participation in FN.

## Results

### Curriculum Development

The qualitative analysis from FGDs identified 11 distinct core ideas based on four FGDs. However, the research team came to the consensus that two of the questions could be collapsed to form one domain. Hence the core ideas were organized into three distinct domains: 1) Perceived influences on fighting behavior (four core ideas), 2) Messages received about fighting (two core ideas) and 3) Techniques to avoid fighting while saving face (five core ideas). Core ideas were those ideas that arose multiple times within the data. Table 2 describes the core ideas that comprised each of the three major domains. These domains and the core ideas and techniques that comprise the domains directly informed the development of the FN curriculum.

### **Initial Evaluation**

Data gathered from pre- and post-interviews revealed five major domains: (a) appreciating threat, (b) non-verbal communication, (c) impact of a crowd, (d) avoiding violence and disrespect, and (e) strategies to “save face.” Table 3 illustrates the response frequency of domains and sub-domains for both pre- and post-interview participants, serving primarily to reflect the relative representativeness of responses. The following is an analysis of the core themes that emerged in each of the five major domains with direct quotes from participants to illustrate concepts.

**Appreciating threat.** This domain focused on whether or not participants in both the pre- and post-interviews identified the situation as threatening and with potential for a physical fight. Despite differences in the context of the situation across time points (i.e., pre-interviews involved a conflict over a romantic relationship while the post-interview presented a dilemma during a basketball game), participants at both time points felt the scenario posed a valid threat to the main character in the story.

The appreciation of threat was further deconstructed into type of threat. The responses were categorized into the core themes of threats to physical safety, social status and or threats to sense of self. For instance, “*Joe wants to fight him. Because of his actions that he's making, going up towards him,*” (Post-Interview Participant 1; “Post1”) and, “*Carlos may also be thinking that it's getting dangerous now,*” (Post12) both exemplify the responses articulating threat to physical safety. Suggesting participants appreciated a threat to social status, a respondent in the baseline interview said, “*because people are gathering around and taking out their camera, so he's probably going to give in to peer pressure,*” (Pre-Interview Participant 9; “Pre9”). And lastly, as an example of a threat to sense of self, one pre-interview participant reported, “*well he doesn't want to be embarrassed, so he might do something foolish,*” (Pre17). In the post-interviews, there were fewer responses suggesting concerns for threats to internal sense of self and to social status. The experience of threat to physical safety was similar between pre- and post-interview.

**Non-verbal communication.** In order to gauge participants’ awareness to the power of non-verbal communication, they were asked how body language could escalate the conflict in the both vignettes. The majority of respondents stated that physical aggression could escalate the situation, with one participant noting that, “*he could... put his hands on Victor, and it will obviously escalate from there,*” (Pre15); and another stating, “*Carlos could punch him in the face...he could push him,*” (Post18). This result was observed across time points, suggesting a prior understanding of non-verbal strategies in escalating conflict.

In both the pre- and post-interview the importance of maintaining a safe space emerged as a core theme. It is important to note that having a safe distance, awareness of the influence of body language in conflictual situations, and assertive communication skills were emphasized in the FN curriculum. Moreover, to examine the techniques learned by the participants through the

curriculum, they were asked, “What could de-escalate the conflict?” Compared to the pre-interview, responses in the follow-up interviews illustrated the attention placed on maintaining a safe physical distance and using assertive communication as de-escalation strategies. Participants reported that, “*he's gotta make sure he's [at] a respectful distance away from Joe. And talk to him calmly so that there's no misunderstanding,*” (Post14); that, “*if he wants to de-escalate it, he can step back, show him that alright, I'll give you space - you have yours, and I have my space*” (Post11); and that, “*he could put his hands up and be like 'yo, it's not, I didn't mean to' so that he could have that distance between them two,*” (Post17). Notably, these specific de-escalating strategies were not present in the responses of participants in the pre-interview.

**Impact of a crowd.** Both the pre- and post-interview vignettes involved a crowd in order to assess the presence of peers on participants’ perception of potentially aggressive situations. Two core themes emerged concerning the role of friends: their ability to encourage the crowd to fight, as well as their ability to intervene to de-escalate the conflict. In both pre and post-interview, the participants asserted that the presence of a crowd could likely persuade the main characters to fight (peer pressure) as illustrated in several responses: “*because [there are] people who will try to keep him in, because they [crowd] want to see the fight,*” (Pre13); and, “*his friends might egg him on, like push him, hype him up to fight Joe,*” (Post10). Both vignettes elicited the importance placed on the main characters by participants to maintain face and an acceptable social reputation. As one respondent noted, “*he doesn't wanna look like a so-called punk because society labels [you that] if you walk away from a fight, as a punk, and you're not worthy of doing anything,*” (Pre15).

The responses of the participants highlighted the power of friends and bystanders to offer an “out” or exit strategy to someone at risk for fighting. In the post-interview, participants were more frequently able to articulate the use of a crowd to de-escalate a potential conflict (60% of pre-interview participants shared this crowd influence vs. 94% among post-interview participants). Notably, the extent to which participants reported the crowd could encourage fighting fell from pre- to post-interview (65% to 50% of participants, respectively), suggesting that participants were beginning to view the presence of friends as an opportunity to de-escalate a situation.

**Avoiding violence and disrespect.** The overarching goal in the development of the FN curriculum was to learn from young people how they respond to potential threats in ways that avoid violence while saving face. In this domain three core themes emerged regarding participants beliefs about the possibility of avoiding violence while saving face: (a) avoiding violence was not possible, (b) avoiding violence was possible but no specific strategy was provided and (c) avoiding violence was possible with specific strategy provided. We posited that by teaching specific contextually- and culturally-relevant tactics for de-escalating a potential conflict, the participants would be more likely to consider and report de-escalation as an acceptable option in the post-interview. In the pre-interview, several participants reported that in order to save face they would have to fight,

*for me [there] wouldn't be an option because if I'm surrounded by someone and someone's confronting me, and everyone's confronting me and taking out their camera, they're expecting to see something, so I'm not gonna sit there and act like I'm some pushover - it's not gonna happen.* (Pre14)

Some participants said it might be possible to de-escalate the situation but were unable to identify a specific strategy. About a third of participants (35%) were able to identify a specific strategy that they felt would be effective (see Table 2 for examples). In contrast, responses in the follow-up-interview revealed that all but one participant believed it was possible to save face and

prevent a fight, with a majority of those respondents offering at least one specific strategy. In sum, the majority of the participants in the post-interview stated it was possible to avoid a fight and identified a strategy that would prevent them from being perceived as a coward.

**Strategies to save face.** While there are many strategies that can be used to manage a conflict in a manner that avoids violence while allowing both parties the opportunity to save face, four core themes emerged in this domain: (a) delaying the conflict, (b) finding common ground, (c) minimizing the conflict and (d) moving the interaction away from a crowd. Participants in both the interview time points provided general or vague examples on ways to resolve the conflict without fighting while also saving face (e.g., talk it out, walk away, and apologize). Two examples include: “*well, at this point he could walk away but that might make it worse*” (Pre8) and “*hmm...talk to him. But, I feel like that would be hard to do*” (Pre2).

Generally, in the post-interview, the participants provided more sophisticated responses on how to resolve the potential conflict without the use of violence while also saving face. For example, one of the pre-interview specific strategies suggested, “*maybe he can be like ‘yo, let's go talk somewhere else’ or something like that*” (Pre16). Many of the participants in the follow-up interview were able to provide specific and or more targeted strategies that were infused into the FN curriculum and apply them to the vignette. Strategies offered by respondents included efforts to: “*try to delay and say if there's a problem let's just talk about it later, like, we're in the middle of the game.*” (Post7); or “*move the fight away from the group, or he could respond by saying can we take this somewhere else, and then talk about it*” (Post3). Other respondents suggested keeping the focus on the situation at hand (i.e., the basketball game): “*Yeah, he could be like...you know this is stupid. We shouldn't be fighting. Let's just keep on playing basketball.*” (Post4); or “*just be like I'm tired man, I didn't mean to, and I'm not trying to fight you, cause you know we're just playing ball*” (Post2).

### Discussion

FN was developed to integrate the lived experience of youth who adhere to the code of the street into an intervention designed to prevent retaliatory violence. From the focus groups, the development of the curriculum, to the strategies to be taught, and to initial efforts at evaluating the potential of the curriculum, this project sought to represent youth's perspectives in each step of the process. The results of this study yield information which can support social service, education, and youth development practitioners seeking to incorporate young people's voices and experiences into violence prevention and intervention efforts.

The primary finding warranting consideration is that the strategies discussed were derived primarily from the youth themselves who told us what they felt worked in real life to respond to threats without violence. Our data suggests that the youth in this study were already clearly aware of the threats that they come across in day-to-day life and did not need an intervention to further refine this awareness. This is in line with the given the literature (e.g., Farrell, et al., 2011) that indicates that youth are well versed in the messages they receive from family, peers and the community as to when fighting is appropriate and when it is not. FN teaches strategies that involvement of peers and friends in de-escalating interpersonal conflict. These strategies were more prevalent in the post- than in the pre-interview, suggesting that participants were at the very least more aware of specific ways peers can act to de-escalate conflict after working with the curriculum.

Perhaps the most encouraging result of the initial FN curriculum testing occurred in increased optimism for violence prevention and pro-social alternatives to resolve interpersonal conflict between pre and post-interviews. Prior to the training and focus group discussions,

about one-fourth of the participants indicated that there was little to no possibility to resolve the dilemma illustrated in the vignette without violence. However, after participating in the interventions, a larger number of participants not only believed that violence need not be inevitable to resolve the problem while maintaining self-esteem, but also had creative, viable real-life strategies for achieving such a positive outcome.

The two most noteworthy de-escalation strategies that allowed the participants to save-face and interrupt a potentially violent encounter included gaining the capacity to search for common ground for a resolution and the emotional-cognitive capacity to imagine means to minimize the significance of the insult so as to avoid the need to resort to retaliatory violence. Furthermore, recognizing the utility of moving away from the crowd was another important strategy to eschew violence while saving face. These two specific strategies may be helpful for practitioners to emphasize in their own work with youth violence prevention.

Our findings are consistent with and extend previous work to explore the factors that influence minority youth to engage in violent behaviors. Mason et al.'s (2013) assessment of the youth risk behavior literature illuminated the nature of risk-taking among young people as a process fundamentally guided by structural factors, thus warranting a need for interventions grounded in socially-embedded lived experiences. Further, Farrell et al.'s (2015) examination of the relevance and usefulness of the Second Step violence prevention curriculum underscored the importance of the broader social ecology in influencing how effective the social-cognitive skills targeted by the curriculum could be. Thus, our data strengthen previous recommendations for youth-serving practitioners and agencies to administer violence reduction services with thoughtful attention to risk and protective factors at individual, relationship, and community levels (Herrenkohl, et al., 2010). Practitioners might also examine the domains elicited by youth from semi-structured interviews as promising areas for education and discussion for clients that struggle with violence, aggression, or delinquency. For example, practitioners could work with clients on the strategies they can use to save face that make sense in the context of their lives while drawing on the examples presented in FN. If clients have examples that they have rehearsed in session, they may be more likely to access them when needed in the moment when confronted by a threat.

### **Limitations, Strengths, and Future Directions**

Interpretation of this study's findings should be read with attention to its limitations. First, while the sample size of this study is considered appropriate for a qualitative study (Hill et al., 1997), future evaluation of FN with a larger sample size would allow for possible quantitative analysis to augment and explain these qualitative findings. Second, having the same interviewer conduct both pre- and post-interviews for the initial evaluation may have introduced an unmeasured source of social desirability and/or expectancy bias. To mitigate this threat, the first interviewer used pre-written semi-structured interview guides for both assessments and was not involved in the coding of primary transcripts. Moreover, we made several *post hoc* efforts to enhance the study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) including methodologic and analyst triangulation (Patton, 1999), as well as consideration and reporting of our research team's background (i.e., reflexivity). Third, all participants from this study were from a mid-size, urban city in the northeast - thus the results may not be generalizable to all populations.

It would be premature to claim that participation in FN results in measurable changes in violent altercations or use of de-escalation strategies. The data is from individual hypothetical situations, and not actual reports of using the techniques in the participant's daily lives. The

most important feature missing from this initial evaluation is whether participants can employ strategies in “real-life” settings and whether the use of strategies are associated with reduced onset or severity of violent altercations. While the vignette methodology was useful in this study for eliciting qualitative data from an *emic* perspective, the vignettes themselves were not empirically-validated nor pilot-tested with the target population. This limitation is inherent to the approach (Barter & Renold, 1999), and the vignettes were informed by the recurrent themes from the focus group discussions.

Nonetheless, we believe the foundational efforts described in this paper are important, as high rates of drop-out and barriers to replication of treatment effects in community settings continue to stymie psychosocial interventions for young people. Many have argued that this may be due to a lack of research exploring how to apply evidence-informed approaches into diverse community settings and in ways that are socially-valid with the lived experience of the target population (Rounsaville, Carroll, & Onken, 2001; Leff, et al., 2010). Though the process of creating a curriculum to prevent violence by using those with lived experiences appears to be a promising approach, the current analysis is clearly preliminary. A rigorous evaluation of the curriculum using an internally and externally valid approach is necessary to demonstrate efficacy with the target population, guide process improvements, and ascertain FN’s potential for dissemination at scale.

## References

- Allison, K. W., Edmonds, T., Wilson, K., Pope, M., & Farrell, A. D. (2011). Connecting youth violence prevention, positive youth development, and community mobilization. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *48*, 8-20. doi:10.1007/s10464-010-9407-9
- Anderson, E. (1999). *Code of the street: Decency, violence, and the moral life of the inner city*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Arnett, J. J. (2005). The Vitality Criterion: A New Standard of Publication for the Journal of Adolescent Research. *The Journal of Adolescent Research*, *20*(1), 3-7.
- Baron, S. W. (2006). Street youth, strain theory, and crime. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, *34*(2), 209-223.
- Barrett, J. G., & Janopaul-Naylor, E. (2016). Description of a collaborative community approach to impacting juvenile arrests. *Psychological Services*, *13*(2), 133-139.
- Barrett, J., & Kallivayalil, D. (2015). "Ride or Die": Therapeutic Interventions for Retaliatory Violence Among Youth. *Adolescent Psychiatry*, *5*(1), 40-49.
- Barter, C., & Renold, E. (1999). The use of vignettes in qualitative research. *Social Research Update*, *25*, 1-7.
- Beck, R., & Fernandez, E. (1998). Cognitive-behavioral therapy in the treatment of anger: A meta-analysis. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, *22*(1), 63-74.
- Bettencourt, A. F., & Farrell, A. D. (2013). Individual and contextual factors associated with patterns of aggression and peer victimization during middle school. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *42*, 285-302. doi:10.1007/s10964-012-9854-8
- Blake, C. S., & Hamrin, V. (2007). Current approaches to the assessment and management of anger and aggression in youth: A review. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, *20*(4), 209-221.
- Boeije, H. (2002). A purposeful approach to the constant comparative method in the analysis of qualitative interviews. *Quality and Quantity*, *36*(4), 391-409. doi: 10.1023/A:1020909529486
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2015). *Violence and homicide among youth*. Retrieved June 25, 2015, from <http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/toolstemplates/entertainment/tips/violenceyouth.html>
- Chen, R. J., Flores, G., & Shetgiri, R. (2016). African-American and Latino parents' attitudes and beliefs regarding adolescent fighting and its prevention. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *25*(6), 1746-1754.
- Copeland-Linder, N., Johnson, S. B., Haynie, D. L., Chung, S. E., & Cheng, T. L. (2012). Retaliatory attitudes and violent behaviors among assault-injured youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *50*(3), 215-220.
- Creswell, J. W., Plano Clark, V. L., Gutmann, M. L., & Hanson, W. E. (2003). Advance mixed methods research designs. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research* (pp. 209-240). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dodge, K. A., & Coie, J. D. (1987). Social-information-processing factors in reactive and Proactive aggression in children's peer groups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *53*(6), 1146-1158.
- Dumka, L. E., Gonzales, N. A., Wood, J. L., & Formoso, D. (1998). Using qualitative methods to develop contextually relevant measures and preventive interventions: An illustration. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *26*(4), 605-637.

- Farrell, A. D., Erwin, E. H., Bettencourt, A., Mays, S., Vulin-Reynolds, M., Sullivan, T., Allison, K. W., Kliever, W., & Meyer, A. (2008). Individual factors influencing effective nonviolent behavior and fighting in peer situations: a qualitative study with urban African American adolescents. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology, 37*(2), 397-411. doi:10.1080/15374410801955821
- Farrell, A. D., Mays, S., Bettencourt, A., Erwin, E. H., Vulin-Reynolds, M., Sullivan, T., & Allison, K. W. (2011). Environmental influences on fighting versus nonviolent behavior in peer situations: A qualitative study with urban African American adolescents. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 46*(1-2), 19-35. doi:10.1007/s10464-010-9331-z
- Farrell, A. D., Mehari, K., Mays, S., Sullivan, T. N., & Le, A. T. (2015). Participants' perceptions of a violence prevention curriculum for middle school students: Was it relevant and useful? *The Journal of Primary Prevention, 36*(4), 227-246.
- Feindler, E. L., & Engel, E. C. (2011). Assessment and intervention for adolescents with anger and aggression difficulties in school settings. *Psychology in the Schools, 48*(3), 243-253.
- Felson, R. B. (1978). Aggression as impression management. *Social Psychology, 41*, 205-213.
- Felson, R. B. (2002). *Violence and gender reexamined*. Washington, DC: American.
- Frey, K. S., Pearson, C. R., & Cohen, D. (2015). Revenge is seductive, if not sweet: Why friends matter for prevention efforts. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 37*, 25-35. doi:10.1016/j.appdev.2014.08.002
- Goldstein, A.P., Glick, B., & Gibbs, J.C. (1998). *Aggression Replacement Training: A comprehensive intervention for aggressive youth*. Illinois: Research Press.
- Grant, M. J., & Booth, A. (2009). A typology of reviews: An analysis of 14 review types and associated methodologies. *Health Information & Libraries Journal, 26*(2), 91-108.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). London: Sage.
- Gwet, K. L. (2014). Benchmarking Inter-Rater Reliability Coefficients. In *Handbook of Inter-Rater Reliability: The Definitive Guide to Measuring the Extent of Agreement Among Multiple Raters* (pp. 74 – 91). Gaithersburg, MD: Advanced Analytics, LLC.
- Heller, S. B., Shah, A. K., Guryan, J., Ludwig, J., Mullainathan, S., & Pollack, H. A. (2016). Thinking, fast and slow? Some field experiments to reduce crime and dropout in Chicago. NBER Working Paper No. 21178. Available at: <http://www.nber.org/papers/w21178.pdf>
- Herrenkohl, T. I., Aisenberg, E., Williams, J. H., & Jenson, J. M. (Eds.). (2011). *Violence in context: Current evidence on risk, protection, and prevention*. Oxford University Press.
- Hill, C. E., Thompson, B. J., & Williams, E. N. (1997). A guide to conducting consensual qualitative research. *The Counseling Psychologist, 25*(4), 517–572.
- Houser, J., & Oman, K. S. (2010). *Evidence-based practice: An implementation guide for healthcare organizations*. Jones & Bartlett Publishers.
- Hughes, R. (1998). Considering the vignette technique and its application to a study of drug injecting and HIV risk and safer behaviour. *Sociology of Health & Illness, 20*(3), 381-400.
- Jackson, M., Harrison, P., Swinburn, B., & Lawrence, M. (2015). Using a qualitative vignette to explore a complex public health issue. *Qualitative Health Research, 25*(10), 1395-1409.

- Johnson, S. L., Burke, J. G., & Gielen, A. C. (2012). Urban students' perceptions of the school environment's influence on school violence. *Children & Schools, 34*(2), 92-102.
- Kimmel, M. S. (1996). *Manhood in America: A cultural history*. Oxford University Press.
- Leff, S. S., Thomas, D. E., Vaughn, N. A., Thomas, N. A., MacEvoy, J. P., Freedman, M. A., & Woodburn, E. M. (2010). Using community-based participatory research to develop the PARTNERS youth violence prevention program. *Progress in community health partnerships: research, education, and action, 4*(3), 207.
- Leff, S. S., Baker, C. N., Waasdorp, T. E., Vaughn, N. A., Bevans, K. B., Thomas, N. A., & Monopoli, W. J. (2014). Social cognitions, distress, and leadership self-efficacy: Associations with aggression for high-risk minority youth. *Development and psychopathology, 26*(03), 759-772.
- MacQueen, K. M., McLellan, E., Kay, K., & Milstein, B. (1998). Codebook development for team-based qualitative analysis. *Cultural anthropology methods, 10*(2), 31-36.
- Margolin, A., Youga, J., & Ballou, M. (2002). Voices of violence: A study of male adolescent aggression. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education, and Development, 41*, 215-231.
- Mason, M. J., Tanner, J. F., Piacentini, M., Freeman, D., Anastasia, T., Batat, W., & Rangan, P. (2013). Advancing a participatory approach for youth risk behavior: Foundations, distinctions, and research directions. *Journal of Business Research, 66*(8), 1235-1241.
- O'Connell, M. E., Boat, T., & Warner, K. E. (Eds). (2009). Preventing mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders among young people. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. Retrieved from <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2009/PreventingMental-Emotional-and-Behavioral-DisordersAmong-Young-People-Progress-and-Possibilities.aspx>
- Oliver, P., & Jupp, V. (2006). Purposive sampling. In V. Jupp (Ed.), *The Sage Dictionary of Social Research Methods* (pp. 244-245). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Onken, L. S., Blaine, J. D., & Battjes, R. J. (1997). Behavioral therapy research: A conceptualization of a process. In S.W. & A.B. Santos (Eds), *Innovative approaches for difficult-to-treat populations* (pp. 477-485). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association.
- Patton, M. Q. (1999). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health services research, 34*(5 Pt 2), 1189-1208.
- Pollack, W. S. (1998). *Real boys: Rescuing our sons from the myths of boyhood*. New York: Henry Holts & Company.
- Reavley, N. J., & Jorm, A. F. (2012). Stigmatising attitudes towards people with mental disorders: Changes in Australia over 8years. *Psychiatry Research, 197*(3), 302-306.
- Rich, J. A., & Stone, D. A. (1996). The experience of violent injury for young African-American men: The meaning of being a "sucker." *The Society of General Internal Medicine, 11*(2), 77-82.
- Richardson, D. R., Vandenberg, R. J., & Humphries, S. A. (1986). Effect of power to harm on retaliative aggression among males and females. *Journal of Research in Personality, 20*(4), 402-419.
- Rodríguez, M. D., Baumann, A. A., & Schwartz, A. L. (2011). Cultural adaptation of an evidence based intervention: From theory to practice in a Latino/a community context. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 47*(1-2), 170-186.

- Rounsaville, B. J., Carroll, K. M., & Onken, L. S. (2001). A stage model of behavioral therapies research: Getting started and moving on from stage I. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 8(2), 133-142.
- Sampson, R. J., & Wilson, W. J. (1995). Toward a theory of race, crime, and urban inequality. *Race, Crime, and Justice: A Reader*, 177-190.
- Sheehan, K., Kim, L. E., & Galvin, J. P. (2004). Urban children's perceptions of violence. *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* 158(1), 74-77.
- Silverman, D. (2005, September). Instances or sequences? Improving the state of the art of qualitative research. In Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research (Vol. 6, No. 3).
- Slater, M., Rovira, A., Southern, R., Swapp, D., Zhang, J. J., Campbell, C., & Levine, M. (2013). Bystander responses to a violent incident in an immersive virtual environment. *PloS one*, 8(1), e52766.
- Stoddard, S. A., Zimmerman, M. A., & Bauermeister, J. A. (2012). A longitudinal analysis of cumulative risks, cumulative promotive factors, and adolescent violent behavior. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 22(3), 542-555. doi:10.1111/j.1532-7795.2012.00786.x
- Wilkinson, D. L. (2009). Event dynamics and the role of third parties in urban youth violence. *National Institute of Justice, United States Department of Justice*.

Table 1. Demographics of participants in each phase of a study to develop a retaliatory violence prevention program, Fight Navigator

|                     | Curriculum Development Stage                         | Initial Evaluation Stage                           |
|---------------------|--|--|
| <i>N</i>            | 20 individuals across 4 focus group discussions      | 20 individuals (pre), 18 individuals (post)        |
| Age Range (Years)   | 13-18  | 13-18  |
| Mean Age (Years)    | 15.7   | 16.2   |
| Male (%)            | 100  | 61   |
| Race/Ethnicity      | 50% Black<br>30% White<br>0.5% Asian<br>20% Hispanic | 50% Black<br>22% White<br>16% Asian<br>1% Hispanic |
| Recruitment Setting | Summer Youth Programs                                | Summer Youth Programs                              |

Table 2. Domains and core ideas identified in the curriculum development stage of a study to develop a retaliatory violence prevention program, Fight Navigator

| Domain                                     | Description  | Core Ideas   |
|--|--|--|
| Perceived influences on fighting behavior  | The types of situations that can arise that make it difficult to walk away from a fight  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Feeling disrespected</li> <li>2) Feeling the need to protect reputation</li> <li>3) Feeling the need to avoid victimization</li> <li>4) Feeling the need to stand up for those close to you</li> </ol> |
| Messages about fighting                    | The types of messages that young people hear or receive from adults about fighting   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Messages are often mixed</li> <li>2) Questions and concerns about the utility of the messages received</li> </ol>  |
| Ways to avoid fighting and still save face | Techniques or strategies that can be used “in the moment” to respond to a threat without escalating to violence but also saving face | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Being assertive</li> <li>2) Humor/Minimization</li> <li>3) Delaying the confrontation</li> <li>4) Friends/others intervening</li> <li>5) Finding a common ground</li> </ol>                            |

Table 3. Core themes identified in the initial evaluation stage across pre- and post-interview domains in a study to develop a retaliatory violence prevention program, Fight Navigator

| Core themes by domain and sub-domain       | Pre-test<br>% (N=20) | Post-test<br>% (N=18) | Pre-post<br>difference<br>% |
|--|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Appreciating threat                        |                      |                       |                             |
| Threat to internal sense of self           | 45 (9)               | 28 (5)                | -17                         |
| Threat to social status                    | 65 (13)              | 33 (6)                | -32                         |
| Threat to physical safety                  | 50 (10)              | 61 (11)               | +11                         |
| Non-verbal communication                   |                      |                       |                             |
| Maintain safe space                        | 20 (4)               | 50 (9)                | +30                         |
| Impact of the crowd                        |                      |                       |                             |
| Friends/crowd can encourage fighting       | 65 (13)              | 50 (9)                | -15                         |
| Friends can intervene to de-escalate       | 60 (12)              | 94 (17)               | +34                         |
| Avoiding violence and disrespect           |                      |                       |                             |
| Not possible                               | 25 (5)               | 6 (1)                 | -19                         |
| Might be possible, no specific strategy    | 40 (8)               | 17 (3)                | -23                         |
| It is possible, identify specific strategy | 35 (7)               | 78 (14)               | +43                         |
| Strategies to save face                    |                      |                       |                             |
| Delaying the conflict                      | 10 (2)               | 6 (1)                 | -4                          |
| Finding common ground                      | 0 (0)                | 44 (8)                | +44                         |
| Minimizing the conflict                    | 25 (5)               | 61 (11)               | +36                         |
| Moving the interaction away from the crowd | 15 (3)               | 17 (3)                | +2                          |

Figure 1. Brief description of the Fight Navigator curriculum

The goals of FN are threefold: (a) to build the capacity of participants to think critically and analyze potential factors in situations that could promote conflict, which create the dilemma of having to fight or be shamed, (b) to prepare participants outside of the threatening situation in order to access the best range of response options when faced with a real-life threat, and (c) to build awareness of pragmatic, in-the-moment skills for dealing with conflict without violence while maintaining one's social reputation (i.e., save face). Guided by the aforementioned literature, the primary assumption of FN is that by improving capacity in these three domains, participants will be able to most effectively respond while still upholding their social reputation.

FN consists of five sections: (a) introduction, (b) awareness, (c) preparedness, (d) strategies, and (e) wrap-up. Each section utilizes a blend of pedagogical techniques, including group discussions, didactic components, and experiential exercises.

Figure 2. Pre- and post-interview vignettes provided to participants for the initial evaluation stage in a study to develop a retaliatory violence prevention program, Fight Navigator

**Pre-Interview Vignette.** *Dom went to a house party thrown by someone from his neighborhood. He ran into Victor, who had previously dated Tina, the girl Dom was currently talking to. Dom knew that Victor and Tina had not ended on good terms and that he was upset that Tina was starting to hang out with him. Victor walked up to Dom and said loudly “yo, you better stop talking to my girl.” A few others heard this, started to gather around and one of them took out his camera phone.*

*Dom replied, “she’s not your girl and why don’t you mind your business?” Victor then said, “why don’t you shut the hell up, bitch, what are you gonna do?” Both men moved closer to each other so they were right in each other’s faces. Some of the people in the crowd were Dom’s friends and some were Victor’s friends.*

**Post-Interview Vignette.** *Carlos was playing pickup basketball with Joe and four other friends. Carlos drove hard to the basket and knocked Joe over. Joe jumped up thinking it was intentional and shoved Carlos saying “what the hell was that?” Carlos told him to relax and that he was just playing ball. Joe took steps towards him.*

*Carlos said, “so what’s up?” Joe said, “shut up unless you want to do something about it right now.” Both men moved closer to each other so they were right in each other’s faces. Joe said, “let me know what you wanna do?”*