Title

Situational Factors and Mechanisms in Pathways to Violence INTRODUCTION

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Abstract

Background: A large body of research has produced vast quantities of empirical data on risk factors for violence in a range of countries and community contexts. Despite the unquestionable successes of this research in cataloguing these risk factors, relatively little is known about the situational factors and mechanisms that translate risks for violence into enactments of violence itself. Without stronger explanations of these situational pathways to violence, understandings of violence remain "fuzzy". This special issue aims to address this important limitation through a focus on the situational dimensions of violence. ***Key points:*** Although directly observing violence is often ethically and methodologically challenging, the studies in this special issue demonstrate the value of better understanding the situational contexts that shape the well-documented affective, interactional and behavioral variables and processes that constitute violent enactments. Examining these processes and factors as they unfold *in situ* can advance and deepen theoretical and empirical research on general risks for violence. ***Implications:*** Situations in which violence is enacted, and the mechanisms through which it is realized, can and should be systematically studied as part of any attempt to enhance the resolution of existing knowledge with respect to violence. Empirical and theoretical research that attempts to get "closer" to violence offers important and innovative insights and opportunities for understanding violence itself, alongside its causes, correlates and consequences. Investing in the design of robust studies of the situational dimensions of violence is important for advancing the field of violence scholarship and potentially informing policy and intervention practices.

Keywords: Situational factors; mechanisms; violence; violence in situ

If there is any point of consensus amongst scholars of violence today, it is that the phenomenon is not reducible to any single, or even predominant cause. In most contemporary research, violence is conceptualized as an emergent outcome within an ecological or multi-level framework. This framework recognizes that the complex pathways to violence move between and within individual, familial, community and social levels of human systems (Krug & Dahlberg, 2002), and are built on a range of interacting factors that are both clustered at these ecological levels and differentially related to violence in time and space. Within this taxonomy, factors such as socio-economic inequality and social cohesion that are robustly associated with violence but are nonetheless far removed from the violent event itself are categorized as "distal" or "upstream", while those such as alcohol consumption and access to firearms that influence violence in ways that suggest close proximity to the event in space and time are conceptualized as "proximal" or "downstream" factors (Matzopoulos, Bowman, Mathews, & Myers, 2010). Identifying, classifying and documenting correlates of violence such as these within this ecological framework has been amongst the leading primary foci of research on violence for over three decades (Dahlberg & Mercy, 2009). This focus has produced vast quantities of empirical data on risks for violence in a range of countries and community contexts. Such data, and the research findings that have arisen from it, have unquestionably proved valuable in identifying risk factors for violence, thereby advancing the science of violence and its prevention.

Noticeably under-represented in this catalogue of factors, however, are those related to the "event-near" or situation-sensitive contexts that shape the production or inhibition of aggression and violence. Perhaps an underlying reason for this discernible lack of data on situational factors is that very few studies of violence have focused on direct examination of its production or enactment. Moreover, in conceptually privileging violence as an outcome of distal

social forces rather than as a form of social action, much research on violence has targeted these forces, rather than violent actions themselves, as the primary objects of study. This led Schinkel (2004, p. 6) to provocatively argue that,

> violence itself has been shied away from in the vast majority of social scientific inquiry concerning violence. What has been researched are certain patterns through which violence inscribes itself, and what has been understood are meanings given to particular occurrences, perhaps even particular kinds, of violence. But these are extrinsic to violence itself. They are added to it, they are facilitative for it or they are the quantitative shape that violence assumes. But they are not violence itself. We have hardly begun to understand violence itself.

The articles in this special issue represent a synergistic response to this provocation in an attempt to address the important limitation in the current state of research on violence it signals. In addressing the relative paucity of studies focused on situational factors and mechanisms, this collection of papers is intended to contribute greater resolution to our current "picture" of violence.

A focus on the situational dimensions of violence is imperative to advancing its theoretical landscape by providing the much-needed contextual specificity required to better understand the pathways to its production through the pool of risk factors that it shares with a host of other social ills (Hamby, 2011). Studies that emphasize the "situatedness" of violence thus promise to elucidate the ways in which *risks* for violence are translated into *acts of violence itself* (Bowman, Stevens, Eagle, & Matzopoulos, 2015). It has long been recognized that even the most risk-disposed individual is not perpetually violent, while violent acts may be perpetrated by individuals who correspond to few or none of the established risk factors. Similarly, individuals with an apparently high risk of experiencing violence at the hands of others may never do so, while some predicted to be at minimal risk may nonetheless become victims of violence. It is

therefore crucial to systematically study how, under what situational conditions and through what interactional processes, violence is enacted or experienced, particularly by those most "at-risk," but also those whose levels of risk might ordinarily be considered minimal. Advances in understandings of these pathways from risk potential to the perpetration or avoidance of violence therefore require careful examination of the situation-bound mechanisms that produce or inhibit violence, rather than only of its well-documented distal correlates. A number of seminal efforts to adopt this type of focus have produced a range of remarkable innovations in theories of violence and methods for studying it that have influenced the genesis of this special issue.

Situational Perspectives and Approaches to Violence

Despite several pockets of scholarly resistance to the situationist approach (Bowers, 1973), social scientists have repeatedly attempted to understand how individuals interact and are influenced by "in the moment" factors in various contexts. From early research on dyadic exchanges in situ (Fincham & Bradbury, 1992; Gottman, 1982) to recent qualitative studies on the role of situational factors in workplace burnout (Rozo, Olson, Thu, & Stutzman, 2017), situation-focused approaches to social phenomena have a long history. One of the key features of criminological research is to identify the situational determinants of violent crime as a means to reduce opportunities for its perpetration (Cohen & Felson, 1979). In sociology and anthropology the relative neglect of the situation as an important target for social study was flagged as an important shortcoming in many social scientific approaches to social phenomena (Goffman, 1964). However, psychological scholarship on violence has been relatively rare within the situationist tradition. The relatively limited situation-sensitive research in this area has focused on several forms of criminal and intimate partner violence (Felson & Steadman, 1983; Wilkinson

& Hamerschlag, 2005). Many of these studies attempted to "reconstruct" or experimentally constitute violent encounters using a range of data and methods. Perhaps the most well-known of these is Haney, Banks and Zimbardo's (1973) experimental Stanford Prison Study, which demonstrated that situational influences, rather than dispositional traits, significantly explained acts of aggression meted out by the "guards" on the "prisoners" under simulated prison conditions. Notwithstanding such seminal findings, there are few studies for which directly observable instances of violence, rather than simulations, reports or accounts thereof, are the primary units of analysis. Rapid recent advancements in and the global uptake of surveillance technologies, however, provide significant possibilities for research on violence. The increasing rollout of closed circuit camera systems across the world's cities, together with the popular consumption of handheld audiovisual devices, enable hitherto unimaginably wide access to the recording (and therefore analysis) of situational and interactional dimensions of violence. Unsurprisingly, a number of scholars have been quick to harness the potential of these new technologies by subjecting recorded frames and sequences of violence to fine-grained empirical analysis. These studies have enabled scholars of violence to get "closer" to their object of study than ever before.

Getting "Closer" to Violence: Developments and Opportunities

Attempts to empirically ground analyses of the situational dimensions of violence have been spearheaded by Collins's (2008) micro-sociological approach, which draws on fine-grained analyses of video and photographic evidence to identify and theorize the magnitude and type of emotional labor needed to overcome an inhibitory *confrontational tension/fear (ct/f)* to perpetrate violence. Building on this work, several scholars have used a range of analytic strategies to

further explore the situational and affective dimensions of violence (Lindegaard, Bernasco, & Jacques, 2014; Nassauer, 2016; Weenink, 2014). These recent studies have persuasively demonstrated that while studying distal and proximal risks for, or predispositions to violence is important for building a comprehensive understanding of its multi-causal structure, a scholarly focus on these factors alone cannot sufficiently account for the complexity and contingencies inherent in the situation-bound unfolding of violent exchanges. Such research invites scholars of violence to identify and enhance our understandings of the relationships between situational or interactional factors and violent outcomes, and to take seriously the need to study precisely how these factors represent key mechanisms for the translation of risks for violence into its observable enactments.

This special issue represents an attempt to respond to these critical opportunities by highlighting innovative research using a range of methods and approaches that are designed to get "closer" to several forms of violence as objects of analysis. The ten studies that constitute the issue pursue this challenge through foci that include tracing the pathways between repeated victimization; attitudes to casual sex; gendered attributions and situation-bound risks for sexual violence; exploring orders of bureaucracy, morality and citizenship in the production of collective violence; interrogating the potentially protective role of affect for interpersonal violence; and empirically demonstrating the ways that upstream "risk factors" are also observable in enactments of violence itself. In the sections that follow we outline and discuss three discernible cross-cutting methodological strategies used to better understand the situational dimensions of violence by the studies in this special issue. These strategies include exploring the ways that situational factors shape emotions and other psychological phenomena during conflict,

examining violent interactions directly, and reconstituting violent encounters for sustained situation-sensitive analysis.

The Situational Shape of Emotions in Violent Encounters

By deploying a comparative, three stage analysis of direct video footage and photographic evidence alongside supplementary documentation including police records, protester reports, and news media between 1960 and 2010, Nassauer's (2018) study tests and then advances Collins's (2008) theory of violence by identifying three key paths to collective violence during the course of protests in Germany and the United States. She shows that the initiation and subsequent trajectories of these paths depend largely on the situation-bound organization of five behavioral factors related to place, mismanagement, escalation, communication and property. As such, the study stands as an exemplar of the sorts of methods and range of sources available to scholars focused on developing well-grounded empirical analyses of the situational dimensions of violence that cut across time, space and units of evidence.

Bramsen (2018) similarly demonstrates the weight of evidence required to pinpoint significant moments in the unfolding of violence. Her analysis explores the explanatory power of Collins's (2008) micro-sociological theory in the context of the collective violence that characterized key uprisings during the 'Arab Spring'. Through the triangulation of video data, participant observations and interviews, she argues that overcoming tension and fear appears to be a prerequisite for the enactment of violence between protesters and the police during attempts at regime change in Bahrain, Tunisia and Syria. These findings draw attention to the power of Collins' (2008) theory of violence, which appears robust even in contexts of authoritarian

regimes that differ vastly from the democratic countries in which it was developed. While the studies in this section use "real-time", direct footage and photographs of violence as part of the assemblages of evidence on which they draw, the two articles that constitute the next thematic section represent the detail and scope of analysis that privilege a direct, focused and sustained analysis of violent situations as they observably unfold.

Interactional Dynamics and Violence

In the main, research on violence has neglected face-to-face interactions as a primary unit of analysis (cf. Goffman, 1983). While social scientists have included interaction amongst other variables under study in research on violence, the anatomy of the violent encounter has seldom formed the primary or even key unit of analysis. Moreover, violent encounters have featured only peripherally as objects of inquiry by ethnomethodologists concerned with studying observable, empirically grounded social phenomena. Bringing the rigorous analytic strategies characteristic of ethnomethodological approaches to social enquiry to the study of violence thus represents a significantly promising new step for violence scholarship, and the yields of pursuing this methodological path in future research are evident in the two studies in this thematic section.

The first, by Mair, Elsey & Kolanoski (2018), uses an ethnomethodological approach to produce a fine-grained analysis of the *Collateral Murder* video leaked in 2010 that describes the "structures of practical action" around which this much publicized act of violence was organized. By paying careful attention to these structures in this form of military talk, they demonstrate that the execution of such professionalized violence involves intricate interactional work, and that even in highly-structured combat environments, where the protocols that govern the "rules of engagement" are explicitly defined, orientations to the contingencies that emerge in situation-

bound assessments of threat and hostility ultimately shape unfolding trajectories of violence. In this respect, violence is constituted as "professional" insofar as it is produced as bureaucratically regulated and justified. That is, so long as the violence emerges from the depersonalized project of matching observed conditions with the rules of engagement, participants constitute the violence they unleash as produced in furthering military, rather than personal, objectives.

Whitehead, Bowman, and Raymond (2018) apply a similar ethnomethodological and conversation analytic approach to online videos of violence in demonstrating that while "risk factors" are important conceptual tools for explaining violence by researchers, they are also used as interactional resources for initiating violence and/or accounting for the violent actions of participants themselves and others before, during or immediately following its enactments. Their study shows that while well-established risk factors for violence such as gender inequality, alcohol and social asymmetries are important theoretical tools for understanding "upstream" social conditions for the production of violence, they are also directly observable in recorded violent interactions. Indeed, this suggests that in at least some cases risk factors may emerge as statistically salient in the aggregate precisely because participants orient to them as relevant for their encounters with others, and as consequential for the type and design of their conduct within those encounters. The many other ways that these and other risk factors evidently shape violent situations is the focus of the next thematic section.

Reconstructing and Foregrounding the Situational Dimensions of Violence

There are a number of ethical and methodological constraints to studying violence directly. These are particularly pronounced in cases where "private" violence is the intended object of analysis. In cases where the collection of data for such analysis potentially encroaches

on the rights of participants or where the recording of interactions would be methodologically difficult, scholars committed to better understanding the situational factors involved in these prevalent forms of violence may develop innovative methods for simulating (potentially) violent encounters. Survey approaches also provide potentially important data for examining mechanisms for violence. Provided that the formulation of the survey questions is sensitive to the situational dimensions of the type of violence under study, country-wide health and demographic surveys may enable researchers to obliquely examine or theorize the way that risks for violence at different levels interact or align to result in its production in context.

The last section of the issue clearly demonstrates the utility of both survey and experimental approaches for exploring situational variables involved in violence. For example, to examine situational variability in vulnerability to sexual victimization amongst young heterosexual couples, Anderson, Cahill and Delahanty (2018) used vignettes to simulate escalating risk in a typical post-date scenario. In showing that prior sexual victimization was associated with both the type and sequencing of the participants' behavioral responses to threat (BRTT), the study highlights some ways in which prior experiences of violence are implicated in managing and responding to "risky" situations. In particular, their finding that participants with a history of sexual victimization were less likely to make early use of assertive responses in sequences of potential responses has important implications for better understanding situational determinants of both poly- and repeated victimization.

Woerner, Abbey, Helmers, Pegram, and Jilani (2018) turn their attention to the other side of the dating violence dyad in exploring the potential pathways to perpetrating sexual violence. In an attempt to bridge understandings of the ways that attitudes to gender and sex influence situation-bound dating behaviors amongst heterosexual males, they test the robustness of the

confluence model of sexual aggression by linking measures of sexual dominance and attitudes to

casual sex amongst males to their responses to a set of rejecting sexual refusals by a female agent

across four simulated dating scenarios. The participants' perceptions of the agent were also

recorded following the simulated dating interactions. By operationalizing the tenets of the

confluence model in "real-time," the study highlights the way that sexual rejection was more

likely to be perceived as hostile amongst sexually dominant men with positive attitudes to

impersonal sex. Although these pathways remain to be tested outside of the laboratory, the

study's multi-layered design promises much in the way of future studies of the ways that

intersecting background and foreground factors lead to sexual aggression in dating scenarios.

Taking seriously the challenge of tracing pathways of risk across the ecological model,
The motivational pathways to perpetrator anger and aggression is the core focus of Lutz

and Krahé's (2018) experimental study. Through the use of a sadness recall manipulation

following an aggression inducing exercise amongst the intervention group, they show that even

negative affective states are incompatible with aggressive intent, thus highlighting the cognitive

complexity and affective contingencies inherent in perpetrating violence. This experimental

evidence implicates the types of affect that may have to be overcome through the types of

emotional labor that, according to Collins (2008), plays such an integral role in enacting

violence. These findings suggest a range of possibilities for "disrupting" pathways to aggression

by inducing potentially de-escalatory situational cues in high-risk contexts for violence.

Taking seriously the challenge of tracing pathways of risk across the ecological model,

Yount, Roof, and Naved (2018) thread feminist theory through a multi-level model of violence in

Bangladesh to test the conditions that shape the "control motive" theorized to lead to intimate

partner violence. The study considers just how community norms that may ordinarily be

understood to be distally related to violence are relayed across systems and activated in

conducive situational conditions. The results show that violence was more likely to be justified when masculine dominance was perceived to be threatened in the contexts of arguments rather than in refusals of sex, and that "junior" men who reported being directly exposed to parental IPV and who grew up in communities in which "senior" men endorsed masculine dominance had significantly higher odds of expressing violent attitudes, and enacting control through IPV in marriage. Although cross-sectional, such studies provide important starting points for research on violence that attempts to specify theoretical links between community level variables and enactments of particular forms of violence.

Focusing on one very specific occasion for violence, Gerber et al. (2018) examine violent clashes between the police and activists protesting against the state. Their innovative use of both surveys and an experiment across three sub-studies demonstrates that it is critical to treat violence emerging from a multi-layered political process rather than a standalone outcome in any attempt to understand why people might condone or justify its use. In so doing, they highlight the moral contingencies of violence as both an object of social study and a form of social action. While this this insight is often highlighted in the context of collective violence and public protests, where violence is used to promote or suppress the specific ideological positions at stake, the moral intricacies of violence should be better appreciated in research on all of its (particularly interpersonal) forms since the use of violence may be associated with moral projects pursued in the course of managing social relations in these contexts as well (Fiske & Rai, 2014). This is a critical lesson for research invested in exploring the complex ways in which people organize and understand the situational dimensions of violence when attributing blame and allocating responsibility to the victims and perpetrators involved in its various enactments.

Felson and Palmore's (2018) study shows the value of attending to such situational

contexts when undertaking research on attributions, gender biases and victim-blaming. By varying the outcomes and relationships between victims and offenders in vignettes presented to college students describing "risky" behaviors, they find that victims of rape were no more likely than those of robbery and accidents to be blamed for their respective situational outcomes. Furthermore, the genders of the participants and victims varyingly described in the vignettes were not significantly associated with the likelihood of blaming victims of rape in particular. Rather, males were more likely to blame victims of crime and accidents more generally. As well as challenging the now often taken-for-granted constellation that ties gender and gender biases to blaming victims of rape, this study draws attention to the problems inherent to examining violence outside of the complex comparative contexts that shape its enactments and outcomes.

Conclusion

Violence is commonly studied as the outcome of intersecting risk factors embedded in individuals, families or broader social systems. The task of the violence scholar has, in recent times, been to identify, code and catalogue this inventory of risks. However, advancing violence scholarship requires more meaningfully connecting rather than merely collecting and collating this data and evidence (Bowman, Stevens, Eagle, Langa, et al., 2015; Hamby, 2011). The articles in this special issue serve as important reminders that although often ethically and methodologically challenging, violence is itself an observable social object built on a complex set of processes and logics that can be used or resisted in specific situational contexts, and studied using a wide range of methodological approaches. Fanning out from the violent event itself, this special issue breaks important ground in beginning to map out these objects of analysis across the systems that intersect to produce the conditions for violence in its various

forms, thus laying the foundation for new horizons of basic and applied research. Such research could further harness the potential of new technologies to systematically examine the complex interactions involved in precipitating different forms of violence across vastly different populations. Unprecedented access to audio and visual recordings of violence opens up new possibilities for designing comparative studies that identify robust patterns and situational variances that more precisely differentiate or indeed connect violence in its various forms. Commitment to this strategy invites scholars to pool resources and data across disciplines in building data archives that facilitate the systematic empirical analysis of violent situations.

The ripple effects of situation-sensitive research for policy and practice are potentially far-reaching. For example, recent studies of doctor-patient interactions have identified situational factors implicated in problems such as the over prescription of antibiotics (Heritage, Elliott, Stivers, Richardson, & Mangione-Smith, 2010), and the proportion of patients who leave primary care consultations without having raised the full range of health concerns for which they initiated the consultation (Heritage, Robinson, Elliott, Beckett, & Wilkes, 2007). Comparable impacts on policy and practice in the criminal justice sector may result from foundational studies of the situational mechanisms that shape the outcomes of police-citizen interactions, particularly with respect to whether and how the interactions come to involve uses of physical force by the police officers (Jones & Raymond, 2012).

Similarly, other situationally-sensitive studies of violence across its various forms, including those reported upon in this special issue, may supplement and test the growing number of evidence-based interventions designed to disrupt the pathways between predispositional factors for violence and its situated outcomes. These may include the identification of situational cues, aggressive behaviors, and escalatory conditions, thereby informing strategies for

preventing, mitigating, or moderating their physically violent outcomes. Findings from these types of studies thus offer potential empirical bases for shifts in policy and treatment practices that could substantially reduce violence.

By foregrounding the significance of the situations in which violence is enacted and the mechanisms through which it is realized, we hope that this special issue will stimulate further empirical research that prioritizes the direct, or at least situation-sensitive, study of violence alongside examinations of its causes, correlates and consequences in moving the field of violence scholarship forward.

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