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Weenink, D.

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Contesting Dominance and Performing Badness: A Micro-Sociological Analysis of the Forms, Situational Asymmetry, and Severity of Street Violence¹

Don Weenink²

This article proposes two ideal types of street violence: contesting dominance and performing badness. These ideal types were used as heuristic devices in qualitative analyses of 159 violent interactions among Dutch youth, taken from judicial case files. These analyses revealed that over half of the interactions resembled the contesting dominance type. Here, opponents engage in sequences of challenges and provocations to aggressively establish a domineering self; attackers purposively looked for or arranged confrontations that revolved around the issue of who is superior per se. The performing badness type was found in 30% of the cases. This is one-sided violence in which attackers humiliate and toy with their victims to display their power and meanness. The relationships between these forms of violence, situational asymmetry (weak victims and supportive groups) and severity of the violence were analyzed statistically. Contesting dominance was associated with more severe violence, resulting from the greater amount of confrontational tension. Situational asymmetry was the rule in both forms of violence. The difference between the size of the attackers' supportive group and that of the victims turned out to be especially important. The larger the difference, the more severe the violence in general, but especially in contesting dominance.

KEY WORDS: crime; micro-sociology; performance; situational asymmetry; street violence; youth violence.

INTRODUCTION

A rich U.S. tradition of phenomenological and interactionist studies has contributed to our understanding of violence as impression management. Seen in this way, violent interactions are performances in which actors aim to present a positive situational identity, thus claiming how others should value and treat them (Goffman [1959]1990). In this tradition, violent interactions in public places (streets, bars, school yards) often appear in the form of contesting dominance: series of challenges and provocations, sequences of claims and counterclaims to the superordinate role that build up antagonistic tension between the opponents. One part of the tradition perceives these contests as a way to defend or aggressively establish masculine identity (Messerschmidt 2000; Polk 1994, 1999; Winlow and Hall 2009; Wolfgang 1958). Another part regards them as a way to enforce respect that yields some protective deference in unsafe inner cities (Anderson 1999; Brezina et al. 2004; Brookman et al. 2011; Jacobs and Wright 2006; Jankowski 1991; Sanders 1994; Trickett 2011).

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² Department of Sociology, University of Amsterdam, PO BOX 15508, 1001 NA Amsterdam, the Netherlands; e-mail: D.Weenink@uva.nl.

However, a much smaller body of work suggests that violence in public places may take a rather different form. Instead of engaging in contests, attackers one-sidedly target weaker victims who did not play an evident role in provoking the violence (Felson 1993; Homel, Tomsen, and Thommeny 1992; Repogle 2011; Tomsen 1997). In terms of impression management, these attackers perform badness (Katz 1988:80–113): they display uncontested dominance and the ability to act mean and cruel.

This article contributes to the tradition in three ways. First, the aim is to specify two ideal types—contesting dominance and performing badness—and to assess their value as heuristic devices to identify forms of youth street violence in qualitative analyses. The second aim is to inquire to what extent these forms of violence might be differently related to two forms of situational asymmetry that may impact the intensity of the violence, an issue that has not been taken up in empirical studies so far. Following the work of Felson and collaborators (Felson 1982; Felson and Steadman 1983), Cooney (1998; Phillips and Cooney 2005), and Collins (2008), the dimensions of situational asymmetry considered here are the presence of supportive groups and the weakness of the victims. Third, the aim is to take the tradition to a different place: Dutch rural and urban neighborhoods where violence is incidental rather than endemic and where behavior in public places is generally respectful and peaceful. As by far the larger part of prior work in this area is oriented to deprived and unsafe U.S. inner cities (but see Copes, Hochstetler, and Forsyth 2013; Jackson-Jacobs 2013), this article extends the conceptual range of the tradition.

The forms of violence are analyzed from the viewpoint of the attackers, here defined as the ones who initiated the actual physical violence and who most often also dominate. The empirical basis of this study consists of detailed descriptions of 159 violent interactions among Dutch youth, taken from judicial case files. Based on a review of prior work, the following section elaborates the distinctive features of the two ideal types. In addition, hypotheses will be formulated to assess the relationships between these ideal types, the situational asymmetry and the severity of the violence. After that, the material, the sample, and the analytical procedures are explained. The empirical sections present the forms of violence that emerged from the qualitative analyses, followed by statistical analyses that focus on the relationships between these forms, situational asymmetry, and the intensity of the violence. The concluding section positions the findings within the U.S. tradition of research and formulates some new questions.

PRIOR INTERACTIONIST AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL WORK

Interactionist studies (Felson 1982; Felson and Tedeschi 1993; Luckenbill 1977; Polk 1994, 1999; Wilkinson and Fagan 2001) developed a model of violent interactions that revolves around saving face (Goffman [1967]2005:5–46), which Felson and Steadman (1983:71) define as attempts to reestablish identity claims (face) when one of the antagonist parties has indicated to themselves that the other has tried to project a negative identity on them, for instance by insulting, humiliating, or neglecting them. Violence as saving face may appear as part of character contests (Goffman

[1967]2005:217–218, 239–258): confrontations between opponents who stand steady (show character) as they try to save face at the other's expense in sequences of provocations and challenges that may escalate into the use of violence (Felson 1993:109). Various studies perceive these contests as attempts to defend masculine honor (Copes et al. 2013; Polk 1994, 1999; Winlow and Hall 2009; Wolfgang 1958) also interpreted as a situational compensation for an otherwise threatened masculine identity due to structurally marginalized social positions (Carrington and Scott 2008; Messerschmidt 2000; Taylor, das Nair, and Braham 2013).

One variant of the contest model revolves around reputations and respect. It appears in deprived U.S. inner cities where the code of the street governs public behavior (Anderson 1999). Respect and reputations must be attained by a presentation of self that displays immediate aggressive responsiveness and a willingness to use violence (Anderson 1999:10, 72; Brezina et al. 2004; Brookman et al. 2011; Jankowski 1991:140; Paille 2013:67–103; Sanders 1994:71–75; Wilkinson and Fagan 2001). In areas where police forces have withdrawn and where criminal economies are predominant (Contreras 2013; Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Jacobs and Wright 2006), reputations provide some protective deference in these hostile environments. Two recent studies point to the existence of alternative codes of violence outside unsafe U.S. inner cities. First, the adult white male bar fighters in a U.S. southern city interviewed by Copes et al. (2013:785–786) relied on a code in which their willingness and ability to fight contributed to their self-image and pride as “men of character and good repute.” For them, clear insults should be responded to, but the violence should take the form of a fair contest and it should be part of a “legitimate conflict.” Therefore, their code also allowed them to tolerate insults in some situations (for instance, when the opponent was clearly weaker or very drunk) and it discouraged excessive and predatory violence (Copes et al. 2013:773, 776–785). Second, Jackson-Jacobs's (2013:33) study of a group of white suburban youth in an affluent area in Tucson revealed a similar code, or “working definition,” of fights as honorable competition “to test one's character.” While their brawls could end up in becoming one-sided or disproportionately violent (see also Copes et al. 2013:782–784), attacking an already-defeated opponent and attacking unilaterally were seen as “cheap and simply being mean” (Jackson-Jacobs 2013:34). While the Tucson youth contrived confrontations purposively in order to experience the thrills and prestige of violence (Jackson-Jacobs 2013:36), they indicated that an honorable fight required some agreement on the part of the opponent—although this often resulted from exploiting their fear of displaying passivity and pusillanimity (see also Copes et al. 2013:775; Winlow and Hall 2009). In line with this, Polk (1999:18, 27) notes that the sequences of moves and countermoves in honor contests require “some form of active participation of victim and offender” (see also Athens 2005; Felson and Steadman 1983; Luckenbill 1977:661). As in the days of European dueling (Shoemaker 2001, 2002), men may actively create opportunities to show their worth. By insulting, humiliating, or denigrating others, they may try to invite other men to mutually define the situation as one in which their honor is at stake.

However, even if such “working agreements” (Jackson-Jacobs 2013:33) are more or less forced upon men given the emotional costs of acting against masculine honor, it would be wrong to perceive such consent as a general feature of violent

interactions in public places (Athens 2005). Indeed, the lack of such agreement is a defining property of the form of violent impression management that appears in Katz's (1988:80–113) account of the “ways of the badass.” The demeanor of the badass requires the display of toughness, alien-ness, and meanness. While toughness rejects the other's moral and emotional existence as futile, alien-ness raises a barrier to the other's understanding of the badass's own moral and emotional existence. Meanness adds ominous unpredictability to the interaction: even when you try to “maintain respectful comportment” (Katz 1988:99), there is no sure way to predict the badass's sudden unleashing of violence. Toughness, alien-ness, and meanness add up to a performance in which attackers want to convey the impression of being bad, rather than displaying honorable character. Thus, contrary to the contests described above, Homel et al.'s (1992:685) observations of young males' violence in Australian clubs lead them to conclude that attackers pick their mark: those who are fewer in number, younger, smaller, and more intoxicated than themselves. Tomsen (1997:97) reported that a large part of the violent encounters he observed in Sydney-based hotels and clubs consisted of “opportunistic violence” in the sense that the victims had no evident role to play in causing the conflict.

This review yields two ideal types of violent impression management in public places. First, the contesting dominance type consists of sequences of provocations and challenges, claims and counterclaims to the superordinate role that result into a mutual understanding—even if it is more or less forced upon men given emotional pressures to maintain masculinity—of the situation as one in which violence is an appropriate means to establish dominance. Furthermore, these contests may be informed by a code of honor that discourages meanness and unilateral violence to a variable degree. These features hold for both contrived arrangements as well as for genuine conflicts. Second, in the performing badness type, attackers do not engage in competition, but they deploy one-sided and mean acts of violence against weaker victims to show their power. Instead of codes of honorable fighting, the attackers' inexplicable whims govern the situation.

Prior work allows us to formulate hypotheses of how these ideal types relate to the intensity of the violence directly and indirectly, through situational asymmetry. The intensity of the violence is here captured by the severity of bodily injuries. Felson (1993:109, 121 n.7) argues that conflicts involve greater emotion and that antagonists in this form of violence are likely to feel angry, unlike individuals who perform badness, particularly when this takes place in a joyous sphere of collective norm-breaking (Felson 1993:109; Tomsen 1997). Thus, the first hypothesis is that *the bodily injuries are more severe in contesting dominance as compared to performing badness*.

Situational asymmetry plays an important role in Collins's (2008) micro-sociological theory of violence. In the theory, attaining emotional dominance is crucial for violence to occur as it offers a way to overcome the barrier of confrontational tension (*ct/f*) that normally keeps people from using violence. Two important pathways that circumvent that barrier of *ct/f* that are also expected to impact on the intensity of the violence will be considered here: supportive audiences and the weakness of the victims (for more on *ct/f* and the pathways to circumvent it, see Collins 2008:39–82, 2013). Both pathways are forms of situational asymmetry that contribute to the shifting of emotional balances.

The weakness of victims is operationalized as the degree to which they are outnumbered by the attackers and their degree of alcohol intoxication (see also Felson and Steadman 1983:65, 67, 72; Homel et al. 1992:685). As opportunistic targeting of weaker victims is supposed to be a typical feature of performing badness, the second hypothesis is that *victims are weaker (more intoxicated, more outnumbered) in performing badness as compared to contesting dominance*. Furthermore, a specific kind of weakness may emerge during the interaction when opponents hit the ground (see also Copes et al. 2013; Jackson-Jacobs 2013). As my earlier analyses demonstrate, youth violence is more likely to turn extreme *after* one party fell down because the now-vulnerable and less-threatening position of the opponent opens up opportunities for total, uncontested dominance (Weenink 2014). While the continued use of violence against opponents who have hit the ground offers an opportunity to display one's meanness in performing badness, it is supposed to demonstrate a lack of character in contesting dominance. Indeed, both the Tucson youth and the southern U.S. bar fighters discussed above consider it mean and dishonorable to continue the violence after the opponent has hit the ground (Copes et al. 2013; Jackson-Jacobs 2013). Thus, the third hypothesis is that *when victims hit the ground, this is related to more severe bodily injuries in performing badness as compared to contesting dominance*.

As for the second pathway through which *ct/f* may be circumvented, a consistent research finding is that the involvement of supportive audiences and even their presence alone is more likely to intensify the conflict, rather than to inhibit or dampen it (Collins 2008:198–207; Felson 1982; Felson and Steadman 1983; Luckenbill 1977; Phillips and Cooney 2005). As audiences often consist of separate groups that are allied to one of the opponents (Black [1983]1998:125–143; Cooney 1998; Phillips and Cooney 2005), the size of the attacker's supportive group may be related to the size of the other party's supportive group to assess the degree of situational asymmetry, or in other words, the numerical dominance of the attacker's supportive group. Similar to the reasoning above with regard to weak victims, the fourth hypothesis states that *the numerical dominance of the attacker's supportive group is larger in performing badness as compared to contesting dominance*. However, various studies (Jackson-Jacobs 2013; Polk 1999; Wilkinson and Fagan 2001) point to the role of audiences in increasing the salience of identity issues. This may mean that the impact of the supportive groups of the attackers on the intensity of the violence is greater in contesting dominance, as establishing an honorable identity is a more pressing concern in this form of violence, especially if the attackers' supportive groups are dominant. Thus, the fifth hypothesis is that *the impact of the numerical dominance of the attacker's supportive group on the intensity of the violence is greater in contesting dominance than in performing badness*.

DATA, SAMPLING, CODING, AND ANALYTICAL PROCEDURES

The data consist of judicial files of Dutch juvenile courts. Hence, the average age of the attackers was 17 years at the time the violence was committed. The files comprise interrogation reports of witnesses, defendants, and victims, and reports of

the courts and the public prosecutor. Based on these files, a textual database was set up, with cases containing detailed descriptions of the violent interaction.

The sampling of case files was based on all sections of Dutch penal law considering violent offenses: public bodily harm, battery or bodily harm, grievous bodily harm, (attempt to) manslaughter and (attempt to) murder. The study is restricted to violence committed by small groups of about 10 attackers at most. Case files were drawn from archives of four judicial districts, spanning both urban and rural areas. Each archive provided a list of cases settled by the juvenile court in 1995 and 2005. The sampling comprised an interval selection of all the cases referring to one or more of the above sections of Dutch penal law, taking each second, third, or fourth case on the list, depending on the total number of cases. In sum, the sample consists of 159 violent interactions.

One potential problem with these data is that they are the result of police interrogation interviews in which the actors had an interest in providing a biased image of their roles in the interaction. Thus, one may expect that attackers tried to justify violence more often, attempting to portray their attacks as acts of self-defense. However, as the cases provide interrogation reports of both opponents and witnesses, it was possible to construct coherent accounts of what happened, based on the commonalities in the reports. Moreover, it turned out that attackers often did not seem to care about upholding a positive image *vis-à-vis* the police, for instance when they plainly indicated they had wanted “to trash someone with the group for no reason” or “to beat someone up for the thrill.” What matters here is that the features of the ideal types elaborated above were clearly discernible on the basis of police interrogation reports. The aim of the qualitative analyses was to identify how these types of violence appeared in the data, using their distinctive features as sensitizing concepts in the analysis. Coding of the texts concerned the patterns of violence (how it started and ended), expressions of emotions (for instance, humiliation, anger, fear, joy, dominance), and expressions of morality (such as accusations, revenge, justness, pride). In the course of the analysis, it emerged that a smaller proportion of the sample (25 cases, 15.7%) did not fit into either one of the two ideal types. Instead, they were more appropriately characterized as one-sided attacks to undo feelings of humiliation that were built up in prior interactions (see below). Furthermore, 30 cases combined elements of both ideal types. For instance, a confrontation could have started as a competitive contest and ended with additional disproportionate humiliations after victory was already secured. In these cases, the coding was determined by how the interaction started, which was also the predominant impression to be conveyed. In the next step, statistical analyses were used to relate the forms of youth street violence to the following indicators.

First, the severity of the bodily injuries was noted for each interaction and later categorized into the following scale: 0 = attackers missed or the attack did not result in pain; 1 = pain; 2 = lasting pain (longer than 1 day); 3 = medical treatment by general practitioner [GP] or dentist; 4 = medical treatment in hospital; 5 = stay in hospital (longer than 1 day); 6 = lasting disability or death. Second, the weakness of the victims was captured as follows. First, it was noted how many attackers and how many victims were actually involved in acts of physical violence. The latter number was subtracted from the former to indicate the degree of outnumbering (ranging

from -2 to 4). Second, the victims' alcohol intoxication was coded by the following items: 0 = victims had not used alcohol prior to the attack; 1 = victims had used some alcohol prior to the attack (maximum 5 glasses of alcohol or the witnesses or police officers reported that the alcohol intake had no tangible impact on the attacker's behavior); 2 = victims were visibly under the influence of alcohol (6-15 glasses of alcohol or it was reported they were under the influence of alcohol); 3 = victims were heavily under the influence of alcohol (more than 15 glasses of alcohol or it was reported they were "very," "completely," or "heavily" drunk or intoxicated, the alcohol inhibiting normal speech, gait, or other movements). Third, for each case it was noted whether the victims had hit the ground during the violent interaction (= 1) or not (= 0). Considering the numerical dominance of the attackers' supportive group, it was coded how many members of the attackers' group were present but who (at least initially) did not engage in the violence, and the same was done for the victims' group. To arrive at the degree of numerical dominance, the latter number was subtracted from the former (ranging from -6 to 9). Finally, the following control variables were included that may affect the severity of the violence: gender, the use of weapons and martial arts techniques, the alcohol intoxication of the attackers, and the relational closeness of the opponents. As for the last indicator, this was measured by coding the closest relational tie between the opposing parties in each case, later categorized into the following scale: 0 = stranger, 1 = familiar face, 2 = acquaintance, 3 = classmate or colleague, 4 = (former) friend, 5 = family. Considering the use of weapons, it was noted whether the opponents used clubs, sticks, knives, and guns (= 1) or not (= 0). Furthermore, it emerged that in some situations, martial arts techniques were deployed that require training and dexterity, mostly karate or kickboxing techniques such as flying kicks high in the face or at the back of the victim. In the police reports, these forceful attacks were often recalled as impressive moments by both witnesses and attackers themselves, as they often effectively ended the opponents' resistance. For each case, it was noted whether the use of martial arts techniques were used (= 1) or not (= 0). Considering gender, a variable was constructed that distinguishes male-on-male (= 1) violence from mixed-gender or female violence (= 0). Finally, the alcohol intoxication of the attackers was captured by the same scale that measured the alcohol intoxication of the victims.

To assess the differences between the forms of violence, *t*-tests were used to compare the mean scores of the ordinal variables and for binary variables, chi-square tests were conducted. The impact of the above indicators on the severity of the bodily injuries was assessed by means of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses. To test the third and the fifth hypotheses, interaction terms were constructed, using the standardized values of the ordinal variable. Inspection of variance inflation factor (VIF) values—the highest was 2.740—indicated that multicollinearity remained at an acceptable level. In 15 cases, information was missing on the degree of alcohol intoxication. To increase the overall explanatory power of the models, the missing values were replaced with the mean, as additional analyzes had demonstrated that the revised variables yielded similar effects.

THE FORMS OF YOUTH STREET VIOLENCE

This section presents the results of the qualitative analyses. It turned out that 54% of the interactions took a form that resembled the contesting dominance ideal type, while 30% of them had more features in common with the performing badness type. The remaining cases did not fit well into either of these ideal types; these interactions took the form of one-sided punishments to retaliate prior humiliations.

Empirical Appearances of Contesting Dominance

It appears that in many situations, youth arrange dominance contests by setting into motion sequences of provocations and challenges purposively. Consider the following excerpt, in which two strangers are bidding against one another in a contest of looks.

Johan: "When we were playing soccer, I saw four boys walking up to us. We looked at them, to know who they were or whether we knew them. One of those boys [Anton] started shouting: 'What are you looking at?' Then we went on playing soccer. I was a bit annoyed because they were loud-mouthed. Then those boys sat down on the stairs at the dike and watched us playing. Again one of them said, 'Don't you look that way.' I did not respond to that. I saw they wanted to walk away and I followed them with my eyes. Again, they told us we should not look at them. Then the two largest boys came down, up to me."

Anton: "While we passed these boys, I saw one of them [Johan] looking conspicuously at me. When I looked back at him and asked what they were looking at, I heard him saying, 'Have I got something of yours on me?' [translated literally from Dutch, meaning: what do you want from me?]. We then walked to the dike and sat down. The other boys started to play soccer again. Suddenly, the ball was kicked in my direction. The boy whom I had spoken to went in my direction to get the ball. Again he was looking at me conspicuously. I said to him, 'Look just a bit longer!' He was annoying me. After I had told him that, that boy put the ball on the ground and kept on looking at me. Then he picked up the ball and turned back to his game. I walked down to him and started to unfold my knife and Machiel jumped on him to kick him in his back." (Case 83)

Being looked at means to be singled out and placed at the center of attention, which Anton's group readily took as a provocation, a challenge that required response: "What are you looking at?" Johan responded defiantly by asking what they wanted from him. Prolonging the sequence of provocations now set into motion, Anton's group positioned itself at the dike to watch the others play. Johan's defiant attitude resulted in their subsequent command, "Don't you look that way." However, Johan did not give in to this claim for dominance—as one of the members of Johan's group reported, "He will not give in, he is strong and is never afraid." When Anton challenged Johan "to look just a bit longer," the latter did not back up and the confrontational tension increased. This contest of challenges was extended even when attacker Anton showed his knife to Johan. Anton explained that Johan was too large to take on with his fists, so that he needed to use his knife. However, Johan did not seem to be impressed and tried to get a hold on the knife. This resulted in the tendon of his left hand being cut by Anton and if it weren't for his hasty retreat and for Anton's slower running, Johan might have been

even more severely wounded. One important feature of these interactions is that both parties persevere in a quest for situational dominance; they do not want to back up or show deference to the other.

Such contests often occur in settings where participants and audiences can expect them to be staged. Two examples will help to explain this. The first setting are the toilets or entrances of clubs and other night-life-related venues (see also Graham and Wells 2003; Tomsen 1997). On the congested routes to or inside these small, crowded, and slippery places, intoxicated persons often cannot avoid bumping into one another. In some places, it is common knowledge that the accidental bumping could very well be interpreted as a provocative push, which then leads to verbal provocations, shoving, and further pushing and finally may end up as a violent confrontation. For protection, boys urinate *en groupe*, which results in more crowding, and an increased readiness to meet perceived impertinence head-on. The second setting, the fair and the dodgems in particular, seems more typical of rural areas. The contest may start by aggressively driving around, and the chances are that someone is equally set on persevering a sequence of mutual provocations. In the following excerpt, Ruud dares to defy Tim, which eventually results in Ruud having his nose broken.

Tim: "I was at the fair with some friends. I had asked a guy [Ruud] to back up a bit, we were driving the dodgems. He replied by yelling to another guy, 'Just look at him sitting there.' That made me very angry, so I waited for him. When he came out of his dodgem, I stopped him. I stood just before him and he looked at me and said, 'What do you want from me?' I said, 'Don't be foolish' and I hit him straight in his face." (Case 71)

As a reply to Tim's rebuking, Ruud makes fun of the attacker ("just look at him sitting there"). In addition, Ruud himself decided to walk straight in the direction of Tim's group after he left his dodgem and defiantly asked what the other wanted from him, while his friend (the witness in this case) feared the confrontation and decided to walk in the opposite direction. In many cases, it seems that both parties could have easily prevented a fight by backing up a bit. However, they stubbornly increase the confrontational tension in a quest for situational domination. Contesting dominance may also appear as request-refusal cycles. In these situations, attackers who want to claim dominance demand a favor, which is (sometimes impudently) declined by the victim. For example, in case 11, Stef and his friend asked victim Mike at a bar to close the curtains several times without any apparent reason and in a demanding tone. Mike answered, "If you can't ask it decently, just do it yourself." Then Stef and his friend came toward him and repeated their request, which Mike refused again. In response, the two aggressively bounced Mike out of the bar and hit him. Mike stumbled back into the bar, went to the attackers, and asked them indignantly to return his necklace, which he had lost in the fight. The attackers then shouted that Mike dared to accuse them of stealing his necklace, which was the reason they bounced him outside again and beat him up for the second time. Stef later justified the beating by saying, "Look, the boy asked for the slapping. I asked him decently, but he give me a big mouth. I wanted to reprimand him for that." However, rather than a righteous punishment, Stef and his friend's actions are more accurately understood as a quest for dominance, which they

started by provoking Mike, who responded defiantly even after he had been bounced outside the bar.

While in many cases both parties are purposively seeking the confrontation, contesting dominance does not always consist of explicit verbal challenges or overt presumptuous behavior of the opponents. In the following case, two boys, Onno and Richard, got extremely worked up by the way two other boys were dancing.

Onno: "Those boys were annoying. They were dancing weird and acting big. Very strange, I thought they were foreigners. They seemed to provoke us, coming closer and closer to our group. Acting like they were so popular. I watched them some time and got more and more worked up by them. Richard asked some of the guys from S. [name of village] what kind of guys they were. One of the S. group, Patrick, said they were fucking idiots who always made trouble. Patrick said that they were idiots. Patrick was setting us against them, and we let him do that because we were very drunk. Suddenly he said, 'Do it now, they are alone!' I got so mad and worked up and struck the most annoying of them with a glass at the back of his head. Richard joined in and immediately gave a cracking headbutt to another boy of that group. I wanted them to stop provoking us." (Case 23)

The weird dancing, the groups coming closer and closer, and the looking may have been perceived by Onno and Richard as stages in a struggle over dominance in attention space and the statement "Acting like they were so popular" may be interpreted as jealousy. While the victims were taken by surprise, they knew they were engaging in a dangerous contest. Two of their friends had left earlier, urging the victims to join them, as they felt the atmosphere had become threatening. The attack took place after an accumulation of tension in Onno and Richard for some hours that night, which was built up by moral downgrading ("idiots"), whose weird dancing became a symbol of their provocative intentions ("always making trouble").

The examples presented above clearly share the main feature of the ideal type of contesting dominance: they consist of sequences of provocations and challenges, series of claims and counterclaims to the superordinate role as opponents engage in a quest for situational dominance. In contrast to earlier studies that perceive these contests as forms of honorable competition, the interactions analyzed here revolve around the issue of who is superior per se: attackers arrange conflicts to aggressively establish a domineering self. Furthermore, these examples suggest that situational asymmetry is a prominent feature of these situations: the ones who started the actual violence often outnumber the other party, have more friends with them, use a weapon, or they attack the opponent by surprise.

Empirical Appearances of Performing Badness

Turning now to a form of violent impression management in which attackers display meanness: they toy with the victims, humiliate and denigrate them in a cruel play. The behavior of the attackers is beyond the victim's understanding. Thus, in these interactions, the victims often exclaim: "Act normal!" which indicates that the attackers successfully display what Katz (1988:80–113) described as "alien-ness." Also, the victims often apologize while being beaten up. However, the attack is not a punishment. In some cases, saying sorry even seems to result in additional inexplicable violence. For example, in one case (no. 44) the attackers return to the victim

after having kicked him while he was laying down on the ground. They then asked him, “Did we hear you saying you were sorry?” and conclude that the victim had apparently dared to hurt some of them, hence questioning him further, “Have you hit him, did you dare to touch him?” and then punch him again. In the following situation, a multiethnic group of five girls was planning to beat someone up. One of them, Nadia, proposed to take on a girl of whom she had heard that others had been saying she had made racist remarks once. The group then collectively imagined the proposed victim as “a filthy racist,” accusing her of secretive attempts to humiliate Nadia behind her back. Caught in the excitement, the girls “could have made up anything to beat up a girl,” as one of them later admitted. Some days later, they waited for the girl after school.

Petra: “We had made the plan to give her a good trashing and when we saw her some days later, we started to yell, ‘Dirty racist, look at that, she is wearing a bomber jack and army boots. There is no hair on your head.’ We were saying she should never ever touch Nadia. We made this up to provoke her. We walked up to her and kept on yelling and shouting at her like ‘Dirty racist put on some decent clothes, you fucking cow, filthy whore.’ We closed her in, while she was sitting on a little bench.”

Nadia: “Ramona cried, ‘Fuck off, you rotten Dutch bitch.’ The girl was sitting at the bench with her arms crossed and her head bowed. Ramona and Monique then started spitting at her. Monique pulled her hair, bend her head forward, and started to pound her face with her knee all the time.” (Case 20)

The moment the victim was pulled to the ground, the girls started to kick her collectively, all of them shouting the mantra “dirty racist!” over and over again. There is no contest here, no claims and counterclaims. The violence is unilateral and situational dominance was already taken care of from the start, by taking the outnumbered victim by surprise. The situational asymmetry was reinforced by the position of the victim: she was sitting with her head bowed—a sign of subordination—while the attackers were standing around her, yelling and scolding. Furthermore, the excerpt indicates the meanness of the group members, as they all knew the accusations were contrived and only served to disparage and degrade the victim. Similarly, but in a remarkable twist, two Dutch native boys toy with their victim while they perform “the discriminated foreigner” act.

Marc: “I saw that Kevin was provoking that guy more and more. Suddenly, he started to speak gibberish and acted as if he spoke Turkish. He then said to him [the victim], ‘You did not understand that, did you, because that is Turkish.’ After that Kevin shouted that the boy would surely dislike Turks and that Kevin’s father is Turkish. And that he was a racist and that Kevin felt discriminated and all that. Shortly after that, he started to beat that guy.” (Case 54)

In this play, all of a sudden the victim has turned into a racist. Here again, the accusations are obviously contrived and serve to degrade the victim. However, they also serve to confuse him, thus contributing to their display of alien-ness: their behavior is beyond the victim’s understanding and it is up to the attackers what will happen next. The victims have become toys in the hands of the attackers. In the following case, the attackers hunt down the victim several times. Victim Jasper was a stranger to the attackers. He was singled out by the older sister of one of the attackers by the words, “it seems to me that guy needs a trashing.”

Jasper: “Yesterday, I didn’t want to tell you [the police] everything because I find it so humiliating. After they had beaten me up I went away. But then they came after us again. They chased us and then kicked me off the dike. I got up, but again they chased me and made me stop. The driver of the blue scooter said, ‘Lick the tailpipe of my scooter or I will hit you again.’ It was very hot and I burned my tongue. After I had licked the tailpipe, the same boy said that I had to lick the cap of his scooter as well because I had made it dirty by touching it.” (Case 85)

The attackers display their domination by a series of inexplicable humiliations: they beat him up, hunt him down, make him clean their scooter, and then force him to wipe out the traces he has left. The collective chasing of victims, beating them up, and then letting them go and chase them again is a form of toying that only occurs in this type of violence. This performance not only displays the ability of the attackers to act cruel, but it also emphasizes their ominous power: it is up to them when violence will be used and the victims cannot tell what will happen to them. Violence is often stirred up by a group of supporters and it is in these cases of collective attunement that attackers reported to have enjoyed the violent action (see further my analysis of solidarity and youth street violence in Weenink 2013). The following case shows the cruel toying with the apologetic victim, the attunement of the group members who support and stir up the attackers, and finally, the joy of the attackers. The girls had agreed to “get someone,” and found a victim in Monica, because Chantal thought she had heard Monica scolding Chantal’s mother a year before. Coattacker Esther, however, had never met Monica before. After a first round of slapping Monica’s face, a group gathered and started to cheer and yell.

*Lars,
friend of
attacker
Chantal:* “After they had slapped her, they let Monica run away, went after her, and hit her again. She was crying and saying ‘sorry.’ Esther said, ‘Come on, let’s beat her up, ‘cause I enjoy it. I just get the hang for it now, so let’s get her again.’ I heard the group yelling, ‘Let her crawl, let her crawl!’”

Monica: “They got closer and overtook me. Chantal pulled my hair so hard that my head turned the other way. Chantal asked me whether that hurt. I said she had hurt me. I heard her friend [Esther] saying, ‘Ah, really did that hurt you?’ Right after that she punched me in the face.” (Case 87)

According to both the witnesses, attackers, and the victim, the group made a lot of noise, shouting, “Beat her up, beat her up!” all the time. Various suggestions to degrade and humiliate were yelled and actually performed: Monica had to kneel down, her hair was burned with a lighter, and her coat was robbed from her.

The excerpts reported above fit well into the ideal type of performing badness as all three elements of Katz’s (1988:80–113) ways of the badass are discernible. First, the attackers perform toughness as they display their disinterest in the victim’s emotional being. For example, the victims’ apologies may even form the overture to another series of humiliation. Second, alien-ness is present: the attackers leave the victims desperately guessing about their intentions and make them feel subjected by their inexplicable whims. Finally, the cruelty and toying correspond to what Katz observed as meanness. However, the analyses also suggest that this form of violence is more about expressing the ability to play cruel and humiliating games with victims rather than displaying membership of a dangerous group or gang, as suggested by Katz (1988:114–163). Rather than “street lords” who attempt to rule the neighborhood, these attackers are situational bullies.

Other Forms of Youth Street Violence

A minority of the interactions (25 cases, 15.7% of the sample) did not fit into either of the two ideal types. They will be considered only briefly, as the aim is to offer a comparison between contesting dominance and performing badness. In these cases, the attackers convey the impression that they want to undo prior humiliations or degradations by punishing their opponents one-sidedly, without any sequences of moves and countermoves. Often, attackers publicly announce the moral justifications for their violent acts. In a relatively mild form, found in 13 cases, the violence consists of just one single blow, punch, or slap. In these cases, victims are accused of secretly ridiculing or humiliating the attackers or their group members. Literally, they say their opponents gossip, spy, or talk about them behind their backs. However, in 12 cases, the violence is much more severe.³ In these situations, the attackers feel that a relationship has been undermining their sense of self and they report they had been obsessively ruminating about the other disparaging them for some time. At a certain point, they start to fantasize about killing or seriously hurting the other. Often, the actual violence occurs in a deluded state. The emotional state these attackers are in closely resembles the shame-rage spiraling process described by Scheff and Retzinger (1991; Scheff 2003). In all these cases, the attackers find themselves at the center of attention while being degraded, rejected, and disconnected at the same time: the painful paradox of shame (Scheff 2003; Scheff and Retzinger 1991). Therefore, these forms of violence could be called retaliations for shame.

SITUATIONAL ASYMMETRY AND THE INTENSITY OF VIOLENCE: CONTESTING DOMINANCE VERSUS PERFORMING BADNESS

Table I compares mean scores and proportions of various situational properties. In line with the first hypothesis, contesting dominance is related to somewhat more severe bodily injuries, a difference that will be analyzed in greater detail below. Considering the indicators that aim to capture the weakness of the victims, it appears that attackers outnumber their targets in both forms of violence, but they do so to a greater extent in performing badness, which offers partial support for the second hypothesis. Another indicator of the weakness of the victims is their degree of alcohol intoxication. Table I suggests that the victims in performing badness are slightly less intoxicated. However, as the degree of alcohol intoxication is rather low overall, these analyses suggest that targets are not very weak in this respect. Victims who hit the ground appear more often in performing badness, but it remains to be seen to what extent such vulnerable position results in more severe violence, and whether this might differ per form of violence, as the third hypothesis suggests. Turning now to the numerical dominance of the attackers' supportive group. Table I shows that, on average, the size of the supportive group of the attackers is larger than that of the victims in both forms of violence. While standard deviations

³ The average score of the severity of the bodily injuries in this form of violence is 3.92 (s.d. 1.084); see further Table I.

Table I. Proportions and Average Scores of the Intensity of the Violence and Situational Properties per form of Violence

	<i>Contesting dominance</i> (86 of 159 cases, 54.1%)	<i>Performing badness</i> (48 of 159 cases, 30.2%)	<i>Significance of difference</i>
Severity of bodily injuries (s.d.)	2.36 (1.446)	1.88 (1.299)	p = 0.056
Victims outnumbered (s.d.)	0.674 (1.056)	1.125 (.981)	p = 0.017
Alcohol intoxication victims (s.d.)	0.49 (.883)	0.23 (.565)	p = 0.046
Victim hit the ground	15 of 86 (17.4%)	17 of 48 (35.4%)	p = 0.018
Dominance of the attackers' supportive groups (s.d.)	0.605 (2.203)	1.125 (2.757)	n.s.
Male-on-male	71 of 86 (82.6%)	40 of 48 (83.3%)	n.s.
Relational closeness opponents (s.d.)	0.86 (1.025)	0.42 (.767)	p = 0.006
Alcohol intoxication attackers (s.d.)	0.65 (1.026)	0.70 (1.152)	n.s.
Use of martial arts techniques	7 of 86 (8.1%)	7 of 48 (14.6%)	n.s.
Use of weapons	21 of 86 (24.4%)	2 of 48 (4.2%)	p = 0.002

Note: Significance of differences between ordinal variables estimated by *t*-tests, using Levene's test to determine equality of variances. Significance of difference between binary variables estimated by one-sided chi-square tests.

are high, indicating wide dispersion within the forms of violence, the two forms do not differ significantly from one another in this respect, thus rejecting the fourth hypothesis. The proportion of male-on-male violence does not differ significantly between the two forms of violence. This finding casts doubts about the portrayal of dominance contests as a way to display masculine identity. While violence as enactment of masculinity is not exclusively restricted to males both theoretically and empirically, one would at least have expected an overrepresentation of male-on-male violence here.⁴ As for the relational distance between the opponents, Table I suggests that the antagonistic parties are more closely related to another in the average dominance contest. However, the proportion of strangers is large in both forms of violence: 47% (40 of 86 cases) in contesting dominance and even 71% (34 of 48 cases) in performing badness. Furthermore, Table I shows that the degree of the alcohol intoxication of the attackers is rather low in general. Moreover, the forms of violence do not differ from one another in this respect. Finally, it appears that while weapons are markedly more often produced in contesting dominance, the two forms of violence do not differ from one another with respect to the use of martial arts techniques. These latter differences will be discussed in more detail below.

Table II gives the results of regression analyses that assess the extent to which the two forms of violence have different effects on the severity of the bodily injuries, either directly or indirectly, through situational asymmetry. In the fitted model, variables that yielded nonsignificant effects in the full model were removed, resulting in a more parsimonious model with equal explanatory power ($\Delta F = 1.54$, $df = 5$, $p = .183$). Hence, the discussion of the results focuses on the fitted model. First, even after controlling for the use of weapons (which appear much more often in

⁴ Studies in this area neither explicitly nor systematically include females (Carrington and Scott 2008; Messerschmidt 2000; Winlow and Hall 2009). At best, the role of masculinity in female violence is discussed only incidentally (Polk 1994).

Table II. Ordinary Least Squares Regression Analyses of the Severity of Violence, by form of Violence and Situational Properties, Standardized Coefficients (N = 133)

	Full model	Fitted model
Performing badness (reference category: contesting dominance)	-0.284**	-0.322**
Male-on-male	0.123	
Alcohol intoxication attackers	0.197-	0.226**
Use of martial arts techniques	0.223**	0.240**
Use of weapons	0.124	
Victims outnumbered	0.058	
Alcohol intoxication victims	0.000	
Victims hit the ground	0.015	0.008
Dominance of the attackers' supportive groups	0.249*	0.280**
Relational closeness opponents	0.121	
Dominance of the attackers' supportive groups * performing badness	-0.214-	-0.238*
Victims hit the ground * performing badness	0.259*	0.246-
<i>Adjusted R</i> ²	0.250	0.234

Note: ~p<0.055, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01.

contesting dominance) and martial arts techniques, performing badness results in less severe bodily injuries, which confirms the first hypothesis. Second, of the three indicators that capture the weakness of the victims, only victims who hit the ground are associated with more severe bodily injuries. While the main term is nonsignificant, the interaction term yields a positive effect, which indicates, as hypothesis three states, that in performing badness the intensity of the violence is more likely to increase when victims hit the ground. Third, the numerical dominance of the attackers' supportive group yields a substantial effect in both forms of violence, its magnitude even exceeds that of the use of martial arts techniques. Furthermore, in line with the fifth hypothesis, the negative effect of the interaction term suggests that the numerical dominance of the supportive group has a larger impact on the severity of the bodily injuries in contesting dominance as compared to performing badness.

The finding that contesting dominance and performing badness differ from one another with regard to the severity of the violence suggests that they involve different emotions of varying intensity. Given the competitive nature of interactions in contesting dominance, the amount of *ct/f* being built up is probably greater in this form of violence. Furthermore, attackers who perform badness are probably more likely to belong to the "violent few" (Collins 2008:370–412, 2013) who have learned to master their own and to manipulate others' *ct/f* in ways that provide them with opportunities to emotionally dominate the situation. They may be more experienced fighters; one indication of this is the result that martial arts techniques are used nearly twice as often in this form of violence than in contesting dominance (although the difference is not significant).⁵ The difference in the intensity of the emotions also explains why weapons are used much more often in contesting dominance. Whereas weapons are used to decide conflicts in dominance contests,

⁵ Martial arts training may increase the attackers' visceral experience of getting around *ct/f* (see also Collins 2008:211). Also, the self-conscious mastery of martial arts techniques may increase opportunities for gaining emotional dominance.

attackers who perform badness do not need to rely on them: as Table I suggests, they have already created more situational asymmetry in other ways. The different emotions associated with these forms of violence also appear with regard to the numerical dominance of the attackers' supportive groups. While this form of situational asymmetry is clearly associated with more severe violence in general, Table II suggests that the strength of the relationship also depends on the form of violence: in performing badness, it is less strongly related to the intensity of the violence. As indicated above, audiences may raise the salience of identity issues in contesting dominance, thus fueling the intensity of the confrontation. In performing badness, attackers prove their ability to be cruel, but in contesting dominance, they prove their ability to persevere in competition. This explains why in performing badness the injuries tend to be more severe when victims hit the ground. In the latter form of violence, attackers seize this opportunity to show that their meanness is unrestrained and that they defy rules of fairness. But in contesting dominance, this moment is a clear marker of the defeat of the opponent, which is what the attackers have been struggling for. Perhaps it is the satisfaction of the desire to attain proven dominance, rather than a concern for a honorable code of fair fighting, that makes them more likely to stop their attacks when victims are in such vulnerable position.⁶

More generally, the findings highlight the importance of situational asymmetry in violent interactions: in both forms of violence, attackers tend to outnumber their victims, and more importantly given its effects on the intensity of the violence, in both forms the size of the attackers' supportive groups exceeds that of the victims'. These results thus support Collins's (2008) micro-sociological theory of violence, in which the attainment of emotional dominance—through apparent situational asymmetry—is crucial for violence to occur.

CONCLUSION

Violence is often portrayed as a defensive act, as a reaction to some perceived wrongdoing: a way to *save face*, *defend* honor, or pre-emptively, as a "*self-rescuing response*" to avoid the emotional disturbance that follows from acting weak or passive (Winlow and Hall 2009). Furthermore, Felson (2009:583), for example, states that "the most important instigator of violence is perceived intentional attack" while Black (1983) posits that violence is predominantly "moralistic," a way to manage conflicts and Gilligan (1996:11, italics original) concludes, "*all violence is an attempt to achieve justice.*" Also, studies that include macro-sociological variables in their explanations of street violence tend to regard it as a way to defend an otherwise-threatened (masculine) identity due to structurally deprived or marginalized social positions (Carrington and Scott 2008; Messerschmidt 2000; Taylor et al. 2013; Tomsen 1997). The present study suggests that these claims should be nuanced, at least concerning youth street violence in relatively peaceful areas. This

⁶ As I have shown elsewhere (Weenink 2014), victims who hit the ground form a tipping point that results into extreme, frenzied violence, similar to what Collins (2008:83–113) has conceptualized as forward panics. However, in performing badness this may be different, as the attackers are probably experienced in manipulating their own and others' *ct/f* and have already secured domination. For them, hurting vulnerable victims who are down on the ground is a proof of meanness.

study offers support for Athens's (2005) claim that people commit violence because of their desire for dominance, or to be more precise, one important motivation to pursue street violence is to attain dominance for the sake of attaining dominance *per se*. Thus, the overwhelming majority of cases (84%) revolve around "situational stratification" (Collins 2004:258–296). In contemporary egalitarian public space, stratification is no longer grounded on trans-situational categorical status groups, but based on ephemeral situational hierarchies instead. This opens up opportunities to aggressively aggrandize oneself at the cost of others in "staging areas" (Anderson 1999:76–79). Both performing badness and contesting dominance are ways to proactively pursue a temporarily superior status (see Collins 2008:232–233).

One striking difference between recent prior work on bar fighters (Copes et al. 2013) and arranged violent encounters between suburban youth (Jackson-Jacobs 2013) on the one hand and this study on the other is the apparent lack of a code that informs attackers how to conduct a proper, honorable fight that contributes to their character. Rules of fair fighting were commonly neglected as situational asymmetry is the rule in both forms of violence. The absence of such code may point to a bias in the sample not only in this study, but also in prior work. This study relied on police interrogation reports, thus providing a sample that may underestimate fights in which the opponents had developed a working agreement to engage in a violent honor contest. On the other hand, both Copes et al.'s (2013) and Jackson-Jacobs's (2013:30) studies relied on interviews predominantly, and as the latter author points out, such data may tend to reflect "storytelling practices, and cultural myths about fighting" (to be fair, it should be added that Jackson-Jacobs tried to overcome this problem by triangulation). In other words, interviewees may tend to overestimate to display their honorable character. Quite strikingly, attackers who perform badness reject such attitude: they defy rather than respect rules of fair fighting.

This study demonstrates that different forms of violent impression management involve different emotions of varying intensity, which are in turn associated with violence of varying intensity. While the often-contrived disputes of contesting dominance involve situationally aroused anger and annoyance and a greater amount of confrontational tension and fear, the toying with victims in performing badness is associated with meanness and sometimes even joy. These different emotions are each related to more, respectively less severe bodily injuries. From the perspective of the victims, however, the emotional trauma that result from being the victim of a performance of badness may be a great burden. Hence, one shortcoming of this study is that it fails to take into account these emotional and mental injuries.

The results presented here raise several new questions. First, the empirical appearances of the two ideal types of street violence could be studied over time and across different places to answer the question to what extent the emergence of more egalitarian public spaces is related to an increase of street violence as situational stratification. Second, various questions revolve around the similarities and differences between performing badness and bullying. Clearly, the humiliation of social inferiors is central in both interactional forms. However, while bullying is part of establishing hierarchy in dense and closed networks (at schools or total institutions), performing badness is committed in relatively open public spaces and victims are most likely strangers. One question in this respect is in what ways performing

badness offers the same type of status rewards (within the hierarchy of the attackers' group) as compared to bullying; while bullies are often would-be dominants, the status position of the attackers in performing badness is yet unknown. A comparative study of bullying in relatively closed social systems versus performing badness in open public spaces may also ask questions of how situational asymmetry is arranged and how supportive groups are mobilized in both interactional forms. Third, in line with the micro-sociological approach followed here, a series of questions can be raised on the relationships between the two types of street violence, situational asymmetry and emotional dominance. The asymmetry that emerges when the supportive group of one party outnumbers that of the other seems particularly relevant. Thus, future studies may ask how exactly this form of asymmetry impacts the emotional state of the principals, how supportive groups of both parties react to one another, in what ways smaller supportive groups may resist larger ones, how supportive groups interact with neutral bystanders, and in what ways all these interactions affect the course of the violence. Furthermore, it can be asked whether supportive groups act differently in performing badness and in contesting dominance, how attackers and their supportive groups are mobilized and aligned toward violent action in both types of violence, and in what ways these processes affect the violent interaction. These questions suggest that despite the impressive stock of knowledge that has been produced by the phenomenological and interactionist tradition, there is much we need to learn about violence. Close-up, micro-sociological analyses of the interactional dynamics are a most promising way to attain that goal.

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