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Consequences of Expected and Observed Victim Resistance for Offender Violence during Robbery Events

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Abstract

Objectives: Drawing on the rational choice perspective, this study aims at explaining why some robberies take place with physical force while others occur only with threat. The focus is how expected and observed victim resistance impact physical force by robbers. *Methods:* We draw on quantitative and qualitative data obtained from 104 robbers who described 143 robbery events. Based on the coding of behavioral sequences between offenders and victims, we distinguish between the use of physical force at the onset from the use of physical force during the progression of the

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event. *Results:* At the onset of robberies, physical force of offenders is influenced by whether they judge the victim to be street credible. During the progression of robberies, offenders are more likely to use physical force against a resistant than against a compliant victim. *Conclusions:* At the onset of the robbery, offender violence is related to expected victim resistance; during the progression, it is related to observed victim resistance. Future research should focus on behavioral sequences within robbery events including the meaning of victim characteristics and victim behavior in different phases of the event.

Keywords
rational choice theory, violence, victim resistance, street credibility

Introduction

To a considerable extent, the public concern about crime is about violent offenses in public places (Cook 2009). Foremost among these crimes is robbery. The direct property losses from robbery are usually small, but the trauma suffered by victims is substantial (Gale and Coupe 2005). While violent threats may produce a psychological gash (Lurigio 1987), the worse scenario is to be on the receiving end of physical force—a strike, slash, or shooting. Such occurrences result in everything from minor bruises to permanent disabilities or death (see, e.g., Luckenbill 1980, 1981; Wright and Decker 1997).

Physical force may arise at various stages of the robbery event. For the purposes of the present research, the most useful distinction is between its onset, when the offender makes the victims aware they are being robbed, and its progression, the subsequent flow of events until the offender leaves the scene. Why do robbers use physical force from the very start or subsequently when the robbery is underway? Prior research suggests victim resistance is an important factor (Luckenbill 1980, 1981; Tark and Kleck 2004; Wright and Decker 1997). In this article, we emphasize that victim resistance comes in two forms. The first is *expected* victim resistance: a robber's prediction that a target will not comply. The second is *observed* victim resistance: tangible noncompliance as the robbery unfolds. As detailed subsequently, the literature paints the former type as affecting violence at robbery onset, and the latter as affecting violence as the robbery progresses.

This article sheds further light on why robbers use physical force, especially the role of expected and observed victim resistance in that decision,

by quantitatively and qualitatively analyzing the characteristics of 143 robberies described by 104 offenders. By examining offenders' potential use of violence in two stages of robbery—its onset and its progression—we distinguish three possible robbery outcomes: no physical force throughout, physical force from the very beginning, and physical force only after the robbery has begun.

Rational Choice and Robbery

Although the rational choice perspective has complexities, at the most basic level it posits the following: The utility of an action is the amount of pleasure minus pain it brings; people seek to maximize their pleasure and minimize their pain (or in the language of economics, maximize benefits and minimize costs). Therefore, when faced with a decision of how to act, people choose whichever option has the greatest utility (Bentham [1789] 1988).

What is rational, however, is not universal, nor are people perfect decision makers. Clarke and Cornish's (1985) rational choice framework brings attention to the variety of factors that weigh on cost–benefit calculations such as cultural values and beliefs (Bennett and Brookman 2008), gender perceptions (Copes and Hochstetler 2003), and emotional conditions (Lindegaard et al. 2013). Thus, people's decisions are swayed by a whole host of influences. In this sense, rational decisions are "bounded" (Simon 1957).

Robbers' Violence and Victim Resistance

Interviews with offenders have shown that some robberies are motivated by the desire to obtain the benefits associated with cash and other forms of property, such as drugs, jewelry, or clothing (Wright and Decker 1997).[1] Robbers achieve this goal through the use or threat of violence (Luckenbill 1980, 1981). But why do some robberies only involve threats whereas others are marked by physical force? And, more narrowly, what is the role of victim resistance—expected and observed—in robbers' use of violence? To best address these questions, we distinguish between two stages of the robbery event: its onset, which entails approaching the victim and communicating "this is a stickup"; and its progression, which is the post-onset period focused on transferring the goods (see also Luckenbill 1980, 1981; Wright and Decker 1997).

Robbery Onset

Research with offenders provides first-hand knowledge of the use of violence in robberies. Their first consideration is how much violence to use from the start of a robbery (Luckenbill 1981). In some cases, only violent threats are made, such as "If you move, you dead" (Wright and Decker 1997:97). Other instances involve physical force from the start. For instance, a robber reportedly walked up to his victim and would "just hit him" (p. 98; see also Luckenbill 1981). Although these techniques vary in the amount of injury they could cause, the goal of both often is to create an illusion of impending death—or of injury, at least—that pushes victims to calculate their property as less valuable than their life or bodily integrity, and thus not worth resisting over (Luckenbill 1981; Wright and Decker 1997).

What explains why some robberies turn immediately physical whereas others commence with just threats? Robbers' accounts of target selection, as documented in ethnographic studies and interviews with offenders, point to one possibility. They allegedly do not randomly select their victims but rather make a calculated decision (Jacobs 2000; Wright and Decker 1997). To maximize benefits, robbers claim to prefer targets deemed likely to have an appreciable amount of cash or other property to steal. Such perceptions are based on, for example, how potential victims dress, their reputation in the community, and whether they are spotted leaving an ATM.

To avoid costs, robbers reportedly select targets they deem unlikely to resist. For instance, in offender-based studies in the United States (Miller 1998; Wright and Decker 1997), robbers claimed to target older persons, females, and Whites owing to the belief they are likely to comply. As explained by a few offenders in Wright and Decker's study (1997): "I pass up a lot of [people in their] thirties and get up to some fifties and some sixties . . . cause they the ones that gonna put up less fight" (p. 86); "women, they won't really do nothing. . . . A dude, he might try to put up a fight" (p. 85); "[Whites] usually don't resist. A black person will try to grab the gun out of your hand" (p. 84). In another offender-based study, conducted in the United Kingdom (Brookman et al. 2007), robbers also purportedly targeted easy victims. However, their definition of such victims differed from the U.S. studies: Easy targets were characterized as outsiders such as tourists, clubbers, suburbanites, and shopkeepers. Age, gender, and race played less of a role.

Ethnographic research identifies another personal trait that may affect a robber's expectation of victim resistance: victim's street credibility

(Anderson 1999). According to the code of the street, a person's status—or street credibility—depends on their willingness and ability to fight back. However, evaluating whether someone is "street credible" is also interpretative, being based on such things as clothing style, accent, body movements, and demographic characteristics such as gender, age, and race (Garot 2010). In other words, some people look tougher than others. Whether based on personal identity or appearance, lacking street credibility leads a person to be marked as "weak"—that is, unlikely to resist—and, as such, from the offender's perspective rational to rob (Jacobs 2000; Jacobs, Topalli, and Wright 2000).[2] To be clear, sometimes robbers go after individuals with street credibility, but the reason for such attacks—according to the predators, at least—is the prey possess enough valuables to offset the increased risk of resistance; drug dealers are a common example (Jacobs 2000). As explained subsequently, because street credible victims are expected to fight back, a reasoned approach of robbers is to get the upper hand by immediately using physical force to quell the threat of resistance.

In theory, a robber who perceives a victim as unlikely to resist—due to their physical capability or cultural orientation—is less likely to use physical force when initiating the victimization (Cook 1991; Luckenbill 1980). Assuming a robber's objective is solely predatory (i.e., not retaliatory or recreational), physical force serves no to little benefit beyond that required to motivate the victim to comply.[3] If threats are enough to generate victim compliance, physical force is irrational because it is potentially costly, as injuring or murdering a victim may increase the chance of formal and informal punishment (Jacobs et al. 2000). Moreover, offender-based research finds that preemptive physicality can be counterproductive if it shocks victims into a state in which they uncontrollably scream or become literally unable to move (Wright and Decker 1997). Therefore, robbers may prefer not to use any more physical force than the amount necessary to generate victim compliance.

However, not all victims are willing to surrender easily. Some robbers are apt to use physical force from the start against victims expected to resist (Luckenbill 1981; Wright and Decker 1997). This is rational for a couple of reasons. As we discuss below, robbers claim to use physical force against victims who do not comply with their initial demands. Thus, if a robber thinks a victim will resist threats, it is potentially a waste of time to not immediately employ physical force against them. Moreover, the problem with merely threatening a victim is that it may give them time to make a counterstrike, which is clearly something robbers want to avoid. Preemptive

violence is seen as a way of speeding up an offense and reducing the odds of self-defense or counterattack by resistance-prone victims.

Robbery Progression

Once a robbery is in progress, offenders typically report not using further physical force against *compliant* victims, that is, those who give up their property. This has a rational basis. As noted previously, physical force serves minimal benefit beyond that required to motivate the victim to comply yet potentially increase the odds of incurring costs (see, e.g., Topalli, Wright, and Fornango 2002). Thus, it may be rational for robbers not to use physical force against victims who give in to demands.

Robbers often report a different response to *resistant* victims. Resistance includes everything from running away to screaming, calling for help, arguing with the offender, fighting back, and more. Such a response to robbery is rather common. For instance, an analysis of the U.S. National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) indicates that about two-thirds of victims involved in personal contact crimes, which includes robbery, took defensive action, and a third of victims used forceful actions such as physically struggling with or shooting at the offender (Tark and Kleck 2004).

Frequently, robbers report handling resistant victims by resorting to physical force, be it by beating, pistol whipping, stabbing, and shooting them (see, e.g., Contreras 2013; Jacobs 2000, 2013; Katz 1988; Miller 1998; Wright and Decker 1997). Quantitative studies based on police reports, as well, have shown that victim resistance increases assailants' use of physical force (Felson and Steadman 1983; Ganpat, van der Leun, and Nieuwbeerta 2013; Luckenbill 1981; McCluskey 2013). Assuming the force is not meant to produce unconsciousness or death (as this is incapacitation), the rationale behind such violence may be to persuade victims to recalculate whether their property is worth the potential consequences of resistance. As said by a robber, "you would be surprised how cooperative a person will be once he been smashed across the face with a .357 Magnum" (Wright and Decker 1997:113).

However, some studies find that observed victim resistance decreases the odds of victim injury or, at worst, does not increase it (Block 1981; Kleck and DeLone 1993; Tark and Kleck 2004). Among this body of work, the most comprehensive study to date is Tark and Kleck (2004). Their detailed analysis of the NCVS suggests that victim resistance generally does not provoke physical violence by offenders, but can thwart completion of

the robbery. They conclude that "victim resistance is usually either successful or inconsequential" (p. 902).

As explained previously, robbers may use physical force against resistant victims as a way of motivating them to turn over the property and thus avoid being hurt or killed. But victims may have a different take, instead perceiving resistance as more likely than compliance to protect against bodily harm, death, or property loss. Furthermore, based on an analysis of the NCVS, it has been argued that there are plausible reasons why robbers would choose to abort an in-progress offense when faced with a resistant victim (Guerette and Santana 2010; Tark and Kleck 2004). From the offender perspective, in-depth interviews with robbers suggest additional motivations for victim resistance (see, e.g., Jacobs 1999:77). To avoid unwanted attention from nearby persons (e.g., bystanders or patrolling officers), robbers may choose not to run after a fleeing victim or not to stay with a victim who is screaming. And some robbers may be unwilling to get physical with victims who stand their ground, as this could have the counterproductive effect of being hurt or apprehended.

The Present Study

This study builds on these prior findings by testing the following hypotheses. Hypothesis 1: Concerning the initial moments of a robbery, a robber is more likely to use physical force against a victim they expect to resist than against a victim they expect to comply. We suggest that offenders are more likely to anticipate resistance from victims categorized according to the more encompassing category of street credibility than broader demographic categories, as these categories involve less specific behavioral expectations. We therefore expect that a robber's perception of victim street credibility is a better predictor than victim gender, race, or age of whether the robber uses physical force from the start of an offense. Hypothesis 2: Concerning the time after the robbery has been declared and is thus in progress, a robber is more likely to use physical force against a resistant victim than against a compliant victim.

Recruitment and Response

Interviews were completed with 104 respondents, of whom 28 were unincarcerated (i.e., "active") and recruited through a snowball sampling procedure in Amsterdam, 41 were recruited from a prison for adult males, and 35 were recruited from two penitentiary institutions for juveniles.

In order to gain contact with the unincarcerated respondents, we used a recruiter known to the third author. The recruiter was paid 20 Euros per recruited respondent. Each unincarcerated respondent was paid 50 Euros for an interview. The incarcerated respondents were approached personally by the first author and asked for participation; the response rate was 66.5 percent. The three most common reasons for nonresponse were (1) uncomfortable about talking about the crime, (2) unwilling to speak to any kind of ''officials,'' and (3) awaiting trial. Incarcerated respondents were paid 30 Euros per interview. The only criterion for participation was formulated as ''having experience with committing robberies.'' Respondents were never asked about their real names and confidentiality was promised.

The ethics committee of the Law Faculty of VU University Amsterdam, reviewed and approved the research design and contents of the questionnaire and interview protocol.

Interviews

The interviews focused on two types of robberies: (1) robberies with threat but without physical force and (2) robberies with physical force. Respondents were asked to focus on the most recent robberies they committed of each type and to only describe robberies they had committed within the last five years. Among the unincarcerated respondents, it was common to discuss robberies for which they had not been arrested. Such robberies were, however, also described by incarcerated offenders.

Interviews lasted between 20 minutes and three hours, depending on the number of robberies referred to by the respondent, their willingness to discuss the robberies in details, and their ability to reflect on their experiences. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interviews outside prisons were conducted by the third author in semipublic spaces such as fast-food restaurants or bars. Inside prisons they were conducted by the first author in a separate room, commonly on the section where the respondent was incarcerated. Sometimes interviews took place in the respondent's cell.

Interviews were semistructured and focused on descriptions of unfolding events rather than reasoning or legitimizations of the respondent's behavior. Although semistructured, all of the interviews covered the same key topics in a largely consistent order. Interviews included parts with open questions followed by closed questions meant to clarify and confirm answers to the open questions.[4]

Each interview started with questions about the background of the respondent and their experience with robbery generally (e.g., details on criminal career) and then moved to details about specific robberies. The first open question posed was ''Please describe the robbery as if it was a movie that you have seen but I have not seen. So please start out with what happened before you did the robbery, what happened during, followed by what took place after you were done.'' This question was generally followed by extensive probing into the details about what happened. The closed questions included specific details about the place, planning, and interaction with victims including attention to hypotheses derived from previous studies. As with any self-report study, it is possible that participants resorted to lying or distortion. To mitigate this problem, participants were promised confidentiality; rapport was established prior to the interview through a variety of techniques (e.g., discussion of shared interests such as recent soccer results); it was emphasized that the interviewer had an academic interest in robbery and thus would refrain from any moral judgments; and, unusual or unfounded comments (i.e., suspicious responses) were asked for clarification.

Sample

The main demographic and social characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

We also asked the respondents how many robberies they had ever committed, how many of these they had been arrested for, and how many times they had served a prison sentence for robbery (possibly in combination with other crimes). Most respondents reported having considerable experience with robbery. More than half reported committing six or more robberies. Note that 15 (14.4 percent) had never been arrested for robbery, of who 11 were unincarcerated offenders and 4 were in prison serving sentences for other crimes.

As some respondents were asked to report details on more than one robbery they had committed, the 104 respondents reported on 155 robbery incidents in total. The robberies were committed on the street (40.3 percent), in shops and other types of retail businesses (34.4 percent), and in private homes (25.3 percent). Based on the recollection and description of the respondents, it was not possible to ascertain the timing of offender violence and victim resistance in six incidents. Another seven cases were classified as incidents that started as assaults and only turned into robberies because property was taken from the victim; these

Table 1. Sample Characteristics.

Variables/Categories	#	Percentages
Age category		
15–18	31	29.8
19–22	30	28.8
23–26	18	17.3
27–49	25	24.0
Immigrant status		
Born in the Netherlands	64	61.5
Immigrant < age 12	28	26.9
Immigrant > age 11	11	10.6
Unknown	1	1.0
Immigrant status parents		
Both born abroad	81	77.9
Mixed in Netherlands-abroad	8	7.7
Both born in Netherlands	15	14.4
Education and work		
Neither school nor work	43	41.3
School, no work	19	18.3
School and work	14	13.5
Work, no school	28	26.9
Living arrangements		
With parents	46	44.2
Alone	17	16.3
With partner (and children)	20	19.2
With others	21	20.2
Alcohol use		
More than 10 glasses a day	5	4.8
More than 3 glasses a day	16	15.4
Less than 3 glasses a day	4	3.8
Weekly	44	42.3
Incidentally	23	22.1
Never	12	11.5
Cannabis use		
More than 10 joints a day	9	8.7
More than 3 joints a day	42	40.4
Less than 3 joints a day	10	9.6
Weekly	14	13.5
Incidentally	11	10.6
Never	18	17.3
Robberies committed		
1–2	28	26.9
3–5	18	17.3
6+	56	53.8
Unknown	2	1.9

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Variables/Categories	#	Percentages
Robbery arrests		
None	15	14.4
1–2	58	55.8
3–5	14	13.5
6+	13	12.5
Unknown	4	3.8
Robbery incarcerations		
None	29	27.9
1–2	52	50.0
3–5	12	11.5
6+	6	5.8
Unknown	5	4.8
Total	104	100

nontypical incidents were also discarded. The remaining analysis is based on the other 143 robbery incidents.

Table 2 summarizes the outcomes of the two decisions that form the focus of the current analysis, namely the offender's decision to use violence at the onset of the robbery and, conditional on not having used violence at the onset, the decision to use violence later on in the course of the robbery. The onset of the robbery was defined as "before or within a few seconds after the victim became aware he or she was being robbed," which essentially implies that it is before the victim could possibly have demonstrated the willingness to comply with the offender's demands. In the 143 incidents, violence was used immediately at the onset of the robbery in 46 incidents (32.2 percent). In the remaining 97 incidents (67.8 percent), violence was not used immediately. In these 97 cases, violence was still used subsequently during the progression of the robbery in 46 cases (47.4 percent). In the other 51 (52.6 percent), no physical violence was used at all during the robbery. Violence was operationalized as physical contact with the victim using force (grabbing, holding, pushing, slapping, kicking, etc.) or intentionally injuring the victim. The coding was based both on the open descriptions of the robbery and on the answers to the closed questions about the specific behavior of offenders and victims and the injuries of the victims (see Table 3).

Based on the coding of behavioral sequences, robberies were categorized as "violence onset" (violence in behavioral sequence 1), "violence

Table 2. Offender Violence at Onset and during Progression if Not at Onset.

Violence (Timing)	#	Percentages	#	Percentages
Violence at onset	46	32.2		
No violence at onset	97	67.8		
Violence during progression			46	47.4
No violence at all			51	52.6
Total	143	100	97	100

Table 3. Example of Behavioral Sequence of Robbery Event Where Violence Occurred during Progression.

No.	Type of Actor	Details Actions	Type of Actions
1	Offender 1	Enters fast-food shop while pointing gun at victim	Threat
2	Victim 1	Grabs sharp object and points it at offender 1	Resistance
3	Offender 1	Offender kicks victim	Violence

progression" (violence in behavioral sequence 3), or "nonviolent," and this variable was included in the statistical analysis.

In our assessment of the street credibility of victims, we also relied on both the open descriptions and the answers to the closed questions about victim characteristics. The measure of street credibility of the victim is not based on the respondents' exact use of the word, but on the presence of at least two of the following four characteristics that respondents attributed to the victims: (1) having an appearance of street credibility expressed through clothing style (e.g., jacket with fur collar and golden necklace), haircut, bodily posture, speaking slang or with an accent; (2) having visible or derived demographic characteristics statistically associated with street credibility, that is, male, young, dark skin color, residing in deprived neighborhood; (3) known or assumed involvement in street crime such as drug dealing or carrying a weapon; and (4) being explicitly referred to by the respondents in terms street credibility, for example, "he was a boy from the street," "a street soldier," "he was that sort of guy," or "with that clothes you know what type you are dealing with." For a victim to be coded "street credible" at least two of these characteristics had to be mentioned by the respondents. This was necessary because a single characteristic would not adequately differentiate street credible victims from others. For example, street credibility is not attributed to all young

men with dark skin color, and some women are also viewed as being street credible. Similarly, while most people seen as street credible are (assumed to be) involved in criminal activities, some types of victims were known to be involved in crime but were not considered street credible (e.g., victims involved in tax evasion, fraud, or other nonviolent "white-collar" crimes).

The measurement of victim resistance was also based on answers to both closed and open questions. Any indicators of noncooperation with the robbery were coded as resistance, including physical resistance (e.g., "fighting back"), verbal resistance (e.g., "trying to persuade the offender to stop and leave the scene"), trying to escape the scene, calling for help, and actively refusing to comply with the offender's requests. Non-intentional noncompliance, such as the occasional "freezing" of victims, was also coded as resistance.

Statistical Analysis

We used both simple cross-tabulations and logistic regression analysis to analyze both decisions: whether to use violence at onset versus as it unfolds. To correct for the possibility that multiple robberies committed by the same person were interdependent, we calculated Huber/White robust standard error estimates. These robust estimates adjust the standard errors upwardly to control for clustering on the individual respondent. They thus represent more conservative tests of the hypotheses than standard estimates.

Our review of prior work suggests that the offender's *expectation of resistance* is an important determinant of violence at onset. As we predicted that being street credible was a more relevant category for expected victim resistance than gender, race, and age, initially the only variable entered in the model of onset violence was the "street credible" attribute of the victim, which, to be clear, is the robber's perception of the prospective victim. Similarly, because the literature suggests that *observed victim resistance* could increase the likelihood of violence during a robbery progression, it was the only variable entered in the model of subsequent violence. In both cases, the hypotheses were tested using a bivariate logistic regression model.

In order to strengthen the evidence and seek a more powerful test of the contention that these are the two main variables that give rise to offender violence, we verified the robustness of the findings by using nonhierarchical stepwise logistic regression procedures, using both forward selection and backward selection methods. The forward selection procedure starts

with an empty model. Subsequently, it seeks the most significant variable in the set of variables that has not yet been included, includes it in the model if it fulfills a certain threshold criterion (we decide to choose $p < .01$), and estimates the model. This process is repeated until there is not a single variable left that fulfills the inclusion criterion. The backward procedure starts with a model that includes all variables and works by removing the least significant variables one by one. Note that our use of the stepwise logistic regression procedure is not meant to be a "fishing expedition" aimed at finding the best fitting model in the data. There are many warnings in the literature against this approach (e.g., Whittingham et al. 2006). Our sole purpose was to check whether the proposed relations between expected and observed resistance and violence are not due to any confounding variables.

The set of variables used in the stepwise procedure contains a number of situational and personal features of the robbery situation, including offender and victim characteristics other than being perceived as "streetwise" and providing resistance. Table A1 in the appendix lists the full set of variables included in the stepwise models and also presents the numbers and percentages of robberies with onset violence and with subsequent violence for each category.

In the sections that follow, we first provide findings of the statistical analysis focusing on the onset and progression of the robberies. Subsequently, we include illustrations of these findings by providing explanations of the findings from the perspective of the offenders.

Findings

Statistical Analysis

Offenders used violence in different phases of the robbery event and the reasons for doing so depended on whether it was at the onset or progression of the robbery. In the robbery onset, violence was related to what the offender expected of the victim. In the progression of the robbery, the observed behavior of the victim played a significant role. Subsequently, we first describe the findings of the statistical analysis for each robbery phase followed by illustrations of these findings as provided by the offenders in their descriptions of the robberies they committed.

Robbery onset. It was hypothesized that expected resistance would be the main trigger for robbers to use violence at the onset of a robbery. Based

Table 4. Street credible Victim and Violence during Robbery Onset.

	No Violence		Violence		N
	#	Percentages	#	Percentages	#
Not street credible	79	74.5	27	25.5	106
Street credible	18	48.7	19	51.3	37
Total	97	67.8	46	32.2	143

Note: Pearson $\chi^2(1) = 8.42$ ($p = .004$).

on the qualitative analysis of the respondents' descriptions of the victims, we expected that seeing a prospective victim as "street credible" would be viewed as the best indication or "signal" of a victim's tendency to resist (e.g., better than merely being young or male). Table 4 presents a simple cross-tabulation of the offender's perception of the prospective victim as a street credible person and the use of violence at the onset of the robbery. While on average one in every three robberies starts violently at onset, violence at onset is twice as likely for robberies with the prospective victims being perceived as "street credible" as compared to robberies in which the victims are not perceived as street credible. Confirming the hypothesis, the χ^2 test of this association is significant. Alternative indicators of potential greater resistance (e.g., male gender, younger age, and "criminal status") had the expected associations with immediate violence, but none was as strong as the association with the street credible label.

A quantification of the influence of expected and observed resistance on offenders' use of violence can be obtained by modeling the decision to use violence with a logistic regression equation. Table 5 displays the major parameters of three models of violence at the onset of robbery, one a bivariate model that includes only whether the victim was perceived as street credible, the other two multivariate models that result from forward and backward stepwise procedures. The odds ratios are the factors by which the odds of using violence increase if the explanatory variable increases by one unit. Thus, the odds ratio of 3.09 means the odds of using violence at onset increase more than threefold if the victim is seen as street credible, as compared to when he or she is not seen as street credible.[5] The outcomes of the multivariate models demonstrate that the victim's street-credible status remains an influential factor. In the forward model (with inclusion threshold $p < .01$), the perception of the victim as street credible is the only variable that survives the selection criterion, in the backward

Table 5. Bivariate and Stepwise Logistic Regression Analyses of Decision to Perpetrate Violence at Robbery Onset.

	Bivariate		Stepwise Forward		Stepwise Backward	
	OR	*z*	OR	*z*	OR	*z*
Street-credible victim	3.09*	2.75	3.31*	2.74	3.19*	2.59
Target is residence					5.08*	3.17
Short planning (ordinal)					1.75*	3.27
Pseudo-R^2	.05		.05		.14	
N	143		130		130	

Note: OR = odds ratio. Standard errors adjusted for multiple robberies per respondent. Stepwise estimation included as independent variables all variables included in Table A1 except *Resistance*. Stepwise procedure based on listwise deletion of missing values. Pseudo-R^2 is defined as $1/L_1 - L_0$, where L_1 is the log likelihood of the resulting model and L_0 is the log likelihood of the constant-only model.
*$p < .01$.

selection model two other variables survive. The odds of violence are five times larger in case of a residential robbery as compared to a street robbery or a commercial robbery, and robberies planned shortly in advance are more likely to be violent at onset. There is no indication that offender characteristics or other victim characteristics affect the decision to become violent immediately at the onset of the robbery.

Robbery progression. The association between victim resistance and the subsequent offender violence during the progression of the robbery (provided the offender did not use violence at the onset) is displayed in Table 6. Evidently, the association is strong. While on average half the robberies that start without offender violence wind up involving it during the progression of the robbery, subsequent violence is almost 10 times more likely in robberies with victim resistance (82.4 percent) than in robberies with no victim resistance (8.7 percent). Confirming the hypothesis, the χ^2 test of this association is significant.

Analogous to Table 5, Table 7 displays estimates of three models of violence during robbery progression, one a bivariate model that includes only whether the victim resisted, the other two multivariate models based on forward and backward stepwise procedures. Confirming our second hypothesis, the results demonstrate a strong effect of resistance on offender violence: given that violence has not been used at robbery onset, the

Table 6. Resistance and Violence during Robbery Progression.

	No Violence		Violence		*N*
	#	Percentages	#	Percentages	#
No resistance	42	91.3	4	8.7	46
Resistance	9	17.6	42	82.4	51
Total	51	52.0	46	48.0	97

Note: $N = 97$.
Pearson $\chi^2(1) = 52.63$ ($p = .000$).

Table 7. Bivariate and Stepwise Logistic Regression Analysis of Decision to Perpetrate Violence Subsequently, Conditional on Not Having Perpetrated Violence at Onset.

	Bivariate		Stepwise Forward		Stepwise Backward	
	OR	*z*	OR	*z*	OR	*z*
Resistance	49.00*	5.40	62.62*	5.36	62.62*	5.17
Weapon available (offender)			6.37*	2.71	6.37*	2.71
Pseudo-R^2	.44		.49		.49	
N	97		89		89	

Note: OR = odds ratio. Standard errors adjusted for multiple robberies per respondent. Stepwise estimation included as independent variables all variables included in Table A1 except *Resistance*. Stepwise procedure based on listwise deletion of missing values. Pseudo-R^2 is defined as $1/L_1 - L_0$, where L_1 is the log likelihood of the resulting model and L_0 is the log likelihood of the constant-only model.
*$p < .01$.

odds of offender violence during progression increase almost 50-fold when the victim resists, as compared to when the victim complies. In addition to the hypothesized effect of resistance, the results of the stepwise models demonstrate that if the offender has a weapon available, the odds of using violence during the progression of the robbery are more than six times higher than when no weapon is carried.

Note that the pseudo-R^2 values, which indicate model fit, are larger in Table 7 than in Table 5, indicating that we are better able (on the basis of knowing whether the victims resist) to predict whether the robbers become violent during the progression of the robbery than whether they start out violent at the onset of the robbery. Without much doubt, this also reflects

the offender's certainty about what to do: whereas initially offender must decide on the basis of expectations, during the robbery an offender can decide on the basis of observations.

Offender Perspective

Having demonstrated that the results of the statistical analysis confirm our expectations about the roles of expected and observed resistance at the onset and during the progression of robberies, and the importance of a victim's street credibility, we now illustrate these findings with some selected quotes from the offender interviews. Again the robbery onset and progression are distinguished.

Robbery Onset

Respondents emphasized the importance of being able to control the behavior of the victims when committing a robbery. The way they created compliance depended on what kinds of expectations they had toward the reactions of the victim. When offenders described why they would use violence at the onset of a robbery, they referred to the risk that someone would not comply and that risk was expected to be higher if the victim was considered street credible. For example, one respondent explained that he once robbed a street-credible victim and, owing to that perception, grabbed and threatened him with a gun from the start:

> **Respondent 106:** When he entered the alley, I said "Give me that necklace." Then he says, "What the fuck?" And I see he wants to pull up his shirt to get something. Then I shot him right in his leg, and then he said "Aah!" and he fell on the ground. . . . I knew he was from the street, and if someone is from the street, he is always unpredictable, because he could always have a gun in his pocket.

Another respondent explained that criminals are unpredictable and therefore require a more convincing approach:

> **Respondent 73:** For instance, if a robbery would take place here, then you come inside and you want to show "this is not for fun. I come for this and this and this, and this is not for fun." Don't make a wrong move because then things will go wrong. I always try to stay cool, but . . . what I experienced among guys, if I see that he suddenly grabs something in his pants . . . yeah,

> then I risk my life at that moment. . . . We're dealing with criminals here, just to remind you. It's not about a bloody supermarket that you're about to rob. Criminals are unpredictable! They might suddenly pull a gun and shoot you down instead of you shooting them down, instead of you leaving with his money. So being alert is very important. And besides that, what I just said: Violence? Just avoid it! Try to show your true colors like: "hey, here I am," And . . . If necessary just hit them in order for them to wake up: "This is the reason I am here."

Avoiding violence was generally considered ideal by the respondents, but with other criminals and more generally with victims who were perceived as street credible, using violence from the start of the robbery was perceived as necessary in order to generate compliance.

Robbery progression. Respondents distinguished between necessary and unnecessary violence: Necessary violence helped them to finish the robbery successfully by getting away with the values without getting caught; unnecessary violence injured the victims without being functional:

> **Respondent 60:** If it's not necessary to use violence, I also don't use violence. If it's necessary, it's necessary. . . . If you use violence, if you get caught you get a much higher punishment. Currently it's supposed to be like eight, nine years.

> **Respondent 44:** No, it was actually kind of a failure. You had the money, but you'd rather not have done it. Of course you hope that everything . . . goes without the use of violence. Everyone who is doing this [robberies] prefer that. If violence is used, it's because of what they [the victims] do. I know it's really blunt to say, but if they [the victims] just cooperate, then nothing happens. That's just how it works.

If victims did not cooperate, respondents saw it as necessary to use violence. For instance, one respondent described how he had to use his weapon to make the victim realize that he and his co-offender were serious about their intentions to rob him:

> **Respondent 87:** And that man [the victim] stayed outside. So we arrived, the passenger behind me gets off, walks straight up to him. And he [co-offender] pulls his gun but the man started fighting with him. And they were not yet inside the house, they were right outside the door. So the guy wanted to keep him outside, but eventually they fall inside. And I still have to park the

> motorbike. I have to get off. So then I came, and I saw them there in front of the door, but inside the house, but in front of the door, and the door was still open. So I see them fighting there, they are lying there [and then] bam! bam! bam! [as the co-offender shoots]. So now I also have to pull my gun. So then I had to beat that guy [victim]: "This is a robbery, don't mess around, don't fight because you'll not win, there are two of us, do you understand? Did you realize that? This is a real gun, don't do anything, just do what we say then we'll leave earlier."

It was common that respondents tried to make the victims calm down by saying things like "everything will be ok if you just do what I say." Reactions like fighting back, screaming, or cursing were often described as the victim being in a condition of "shock." For example, another respondent described how the victim resisted verbally because he was shocked:

> **Respondent 89:** So we park the car next to him and he still didn't see us. Only when all four doors opened, he was shocked. And he was still with another guy in the car. And I asked him to get out of the car, and he didn't want to. He put on this big mouth like: "What do you want from me? Who are you?" And stuff like that. So one of the guys [co-offenders] moved to the front of his car so he couldn't leave. If he tried he would be gunned down immediately [. . .] And one [co-offender], he directly shot him in the leg. [They did this] to show they are serious and that he should listen to me because he started to give me a big mouth and stuff like that. Then he collapsed, then I gave him a few kicks, and took his car keys and car.

Similarly, one respondent described how the victim of a home robbery was shocked and attacked him and his co-offenders. This resistance made his co-offender hit the victim with a weapon:

> **Respondent 54:** Once the door opened, they immediately entered. But then, yeah, that lady was scared to death and began pulling the bala . . . a balaclava from one of the guys [co-offenders]. And if someone pulls that, then you see nothing anymore, because there are only two small holes in it. So he saw nothing and began to wave, and he had a gun in his hand, so he had beaten the woman with the weapon. Yes, that woman fell on the ground, she began to scream. I know that someone put his hand on her mouth.

Victims generally avoided injury and exposure to physical force if they complied with the demands of the offender by following their instructions and not screaming or fighting back. Our analysis suggests that victim resistance was the major cause of physical violence used by the offender in the

progression of the robbery. Respondents described having "no choice" but to use violence when victims did not comply. Where offenders explained that violence at the onset of the robbery was necessary when victims were street credible, violence during the progression of the robbery was seen as unavoidable if victims did not comply.

Discussion

Based on 104 offender interviews about 143 robbery events, we addressed why some robberies are committed with physical force while others only involve threat. Our findings showed that respondents were more likely to use violence at the onset of the robbery when preying on victims that were seen as "street credible" than when targeting other victims, apparently because street-credible victims were anticipated to resist when being robbed. In addition, the use of violence at the onset was more likely when the robbery was not extensively planned and when it took place in a residence instead of in a retail business or on the street. If no physical violence was used at the onset of the robbery, actual resistance by the victim was the single best predictor of offender violence during the progression of the robbery. The odds of a resisting victim experiencing physical violence are 50 times the odds of a cooperating victim. In addition, we found that if offenders carried a weapon, and controlling for observed victim resistance, they were more likely to use physical force toward the victim.

Previous studies suggest that demographic victim characteristics matter for whether offenders use physical force when doing a robbery because they signal a probability of resistance (e.g., Baumer et al. 2003; Wright and Decker 1997; Zimring and Zuehl 1986). Our discussion and measurement of street credibility supports and specifies this hypothesis: Street credibility as measured by a mixture of looks, clothing, gestures, behaviors, and observable demographic characteristics proved a better predictor of violence at robbery onset than demographic labels such as gender, age, and racial background, which only partially define perceived street credibility.

Previous findings about the impact of observed victim resistance on the use of physical force by robbers have been mixed. Some studies suggest that victim resistance increases the risk of violent outcomes (Contreras 2013; Jacobs 2000, 2013; Katz 1988; Miller 1998; Wright and Decker 1997). Based on the analysis of police records (Block 1981) and of victimization surveys (Kleck and DeLone 1993; Tark and

Kleck 2004), others suggest that victim resistance decreases the odds of victim injury or, at worst, does not increase it. Our findings align with the former set of findings, as they show that during the progression of the robbery, victim resistance increased the risk of violent offender behavior.

We continue the discussion with an elaboration of what we see as the two main contributions of this study and its findings to the literature: teasing out sequences of action and reaction in robberies by the analytical distinction between robbery onset and progression, and mixing quantitative data analysis with in-depth interviews.

In their study of victim injury and death in armed robberies that was based on police reports, Zimring and Zuehl (1986:30) characterize their data as circumstantial ''because the sequence of offender force and victim resistance is incompletely identified,'' a caveat that was reiterated by Baumer et al. (2003) in their NCVS-based study on neighborhood effects on offender and victim behavior in assaults and robberies. Through our distinction between decision-making moments in the robbery event, our main contribution to the literature is that compared to previous studies, we were able to reach more specific conclusions about how victim characteristics and victim resistance play a role for the behavior of the offender. Our findings propose that victim characteristics are important in the beginning of the robbery because offenders base their expectations and concomitant behavior on interpretations of those characteristics. When the robbery is already in progression, characteristics and anticipated behaviors of victims seem to play less of a role because the victim's actual behavior is more informative than his or her characteristics.

The analytical strategy pursued in this study is uncommon. Most prior research has used either quantitative analysis of medium-scale or large-scale databases from police records (e.g., Zimring and Zuehl 1986) or victim surveys (e.g., Baumer et al. 2003; Tark and Kleck 2004) or qualitative analysis of in-depth offender interviews (e.g., Feeney 1986; Wright and Decker 1997). Our study combined the quantitative analysis of a medium-sized sample with in-depth interviews of active and incarcerated offenders, and combines the advantages of both methods. The sample structure, the sample size, and the response rates obtained provide arguments for claiming that the results can, at least to some extent, be generalized. The (transcribed and coded) contents of the extensive semistructured interviews allowed us to verify the interpretation of how situational characteristics affected offenders' use of violence. For example, they helped us figure out what types of behavior are viewed as ''victim resistance''

by offenders, and to precisely determine victim characteristics that make prospective victims be perceived as "street credible."

A remaining disadvantage that our methodology shares with those of others is that we had to rely on the accounts of respondents, which are limited not only by their willingness to share information but also by their capability to reconstruct and to objectively reflect on events from the past. In future work, researchers might consider reconstructing robbery incidents by combining offender, victim, and bystander perspectives on the same event. This might help to overcome possible biases, including tendencies to justify and excuse one's behavior as well as the problem of relying on respondents' memory.

Another analytical strategy to pursue is to analyze closed-circuit television (CCTV) footage of actual robberies. Assuming qualitatively appropriate footage (note that most recordings will be limited by the absence of sound, and have only a single viewpoint) and acknowledging that selectivity will be introduced (residential robberies and street robberies are rarely covered on CCTV), the analysis of CCTV footage could help to objectively measure behavior sequences in robberies and assess the validity of reconstructions based on offender, victim, or bystander accounts of the robbery. The analysis of CCTV footage is one of the very few opportunities that criminologists have to directly observe criminal acts (for a study that used CCTV footage to study public violence, see Levine, Taylor, and Best 2011).

Finally, we hold out the prospect of establishing factors that could help prevent robberies. The findings presented in this article demonstrate which situational features distinguish violent from nonviolent robberies, but do not tell us much about situational features that could prevent robberies from being perpetrated in the first place. Obviously, rather than preventing a nonviolent robbery from turning into a violent robbery, better yet is to altogether prevent the robbery. In the interviews that are part of this study (see Bernasco, Lindegaard and Jacques 2013), we did not only ask the respondents to provide details about a violent and a nonviolent robbery but also asked them to answer questions about a robbery that they had planned (operationalized by having decided on the location and target) but not perpetrated. In other words, we asked them about a robbery that was canceled before it had been started. To be clear, these are not interrupted robberies per se. Rather, the canceled robberies are literary nonevents, and the prospective victims have likely never known they escaped being robbed. Without exception, respondents were able to come up with detailed concrete examples of cancelled robberies. This complex material will be further

analyzed in future work with the aim of finding situational factors that can prevent robbery intentions from turning into action.

Appendix

Table A1. Percentages of Robberies Violent at Onset ($N = 143$) and Violent during Robbery Progression ($N = 97$), by Situational and Personal Characteristics.

	Robbery Onset		Robbery Progression	
	Percentage	#	Percentage	#
Total	32.17	143	47.42	97
Resistance				
No resistance			8.7	46
Resistance			82.4	51
Target type				
Nonresidential	26.17	107	46.84	79
Residential	51.43	35	47.06	17
unknown		1		1
Public space (street robbery)				
Semi-private or private space	30.59	85	50.84	59
Public space	35.09	57	40.54	37
Unknown		1		1
Darkness				
Light	31.88	69	46.81	47
Dark	32.43	74	48.00	50
Length of planning				
Less than hour	43.48	46	34.62	26
More than hour	26.80	97	52.11	71
Clothing prepared				
Not prepared	34.33	67	45.45	44
Prepared	30.26	76	49.06	53
Method prepared				
Not prepared	30.35	56	46.15	39
Prepared	33.33	87	48.28	58
Victim/target selected				
Not selected	32.56	43	37.93	29
Selected	46.88	100	51.47	68
Neighborhood selected				
Not selected	37.78	45	42.86	28
Selected	29.17	96	48.53	68
Unknown		2		1

(continued)

Table A1. (continued)

	Robbery Onset		Robbery Progression	
	Percentage	#	Percentage	#
Street selected				
Not selected	35.29	51	42.42	33
Selected	46.08	90	49.21	63
Unknown		2		1
Timing prepared				
Not prepared	33.33	69	47.83	46
Prepared	31.51	73	46.00	50
Unknown		1		1
Tip obtained				
Not tipped	33.33	90	46.67	60
Tipped	29.42	51	50.00	36
Unknown		2		1
Co-offender				
No co-offender	29.55	44	41.94	60
Co-offender	32.65	98	50.00	36
Unknown		1		1
Retaliation				
No retaliation	30.16	126	46.59	88
Retaliation	29.31	17	55.56	9
Weapon available (offender)				
No weapon	42.86	42	25.00	24
Weapon	27.72	101	54.80	73
Multiple victims				
Single victim	33.33	78	48.08	52
Multiple victims	30.16	63	47.73	44
Unknown		2		1
Known victim/victims				
Unknown victims	30.48	105	49.32	73
Known victim/victims	37.84	37	43.48	23
Unknown		1		1
Victim "criminal"				
Not "criminal"	28.18	110	46.84	79
"Criminal"	45.45	33	50.00	18
Street-credible victim				
Not street credible	27.94	68	65.31	49
Street credible	51.35	37	66.67	18
Unknown if street credible	23.08	13	0.00	10
Unknown		25	10.00	20
Victim gender				
Male	36.21	116	47.30	74
Female	15.38	26	50.00	22
Unknown		1		1

(continued)

Table A1. (continued)

	Robbery Onset		Robbery Progression	
	Percentage	#	Percentage	#
Victim age				
0–20	40.91	22	15.38	13
21–30	43.75	48	55.56	27
31–40	21.43	42	51.51	33
41–99	23.33	30	52.17	23
Unknown		1		1
Offender age				
15–18	40.43	47	39.29	28
19–22	30.00	40	53.57	28
23–26	22.73	22	29.41	17
27–49	29.41	34	62.50	24
Violent robberies before				
0	21,05	19	6.67	15
1–2	34.29	35	52.17	23
3–5	47.83	23	75.00	12
6 or more	30.65	62	48.84	43
Unknown		4		4
Immigrant status				
Born in the Netherlands	32.97	91	42.62	61
Immigrant age < 12	36.84	38	54.17	24
Immigrant age 12+	8.33	12	63.64	11
Unknown		2		1
Country of birth parents				
Both abroad	35.24	105	42.65	68
Mixed abroad–Netherlands	30.77	13	77.78	9
Both the Netherlands	20.00	25	50.00	20
Interview setting				
Semiprivate setting	44.44	27	40.00	15
Prison	29.31	116	48.78	82

Notes: Percentages calculated for non-missing cases only.

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Notes

1. Although less common, another prominent reason to rob is retaliation (see, e.g., Jacobs and Wright 2006, 2008). For details on the distinction between predatory and retaliatory violence, see Felson (1993), Cooney (2006), or Cooney and Phillips (2002).
2. There may be a paradox in that people who know the code of the street might also be more likely to comply with robbers' commands (Anderson 1999; see also Baumer et al. 2003) because they realize that robberies are one-sided fights in which the reputational benefits of resistance are outweighed by the risk of serious injury or death.
3. One exception is physical force can be used to murder the victim and thereby get rid of a potential witness (see Jacobs and Wright 2006).
4. The 62-page questionnaire is available on request from the authors.
5. Note that this odds ratio is the ratio of the cross products of Table 4, that is, $(79 \times 19)/(27 \times 18) = 3.09$.

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