Essays Exploring Urban Violence

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Essays Exploring Urban Violence

A dissertation presented

by

David Myers Hureau

to

The Committee on Higher Degrees in Social Policy

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Abstract

Despite continued interest in understanding the problem of urban violence in the United States, fundamental scholarly and policy-relevant questions remain regarding the nature of urban violence, its consequences, and the effectiveness of social policy efforts aimed at reducing the harms it causes. This dissertation consists of three papers that address each of these questions. The first paper—developed from collaborative research with Anthony Braga, Tracey Shollenberger, and Christopher Winship—uses quasi-experimental methods to assess the effectiveness of a gang outreach and mediation “streetworker” program in Boston. The second paper turns its focus to the primary tool used in the creation of serious urban violence—the firearm—and makes use of both quantitative and qualitative data to shed light on handgun access and use among those embedded in social networks where gun violence is common. The third paper examines the consequences of exposure to concentrated homicide within a social network of young men that have experienced the deaths of a large number of friends and peers. I close this dissertation by briefly discussing the overarching findings of these papers and their import for social theory and policy.
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Introduction

In spite of an unprecedented decline in violent crime since the early 1990s, serious violence remains a persistent problem in America. Gun homicide—which overwhelmingly shapes aggregate homicide rates—decreased by approximately 50% since its zenith in the early 1990s (Zimring 2008), but has remained generally stable since that time. Over the last decade, more than 11,000 Americans have died in firearm homicides each year and roughly four times that number sought emergency room treatment for a gun assault (Cohn et al. 2013). And while declines in violence have disproportionately occurred in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods, evidence suggests that these declines did not change the distribution of violence within American cities (Friedson and Sharkey 2015). Those neighborhoods and populations that bore the burden of the epidemic of gun violence in the late 1980s and early 1990s continue to experience the highest rates of violence today. Thus, the grand decline in American crime rates holds within it an important story of persistence—the persistence of the problem of serious violent crime and its enduring link with racial inequality.

American blacks remain exposed to the greatest risk of homicide in large part due to the vastly unequal ecological conditions—marked by poverty, disadvantage, and racial segregation—in which they live. In 2010, blacks comprised 55% of all American homicide victims despite making up 13% of the U.S. population. While overall crime declines have generally reduced the black-white disparity in exposure to violent crime (Friedson and Sharkey, 2015), black Americans still experience approximately 11 times the gun homicide rate as their white counterparts (author’s calculation, CDC-WISQARS tables 2010). For young men aged 15-34, the rate of gun homicide for blacks is roughly 35 times that of whites (author’s calculation,
CDC-WISQARS tables 2010). Such stark inequality in exposure to homicide affects life expectancy at the population level. Homicide still explains more than 18% (more than one full year) of the life expectancy gap between white and black men—approximately the same gap in percentage terms as in 1993 (Harper, Rushani, and Kaufman, 2012).

Important questions emerge from the persistent problem of urban violence and its enduring connection with racial inequality—questions that are consequential for those most exposed to serious violence, particularly young black men living in disadvantaged and segregated social contexts. This dissertation is organized around three such broad questions aimed at improving scholarly and policy-relevant understanding of the empirical realities of urban violence. First, do social policy programs that promote “street outreach” to those deemed most likely to be involved in serious violence meaningfully reduce serious violence? Second, given the important role that guns play in making urban violence more deadly and harmful, how do guns become available to those most likely to use them? And third, what are the consequences of concentrated homicide for the relatively small social networks that are disproportionately exposed to deadly violence?

The first paper in this dissertation contributes to the understanding of the effectiveness of perhaps the primary non-law enforcement policy instrument aimed at serving those most exposed to the threat of serious urban violence: the “streetworker” or gang outreach program. This paper is organized around a policy-level impact evaluation of StreetSafe Boston, a multi-year gang outreach and social service provision program serving 20 Boston gangs, privately funded and operated by The Boston Foundation. While streetworker programs were one of the main policy tools for addressing social problems associated with gangs during the mid-century period (Klein 2001; Klein and Maxson 2006), these programs have experienced a resurgence due in part to the
proliferation of replications of Chicago’s popular CeaseFire program (now known as Cure Violence).\(^1\) CeaseFire’s public health approach to addressing violence—employing streetworkers to interrupt the spread of violence as if it were a communicable disease—has been embraced by policymakers seeking novel and less punitive approaches in combating serious urban violence. Pittsburgh, Phoenix, Newark, Baltimore, and Brooklyn—among several other cities—have launched CeaseFire influenced streetworker programs in recent years, in spite of little social scientific evidence that such programs reduce serious violence (Papachristos 2011). StreetSafe Boston, while not a CeaseFire replication, shares many of its core features—most centrally the use of data to direct streetworker outreach and mediation to those most likely to be involved in serious violence. In this paper, my co-authors and I use a quasi-experimental design to compare trends in fatal and non-fatal shootings by gangs that received the StreetSafe treatment relative to trends in fatal and non-fatal shootings by matched comparison gangs. We find that the StreetSafe intervention had no discernable impact on the gun violence involvement of the gangs served by the program. The policy implications of these findings are discussed within the context of a broad view of the history of streetworker programs and the evolving position of these initiatives within the portfolio of policy options dedicated to addressing serious violence.

The second paper in this dissertation sheds light on another poorly understood facet of urban violence—the role that guns play in shaping the distinct contours of serious urban violence—particularly the pathways through which guns are obtained for those at highest risk for violence involvement. Making use of quantitative data detailing ATF traces of guns recovered from Boston gang members, as well as ethnographic interviews with Boston gang members and

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\(^1\) CeaseFire Chicago, which espouses a streetworker-driven public health approach to addressing street violence should not be confused with Boston’s “Operation Ceasefire,” a law-enforcement led intervention that uses principles of “focused deterrence” to disrupt cycles of retaliatory violence among gangs and other street groups (see Kennedy 1997, 2012).
individuals involved in the drug trade, I provide an analytic description of the stock of illicit guns among three distinct networks involved in crime and violence. I show that the guns possessed by Boston gang members are generally older handguns that originated from New Hampshire, Maine, and I-95 Southern States. Taking advantage of detailed data on gun transactions, I document patterns underlying the relationship between gun value in formal and illicit markets, and identify pathways by which guns are diverted from legal commerce and become available for purchase on the street. The findings of this study are discussed with respect to the possibilities and constraints of the contemporary policy landscape in regulating gun transactions in the United States.

This dissertation’s third and final paper examines some the effects of serious urban violence—especially the effects that concentrated homicide has on social networks. Drawing upon ethnographic fieldwork among a social network of young men exposed to high levels of homicide, this study presents a new way of looking at urban violence and its consequences, one that emphasizes how homicide is experienced within a web of social relationships. Above and beyond their exposure to serious violence, the young men I studied repeatedly confronted the deaths of their friends and peers, leaving them to bear the burden of mourning. I find that the challenges inherent in mourning in a context marked by disproportionate homicide exposure can lead to fundamental discontinuities in social life that deepen social marginality and inequality. The findings of this study are discussed with regard to their contribution to deepening understanding of the links between urban violence and social and racial inequality. The dissertation concludes with a brief discussion of overarching theory and policy implications suggested by results of all three papers.
Chapter One

A Policy Evaluation of a Gang Violence Intervention: StreetSafe Boston

With
Anthony A. Braga
Tracey Shollenberger
and
Christopher Winship
ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes the findings of an impact evaluation of StreetSafe Boston—a multi-year gang violence intervention featuring street outreach and social service provision to active Boston gang members. A quasi-experimental design was used to compare trends in fatal and non-fatal shootings by gangs that received the StreetSafe treatment relative to trends in fatal and non-fatal shootings by matched comparison gangs. Three distinct matching techniques were used to identify comparison gangs that were equivalent to the treatment gangs on relevant group-level characteristics. Regardless of the matching approach used, statistical models suggest that the StreetSafe program did not generate discernible impacts on gun violence. The policy implications of these findings are discussed in the context of a growing body of literature demonstrating that gang outreach programs frequently produce null or harmful effects.
INTRODUCTION

This document represents the policy-level impact evaluation of The Boston Foundation’s StreetSafe Boston (SSB) initiative, an ambitious multi-year violence prevention and intervention effort aimed at significantly reducing violence among a subset of Boston gangs. Conducted by a Harvard University research team, these impact evaluation efforts are built around a set of quantitative analyses that assess StreetSafe Boston’s overall impact on the violence involvement of the 20 gangs with which it has worked intensively between 2010 and 2013. These analyses use a rigorous quasi-experimental design to analyze longitudinal data on shootings involving SSB focus gangs and matched comparison gangs. These statistical tests aim to answer StreetSafe Boston’s most important policy question: “Did the intervention reduce violence by and against the gangs it served?”

This report proceeds as follows. First, we briefly introduce the StreetSafe Boston intervention and its two key violence reduction strategies: the streetworker strategy and the Service Delivery strategy. We follow this with a description of the contours of violent crime in Boston prior to, and during, the evaluation period. Next, we provide a critical review of the literature on streetworker programs and their known impacts on gang violence. The ensuing section of the report describes our impact evaluation efforts. We begin by assessing StreetSafe’s impact on violence reduction at the gang-level; we describe our quasi-experimental evaluation design, the outcome data used in our impact assessment, the matching processes used to develop comparison gangs, and statistical models used to analyze gun violence trends for treatment gangs and comparison gangs. Finally, in the concluding section, we summarize our overall findings and
discuss their broader implications for the StreetSafe program and gang violence prevention policy and practice.

**THE STREETSAFE BOSTON INTERVENTION**

Launched in mid-2009 after a lengthy planning process, StreetSafe Boston (SSB) is an initiative of The Boston Foundation (TBF) aimed at significantly reducing gang-motivated shootings by actively targeting for intervention those most likely to be involved in serious gun violence. Operating in five “Focus Areas” of concentrated gun violence (South End, Dudley, Grove Hall, Bowdoin-Geneva, and Morton-Norfolk) selected by TBF, SSB engages 20 active gangs (and the individuals most centrally associated with them) for ongoing intervention. These gangs, which SSB refers to as “Focus Groups,” were not selected randomly, but were selected by TBF staff after consultation with the Boston Police Department (BPD), partners from the City of Boston, and the Harvard Research Team. Gangs were selected into the intervention based on their: a) association with a given Focus Area; b) their historic level of violence; and c) their “current form” with regard to involvement in violence and perceived risk for long-term violence involvement.

The SSB intervention is comprised of two complementary violence reduction strategies. The first involves street-level conflict negotiation and mediation work conducted by streetworkers. Briefly, the SSB streetworker strategy depends on the ability of streetworkers to connect and build meaningful relationships with the gang members it serves in order to mediate and resolve gang conflicts and/or interrupt cycles of ongoing gang violence. Although the

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2 SSB’s final Mission Statement reads: “StreetSafe Boston motivates and empowers young people directly affected by gang life through interrupting cycles of street violence and creating access to transformative opportunities in personal growth, education, and the workforce. All people deserve and need to be safe. StreetSafe Boston offers a way up and a way out of danger and instability and enables young people to reach their full potential. We commit to learning and embracing evidence-based practices and sharing our knowledge of street outreach and gang intervention with others.”
number of streetworkers has varied over time, SSB has generally aimed to deploy approximately 15 streetworkers at a time to serve its 20 Focus Groups. While most streetworkers are assigned to a single gang, a small number of streetworkers are assigned to two closely aligned gangs. Typically, a lone streetworker serves as the primary point of contact for each gang. Over the course of the intervention, however, streetworkers have become collaborative in serving their Focus Groups. This is particularly true of streetworkers working within the same general area and during times of stress and conflict when strategic problem-solving approaches are required.

SSB’s second violence reduction strategy is its “Service Delivery” program, spearheaded by Program Coordinators (PCs). Complementing the work of the streetworkers, PCs address the service needs of individuals embedded in gangs that become involved with SSB (typically through the work of a streetworker). PCs offer case management services, serve as resource brokers for gang-involved individuals, and attempt to steer individuals away from gang-involved activities and toward structured life-skills, education, and employment opportunities. The flagship effort of SSB’s Service Delivery, particularly in the intervention’s final year, has been the StreetSafe Transitional Employment Program (STEP). In contrast to many of the services provided by referral to external service providers, STEP is an in-house program that blends three weeks of intensive pre-employment training with three months of subsidized employment with community employment partners. Of the 426 individuals on SSB’s active caseload, 64 (15%) participated in STEP programming through September 2013.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Streetworker Programs in Historical Context

Streetworker programs have roots that extend at least as far back as the early 20th century.
Often known as “gang outreach” or “detached worker” programs\(^3\), such programs became the default policy response to the social problems caused by street gangs in the 1950s and 1960s (Klein 1971; Klein and Maxson 2006). Building upon the work of the “Chicago School” of urban sociology, street gangs were commonly understood to be associated with the mostly white ethnic sections of America’s inner cities, as the products of transitional neighborhoods and populations that lacked the institutions and organizational capacity required to supervise and socialize groups of young men (Bursik and Grasmick 1993). As such, streetworker programs of the midcentury period have been characterized as promoting a “transformational” public policy approach toward street gangs; that is the idea that street gangs could be transformed from incubators of crime and delinquency through the work of streetworkers tasked with repurposing the group structure of gangs toward pro-social ends benefiting individual young men and their broader communities (Klein and Maxson, 2006). Streetworker programs proliferated across the United States’ major cities in the midcentury period, but programs in Los Angeles (Klein 1971), Chicago (Cohen and Short 1958; Kobrin 1959), New York (New York City Youth Board 1960), and Boston (Miller 1962) deserve particular mention for the extensiveness of the programs that were run and the records they left behind from researchers and administrators.

The prominent position of streetworker programs in mid-20\(^{th}\) century urban social policy may come as a surprise to some contemporary readers more familiar with outreach programs that developed in response to increases in gang violence in the late 1980s and 1990s. The decline in popularity of streetworker programs in the 1970s and early 1980s flowed from two related developments in the realms of research and policy. In the realm of research, by the 1970s the

\(^3\) This review pertains to violence intervention programs that conduct active street outreach in effort to reduce gang/street violence; programs that address the needs of other street populations (i.e. homeless youth) or operate within the walls of institutions are beyond the scope of this review. While there are many names for those who do gang outreach in practice, here we use the term “streetworker”: a) as a term of convenience; and, b) because it aligns with StreetSafe’s organizational terminology.
community-based sociology of the “Chicago School” (with its interest in gangs as important neighborhood social groups) was losing influence in academic and policy circles to criminological research concerned with predicting individual propensity for offending (Klein and Maxson, 2006). In the policy domain, by the 1970s criminal justice policy—in step with broader trends in social policy—forcefully shifted away from the idea of rehabilitating crime-involved individuals in favor of a novel “punitive regime” characterized by principles of deterrence,\(^4\) harsher penalties for crime, and increasing rates of incarceration (Western 2006). As violent crime rates climbed from the 1960s and into the 1980s, the idea of “transforming” gangs—through streetworker and other social policy initiatives—was discarded in favor of deterrence-based approaches emphasizing “surveillance, parole revocation, violence control, and greater reliance on police and prosecution programs” (Maxson and Klein 1983; Klein and Maxson 2006).

Streetworker programs would once again reemerge in the late 1980s and early 1990s in response to the significant increases in serious gang violence in many U.S. cities, but they would no longer be the favored policy response to addressing the problem of street gangs—that job belonged to law enforcement. As broad-based gang prevention programs grew during the 1980s and 1990s, streetworker programs—practicing gang intervention—found their niche as: 1) community-based alternatives to law enforcement strategies; and/or, 2) as a component of larger community-based “comprehensive” gang control efforts (Spergel 1995). As several critics have noted, streetworker programs embedded in such comprehensive gang control efforts have frequently taken a back seat to police gang suppression efforts and struggled to provide appropriate services for gang members, establish meaningful gang intervention alternatives to

\(^4\) It should be noted that the punitive policies adopted during this period favored deterrence as a “commonsense” ideal and generally were not informed by academic research into deterrence (Klein and Maxson 2006).
police suppression, and develop streams of funding for their work (Klein and Maxson 2006; Kennedy 2011).

The most recent thread in the evolution of streetworker programs has come from the “public health perspective” and led by the efforts of CeaseFire Chicago (now known as Cure Violence), established in the late 1990s. In seeking to promote the understanding of violence as a “public health issue,” Cure Violence and its followers have importantly sought to sidestep the aforementioned entrenched academic and ideological debates regarding the nature of crime, in their place offering a new disciplinary perspective and engaging researchers and policymakers invested in intervening in street violence as if it were a disease. As we review below, at the present time the principal success of the public health approach to intervening in gang violence has been in the reframing of policy debates around violence intervention. The approach has proven less obviously successful in developing novel approaches to gang outreach, as public health interventions frequently closely resemble classic streetworker programs in their on-the-ground methods and the results they garner, in spite of their novel framing.\(^5\)

While the format of these various streetworker programs and the social problems they have sought to address have shifted over time, streetworker programs have historically been motivated by a common foundational presupposition: “Because gang members do not ordinarily respond well to standard agency programs inside the agency walls, it is necessary to take the programs to the gangs” (Klein 1971). Below we review the historical record in assessing how effective a range of streetworker programs have been in taking their work to the gangs.

*The Goals of Streetworker Programs Over Time*

Among the many challenges in evaluating streetworker programs, one of the most

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\(^5\) The degree of novelty in promoting the understanding of crime and violence as a public health issue is also a matter of some dispute (see Hemenway 2006; Papachristos 2011).
difficult problems lies in taking stock of the multifaceted goals of these programs. Spergel (1966), in reviewing the goals of many early streetworker programs, noted that these programs aimed to: control gangs (and their fighting), treat individual problems, provide access to opportunities, change (delinquent) values, and prevent delinquency. A single program might aim to address any or all of these goals. Contemporary streetworker programs share these goals and have added new goals, particularly the goal of reducing community violence. While it is useful to keep in mind all of the espoused objectives of streetworker programs, evaluation of these programs has followed two major currents over time. First, early streetworker programs were assessed on their ability to control and prevent delinquency. As our review will demonstrate, in overview, these early streetworker programs failed to reduce gang delinquency—in several cases, actually increasing it. In contrast, more recent streetworker programs have generally been assessed on the degree to which they have prevented or reduced gang violence. While the results are more mixed than those of early streetworker programs, as we show below, on balance we interpret the literature covering more recent streetworker programs as tilting toward mixed/null findings in reducing gang violence.

“Early / Classical” Streetworker Program Evaluations

Four high-quality evaluations inform our understanding of the effectiveness of the early (pre-1970) streetworker programs. The first of these was conducted by Walter Miller in Boston’s Roxbury neighborhood between 1954 and 1957. Forerunning the comprehensive community approaches to gang control that would come into vogue later in the century, Miller

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6 While it was never formally evaluated, the Chicago Area Project was one of the most important early streetworker programs that served as a blueprint for many streetworker programs that would follow. Designed by University of Chicago sociologist Clifford Shaw, the CAP model employed local adults to outreach gang youth with group activities and social service opportunities in order to drive down neighborhood crime. Spergel (2007) has noted that CAP’s outreach workers among the first “curbstone counselors”—individuals with ties to both the neighborhood and gangs dedicated toward group and individual transformation (See Kobrin 1959; Tita & Papachristos 2010).
dubbed his project a “‘Total Community’ Gang Control Project” which sought to reduce neighborhood adolescent delinquency by deploying an intervention aimed at three ecological levels: the community, the family, and the gang. The project’s main intervention was aimed at gangs however, featuring seven professionally-trained streetworkers assigned to 21 Roxbury gangs, seven of the gangs receiving “intensive” attention from at least one of the streetworkers. In line with the “transformational” approach to gang intervention at the time, street workers were directed “to contact, establish relations with, and attempt to change resident gangs” (Miller 1962: 169). Using delinquency data from streetworker reports as well as official agencies, Miller reported that the treatment gangs showed no improvement on a variety of delinquency measures when compared to counterpart control gangs. In fact, increases in delinquency were detected among several categories of offending—particularly increases in “serious” offending, among younger gang members, and among boys relative to their female counterparts (Miller 1962).

The Chicago Youth Project was an initiative of the Chicago Boys’ Clubs from 1960 through 1966, evaluated by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. The intervention followed the same basic logic of Miller’s “total community” approach, but placed greater emphasis on community organization, outreach to non-gang youth, and made greater use of data and research to refine its outreach efforts (Klein 1971; Spergel 1995; Gold and Mattick 1974). The targeted group-based streetworker interventions did not yield results in the prevention of delinquency; in fact, individuals served most intensely by their assigned street workers demonstrated the greatest delinquency increases. While the project showed some promise in finding employment opportunities and reengaging school dropouts, evaluation results suggested that youth living in the target intervention neighborhoods were slightly worse off on a variety of

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7 Miller studied both male and female street gangs. Among the five male groups, four were “white ethnic” groups, while one was black/African American. Among the two female groups, one was a white ethnic group while the other was black/African American.
delinquency and pro-social indicators than youth living in control neighborhoods (Gold and Mattick 1974; Spergel 1995).

The Los Angeles Group Guidance Project was sponsored by the Los Angeles County Probation Department and operated between 1961 and 1965. A careful evaluation of the project, headed by Malcolm Klein, provided ample material for several articles and a book (see Klein 1969; Klein 1971). The Group Guidance Project employed a “transformational” streetworker approach to engage four majority-black Los Angeles gangs, broken into 16 subgroups comprised of approximately 800 members. Relying heavily on a streetworker-led group programming approach (which featured little employment, educational, and community organizing content), Klein found that the program was associated with a significant increase in delinquency among the gang members served. In line with the findings of previous studies, Klein discovered that gangs most intensively served performed the worst on a variety of delinquency indicators. Klein’s study utilized careful constructed streetworker contact data and ethnographic field notes to arrive at an important and novel explanation for the program’s negative findings. Klein reasoned that gang delinquency increased as a result of: 1) increased gang cohesion brought about by large amounts of group-based programming; and, 2) increased gang recruitment fueled by this group programming (Klein 1969; Klein 1971).

Klein’s (1971) “Ladino Hills Project” of 1965-1966 was specifically designed in contradistinction to the findings of the aforementioned Group Guidance Project. This Los Angeles-based project engaged a single Mexican gang for 18 months, with a six-month follow-up period of data collection. Reasoning that the increased gang cohesion—and delinquency—produced by the Group Guidance Project was the result of group programming, the Ladino Hills project dispensed with all group programming in an effort to reduce gang cohesion, and
resultantly, gang delinquency. In place of the group-based programming (i.e. meetings, sports, trips, etc.) employed by streetworkers in the Group Guidance Project, Ladino Hills streetworkers, aided by research staff, outreached to individuals and pre-existing cliques, promoting educational and employment opportunities to wean away members from the gang. While the project did not significantly affect rates of offending for gang members, the authors reported that overall crime by the gang was reduced by means of curtailing gang membership and gang joining.

“Contemporary” Streetworker Program Evaluations

Although a variety of streetworker and gang outreach programs proliferated over the course of the late 1980s and 1990s, most of these programs went unevaluated. As this review will document, much of the recent interest in evaluation of such programs has been driven by CeaseFire Chicago (now known as Cure Violence) and the various replication demonstrations it has inspired. An irony of this development is that CeaseFire Chicago itself, which began in 1999, was not formally evaluated until 2009, after it had already been replicated several times due to its track record of “success” (Papachristos 2011).

CeaseFire Chicago (Cure Violence) has become the exemplar public health street violence intervention operating in the United States. The heart of the CeaseFire intervention is streetwork, but the streetworker function has become specialized in the program’s model. One set of outreach workers (typically professionally trained) maintains contact with “at risk” individuals and aims to broker services and pro-social opportunities, while (typically formerly street-involved) “violence interrupters” are freed to focus solely on the mediation of violent disputes and the prevention of retaliation. Other facets of CeaseFire’s programming extend beyond the streetworker approach to reveal its public health underpinnings. Specifically, the program aims to promote broad-based, population-level shifts in attitudes toward the acceptability of the use of violence, akin to previous
public health campaigns targeting issues such as smoking cessation and seatbelt use. Furthermore, the CeaseFire model prescribes the promotion of various community-level campaigns aimed at both community attitude change and the enrollment and mobilization of community members in responding to high-profile violent events (Skogan, 2009; Wilson & Chermak 2011; Papachristos 2011).

Skogan (2009) and his collaborators’ evaluation of CeaseFire, employing a neighborhood-level quasi-experimental longitudinal analysis of shootings, suggested that neighborhoods that experienced CeaseFire intervention experienced significantly fewer shootings (ranging from 16% to 34%) when compared to their comparison counterparts. This evaluation has not gone undisputed, however. Additional analyses of CeaseFire’s programmatic effects (published within CeaseFire’s evaluation report itself) employing slightly different datasets and analytic techniques suggest that CeaseFire’s effects are far more modest than Skogan et al.’s estimates, with roughly half of CeaseFire’s target neighborhoods demonstrating significant violence reductions while the others showed a null effect (see technical appendices by Block and Papachristos within Skogan, 2009; Papachristos 2011). Ensuing evaluations of Ceasefire’s replication efforts have similarly yielded uneven or mixed results.

Pittsburgh’s “One Vision One Life” was inspired by CeaseFire Chicago but deviated sharply from its model due to a host of political factors beyond the scope of this review (see Wilson & Chermak, 2011). One Vision represents an important analogue to StreetSafe due to its data-driven “problem solving” approach to streetworker intervention in ongoing gang feuds, an approach that the authors note has been relatively uncommon outside of the law enforcement domain (Wilson & Chermak, 2011). Operating in the mid-2000s, One Vision tasked former street-involved streetworkers with gathering meaningful intelligence into the nature of ongoing
gang conflicts in order to: a) prevent the escalation of minor disputes from turning violent; b) develop “behind the scenes” responses to all homicides in the One Life target area; and c) connect high-risk individuals to pro-social and employment services. In spite of the espoused “problem solving approach,” evaluators found that One Vision rarely made effective use of program and crime data to organize responses to violent incidents and its streetworkers very infrequently engaged in strategic problem solving activities to prevent retaliation in the wake of a violent incident. The project was also characterized by some significant implementation issues, most notably that streetworkers were typically engaging non-gang youth more than they were intervening with gang-involved individuals embedded in cycles of gun violence. Using a quasi-experimental, neighborhood-level, difference-in-difference analysis, One Vision evaluators found that the program had no effect on the incidence of homicide and was associated with a statistically significant increase in aggravated assaults and gun assaults in its target neighborhoods.

Baltimore’s “Safe Streets” represents a rigorous CeaseFire (Cure Violence) replication piloted in several Baltimore neighborhoods from 2007-2010. Overseen by the Baltimore City Health Department, in conjunction with the Chicago Project for Violence Prevention (the creators of CeaseFire Chicago), Safe Streets received ample training and technical support to ensure that the program was implemented faithfully to the CeaseFire model. The program was implemented in four of Baltimore’s highest violence neighborhoods, although a fifth program site experienced implementation failure and was later not included in evaluation results. An interim evaluation by Webster and colleagues (2012) made use of a longitudinal dataset of homicides and nonfatal shootings furnished by the Baltimore Police Department to analyze Safe Streets’ effect on neighborhood violence across targeted neighborhoods. Importantly, the
evaluation attempted to control for other law enforcement and social service interventions affecting the incidence of gun violence. Only one program site (Cherry Hill) evidenced significant declines in both homicides and nonfatal shootings, although two others showed overall reductions in gun violence (driven largely by decreases in nonfatal shootings). A single program site (Madison-Eastend) experienced a statistically significant increase in homicides, accompanied by a significant decrease in nonfatal shootings.

“Save Our Streets” (SOS) represents the most recent CeaseFire Chicago (Cure Violence) replication project evaluation, implemented over the course of 29 months in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, NY. Although the project was characterized as a high-quality replication which closely followed the CeaseFire approach, SOS operated at a much smaller scale, employing just four outreach workers who outreached to only 96 clients—only 68% of whom were classified as “high risk” for involvement in gun violence (Picard-Fritsche & Cerniglia 2013). In spite of SOS’ limited street outreach—although in keeping with the CeaseFire model, SOS conducted several community norm-changing campaigns—evaluators reported that SOS was associated with statistically significant violence reductions at the neighborhood level. Making use of an interrupted time series method using matched comparison neighborhoods, evaluators credited SOS with bringing about an approximate 20% reduction in gun violence relative to comparison neighborhoods. We view these findings with some natural skepticism. First, these sizable reductions in gun crime are hypothesized to be largely the product of intensive intervention with fewer than 96 individuals in a police district of more than 96,000 people. Second, the SOS research design could not rule out alternate policing and social service interventions or other demographic or policy trends that might account for the observed results.

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8 SOS streetworkers spent an average of 20 hours with their 96 participants over the 29-month evaluation period—another indicator of the very modest dosage of the intervention (Picard-Fritsche & Cerniglia 2013).
In comparing the general features of evaluation efforts across the two time periods we reviewed, several basic contours can be observed. First, it is important to note that evaluations of the early streetworker programs are clear in their findings that such programs do not decrease—and often increase—delinquency. Evaluations of contemporary programs concerned with violence prevention have yielded more mixed results. Second, whereas implementation failure appears to be a common problem for contemporary streetworker programs, the results of early streetworker programs were not influenced by implementation failure. Klein (1971) suggests that the presence of embedded researchers in these classical studies practically forced goal specification and strong implementation efforts upon program administrators. Third, while contemporary streetworker evaluations distinguish themselves for their technical sophistication, they are also characterized by greater distance from the on-the-ground work when compared to earlier evaluations. This distance has left several contemporary researchers struggling to explain some of the surprising results produced by their econometric models. And finally, recent streetworker evaluations have uniformly tested program impacts at the neighborhood level. While some early evaluations also employed neighborhood-level analyses, they also sought to document outcomes among the specific groups and individuals that served as the targets of their intervention. Herein lies the challenge for evaluations of contemporary streetworker programs—particularly public health interventions: for reported neighborhood-level (or population-level) decreases to be viewed as credible, these programs must also demonstrate meaningful behavioral change among the high-risk actors theorized to be driving neighborhood and population rates of violence. Our review of the evidence suggests that no contemporary streetworker program has taken this step to date, and knowledge of the field remains impoverished as a result.
IMPACT ASSESSMENT: VIOLENCE AT THE GANG LEVEL

Analytic Approach

We used a non-randomized, quasi-experimental design to compare serious gun violence trends for Boston gangs that experience the StreetSafe treatment to serious gun violence trends for comparison Boston gangs that did not receive the StreetSafe treatment (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell 2002). Using the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale (Sherman et al. 1997) as a standard, our quasi-experimental design with matched treatment and control groups would be considered a “Level 4” evaluation (out of five possible levels) as it measures outcomes before and after the program in multiple treatment and control condition units. These types of designs have better statistical control of extraneous influences on the outcome and, relative to lower-level evaluations, deal with selection and regression threats more adequately. Subsequent sections describe the development of the data and units of analysis in our quasi-experimental analyses, the identification of comparison gangs, and the specification of appropriate statistical models to estimate the effect of the StreetSafe intervention on serious gun violence trends for treated gangs relative to serious gun violence trends for comparison gangs.

Data

In this study, we measured serious gun violence by using computerized records of BPD official reports of Homicide by Firearm and Assault and Battery by Means of a Deadly Weapon – Firearm (ABDW – Firearm) incidents between July 1, 2006 and June 30, 2013. Incident reports

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9 In 1996, the United States Congress commissioned the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Maryland to provide an independent, scientifically rigorous assessment of more than $4 billion worth of federally-sponsored crime prevention programs. Lawrence Sherman and his colleagues (1997) reviewed scientific evaluations of programs intended to prevent crime in seven settings in which crime prevention takes place: families, schools, communities, labor markets, places (e.g., urban centers, homes), police, and courts/corrections. Programs were evaluated on the Scientific Methods Scale which ranked scientific studies from Level 1 (weakest) to Level 5 (strongest) on overall internal validity. Properly implemented randomized experiments were rated highest on the scale and observational studies lowest.
are generated in the BPD by detectives or police officers after an initial response to a request for police service. In the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, ABDW – Firearm incidents essentially represent shooting events where guns were fired and victims were physically wounded by the fired bullets. These incident data include demographic, geographic, motive, and gang information as recorded by the investigating detectives and responding officers. The units of analysis in this study are quarterly counts of shootings by and against specific Boston gangs between July 1, 2006 and June 30, 2013. Since shootings by and against any particular gang were relatively rare events, we aggregated specific shootings into quarterly counts to provide more stable estimates of any measurable impacts of StreetSafe activities on gang shooting behaviors.

It is well known that police incident data, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Uniform Crime Reports, have shortcomings. For instance, crime incident data are biased by the absence of crimes not reported by citizens to the police and by police decisions not to record all crimes reported by citizens (see Black, 1970). Although incident reports have flaws, careful analyses of these data can yield useful insights on crime (Schneider & Wiersema 1990). Moreover, official police incident data are widely used for assessing trends and patterns of gun crime (Blumstein, 1995; Cook & Laub 2002) and the evaluation of gun violence reduction programs (see, e.g. Sherman & Rogan, 1995; McGarrell et al. 2001; Cohen & Ludwig 2003). Since the commission of homicide generates a cadaver, homicide incident reports, involving guns or other means, are generally regarded as the most reliable and valid data collected on crime. Similarly, non-fatal gun assault incidents that involve injuries are more likely to come to the attention of the police via ShotSpotter\textsuperscript{10} activity and responses to emergency calls for service.

\textsuperscript{10} ShotSpotter is a system used by BPD that detects and conveys—in real time—the location of gunfire using acoustic, optical, and other types of sensors throughout the city. Because ShotSpotter transmits precise shooting
or reports of gun injuries from hospitals due to mandatory reporting of gunshot wounds. The availability of non-fatal incident data has the unique advantage of allowing us to analyze a wider and more representative range of gang-involved gun violence.

To determine whether a shooting event involved a gang member as a suspect, victim, or both, the “crime incident review” process was used (see Klofas & Hipple 2006). Between 2006 and 2013, the BPD’s Boston Regional Intelligence Center (BRIC) convened separate quarterly shooting review meetings for the four policing districts (B-2, B-3, C-11, and D-4) that experience the bulk of gun violence in Boston, in addition to one quarterly shooting review meeting for the remaining policing districts. For each district meeting, detectives and officers with detailed knowledge on gangs and gang violence problems were required to attend; this included district detectives, plainclothes Anti-Crime district officers, Drug Control Unit detectives and officers, Homicide Unit detectives, Special Investigations Unit detectives, and Youth Violence Strike Force (YVSF, or “gang unit”) detectives and officers.

In each quarterly shooting review meeting, BRIC detectives and civilian analysts presented the objective characteristics of each shooting event (date, location, victim information, and, if arrested, offender information) and the available gang intelligence on the event based on their computerized data systems. The meeting participants shared their working knowledge on circumstances of the shooting event, the relationships between victims and suspects, and, if the event involved gang members, details on the gangs involved in the shooting. Harvard researchers attended the quarterly shooting review meetings and partnered with the BRIC in collecting, coding, entering, and analyzing the qualitative insights on the nature of each shooting event.

Challenging the notion that police data suffer from biases and measurement errors, a coordinates to police nearly instantly, citizen calls for service are often not required to identify potential shooting incidents.
recent study by Decker and Pyrooz (2010) found that police reports of gang homicide in large U.S. cities (1) exhibited strong internal reliability, (2) were consistent with the principles of convergent-discriminant validity tests, and (3) demonstrated considerable external validity. Furthermore, the validity of police-reported gang measures was higher in cities that had specialized policing units directed toward gang problems—such as the BPD’s YVSF (see also Katz, Webb, & Schaefer 2000). In summary, although police reported data on gang homicides and shootings are not perfect, prior research has found such data to be valid and reliable indicators of gang activity and violence.

The Development of Comparison Groups

Because StreetSafe Focus Groups were not selected randomly, the rigor of our quasi-experimental analyses is influenced by our ability to successfully match these Focus Groups—which received SSB treatment—to comparable gangs in the city that did not receive SSB services. Although our analyses vary in their degree of technical sophistication, all of these approaches shared a basic goal of establishing appropriate “apples-to-apples” comparisons between SSB Focus Groups and non-SSB Boston gangs. The basic intuition behind all of our analytic approaches was to match each SSB Focus Group with a comparable Boston gang—or gangs—that did not receive the SSB treatment.\(^{11}\) By means of matching two separate classes of gangs on basic, theoretically-relevant characteristics prior to the start of the SSB intervention, we could estimate the impact of SSB treatment activities by comparing changes in involvement in serious violence of the SSB groups and comparison groups during the treatment period.

Matching Covariates

In the first stages of evaluation activities, the Harvard Evaluation Team began to outline

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\(^{11}\) Although the basic point stands as an illustration of the intuition involved in the matching process, some analyses (specifically propensity score matching and coarsened exact matching) matched more than one comparison group to a given SSB gang.
the key dimensions along which gangs varied in their structure and composition, with a particular interest in the constellations of social factors that cause some gangs to be involved in more shootings than others. The team immediately set to identifying sources of data that could provide reliable information on these factors. Drawing on a large body of research in sociology and criminology, as well as original research produced for the SSB Baseline Report on the correlates of gang violence in Boston, we identified the following variables as theoretically important in establishing a sound matching process.

• **Pre-Treatment Shootings**: Gun violence among Boston gangs has been previously described as perpetuated by vendettas and ongoing series of retaliations (Kennedy et al. 1996). Gangs with higher levels of gun violence have an increased risk of persisting in their shooting behaviors over time. In this analysis, we employed counts of gang-motivated\(^\text{12}\) shootings from the aforementioned Harvard-BRIC shooting database. Pre-treatment shooting data were drawn for three full years prior to SSB’s implementation (mid-2006 through mid-2009). We matched on the total number of shootings by and against each gang (i.e., both perpetrations and victimizations) occurring during this 3-year pre-treatment period.

• **Gang Size**: Gangs with larger memberships have an increased number of members who can commit or be victimized by shootings. As such, SSB groups were balanced against comparison counterparts in terms of gang size. Gang size data were furnished from BPD from a large-scale gang census conducted in 2007.

\(^{12}\) Gang-motivated shootings refer to shootings that were determined by the systematic shooting review process to be the product of an ongoing gang feud (as opposed to a sudden personal dispute, drug dispute, domestic dispute, etc.). This measure—in contrast to overall shootings or even gang-involved shootings—is the available measure that is most closely aligned with SSB’s mission and everyday intervention activities. By contrast, a gang-involved shooting would describe an incident where a gang member is involved in a shooting, but where gang motives are not considered to be at the root cause of the shooting (i.e. when a gang member is shot in a dispute with a drug supplier or when a gang member shoots a victim who resists in the course of a robbery).
• **Number of Active Conflicts:** Gangs vary greatly in the number of active conflicts they take on, even when accounting for other factors like neighborhood and race. Some groups are involved with a single “deep” conflict focused on one opponent, while others find themselves embedded in a complicated network of conflicts and alliances. Gangs with larger numbers of rivalries with other gangs have an increased risk that one or more of these rivalries could turn into an active violent dispute that would generate a string of retaliatory shootings. Retaliation and retribution are perhaps the most frequently cited mechanisms of gang violence (Decker 1996; Hughes & Short 2005; Papachristos 2009). Therefore, we matched SSB groups against comparison groups with roughly equal numbers of active conflicts in the pre-treatment period. Making use of a jointly produced Harvard-BPD gang conflict map, Harvard researchers coded the number of active conflicts for all major gangs in the city in 2007-2008.\(^\text{13}\)

• **Longevity:** We theorized that groups with deep historical roots were likely to have important differences from more recently formed gangs with regard to the structure of their conflict networks, leadership, influence of incarcerated individuals, and other important intangible factors. As such, we drew from a citywide gang conflict map produced by Kennedy, Braga, and Piehl (1997) to establish our measure of longevity. Gangs that were present in this map in 1997 received a 1, while all others received a 0.

• **Housing Project Status:** Research has found that housing project areas are associated with

\(^{13}\) We fully expect that some gang conflicts will remain stable over time, while others will change—new conflicts can emerge rapidly, old ones can be rekindled easily, and still others may atrophy with the passage of time and memory. The key idea behind this measure, however, is that the number of conflicts a group has at Time 1 (the baseline period) is strongly correlated with: a) its number of conflicts and shootings at Time 2 (the end of the SSB treatment period).
increased levels of gang homicide relative to other city areas without housing projects (Smith 2012). Moreover, prior fieldwork and reports from BCYF streetworkers led us to hypothesize that housing project gangs were structured differently from other Boston street gangs. Gangs that were associated with a large housing development were assigned a 1, while all others received a 0.

- **Gang Race/Ethnicity:** Because so much gang violence in Boston (as well as nationally) is intraracial, we hypothesized that gangs should ideally be matched against gangs of a similar racial/ethnic composition. Making use of the aforementioned dataset provided by the BPD gang census, we coded gangs into four major categories. Gangs were classified as Black (1), Latino (2), or Cape Verdean (3) when more than 2/3 of their membership was from one of these single racial/ethnic categories, per BPD records. Gangs were classified as Mixed (4) when less than 2/3 of its membership was determined to be of a single race/ethnicity. No majority White or Asian gangs were targeted for SSB intervention or were included in the pool of potential comparison groups.

- **Neighborhood Disadvantage:** We included an index that measured concentrated social disadvantage^{14} in the 2000 U.S. Census block group(s) surrounding gang turfs to make certain that comparison gangs were selected from neighborhoods that were similar to the

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^{14} The concentrated disadvantage index is a standardized index composed of the percentage of residents who are black, the percentage of residents receiving public assistance, the percentage of families living below the poverty line, the percentage of female-headed households with children under the age of 18, and the percentage of unemployed residents (as measured by the percentage of men over the age 16 who did not work in the previous year) (see Morenoff et al. 2001; Sampson et al. 1997). Because of the high correlation of these variables, we conducted principal components factor analysis, which revealed that variables load on a single factor (which was retained as a standardized index variable). For example, a Boston block group featuring a disadvantage index score of 1.5 would be 1.5 standard deviations more disadvantaged than the mean Boston block group. As such, the disadvantage index is adjusted specifically for the city of Boston using 2000 Census variables, even while the components used to construct the index remain constant across much neighborhood research and remain robust predictors of crime across a variety of city types and spatial aggregations. For those gangs whose turf spanned more than one census block group, we used a spatially-weighted mean of the connected block groups to calculate the disadvantaged index for the neighborhood surrounding each gang’s turf.
neighborhoods in which the SSB gangs were located. Research reveals that the degree of concentrated social disadvantage in a neighborhood is strongly correlated with the concentration of violent crime (Morenoff et al. 2001; Sampson & Wilson 1995) and gang crime in these areas (Papachristos & Kirk 2006; Rosenfeld et al. 1999).

We obtained complete data on all of the covariates listed above for each of the 20 SSB Focus Groups as well as for a pool of 46 potential comparison groups.

Selecting the appropriate comparison group or groups for each SSB gang is a complicated task. For this reason, we used three distinct matching approaches: theoretically-informed matching (TIM) (Rossi, Freeman, & Lipsey 2006), propensity score (p-score) matching (Rosenbaum & Rubin 1983, 1985) and coarsened exact matching (CEM) (Iacus et al. 2012; Blackwell et al. 2009). These methods vary in their level of statistical sophistication, but the goal of each is the same: to minimize the extent to which SSB groups differ from comparison groups on the seven characteristics described above. With each matching method, we selected comparison groups from our pool of 46 potential comparison groups. Each potential comparison group was a non-SSB gang active in Boston during the entire seven-year evaluation period.

Fortunately, the three distinct matching methods produced similar results, increasing confidence in the overall findings. In this section, we present the results of the theoretically informed matching approach because we believe it produced the strongest matches, drawing on the deep local knowledge of the research team in addition to statistical data. TIM is also the most intuitive of the strategies and the most easily understood in policy discussions. The comparable results from the propensity score and coarsened exact matching analyses are detailed in Appendix A.

Matching: The Theoretically Informed Matching (TIM) Approach
Unlike the propensity score and coarsened exact matching methods, which produced appropriate comparison groups by mechanical calculations on the covariates listed above, the TIM approach allowed for the deep knowledge of the investigators to play an active role in the selection of comparison groups. In this approach, the investigators sacrificed some degree of balance on any particular covariate in order to achieve matches that made the most intuitive sense. In this manner, investigators sought to inject into the analysis balance on non-observable characteristics of each gang in addition to balancing on the observable characteristics outlined in the matching covariates section above. This approach not only produced extremely strong matches in a qualitative sense, it also achieved strong balance on observable covariates, as shown below.

The matching process proceeded in a straightforward manner, with the analytic goal being to match each given SSB Focus Group with a potential comparison group that resembled the SSB group on observable characteristics. Particular care was taken to match pairs based on their approximate level of pre-treatment shootings due to its potential influence on violence in the post-treatment period. Investigators then prioritized matches based on gang size and housing project status, followed by the remaining covariates. The matching process continued until each SSB group was paired with an optimal match in the form of a Boston gang that did not receive SSB intervention.\textsuperscript{15}

\begin{table}
\centering
\caption{Theoretically Informed Matching, Mean Covariate Balance}
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
 & Annual Pre-Treatment Shootings & Size & Conflicts & Historicity & Project & Race & N*Hood Disadvantage \\
\hline
SSB (N=20) & 5.62 & 45.95 & 3.45 & 0.75 & 0.40 & 1.45 & 1.07 \\
All comparison (N=46) & 3.02 & 26.50 & 2.65 & 0.52 & 0.28 & 1.67 & 0.78 \\
Matched comparison (N=19)\textsuperscript{*} & 4.95 & 41.7 & 3.3 & 0.65 & 0.4 & 1.65 & 0.80 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\textsuperscript{*} None of the differences between the matched comparison groups and SSB groups are statistically significant at the p < 0.05 level
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{15} We set out to conduct our TIM analysis using 1:1 (one comparison group for each SSB treatment group) matching due to its intuitive appeal. But, after several rounds of analysis, we struggled to establish a satisfactory match for one of the Focus Groups. In large part this stemmed from the fact that our pool of 46 comparison gangs contained a relatively limited set of project gangs (see Table I). In the end, we compromised by matching one high-violence, project-based comparison group to two SSB Focus Groups instead of one.
Table I (above) displays the covariate “balance” in comparing SSB Focus Gangs against:
a) all potential comparison gangs (N=46) for which we were able to obtain complete data; and b) the comparison groups (N=19) that were matched against SSB Focus groups in our TIM analysis. A cursory glance at the difference in pre-treatment covariate means between SSB groups and the pool of 46 potential comparison groups is suggestive of some of the challenges inherent in the matching process; all shown in the “all comparison” row, SSB gangs are generally larger, more violent, more historic, and come from more disadvantaged neighborhoods than the typical established Boston gang. The third row in this table, “Matched Comparison” displays the covariate means for the 19 comparison groups selected for TIM analysis and demonstrates the quality of matches we were able to produce. While our matches were not perfect, we were able to identify a set of gangs that closely approximated the SSB Focus Gangs on all relevant pre-treatment characteristics.\textsuperscript{16}

\textit{Growth-Curve Regression Model Specification}

We use a variation of a multi-level negative binomial regression model in order to analyze the quarterly change in gang-involved shootings for treatment and comparison gangs over a 7-year observation period (N = 28 quarters). More specifically, we developed individual growth curve models to estimate street gang changes in shooting incidents over the observation period.

\textsuperscript{16} It is worth taking stock of two (related) reasonable objections to this basic matching approach. First, that certain SSB Groups should be considered “unmatchable,” in the sense that no appropriate comparison group exists to serve as a match for them. For the research team, this objection was typified in the case of Lucerne, which (as an outlier in overall shootings) proved to be one of most difficult SSB groups to match. Yet far from being “unfair” in attempting to match Lucerne, SSB’s results worsened when Lucerne was excluded from the analysis, in large part because its large decrease in shootings helped to drive overall SSB reductions. Similarly, another objection might be raised regarding the (statistically insignificant) differences in the balance between SSB Focus groups and comparison groups. Near identical balance can be achieved by dropping as few as three SSB Focus groups from the analysis, but once again at the expense of SSB violence reduction impact.
period (Gelman 2005; Singer & Willet 2003). Here, we used a longitudinal negative binomial model where we predict within unit variation at level 1 and between unit variation at level 2 using level 1 intercepts and slopes as outcomes. In non-technical terms, we are interested in accurately analyzing the overall shooting trend of each gang during the observation period. Each street gang is also allowed to have its own slope and intercept in order to model different starting levels of shootings as well as different rates of change. This is consistent with the observed variation in shootings by gangs; that is, some groups are highly active and others are less active.

Our initial analysis involved the estimation of the impact of StreetSafe on total shootings involving treated gangs (N=20) relative to total shootings involving comparison gangs in Boston (N=20) via the difference-in-differences (DID) estimator. The DID estimator is a quasi-experimental method that estimates the difference in a targeted gang’s post-intervention outcome at time $t$ compared to its pre-intervention outcome, relative to the same difference for the comparison gangs in the sample (see Card & Krueger 1994). A DID estimator was created to estimate the distinct impacts of StreetSafe on the treated Boston gangs. As such, our growth curve regression model was as follows:

$$Y_{ij} = \alpha_i + \beta_{1i} (StreetSafe) + \beta_{2i} (period) + \beta_{3i} (impact) + \beta_{4i} (trend) + \beta_{5i} (trend2) + \beta_{6i} (quarter2) + \beta_{7i} (quarter3) + \beta_{8i} (quarter4)$$

Where the quarterly counts of total gang-involved shooting incidents over the 7-year study time period was our primary outcome measure ($Y_{ij}$). However, we also analyzed changes in the quarterly counts of victim gang-involved shootings and the quarterly counts of suspect gang-involved shootings. To estimate the effect of the StreetSafe treatment, we created dichotomous dummy variables indicating whether a street gang was in the treatment group (variable: $StreetSafe$) (1) or in the comparison group (0) and whether the quarter was pre-intervention
(variable: *period*) (0) or during the intervention period (1). We then created a DID estimator by inter-acting these two dummy variables (variable: *impact*). To account for secular linear and nonlinear quarterly trends in the dependent variable, we included a variable that was measured as the simple linear additive progression for each quarter over the course of the seven-year observation period (variable: *trend*) and a variable that squared this simple linear additive progression for each quarter (variable: *trend2*). We also controlled for seasonal variations in the quarterly counts of shootings by including a polychotomous dummy variable (*quarter2*, *quarter3*, and *quarter4*).\(^\text{17}\)

Stata 13.1 statistical software was used to calculate the maximum likelihood estimate of the parameters for the DID estimator and to compute the associated probability values; this provided estimates of the effects of the StreetSafe intervention on the treatment gangs as relative to the comparison gangs. Following convention, the two-tailed .05 level of significance was selected as the benchmark to reject the null hypothesis of “no difference.”

\(^\text{17}\) Quarter 1 served as the reference category for this polychotomous dummy variable. Quarter 1 represented whether the outcome included the sum of January, February, and March shootings (1 = Yes, 0 = No). Quarter 2 represented whether the outcome included the sum of April, May, and June shootings (1 = Yes, 0 = No). Quarter 3 represented whether the outcome included the sum of July, August, and September shootings (1 = Yes, 0 = No). Quarter 4 represented whether the outcome included the sum of October, November, and December shootings (1 = Yes, 0 = No).
Results

Simple Pre-Post Analysis of Matched StreetSafe Gangs and Matched Comparison Gangs

Figure 1.

Total Annual Shootings, SSB Groups

- Baseline 1 (7/06-6/07)
- Baseline 2 (7/07-6/08)
- Baseline 3 (7/08-6/09)
- Baseline Average (7/06-6/09)
- Year 1 (7/09-6/10)
- Year 2 (7/10-6/11)
- Year 3 (7/11-6/12)
- Year 4 (7/12-6/13)
- Post-Treatment Average (7/09-6/13)
Figure 1 above provides a simple pre-post snapshot of the annual gang-motivated shooting involvement of the 20 SSB Focus Groups over the seven-year observation period. The blue bars on the left represent SSB Focus Group shooting totals in each baseline year, followed by a three-year baseline average, represented by the green bar. The red bars represent the SSB Focus Group shooting totals for each treatment year, followed by a four-year treatment average (the purple bar). A percent-change from the baseline average statistic is included in the body of each red bar. As Figure 1 makes clear, from the perspective of a basic pre-post comparison, the SSB groups averaged 86.75 shootings per year during the treatment period when compared with 112.33 shootings per year during the baseline period—a 22.8% reduction.

Figure 2.

Figure 2 shows the basic gang-motivated shooting trend lines for SSB Focus groups when compared to their theoretically informed matched comparison groups. In aggregate, SSB

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18 For reference, a figure describing trends in overall citywide shootings and gang-involved shootings has been included in Appendix B.
Focus Groups averaged 5.62 shootings per year during the baseline period, compared to 4.92 shootings per year during the same period for the comparison groups. When compared to the treatment period, SSB averaged 4.34 shootings per year, against an average of 3.43 shootings per year for the matched comparison groups. In this simple pre-post comparison, SSB groups demonstrated a 22.8% reduction in yearly average shootings, while the matched comparison groups yielded a 30.3% reduction in yearly average shootings.

Standardized mean difference effect size statistics were used to determine whether the shooting trends observed for the treated StreetSafe gangs were significantly different from the shooting trends observed for the matched comparison gangs. The standardized mean-difference effect size \((d)\) is designed for contrasting two groups on a continuous dependent variable (Lipsey & Wilson 2001). For this simple analysis, we calculated the mean Time 2 (post-test yearly mean) minus Time 1 (pre-test yearly mean) gain score, the standard deviation of the gain score, and the correlation between the Time 1 and Time 2 scores for the matched 20 StreetSafe gangs and the 20 matched comparison gangs. These statistics were entered into David B. Wilson’s Practical Meta-Analysis Effect Size Calculator to estimate the standard mean difference effect sizes.\(^\text{19}\) As will be described below, these results suggested that the StreetSafe intervention was not associated with any statistically-significant decreases in shootings involving treatment gangs relative to shootings involving comparison gangs.

The standardized mean effect sizes revealed that the StreetSafe gangs experienced small, but not-statistically significant, increases in shootings relative to comparison gangs. For total gang-involved shootings, the StreetSafe intervention was associated with a small, not-statistically-significant standardized mean difference effect size favoring control conditions over treatment conditions \((d = 0.1986; 95\% CI = -0.4649, 0.8621; \nu = 0.1146)\). For suspect gang-

\(^{19}\) http://gemini.gmu.edu/cebcp/EffectSizeCalculator/d/mean-gains-scores-and-gain-score.html
involved shootings, \( d = 0.1837; 95\% CI = -0.5394, 0.9069; \nu = 0.1361 \) and victim gang-involved shootings \( d = 0.1441; 95\% CI = -0.5719, 0.8601; \nu = 0.1335 \), the reductions in shootings were also larger in the control group when compared to the SSB group suggesting the lack of a beneficial program effect.

**Growth Curve Regression Model Results**

Table II presents the results of the growth curve regression models. Controlling for the other covariates, the StreetSafe intervention was not associated with any statistically-significant impacts on quarterly total gang-motivated shootings, quarterly suspect gang-motivated shootings, and quarterly victim gang-motivated shootings for the treatment gangs relative to the comparison gangs. The StreetSafe dummy variable was not statistically significant \( p < .05 \) for all three outcome variables, confirming that the matched groups were comparable on the gun violence outcome measures controlling for the other covariates. For all three outcome variables, the growth curve regression models revealed that Boston gang-motivated shootings had statistically-significant seasonal variations; relative to January through March quarterly gang-motivated shooting counts (Quarter 1), April through June (Quarter 2) and July through September (Quarter 3) experienced higher counts of gang-motivated shootings \( p < .01 \).20

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20 We also ran a simple model specification test to determine whether any of the observed findings were due to a placebo effect. This involved restricting the growth curve regression models to the baseline time period analysis and the estimation of the group (0=comparison, 1=SSB treatment) dummy variable only. The SSB treatment group variable was not statistically significant in the total, suspect, and victim growth curve regression models. This suggested that a placebo effect was not present in our full models.
Table II. StreetSafe Boston Impacts on Gang-Motivated Shooting Incidents: Growth Curve Regression Models for Theoretically Informed Matching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Suspect</th>
<th>Victim</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>StreetSafe impact (Interaction)</td>
<td>.142 (.202)</td>
<td>.089 (.202)</td>
<td>.117 (.179)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>StreetSafe gang (1= Treated)</td>
<td>.231 (.194)</td>
<td>.192 (.196)</td>
<td>.241 (.167)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period (1 = Intervention)</td>
<td>-.531 (.231)*</td>
<td>-.495 (.239)*</td>
<td>-.504 (.181)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trend</td>
<td>.060 (.030)*</td>
<td>-.009 (.029)</td>
<td>.037 (.023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trend-squared</td>
<td>-.002 (.001)*</td>
<td>.001 (.001)</td>
<td>-.001 (.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 2</td>
<td>.286 (.145)*</td>
<td>.550 (.158)**</td>
<td>.454 (.116)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 3</td>
<td>.598 (.141)**</td>
<td>.877 (.152)**</td>
<td>.742 (.114)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 4</td>
<td>-.076 (.159)</td>
<td>.301 (.167)</td>
<td>.127 (.125)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-.896 (.248)**</td>
<td>.376 (.243)*</td>
<td>-.357 (.181)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-1159.142</td>
<td>-939.189</td>
<td>-1533.927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wald $X^2$</td>
<td>56.85</td>
<td>56.39</td>
<td>84.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wald df</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations (gangs X quarters)</td>
<td>1092</td>
<td>1092</td>
<td>1092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of gangs</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. Quarter 1 is the reference category for the seasonal dummy variable.

* = $p < .05$
** = $p < .01$

**DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION**

StreetSafe Boston represents an ambitious attempt to address a seemingly intractable urban social problem—gang-related gun violence—by means of non-law enforcement intervention. Indeed, the recent Institute of Medicine and National Research Council (2013) report on national priorities for reducing gun violence stresses the need for research and evaluation on prevention programs designed to reduce gun violence by high-risk individuals in high-risk settings. Like other cities, ongoing conflicts among street gangs generate a majority of the fatal and non-fatal shootings in Boston. While gang outreach workers have been noted to play important roles in prior comprehensive gun violence prevention strategies implemented in
Boston’s recent past (see Braga et al. 2001), the present report represents an important step in assessing the independent effects of the SSB program on gang violence. This study included a process evaluation to assess the implementation of the SSB program as well as an impact evaluation to measure the specific impacts of the SSB program on fatal and non-fatal shootings by treated gangs relative to matched comparison gangs.

As described earlier in this study, the StreetSafe gang violence reduction strategy included two key components. The StreetSafe streetworker component assigned gang outreach workers to develop relationships with specific violent street gangs to reduce ongoing violence through mediation and negotiation techniques. The StreetSafe service delivery strategy attempted to steer proven-risk individuals away from gang activities through the provision of social services and opportunities. While both program components experienced some implementation difficulties during early program years, our process evaluation documented a well-functioning program in latter years. StreetSafe streetworkers had established contacts with the vast majority of PRIs in their focus gangs and were spending considerable amounts of time working with these individuals. By the final year of the evaluation period, nearly one third of PRIs were engaged in social service activities such as participation in education, healthcare, and workforce development programs. These are important achievements given how disconnected this population can be from traditional service delivery outlets in Boston.

We used a quasi-experimental research design to estimate the impact of the StreetSafe intervention on fatal and non-fatal shootings by and against treated gangs relative to fatal and non-fatal shootings by and against matched comparisons. Recognizing the complexities in developing an equivalent comparison group, we used three different types of matching processes: theoretically-informed matching, propensity score matching, and coarsened exact
matching. These techniques yielded balanced sets of treatment and comparison gangs for further analyses. StreetSafe program impacts were assessed using both simple statistical analyses and more complex longitudinal panel regression designs. Unfortunately, none of the analyses revealed that the SSB program had discernible gun violence reduction impacts on the treated gangs relative to the comparison gangs. Indeed, the similarity of findings across the different matching processes and statistical models used in this evaluation suggests that the observed null program effect is robust.

Given the generally positive findings of our process evaluation, it might be surprising to some observers that the StreetSafe program failed to generate larger impacts on gang-involved gun violence in Boston. However, as previously noted, a growing body of evaluation evidence suggests that streetworker gang violence reduction strategies, as stand-alone programs, might not produce desired violence prevention benefits. For instance, the available evidence on the well-known CeaseFire Chicago public health violence reduction approach (now known as Cure Violence), with its premium on gang violence mediation and negotiation work by “violence interrupters,” is mixed at best (see Papachristos 2011). Evaluations of subsequent replication programs in Baltimore, MD (Webster et al. 2009), and Newark, NJ (Boyle et al. 2010) have not revealed significant overall gun violence prevention gains. Results from the Pittsburgh, PA “One Vision, One Life” streetworker program (Wilson & Chermak 2011), recently revealed that the program was associated with a significant increase in violence in areas where the program was operational.

Earlier research examining the delinquency prevention impacts of streetworker programs documented unintended harmful effects (see Klein 1969, 1971). In essence, this body of research suggested that particular streetworker activities increased delinquent acts by strengthening group
identity and cohesion. Reflecting upon the specific actions and strategies pursued by StreetSafe streetworkers, the Harvard research team believes that the StreetSafe program may have unintentionally strengthened the cohesion and identity of the targeted gangs it served. It is important to note here that there are many examples of well-intentioned youth programs generating adverse impacts on participants (McCord 2003). Indeed, it is well-known that “Scared Straight” juvenile awareness programs (Petrosino et al. 2002) and the landmark Cambridge-Somerville youth delinquency prevention study (Dishion et al. 1999) produced harmful effects on the youth participants in those programs. Relative to the comparison gangs, the StreetSafe intervention was associated with non-significant increases in shootings by and against treated gangs. Taken as a whole, our findings seem generally consistent with the observations of other scholars in the evaluation of specific types of group-based delinquency prevention programs.

The Future of Gang Outreach Work in Boston and Beyond

From a normative perspective, it must be considered worthwhile to experiment with prevention programs that strive to keep young people who are caught up in pernicious cycles of street violence alive and out of prison by mediating and negotiating conflicts that they seem ill-equipped to resolve on their own. It is also worthwhile to attempt to provide these young people with opportunities and services to improve their life trajectories. This is particularly true for the approximately 500 hard-to-reach gang members SSB has invested in engaging over the past four years. From a research perspective, the field of gang outreach work is at a crossroads. Researchers have bemoaned the fact that null or negative evaluation results have rarely been used to alter future programming, but have typically been used to justify the withdrawal of funding for gang intervention programs (Klein 2011).
We believe that the investment The Boston Foundation has made in developing, implementing, and evaluating StreetSafe Boston has generated extremely valuable knowledge on streetworker programs. Methodologically, our evaluation will push future streetworker programs and their evaluations to move beyond area-level analyses of violence reduction to demonstrate meaningful behavioral change among the individuals and groups they serve. Our evaluation results show that it is possible to develop working relationships with disconnected older gang-involved individuals who are often regarded as law enforcement problems rather than worthy targets of social service intervention. What is more, many of these high-risk individuals will take advantage of offers of help when relationships with outreach workers are firmly established. While StreetSafe’s streetworker strategy did not generate gun violence reduction impacts, and may have unintentionally increased group-based capacity for violence over the short-run, we believe that StreetSafe—and programs like it—could adjust its programmatic theory in light of these findings to avoid the iatrogenic effects associated with increased group cohesion. StreetSafe could take advantage of its proven connection to this critical population by designing gang outreach practices aimed at understanding and responding to group dynamics without reinforcing group identity and connection. Streetworkers could be oriented toward actions that address individual situations rather than interventions that bring together groups of gang members. This might include actively attempting to prevent younger children from joining the gang when they first start hanging around with older gang peers. As previous researchers have noted, overall gang delinquency might be reduced not only by addressing group dynamics, but also by reducing the size of the gang itself (Klein 1971). To this end, streetworkers could prioritize attempts to facilitate peaceful exits from gang life and be trained to recognize opportunities for “peeling off” members of the gang whose situations allow for it. Group identity
and cohesion reduction actions may take many forms, and we recognize this area as one that is worthwhile for continued research, program development, and investment.

The StreetSafe experience, in conjunction with past research on effective gang violence prevention in Boston and elsewhere, suggests that the problem of preventing the next gang shooting from happening may be too big for any one agency or program to handle by itself. The presence of street gangs, and the violence generated by their conflicts, stem from very complicated and longstanding underlying social conditions in urban neighborhoods (Bursik and Grasmick 1993; Klein 1995). The value of streetworker programs may be better understood as a necessary component of a larger network of capacity (Braga and Winship 2006; Moore 2002) to reduce gang violence rather than the sole response to this very complicated problem.

While previous evaluations—ours included—have sought to isolate the independent impacts of streetworker programs, it is important to note that these programs could have beneficial impacts as important elements of comprehensive violence reduction strategies. As part of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) National Youth Gang Suppression and Intervention Program, Spergel and Curry (1990, 1993) grouped gang intervention programs into four broad categories: (1) suppression, (2) social intervention, (3) opportunity provision, and (4) community organization. As Spergel (1995) observes, coordinated strategies that integrate these varied domains are most likely to be effective in dealing with chronic youth gang problems. Future evaluations should consider the value of streetworkers as key partners in broader partnerships that include law enforcement agencies and community-based organizations in disrupting ongoing gang conflicts and providing social service intervention and opportunity provision to gang members.
These types of collaborative initiatives have generated noteworthy impacts on gang violence in Boston in the past. As mentioned above, streetworkers played important roles in the Operation Ceasefire gang violence reduction strategy during the 1990s and 2000s (Kennedy et al. 1996; Braga et al. 2001; Braga, Hureau, and Papachristos 2014). The focused deterrence intervention behind Operation Ceasefire was designed to prevent violence by reaching out directly to gangs, saying explicitly that violence would no longer be tolerated, and backing up that message by “pulling every lever” legally available to law enforcement agencies when violence occurred (Kennedy 1997, 2011). Streetworkers were key members of the Operation Ceasefire Working Group and added a much needed social intervention and opportunity-provision dimension to the Ceasefire strategy. With these resources, the Ceasefire Working Group was able to pair criminal justice sanctions, or the promise of sanctions, with help and with services. The availability of social services and opportunities were intended to increase the Ceasefire’s strategy’s preventive power by offering gang members any assistance they may want: protection from their enemies, drug treatment, access to education and job training programs, and the like. Streetworkers were also important partners in delivering anti-violence message directly to gang members via direct communications on the street and their participation in more formal Ceasefire “call-in” sessions. As indicated by the Harvard Evaluation Team’s interviews with BPD officers, a majority of officers signaled that they saw value in the work of StreetSafe streetworkers and appreciated their contributions to the city’s efforts to curb gang violence.

The choices confronting StreetSafe and the City of Boston are consequential not only for the neighborhoods and individuals of the city affected by ongoing serious violence, but also for the fate of gang outreach efforts across the country and beyond. Boston has long been considered
an exemplar for best practices in the domain of gang violence prevention policy, and its streetworker programs are no exception, having influenced the form and content of gang outreach programs in dozens of other cities. At a time when policymakers are under increasing pressure to find policy responses to the problem of urban violence that do not exacerbate the consequences of mass incarceration, streetworker programs have become an increasingly attractive option. And as the many replications of CeaseFire Chicago (Cure Violence) make clear, established programs that project competence in addressing the problem of gang violence—whether supported by rigorous evidence or not—frequently have a disproportionate impact in shaping the form that these policy initiatives take. StreetSafe, and street outreach in Boston, will be regarded with consequence in how it responds to the findings of this evaluation. In the field of policy discourse, somewhere between the poles of those who will hastily simplify our findings as evidence that “nothing works,” and those that will continue projecting that their streetworker program offers “the answer,” Boston is uniquely positioned to develop a new path forward. This path will need to integrate the uncomfortable, but necessary process of meaningfully reckoning with a sizable—and growing—body of evidence that conventional gang outreach not only fails to produce violence reduction gains—it can often cause harm to those it serves. Much has been learned, and much more could be gained.
Chapter Two

The Illicit Entry of Guns into High-Risk Networks
ABSTRACT

Guns in the hands of members of high-risk networks represent a serious threat to the safety of urban neighborhoods. Gangs, drug crews, and other criminally-active groups are involved in a large share of serious gun violence in U.S. cities. Research suggests that illegal firearms are acquired through a variety of means including theft and illicit diversions from legitimate firearms commerce. However, little is known about the specific workings of underground gun markets supplying gang and drug networks. In this paper, I take a mixed-methods approach, bringing together statistical analyses of traces of recovered handguns with ethnographic interviews of network members to develop new insights on the entry of guns into three criminal networks in Boston. I find that the guns possessed by Boston gang members were generally older handguns that originated from New Hampshire, Maine, and I-95 southern states. Boston gang members and drug dealers report paying inflated prices for handguns diverted by gun traffickers exploiting unregulated secondary market transactions. These findings suggest that existing enforcement and regulation policies aimed at primary market sources do seem to limit criminal access to guns, as illegal gun sellers appear to rely upon secondary market sources to supply criminal networks.
INTRODUCTION

Guns are the tools of the trade in the United States’ anomalous homicide problem. More than two thirds of U.S. homicides are perpetrated by gun, and more gun homicides are committed each year in the U.S. than all other high-income OECD countries combined (Richardson and Hemenway 2011). In 2011, there were over 11,000 gun homicide victims and some 467,300 victims of non-fatal firearm crime in the U.S. (Plany and Truman 2013). The available research evidence demonstrates that the involvement of guns make quarrels, robberies, domestic disputes and other conflictual situations more deadly (Cook 1991; Hemenway 2004). The picture that emerges suggests that those engaged in violent crime in the U.S. are not more intent on killing than their counterparts in comparable nations, they simply have better access to powerful tools—particularly handguns—that make death a more likely outcome of an assault or conflictual encounter (Cook 1987; Zimring 1968, 1972). Lives would be saved by reducing gun use in violent crimes.

In many U.S. cities, gun homicides are driven by conflicts involving gangs, drug selling crews, and other street groups active in crime (Blumstein 1995; Braga 2003; Howell and Griffiths 2015). Even within the context of gang conflicts, research demonstrates that gun violence is highly concentrated in specific components of co-offending networks and that the social proximity of individuals in the network to gunshot victims significantly influences their own risk of shooting victimization (Papachristos, Wildeman, and Roberto 2015; Papachristos, Hureau and Braga 2013). Many—but not all—individuals involved in gun crime have prior criminal histories, including felony and/or misdemeanor domestic violence convictions, that prohibit them from legally acquiring and possessing firearms (Braga and Cook 2015; Cook,
Ludwig, and Braga 2005). Clearly, the United States has a large problem with the illegal acquisition of guns by people who should not have access to them.

Research suggests that illegal guns are acquired through a variety of pathways, including theft, illegal diversions from legitimate firearms commerce, as well as off-the-books transactions, often from social connections such as family and acquaintances, or from “street” sources such as illicit brokers or drug dealers (Braga et al. 2002; Cook, Parker, and Pollock 2015). Within the domain of gun-control policy, one broad class of policy instruments is designed to differentially influence who has access to different kinds of firearms (Cook, Braga, and Moore 2011). These “supply-side” interventions seek to reduce gun crimes by keeping guns out of the wrong hands without denying access to legitimate owners or infringing on legitimate uses of guns. One unfortunate side effect of maintaining legal firearms commerce for law-abiding citizens is the serious problem of illegal gun transfers. Loopholes in existing gun laws weaken accountability of licensed gun dealers and private sellers alike, facilitating illegal transfers by scofflaw licensed gun dealers and generating difficulty in screening out ineligible buyers. Most importantly, these loopholes result in a vigorous and largely unregulated secondary market—gun sales by private individuals—in which secondhand guns change hands (Cook, Molliconi, and Cole 1995).

Very little is known about the activities of underground gun market participants, such as gang members, brokers, and gun traffickers (Cook, Parker, and Pollock 2015). In this paper, I take a mixed-methods approach to understand how members of high-risk networks in Boston acquire guns. First, I analyze administrative data on firearms recovered and submitted for tracing by the Boston Police Department (BPD) to describe the types of guns possessed by local gang members and their retail purchase and sales patterns. Second, I use ethnographic interviews with network members to identify the current stock of firearms, including how these guns were
acquired and the prices paid, for three distinct high-risk Boston criminal networks. These interviews include case studies of two gun traffickers who were actively diverting guns from legal commerce to gang members and drug hustlers in the networks I studied. I find that members of these high-risk networks have a steady supply of firearms diverted from secondary market sources. However, these network members pay inflated prices for secondhand guns imported from other states, suggesting that their supply lines are tenuous and vulnerable to focused law enforcement attention.

DEMAND AND SUPPLY OF ILLEGAL GUNS

The Demand for Guns by High-Risk Possessors and Gang Members

Explaining the demand for illegal guns appears straightforward at first glance. When asked directly, illegal possessors—whether adults or juveniles, in custody or in the community, in surveys or in interviews—most commonly state they want guns for self-protection (Wright and Rossi 1994; Harcourt 2006; Lizotte et al. 1994; Fagan and Wilkinson 1998; Sheley and Wright 1995). The underlying meanings of self-protection, however, require some unpacking. On one hand, research emphasizes that the self-protecting desire to carry a gun is born of a calculated choice to gain strategic advantage in the threatening—but also opportunistic—situations that are part and parcel of “criminal” life worlds (Wright and Rossi 1994; Sheley and Wright 1995). In this sense, the meaning of protection tilts toward active preparedness for a variety of potential criminal encounters—with victims, other aggressors, and even police. On the other hand, studies that describe the demand for guns in disadvantaged urban areas stress the importance of the “background” conditions in spurring gun demand. These conditions include the ecology of danger and fear that has promoted the diffusion of guns as a necessary self-defense tool (sometimes even among young people otherwise not involved in “street” activities)
and the socialization of young people in these contexts—particularly by (older) peers—toward the understanding gun carrying as “natural,” and the learning of situational scripts that require guns to properly carry out (Anderson 1999; Fagan and Wilkinson 1998).

There is good reason to consider gangs and other high-risk groups as important contexts in their own right in shaping demand for guns. Recent research has shown gangs to be critical mechanisms in explaining both the stability of gun violence in disadvantaged neighborhoods and its transmission via spatial and social network processes (Papachristos 2009; Papachristos, Hureau and Braga 2013). In addition to their disproportionate use of guns in homicide (Klein et al. 1991; Block and Block 1993), gangs further seem to influence the gun carrying patterns of the people involved in them. The work of Thornberry et al. (2003) highlights the important distinction between gun ownership and gun carrying. Drawing from the Rochester Youth Study, the authors find that gangs facilitate gun ownership, but especially gun carrying, among their associates (see also, Bjerregaard and Lizotte 1995). Controlling for individual-level characteristics, individuals involved in gangs were between seven and twelve times more likely to carry a gun than their non-gang counterparts. Interview studies with youth in correctional facilities have similarly associated gang membership with the carrying of multiple firearms (Harcourt 2006).

The Illegal Supply of Guns to High-Risk Possessors and Gang Members

Some of the most influential work establishing how high-risk possessors obtain guns draws upon now-dated survey research on incarcerated felons, juveniles in secure facilities, and high school students (Wright and Rossi 1994; Sheley and Wright 1995). In their survey of more than 1,800 incarcerated felons, Wright and Rossi (1994) found that illegal gun acquisition was typically an “off the books” process, with more than 80% of documented handgun transactions
made by informal arrangements with friends, family, and “various black market outlets.” The authors also found that more than 50% of those surveyed had stolen a gun in the past—mostly as a crime of opportunity—and estimated that between 40% and 70% of all guns described in their survey were stolen (Wright and Rossi 1994). The authors concluded that theft was the primary source of guns for convicted felons, a view that continues to have currency among a small number of academics (e.g. Kleck and Wang 2009) as well as gun rights advocacy groups.

Other studies have confirmed that theft does seem play an important role in the supply of illegal guns, with current estimates suggesting some 250,000 guns are stolen in the United States per year (Langton 2012). However, as will be discussed further below, prohibited possessors seem to acquire firearms from a diversity of sources including illegal diversions of firearms from legal commerce. A well-recognized limitation to the Wright and Rossi (1994) and Sheley and Wright (1995) studies is that the surveys could not precisely determine if theft itself was the proximate cause of a gun’s move into the “illegal” market or if theft occurred within the “criminal” domain after a gun was already illegally diverted from legal commerce (Kennedy et al. 1996; Wachtel 1998). While theft may play a greater role at an earlier stage of moving guns from the licit to the illicit sector, more contemporary surveys of prison and jail populations suggest that theft plays a much more modest role in the direct supply of criminal guns than previously thought.

A recent analysis of data drawn from the 2004 Survey of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities (SISCQ), the 2004 Survey of Inmates in Federal Correctional Facilities (SIFCF) and the 2002 Survey of Inmates in Local Jails (SILJ) suggest that very few illegal gun users directly acquire their guns through theft. Among male respondents ages 18 to 40 who were in the first two years of their prison term and admitted in the survey interview that they had a gun at the
time of crime, Cook, Parker, and Pollock (2015) found that only four percent reported directly stealing their most recent crime gun. Cook, Parker, and Pollock (2015) also found that only ten percent of recently incarcerated state prison inmates who carried a gun indicated that they purchased that gun from a licensed dealer (gun store or pawnbroker). Most of the transactions, roughly 70 percent, were with social connections (friends and family) or with “street” sources (fences, drug dealers, illicit gun brokers, and gangs).

Other research suggests that prohibited possessors circumvent lax laws and regulations governing legal firearms commerce to acquire guns. Much of this evidence comes from analyses of Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) firearm trace data and firearms trafficking investigations that indicate some percentage of the guns used in crime were recently diverted from legal firearms commerce (ATF 1997, 2000, 2002; Braga et al. 2012; Cook and Braga 2001; Pierce et al. 2004). Among the main findings of these research studies are: 1) New guns are recovered disproportionately in crime (Cook and Braga 2001; Pierce et al. 2004; Zimring 1976). 2) Some licensed firearm retailers (Federal Firearms Licensees or FFLs) are disproportionately frequent sources of crime guns; these retailers are linked to more guns traced by ATF than would be expected from their overall volume of gun sales (there could be many reasons for these patterns, see Wintemute, Cook, and Wright 2005). 3) Under test conditions, significant proportions of licensed retailers and private party gun sellers will knowingly participate in illegal gun sales (Sorenson and Vittes 2003; Wintemute 2010). 4) On average, about one third of guns used in crime in any community are acquired in that community, another third come from elsewhere in the same state, and a third are brought from other states (ATF 1997, 2002; Cook and Braga 2001). 5) There are longstanding interstate trafficking routes for crime guns, typically from states with weaker gun regulations to states with stronger ones. The
best known of these is the Interstate 95 “Iron Pipeline” from the Southeast to the Middle Atlantic and New England states (Cook and Braga 2001; Pierce et al. 2004).

Analyses of ATF firearm trafficking investigation data reveal that illegal gun traffickers exploit an incredibly leaky legal firearms commerce system (ATF 2000). For instance, a recent analysis of 2,608 gun trafficking investigations made by ATF between January 1, 1999 and December 31, 2002 found that more than 117,000 firearms were diverted from legal to illegal commerce (Braga et al. 2012). The study identified the primary gun trafficking pathways as scofflaw and negligent firearms dealers, “straw man” legal purchasers who provide guns to criminals, and illegal diversions through secondary market sources such as gun shows, flea markets, and want ads. The analysis also revealed the organized theft of firearms from licensed dealers, common carriers, and residences as illegal diversion pathways. Moreover, Braga et al. (2012) found that 73 percent of the cases involved the diversion of twenty or fewer firearms, and concluded that most but not all gun trafficking investigations involve a relatively small number of firearms. The largest gun trafficking case, however, involved the illegal diversion of some 30,000 firearms by a corrupt FFL working with several unlicensed dealers in gun show settings.

While survey research highlights the importance of theft and secondary market acquisitions in supplying adults and juveniles with illegal guns, these studies also complement analyses of firearm trace and investigation data in suggesting a fairly substantial role, either direct or indirect, for retail outlet sales. For instance, Wright and Rossi (1994) reported that 21 percent of male prisoners had acquired their most recent handgun from a licensed dealer. Sheley and Wright (1995) found that 32 percent of juvenile inmates had asked someone, typically a friend or family member, to straw purchase a gun for them in a gun shop, pawnshop, or other retail outlet. Survey studies also find that “street” and “black market” sources are important,
sources that may well include traffickers who are buying from retail outlets and selling on the street (Cook, Parker, and Pollock 2015).

Despite multiple illegal sources of firearms for those involved in crime, ethnographic research suggests that illegal gun markets may not work very well in particular urban environments. Cook et al. (2007) found evidence of considerable frictions in the underground market for guns in Chicago. These frictions were due primarily to the fact that the underground gun market was both illegal and “thin,” indicating that the number of buyers, sellers and total transactions was small, and relevant information on reliable sources of guns was scarce. Not surprisingly, the authors found substantial price markups for guns on the street relative to the purchase price in legal transactions. The research further found that Chicago street gangs helped to overcome these market frictions, but the gangs’ economic interests caused gang leaders to limit supply primarily to gang members, and even then transactions were usually loans or rentals with strings attached.

A more recent analysis of ATF trace data for crime guns recovered by the Chicago Police Department between 2009 and 2013 found that the guns recovered from gang members were quite old (median age was 10 years from first retail sale), suggesting that they had gone through a series of secondary transaction before being acquired by the gang owner (Cook, Harris, Ludwig, and Pollock 2015). What is more, some 60 percent of traced guns associated with Chicago gang members were first purchased from licensed dealers in other states, especially in nearby Indiana (known for its weak gun laws). Cook, Harris, Ludwig, and Pollock (2015) concluded that if law enforcement is to be effective at reducing access to guns by gang members, it should focus on the intermediaries in the underground market—straw purchasers, brokers, and traffickers. As such, alongside further analyses of trace data, insight into the functioning of these
intermediaries must be developed through qualitative approaches. After all, there is little in the way of administrative data that would provide direct guidance on the workings of the underground market and its actors.

RESEARCH METHODS & DATA

This study draws upon two different sources of data to develop new understanding of the trade in illegal guns at the street level. First, I analyze administrative data on illegal gun recoveries maintained by the Boston Police Department (BPD). These data provide useful context for the ensuing qualitative findings and help to improve interpretations of the data collected. Second, I use ethnographic interviewing and participant-observation fieldwork to catalog the active stock of illegal guns in three distinct social networks involved in crime and violence. Using these same methods, I further attempt to document the prices paid for specific guns, the kinds of transaction (cash, trade, and other), and the sources of specific guns. Finally, diagnostic regressions are employed to further analyze the qualitatively obtained transaction data in the service of exploring the relationship between gun prices in the formal and illicit markets. After a brief description of the research setting, these methods are presented in detail below.

Research Setting

Massachusetts is well-known for having some of the strongest gun laws in the United States. In 2013, the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence ranked Massachusetts gun laws as the sixth strongest among gun laws in the 50 states. Importantly, Massachusetts regulates all secondhand gun transactions by requiring records of ownership transfers, thefts, and losses to be reported to the state (Braga and Hureau 2015). Massachusetts has been noted as having very low

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21 http://www.bradycampaign.org/2013-state-scorecard (Accessed September 3, 2015). The Brady Campaign ranked all 50 states based on 30 policy approaches to regulating guns and ammunition, such as: background checks on gun sales; reporting lost or stolen firearms; and prohibiting dangerous people from purchasing weapons.
prevalence of gun ownership relative to other U.S. states (Azrael, Cook, and Miller 2004). In a recent survey, only 12.8 percent of Massachusetts households reported owning guns as compared to 32.6 percent of U.S. homes reported owning a gun (Okoro et al. 2005). A 2010 Harvard School of Public Health representative survey of Boston residents estimated that only 3.7 percent of respondents reported that someone in their household owned a handgun (see Braga and Cook 2015).

Research has characterized gun violence in Boston as highly concentrated among a small number of high-risk places and high-risk people and disproportionately driven by gang conflicts. Roughly five percent of Boston’s street block faces and intersections generated about 74 percent of fatal and non-fatal shooting incidents between 1980 and 2008 (Braga, Papachristos, and Hureau 2010). These gun violence hot spots were noted to be located in and proximate to gang turf and drug market areas. In 2006, only one percent of Boston’s population between the ages of 14 and 24 were members of street gangs involved in gun violence; however, gang-related disputes generated more than two-thirds of all gun homicides and gang members were involved as offenders, victims, or both in 70 percent of non-fatal shootings (Braga, Hureau, and Winship 2008). In a recent study, Papachristos, Braga, and Hureau (2012) used social network analysis to study all fatal and non-fatal gunshot injuries in a co-offending network within one disadvantaged Boston community. The analysis revealed that roughly 85 percent of all gunshot victims were in a single network of gang associates representing less than 5 percent of the community’s population.

Research conducted during the mid-1990s revealed that firearms associated with youth, especially with gang youth, tended to be semiautomatic pistols, often ones that were quite new and apparently recently diverted from retail (Kennedy, Piehl and Braga 1996). Many were being
smuggled into Boston from out of state. In response to these patterns, Boston law enforcement agencies implemented a gun market disruption strategy that focused on shutting down illegal diversions of new handguns from retail sources (Braga and Pierce 2005). Half of the ATF gun trafficking investigations launched as part of this strategy focused on firearms illegal diverted by straw purchasers. An impact evaluation found that the gun market disruption strategy significantly reduced the illegal supply of new handguns to Boston criminals (Braga and Pierce 2005). However, the evaluation also suggested that gun traffickers may have substituted older handguns purchased through secondary market transactions to avoid enforcement attention.

*Official Data on Firearm Recoveries*

The Gun Control Act of 1968 (GCA) established a set of requirements that allows any given firearm to be traced from its manufacture or import to its first sale by a retail dealer (Zimring 1975; Cook and Braga 2001). Firearm tracing makes it possible, at least in principle, to determine the chain of commerce for a firearm from the point of import or manufacture to the first retail sale (and beyond, in states that maintain records of gun purchases). Unfortunately, not all firearms can be traced and firearm trace data have some widely recognized limits. Firearms traces can be unsuccessful for a variety of reasons such as local police incorrectly completed the trace request form, the firearm was too old to trace (pre-1968 manufacture), or the gun had obliterated serial numbers. Most centrally, ATF trace data cannot directly determine whether a recovered firearm was illegally diverted from lawful firearms commerce. Inferences on illegal gun diversion are made based on suspicious purchase and sales patterns. Nevertheless, ATF trace data can provide policy-relevant insights on illegal gun market dynamics when conclusions are based on careful analyses that are coupled with clear acknowledgments of the data limitations (Cook and Braga 2001; National Research Council 2005).
ATF and academic analyses of firearms trace data typically focus on a critical dimension of the illegal firearms market: the time between a firearm’s first sale at retail and its subsequent recovery by a law enforcement agency, most often in connection with a crime ("time-to-crime"). Law enforcement investigators consider a traced firearm with short time-to-crime, defined as recovery within 3 years of first retail sale, as possibly having been recently and illegally diverted from a retail outlet (ATF 2002). Research has also identified a number of gun trafficking indicators associated with short time-to-crime, such as firearms purchases made as part of a multiple sale and firearm recovered in tight gun control states that were originally purchased at FFLs in loose control states (Pierce et al. 2004; Braga et al. 2012). So-called “Junk guns” are cheap firearms of low quality manufacture and, as suggested by Webster et al. (2013), their low price enables traffickers to invest relatively little money in guns that can sell for nearly five times as more than retail prices in states with the most restrictive gun laws.22

The BPD has been comprehensively submitting all recovered firearms to ATF for tracing since 1991 (Kennedy et al. 1996; Braga and Pierce 2005). Between 2007 and 2013, the BPD recovered and attempted to trace 3,764 firearms. 58.3 percent of these firearms (2,196) were recovered from an individual possessor and the remainder was recovered in public places without a known possessor. Firearms recovered from known gang members were determined by matching the names and dates-of-birth of crime gun possessor to the BPD’s gang member database.23 Of the firearms recovered from identified possessors, 38.1 percent (837 of 2,196) were determined to be recovered from Boston gang members.

22 For the purposes of this analysis, recovered handguns were characterized as “low quality” firearms if they were manufactured by Hi-Point Firearms, “ring of fire” firearm companies (Bryco, Jennings, Lorcin, Davis, etc.; Wintemute 1994) or its descendants (Cobra Industries, Jiminez, Talon, Sedco, etc.), or companies popularly-recognized as a manufacturers of cheap firearms (see, e.g., http://junkguns.com/).

23 To be classified as a gang member, the BPD requires that a person has to accumulate 10 points based on a set criteria that includes self-admitted gang membership, gang tattoos, participation in gang-related crimes, and other factors (see Braga et al. 2014).
Analysis of these data proceeds as follows. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the characteristics of all handguns recovered by the BPD during the study time period and the results of ATF tracing. For handguns traced to their first known retail sale by an FFL, selected gun trafficking indicators, such as time-to-crime, source states, and characteristics of retail purchasers and recovery possessors, are also presented. Logistic regression (Aldrich and Nelson 1984) is then used to examine whether there were any systematic differences between traced firearms recovered from gang members and traced firearms recovered from non-gang members.

**Qualitative Data Collection Methods**

The foundation of the qualitative data collection efforts involved repeated ethnographic interviews (Spradley 1979) and participant observation with six respondents who opened themselves to research inquiry, sharing the manifold ways that guns permeate their social networks. I was introduced to these respondents by gang outreach streetworkers\(^{24}\), who served Boston’s high-violence neighborhoods.\(^{25}\) I asked these streetworkers to help connect me to individuals they knew who met the following criteria: a) involved in gang networks; b) willing to openly, but confidentially, discuss the guns circulating through their social networks; c) generally knowledgeable about guns; and, d) had the social vantage point to be aware of most guns circulating in their network. Streetworkers connected me with six individuals. Four individuals were self-described active gang members representing two separate gang networks (Networks A and B). The two other respondents were involved in an active crew of drug dealers (Network C). All three networks were geographically centered in Boston’s Roxbury, Dorchester,

\(^{24}\) The term “streetworker” is the most commonly used term in the field of violence prevention for detached gang outreach specialists involved in building relationships with hard-to-reach gang members for the purposes of mediation and intervention.

\(^{25}\) I had established rapport with this group of streetworkers by means of a previous multi-year study on the effects of a community-based gang violence intervention. Relationships with these streetworkers, as well as some of the gang members they served, helped to provide a sense of trust and legitimacy for the present research project.
and Mattapan neighborhoods—neighborhoods known for historically high-levels of serious gun violence and other co-occurring forms of social disadvantage (Braga 2003; Harding 2010).

All six participants were African-American men, with an age range spanning from the mid-20s through the mid-30s. Because of their age, position within the gang, and general knowledge of guns, respondents were well positioned to observe the gun usage patterns of a wide range of actors within their social networks. Each participant owned or regularly accessed at least one firearm for their own protection, and each of the six participants had been previously shot and witnessed the shooting of friends. Only one participant, associated with the drug-dealing Network C, reported owning a gun legally.26

Prior research in Boston suggests that the average gang engaged in gun violence comprises between 25 and 30 members (Kennedy, Piehl, and Braga 1996; Braga, Hureau, and Winship 2008; Papachristos, Hureau, and Braga 2013). Network A drew from the overlap between two distinct but allied gangs; one gang was a “side street” gang of approximately 15-20 members, while the other was a larger gang of approximately 50 members based around a nearby housing development. Network B was comprised of the intersection of two separate but allied housing development-based gangs, each with approximately 100 members and associates. Network C was made up of a small, tightly bound group of approximately 10 friends that referred to themselves as hustlers. Although these hustlers had experience with gun violence, its threat was not an enduring feature of their lives and relationships with one another in the way it was for those in Networks A and B. Describing their use of guns as “mainly for defense and not

26 Owing to his ability to hide his criminal involvement, he was able to fulfill the requirements for a “license to carry” (LTC) in Massachusetts, and subsequently purchased several legal firearms that augmented his constantly changing stock of “off the books” guns. In order to be eligible to legally purchase, possess, transport and carry a handgun in Massachusetts, residents must obtain a LTC, which is issued at the discretion of the local police agency. Applicants must be 21 years of age and older and: 1) pay a licensing fee of $100; 2) participate in a state-police run gun safety course; and 3) pass a criminal background check. See [http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dfg/dfw/education-events/hed/gun-licensing-requirements.html](http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dfg/dfw/education-events/hed/gun-licensing-requirements.html) for more information.
offense,” the hustlers of Network C supported themselves through a shifting portfolio of formal employment, drug dealing, insurance fraud, and other illicit enterprises.

I met with each respondent one to two times per week over the course of the summer and fall of 2014, resulting in a total of 71 meetings. These meetings lasted approximately two hours and took place at a public location (i.e. coffee shops, restaurants, parks, etc.) outside of the main study neighborhoods to allow for private conversation. Respondents were paid $50 for each interview session. Unlike structured interviews where the interview unfolds from a formal script, our ethnographic interview approach (see Spradley 1979) retained the style of an informal conversation, albeit one infused with ethnographic elements—most critically the explicit purpose of gaining insight into the manifold ways that guns permeated the respondent’s social network. During the interviews, great care was taken to identify the precise details of the guns under study. Rather than being satisfied with the report of a “black 9mm semi-automatic handgun,” I worked with respondents to determine the specific make and model of the gun in question (i.e. “Glock G19 Gen 4 9mm with 15 round magazine”) and a standardized description of condition.27 Documenting the details of any particular gun could require several weeks of iterative research work for the respondents and the fieldworker alike.

While I made my best attempt to carefully document guns and their transactions into the three distinct networks, it is difficult to assume that respondents would be positioned to be aware of every gun in circulation. This limitation is inherent in the research method, but it is mitigated by some of the vision advantages that respondents brought to their social networks. First, the

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27 I consulted the Blue Book of Gun Values—which employs the National Rifle Association (NRA)'s gun grading criteria—to educate myself and respondents regarding how to assess gun condition. Making use of sample photographs published on the Blue Book and NRA websites, guns were ranked as: "new" (in box or without box), "mint" (perfect, without any flaws in finish, but without box), "excellent" (95%-98% condition of finish), "very good" (all original parts with some acceptable finish loss), "good" (80%-95% condition of finish), "fair" (20%-60% condition of finish), or "poor" (gun does not fire and in otherwise poor cosmetic condition). I was able to obtain a condition for more than 2/3 of the sample. Based on the conditions returned, for guns where I could not establish a condition, I imputed the condition as "good" at 80% finish value.
respondents had a high degree of gun knowledge and experience, so they possessed the ability to identify the guns they could see in circulation. Second, because of their technical knowledge, they were often sought out for help with a variety of gun issues, particularly problem diagnosis and repair. And finally, as older members of their respective networks who remained strongly connected to younger members of the gang, they had both the access and social standing to ask about the guns circulating among this population. This latter type of vision and access is important, as the most active guns tended to also be the most visible because they are typically carried and/or stored in public, are owned or used by more than one person, and are frequent sources of network discussion.

To make the best use of the detailed gun and transaction data collected, I complete the analysis of qualitative data by exploring it quantitatively to search for patterns suggested (as well as hidden) by the fieldwork process. In particular, I attempt to develop insight into the various features of guns and their transactions that were associated with their selling price on the street. This analysis proceeds by using various diagnostic descriptive analyses to better understand the relationship between formal price and street price, followed by OLS and spline regressions (Friedman 1991) predicting street price by formal value and a slate of other fieldwork- and theory-informed regressors.

RESULTS

*The Characteristics of Guns Recovered from Boston Gang Members*

Table III presents the characteristics of N=837 firearms recovered by the BPD from gang members between 2007 and 2013. Nearly 96% of the firearms recovered from gang members were handguns. Slightly less than two-thirds were semiautomatic pistols (61.3%) and almost
one-third were revolvers (32.9%). Derringers accounted for a very small portion of the recovered firearms (1.5%). A variety of calibers were represented among the recovered gang guns.
Table III. Characteristics of Firearms Recovered from Boston Gang Members, 2007-2013

N=837

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semiautomatic pistol</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>61.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revolver</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rifle</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shotgun</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derringer</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Caliber</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9mm</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.22</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.38</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.380</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.25</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.45</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.32</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.357</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.40</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other calibers</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Top manufacturers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith &amp; Wesson</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sturm Ruger</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hi-Point</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colt</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taurus</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beretta</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorcin</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryco</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glock</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrington &amp; Richardson</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other manufacturers</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>47.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recovery crime type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal gun possession</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>81.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent crime</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug offense</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The most frequent recovered caliber firearms included: 9mm (19.6%), .22 (17.0%), .38 (14.2%), .380 (11.0%), and .45 (7.6%). Smith & Wesson manufactured the largest share of recovered handguns (17.5%) with the remainder manufactured by a number of reputable (e.g. Sturm Ruger, Colt, Glock, and Beretta) and lower-quality (e.g. Hi-Point, Lorcin, and Bryco) companies. A majority of the gang guns were recovered by the BPD in illegal firearm possession crimes (81.5%) and a smaller share were recovered in violent crimes (homicide, aggravated assault, and robbery; 13.3%).

**Table IV. ATF Trace Results and Selected Gun Trafficking Indicators for Firearms Recovered from Boston Gang Members, 2007 – 2013**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source state</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I-95 southern states</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire, Maine</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other states</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retail purchaser gender</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>89.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purchaser and possessor identity</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purchaser and possessor are different people</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>99.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchaser and possessor is the same person</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time to crime</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recovered more than 3 years of first retail sale</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>87.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recovered within 3 years of first retail sale</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Median time to crime</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13.8 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>31 days – 43.8 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ATF was able to successfully trace 55.1 percent (N=461) of the guns recovered from Boston gang members to their first known retail sale (Table IV). Some 13.9 percent were not traceable due to obliterated serial numbers, an indicator of illegal gun trafficking (Kennedy et al. 1996). The remaining gang guns were not traceable due to pre-1968 manufacture (18.1%) or problems with the trace request form submitted (12.9%). Almost one third of the gang guns were traced to first retail sales at I-95 southern states with comparatively weak gun laws (32.9%; specifically, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia). FFLs located in New Hampshire and Maine, both proximate states with weak gun controls, were the first retail sale sources for 21.9 percent of the traced gang guns. Slightly more than one fifth of the recovered handguns (20.6%) were first sold at retail at a Massachusetts FFL.

The vast majority of traced gang guns were first purchased by males (89.4%) rather than females (10.6%). All but one traced gang gun were recovered in the hands of someone other than the first retail purchaser (99.8%), suggesting a possible transfer from a legal owner to a criminal possessor. Only 12.6 percent of traced gang guns were recovered by the BPD within three years of the first retail sale. The median time to crime was 13.8 years.

Table V presents the results of the logistic regression of traced firearms recovered from gang possessors relative to N=814 traced firearms recovered from non-gang possessors during the same time period on selected firearm characteristics. The binary dependent variable represented whether a traced firearm was recovered from a gang member (1) or not (0). The logistic regression model tested whether specific firearm characteristics (type, caliber, and manufacturer quality), recovery crime type (illegal possession relative to found guns and other recovery crimes), and gun trafficking indicators (time to crime, purchaser and possessor are different people, and source states) were statistically-significant predictors of the log of the odds
of a firearm being recovered from a gang member. Odds ratios were used to represent the impact of a one-unit change in the predictor variables on the ratio of the probability that a firearm was recovered from a gang member.

Table V. Logistic Regression Comparing Traced Boston Firearms Recovered from Gang and Non-Gang Possessors on Selected Firearm Characteristics, 2007 – 2013

N = 1,275 firearms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Handgun</td>
<td>2.847*</td>
<td>0.274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-quality manufacturer</td>
<td>1.140</td>
<td>0.137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.380, 9mm, .40, .45</td>
<td>0.805</td>
<td>0.130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal gun possession</td>
<td>1.202</td>
<td>0.141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent crime</td>
<td>0.963</td>
<td>0.329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast time to crime (&lt;3 years)</td>
<td>0.477**</td>
<td>0.170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different purchaser and possessor</td>
<td>3.871**</td>
<td>0.267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts FFL</td>
<td>0.633**</td>
<td>0.177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire, Maine FFL</td>
<td>1.516*</td>
<td>0.184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-95 southern state FFL</td>
<td>1.577**</td>
<td>0.166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.227**</td>
<td>0.308</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

-2 log likelihood                  1570.170
Nagelkerke R-square                0.102

* = p<.05
** = p<.01

Note: The model analyzed 461 gang member guns (36.2%) and 814 non-gang member guns (63.8%). Traced firearm sold by FFL in another state is the reference category for the Massachusetts FFL, New Hampshire and Maine FFL, I-95 southern state FFL dummy variables.
Controlling for the other covariates, traced Boston gang member guns were much more likely to be handguns relative to firearms recovered for their non-gang counterparts \((p<.01)\). However, traced gang guns were not more likely to be medium and higher-powered calibers (.380, 9mm, .40, .45), made by low-quality manufacturers, or recovered in illegal possession offenses when compared to traced non-gang member guns.

The logistic regression analysis did reveal that successfully-traced gang and non-gang guns had very different retail commerce patterns. Holding the other predictors constant, Boston gang guns were almost 37 percent less likely to be first sold at FFLs in Massachusetts \((p<.01)\) but nearly 58 percent more likely to be first sold at FFLs in I-95 southern states \((p<.01)\) and almost 52 percent more likely to be first sold at FFLs in neighboring New Hampshire and Maine \((p<.05)\). Controlling for other covariates, traced guns recovered from Boston gang members were nearly four times as likely to be first purchased at retail by someone other than the crime gun possessor \((p<.01)\)\(^{28}\) and were 52.3 percent less likely to recovered by police within three years of their first retail sales relative to traced guns recovered from non-gang members \((p<.01)\). In sum, relative to other criminal gun possessors, Boston gang members tended to possess older guns that were first purchased by someone else in loose gun control states.

**Guns in Observed Networks: Existing Stock, Transactions, and Prices**

Eighty-six active firearms were documented across the three networks over the course of the summer and fall of 2014: 38 guns were associated with Network A, 28 were associated with Network B, and 20 guns were associated with Network C. Ninety percent of the guns observed in the sample were handguns (77 of 86 firearms), with 70% of all guns in the sample being semi-automatic pistols. Twenty percent of the total sample was comprised of revolvers. A small

\(^{28}\) As mentioned earlier, only one of the traced guns recovered from gang members (0.2% of 461) was recovered from the first retail purchaser. In contrast, 19.7% (160 of 814) of traced guns recovered from non-gang members were recovered the first retail purchaser.
number of rifles, shotguns, and other types of guns also appeared in circulation.\textsuperscript{29}

Table VI summarizes the types, calibers, and manufacturers of the handguns observed in the three networks. Indeed, relative to the overall distribution of Boston gang member guns, these handguns in this sample tended to be medium and higher-powered (.380 and larger calibers) semiautomatic pistols. More than one quarter of handguns in the sample were 9mm automatics. Although one respondent preferred the simplicity and reliability of a revolver,\textsuperscript{30} all other respondents at various times stressed that the most desirable guns were larger-caliber semiautomatic pistols. Semiautomatics were perceived to offer two key advantages: first, they generally offered the potential to fire more shots without reloading; and second, they were more concealable when carrying because semiautomatics are typically thinner and lighter than revolvers. Smaller pistols like the 9mm Glock 19 or the pocket-sized .380 caliber Ruger LCP were particularly sought after.\textsuperscript{31} In all, 22 manufacturers were represented, with the top five

\textsuperscript{29} Rifles (N=5, 5.5\% of the total sample) and shotguns (N=2, 2.3\% of the total sample) were described as impractical for carrying and everyday use, and were referred to in terms of their option value (having “something big in the house” in case the situation required it) rather than their use value. Two (2.3\% of total sample) “other” types of guns were recorded, including a flare gun and an Airsoft pellet gun manufactured (and further modified) to resemble a .45 1911-style pistol. Respondents perceived these replica guns as useful only for the younger members of their network, who had made use of them in street robberies.

\textsuperscript{30} The respondent expressed his preference for revolvers when discussing a recent trade made by the younger members of his gang network. Much to his dismay, one group of young members traded away a practically new Taurus .357 Magnum snub-nosed revolver to another group of young boys for a new looking Glock 26 that was rumored to be “hot,” because it was believed to be used in a shooting. In his mind, these young men who traded away the Taurus because they “already had enough revolvers,” had lost out badly in the transaction. First, they had given away a new gun for one that was a potential liability because it was “hot”; and second, they failed to see what they had in Taurus—a high power, reliable gun. The inherent reliability of revolvers was a central concern to this respondent, particularly in contrast to the recently acquired Glock, which started to jam not long after his young boys received it. Alongside the sensual dimensions of firing a powerful revolver that he loved (the “PAP! PAP!” sound produced, the heft of the cylinder as it moved, etc.), revolvers offered another advantage not considered by his younger counterparts: they did not leave behind shell casings as physical evidence for the police to collect.

\textsuperscript{31} The Glock 19 measures 7.36 inches in length, and just over an inch wide. It weighs approximately 30 ounces when fully loaded with a 15 round magazine. The miniscule Ruger LCP (.380) measures just over 5 inches in length, and is a mere .8 inches wide. When fully loaded the LCP weighs approximately 12 ounces with a 6 round magazine (plus one round in the chamber). This preference for smaller, more easily concealable guns stands in sharp contrast to the findings of Wright and Rossi (1994) that illegal gun users prefer large guns. Many factors might shape respondents’ preference for smaller guns, but two deserve special mention. First, the offerings of gun manufacturers have shifted considerably since the 1990s, as reliable and high-quality “compact” and “sub-compact” pistols have become widely available to fill a market niche for guns suitable for “concealed carry.” Second, in contrast to Wright and Rossi’s general population sample of felons, the respondents in this study were generally engaged in ongoing
manufacturers (Smith & Wesson, Taurus, Glock, Sturm Ruger, and Hi-Point) comprising approximately 60% of the sample. Although lower quality manufacturers were present (particularly Hi-Point), the guns in the three networks were notable for being mostly comprised by reputable manufacturers of quality handguns.

Table VI. Summary of Handguns in Network Sample (N=77)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Network A</th>
<th>Network B</th>
<th>Network C</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% Hand Guns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HANDGUNS</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-automatic</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>77.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revolver</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY CALIBER</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9mm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.380</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (.25, .357, .38, etc.)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BY MANUFACTURER</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith &amp; Wesson</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taurus</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glock</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sturm Ruger</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hi-Point</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Colt, Bryco, Intratec, Beretta, etc.)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I was able to obtain the purchase price for 58 of the 77 handguns in the sample. The majority of these guns entered the three networks by means of cash transactions. Fifty-three (68.8%) handguns were procured by means of “pure” cash transaction (no other trade or in-kind gun conflicts that: a) shaped a perceived need for everyday gun carrying; and b) put them at the center of police enforcement efforts that prioritized getting guns off the street.
involved). Four guns (5.2%) entered the networks by cash sale where the price was discounted to reflect a family connection or a previous debt that was owed—two guns were discounted for family connections while the remaining two transactions were discounted because the seller owed the buyer money for drugs or a lost gun. One gun (1.3%) entered the sample by way of a blended transaction involving the exchange of a gun plus additional cash.\footnote{The prices for these discounted guns are included in the price figures without adjustment. As such, the estimates of gun prices and markups within the sample may be understated.} In sum, these transactions involved more than $36,000 in cash transfer. Of the 19 handguns (24.6%) that were unable to be priced, in the case of seven guns (9.1%) the purchase price was simply unknown or couldn’t be recalled accurately; six guns (7.8%) entered the networks via gun-for-gun trades without additional pricing information; three guns (3.9%) were “given” to network members by acquaintances no longer involved in illicit street activity; two guns (2.6%) entered the networks via theft without first being resold; and, one gun (1.3%) was “given” by a family member.

It is important to note here that 15 of the full sample of 86 guns (17%) entered the networks via joint acquisition. All joint acquisitions occurred among Networks A and B, the networks comprised of street gangs. Typically, two to three people pooled money together to purchase a particular gun and, in some cases, jointly deciding to trade that gun for another mutually agreed upon gun down the line. In contrast to the commonsense notion of “community guns” among gangs, wherein all members of the gang are theorized to have access to a gun, property rights to these jointly-purchased guns were sharply defined to be shared among the small number of original purchasers.\footnote{In a handful of cases gun ownership was established shortly after the purchase of a gun. That is, an individual purchased a gun independently and thereafter sought out or otherwise arranged to share the gun and its purchase cost. The constant churning of guns between these individuals with shared ownership of a single gun was one of the reasons that within-network transactions were not possible to enumerate in the same manner as entry transactions.}

In one view, the phenomenon of joint ownership can be understood as the solution to an
economic problem, a market adaptation to overcoming the expense of purchasing a gun in a context characterized by high mark-ups and financially constrained buyers. But these arrangements do not merely bring together any two would-be market participants in the interest of achieving an efficient match. On the contrary, the transactions recorded were built on pre-existing relationships of trust and reciprocity. This was precisely the case when one respondent in Network A split the $700 purchase price of a new Ruger 9mm with one of his best friends in the gang. He explained that the $350 he put in to purchase the gun, from a financial perspective “was nothing! I was hustling at the time.” More important than sharing the cost of the gun was sharing the opportunity to get a quality gun during a time when both men needed one.

Of the 58 handguns for which a price was recorded, the lowest documented purchase price was $200 (secondhand Ruger Straight Six .22 revolver; secondhand Taurus 731 .32 Magnum revolver) while the highest purchase price was $1,100 (a “new in box” Springfield Arms XD4 .40 pistol). The mean price for a handgun in the sample was $636, with a median price of $638. Figure 3 shows the distribution of handgun prices in the sample.

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34 Readers may question how it is that disadvantaged men can afford the purchase prices that are detailed in this study. The respondent responsible for this quote was employed in a part-time low-wage job at the time of the interview, although as he notes, he was making better money selling high-grade marijuana just months prior. As Zelizer (1994) has shown, money that can be spent on socially inclusive items or experiences is often “earmarked” over “regular” money (see also Collins 2004). In this sense, “gun money” can be earmarked for its importance in personal protection, but also, as in this case, for its importance in contributing to spending for a social cause promoting interpersonal solidarity and inclusion.
It is noteworthy that guns in these networks exhibited significant markups over fair market values. To establish fair market value, I consulted the online version of the Blue Book of Gun Values (www.bluebookofgunvalues.com), one of the most used resources among gun dealers and retailers for determining the value of gun. Using the detailed information collected on the manufacturers, models, and condition of guns, fair market values were obtained for 54 of the 58 handguns for which a street purchase price was recorded. Based on this price and condition information, I conservatively estimate that the handguns in the sample are marked up 191 percent over their fair market value.\textsuperscript{35} Perhaps most telling of the significant markup these guns have undergone can be determined by comparing their street price against their full, new-in-box, manufacturer’s suggested retail price (MSRP). Street prices reflected a 64 percent markup over this full MSRP value.

\textsuperscript{35} Some might be concerned that respondents may have overstated the condition of guns in their networks. I do not share this concern, but note that assuming a generally poorer condition for the guns in the sample only exacerbates the markup estimation. Assuming a “low” Blue Book used condition of 60% for all guns in the sample, the overall markup for the sample rises to 363% over fair market value.
Figure 4 presents two plots exploring the relationship between the observed prices paid for guns and fair market value for the 54 priced handguns in the sample. The left plot maps the simple relationship between the street price paid and the gun’s fair market value. The right plot offers a slightly different view of this relationship, showing each gun’s markup against its fair market value. While most guns appear to be marked up approximately 100%, a small number of guns actually sell below their fair market value. Perhaps what is most striking, however, is the exorbitant markup on guns of lower fair market value, as demonstrated in the right plot. The seemingly inverse relationship between fair market gun value and markup demonstrated in the right plot is heavily influenced by the markup on guns of lesser fair market value. What is more, these heavily marked up guns are not simply old or in poor condition, but are renowned low-quality guns. Of the ten most marked-up guns in the sample, eight were made by low-quality gun manufacturers such as Hi-Point (4), Bryco (2), Jennings (1) and Lorcin (1).

**Figure 4. Plots of Handgun Fair Market Value, Price, and Mark-Up (N=54)**
Linear regression analyses and additional quantitative diagnostic techniques were used to assess several firearm features hypothesized to influence street guns prices beyond formal legal market prices (as measured by Blue Book values). These features included:

- **Gun Type**: Fieldwork, along with previous research, (i.e. Kennedy, Piehl, and Braga 1996) suggests that semi-automatic pistols are preferred to revolvers among street gun users. For these analyses, gun type is constructed as a dummy variable where 1=semi-automatic pistol and 0=revolver.

- **Gun Caliber**: A number of studies indicate that illicit gun users prefer “high power” handguns (i.e. Wright and Rossi 1994, Harcourt 2006, Kennedy, Piehl, and Braga 1996), a view supported by research subjects. Here caliber is constructed as a dummy variable comparing “high power” calibers against medium and small caliber guns. High power guns are defined as .40, .45, and .50 caliber guns as well as all Magnum calibers (in this sample .44, .357, and .32).

- “New” Guns: Recently manufactured guns: a) function well (in theory); and, b) do not come with the risk associated of prior use in violent crime (Braga et al. 2012). As such, new guns are hypothesized to have greater street value when viewed against comparable used guns. “New” is a dummy variable where 1=gun reported to be “new” or “new in box,” and 0=gun reported to be used.

- **Gun Size**: While respondents indicated that smaller guns (of sufficient caliber and capacity) were preferred to large guns for their ease of carrying and concealment, Wright and Rossi (1994) reported that large size guns were preferred among their sample of incarcerated felons for their shock and intimidation value. Here a dummy variable is constructed where large guns (=1) are defined as being longer than 8 inches in total length, while small guns (=0) are guns less than 8 inches long.\(^{36}\)

Several visual diagnostic analyses (including plots represented in Figure 4) suggested that, while blue book value clearly appeared to be associated with final street price, this relationship might not be perfectly linear. Specifically, these visual tests appeared to show a strong relationship between blue book value and street price at blue book values under $350-$400, with a much more ambiguous relationship above those blue book values. Figure 5 presents

\(^{36}\) Hand guns in the sample ranged from 4 to 17 inches in total length. Handguns of 8 inches and higher represent approximately the top third of the length distribution. Many alternative “cut points” were used to examine the influence of gun size on price (including alternative specifications testing the influence of small guns), but none influenced the general pattern of the findings described in this section.
box plots that illustrate the attenuation of this relationship at higher blue book values. To account
for this potential non-linearity, two models were specified. First, a “base” OLS regression of
street price on the featured covariates, and second, a linear spline regression interpreting the
same relationship by means of a specification tailored to account for the observed nonlinearity.\(^{37}\)

**Figure 5. Box Plot: Street Price by Fair Market Value (N=54)**

Table VII presents the results from both OLS (Model 1) and spline (Model 2) regressions
of street price on selected gun characteristics. In Model 1, street price is regressed on blue book
price, gun type (pistol/revolver), gun caliber, new status, and gun size. As suggested by the
simple bivariate plots, retail prices are important determinants of street prices. Controlling for the
other covariates, a one-dollar increase in blue book value is associated with a $0.46 increase in

\(^{37}\) In addition to improvement in measures of goodness of fit, linear spline regression was chosen over alternative
quadratic specifications because spline regressions (unlike quadratic) do not have the flaw of imposing a form (see
Friedman 1991) that requires the relationship between blue book value and street price to eventually turn negative at
higher values. Such a specification seems quite unrealistic for the phenomenon under study.
street price ($p<.01$). Pistols generally cost $237.60 more on the street relative to revolvers ($p<.01$) and high caliber guns commanded $160.70 more than medium- and lower-caliber guns ($p<.01$), holding the other variables constant. While the coefficients for both covariates were positive, neither new guns nor large guns were significantly different in price from older and smaller guns, respectively.

Table VII. OLS and Spline Regressions of Gun Street Price on Selected Characteristics (N=54)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>(1) OLS</th>
<th>(2) Spline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blue Book Value</td>
<td>0.460***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.140)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Book &lt; Median</td>
<td>1.013***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.262)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Book &gt; Median</td>
<td>0.103</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.198)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pistol</td>
<td>237.6***</td>
<td>230.4***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(75.97)</td>
<td>(72.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Caliber</td>
<td>160.7***</td>
<td>142.3**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(59.61)</td>
<td>(57.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New</td>
<td>59.38</td>
<td>43.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(59.82)</td>
<td>(57.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Size Gun</td>
<td>6.413</td>
<td>-1.526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(61.78)</td>
<td>(58.90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>198.5**</td>
<td>93.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(92.26)</td>
<td>(97.78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.416</td>
<td>0.481</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$

Model 2 builds on Model 1 by imposing a spline representation of the relationship between street price and blue book value. In particular, a “knot” was specified in this relationship at $356$ (the median blue book value) such that two coefficients could be predicted: one
predicting the relationship between street price and blue book value at values below this $356 median blue book price, and an additional coefficient predicting this relationship at values above the median blue book value.\textsuperscript{38} Indeed, the spline regression coefficients suggest that significantly different returns to blue book value occur above and below this knot value. The positive and significant coefficient on “Blue Book < Median” (1.013, \( p < .01 \)) indicates that, on average and holding constant all other gun factors, a one dollar increase in blue book value will be associated with a $1.01 increase in street price. This slope is more than double that identified by the simple linear conception of blue book value specified in Model 1. Importantly, the mildly positive but statistically insignificant coefficient for “Blue Book > Median” suggests that there is no clear relationship between blue book value and street price at higher blue book values after controlling for other relevant gun factors.\textsuperscript{39} It is also important to note that the spline regression specification does little to alter the substantive relationships between other gun feature variables and street price in terms of their magnitude, direction, and statistical significance.

Given the relatively small size of the sample (54 handguns), caution should be exercised when making inferences from these regression results. Further, fieldwork for this project supported a view that gun transactions are influenced by non-market factors—such as “need” or the relationship between buyer and seller—that could not be accounted for in our quantitative diagnostic exercises. Yet in spite of these limitations, the findings presented here—both null and significant—are important for understanding the relationship between the value of handguns on the street and in the formal legal market. First, the analyses revealed a robust increase in street

\textsuperscript{38} The location of the “knot” in the spline at $356 was selected after exploring various box, residual, and scatter diagnostic plots. Various alternative specifications for this “knot” were explored, suggesting that a range of blue book values between $300-$400 could suitably be selected for identifying a spline specification. For the purposes of this study, establishing a precise estimate of this knot is less important than providing general evidence that returns to blue book value attenuate at higher values.

\textsuperscript{39} For this spline regression, two separate F-tests were conducted to test the null hypothesis that the slopes of these under- and over-median variables were equal. In both tests the null was rejected (\( p = .0119 \) and \( p = .0183 \)).
prices for large caliber, semiautomatic pistols. Gang members and drug hustlers demand these kinds of handguns and seem willing to pay elevated prices to obtain them. Second, a strong relationship exists between a gun’s value in the legal market and its corresponding value on the street, but only up to a point. This relationship attenuates at approximately $356 blue book value, suggesting that the transactions observed do not appear to be distinguishing between medium and high value guns. High-risk gun possessors seem willing to pay a premium for quality but may be generally reluctant to pay exorbitant prices for high-end handguns beyond the existing street markups when a “good quality” gun will function well enough. Certainly, this is an area worthy of further research.

Given academic and policy attention given to the illegal diversion of new guns from retail sources as a key pathway for illegal gun acquisition, it was surprising to observe no significant differences in the street prices paid for new and older handguns acquired by Boston gang members and drug hustlers. While qualitative interviews do not directly test this hypothesis, it may be that changes in gun enforcement policy and practice over time may have made newer guns less appealing to gun traffickers and criminal consumers. As in many cities, ATF and BPD investigators prioritize their enforcement actions on uncovering the sources of new guns in Boston (Braga and Pierce 2005). Newer recovered crime guns are easier to investigate, as the people associated with recent retail transactions are easier to locate and hold accountable for any illegal behaviors. Knowledgeable gun possessors may understand that newer guns come with increased risks as law enforcement agents are better positioned to identify proximate sources that could identify them as the ultimate recipients of the diverted gun. Further, as will be described in the next section, interviews with gun traffickers suggest that they attempt to avoid detection by purchasing firearms from secondary market sources in states that do not require any formal
transaction paperwork.

**Sources of Guns into High-Risk Networks**

While the existing stock of guns in the networks was discussed openly, it was agreed at the outset that respondents would not be pressed to provide details on the specific people associated with entry transactions. This arrangement was necessary to prevent any perception that respondents were in some way informing on those in their social networks who were illegally acquiring guns. For Networks A and B, respondents shared their knowledge of the practices associated with guns entering their networks, but generally avoided providing specific details on the source for any particular gun transaction. A respondent from Network B explained that this was because there were limited active supply lines for guns, and through describing the gun’s source pathway they would essentially be revealing the identity and practices of one of their own. This process worked slightly differently for the respondents associated with Network C. Because Network C respondents were centrally involved in the sourcing of guns for their social networks, they were not sharing anyone else’s business but their own and, as such, were willing to provide details on the sources of guns in their network.

Respondents reported that nearly all of the handguns observed in Networks A, B, and C were sourced via illegal diversions from secondary market transactions in loose gun control states. A respondent from Network A summarized the prevailing understanding of the geographic sources of guns that flow into gang networks in the city: “They are coming from up North and down South.” He clarified that by “up North” he meant Maine and New Hampshire, and by “down South” he meant Georgia, Virginia, South Carolina, Florida—“basically the whole South—the Southern United States.” Respondents from Network B made similar claims that guns were coming in roughly equal numbers from Southern states and Maine and New
Hampshire, although it was perceived that guns coming from northern states were a newer phenomenon. Respondent conceptions of the geographic sources of guns for their networks complement the trace data analysis revealing that traced guns recovered from Boston gang members are significantly more likely to be first purchased in I-95 Southern states and in New Hampshire and Maine.

Respondents from Networks A and B suggested that they were largely supplied by a mix of point and diffuse sources of illegal firearms\(^\text{40}\) that could vary over time. Handgun entries into Networks A and B were generally described as cash and trade transactions involving friends, family members, street connections, and known illegal gun sellers. Respondents did not identify theft as a central source of handguns for their networks. Indeed, only seven (9.1\%) entered the observed stock of 77 handguns via theft. Members of gang Networks A and B stole three handguns directly from other neighboring gangs and drug dealers who hadn’t sufficiently secured their weapons, while the other four handguns were noted as stolen from “civilians,” presumed to be legal gun owners. In the case of these civilian thefts, handguns were not stolen by individuals from within the networks, but were brought to the networks by intermediaries seeking an outlet to sell stolen guns.\(^\text{41}\) The remaining 70 handguns (90.9\%) that were not reported as stolen were believed to have been diverted from legal firearms commerce at some

\(^{40}\) Individuals who are proscribed from buying guns legally (by virtue of their criminal record, youth or other prohibition) have been noted as acquiring guns from “point sources” such as gun traffickers and scofflaw dealers, and from “diffuse sources” that include a variety of informal transfers from the vast stock of guns in private hands (Cook and Braga 2001; Braga et al. 2002).

\(^{41}\) Such cases were notable for the apparent unfamiliarity these intermediaries had in appropriately pricing guns. One thief brought guns he had come across while breaking into cars in a mall parking lot to members of Network C precisely because he didn’t know how to price the guns or find a buyer. Wanting to keep a good relationship with their friend, they assisted him in selling the gun to a secure connection at a fair price. Conversely, members of Network B were thrilled to take advantage of a thief who had come across two new guns. Because he didn’t know their value (or perhaps because the selling price was all profit to him), they were able to purchase new guns at below retail price—a rare feat.
point in time before the immediate transaction that led to entry into the three networks.\footnote{It should be noted that these numbers do not align with the prior figures given regarding entry transactions into the network. Those figures described entry transactions, while these figures describe known sources. For example, a gun could enter the network by means of cash transaction while having been known to be previously stolen by the seller.}

In contrast to Networks A and B, individuals from Network C were centrally involved in the trafficking of guns, and were themselves the principal sources of guns to the longstanding group of friends that made up their network. As will be discussed further below, because they sourced their own guns, these respondents were able to document the state of origin for every gun within their network. With the exception of two guns (one sourced from New Hampshire and one sourced from Mississippi), all of the remaining 17 guns in the network were reported to be sourced from a single southern state—Virginia.

All three networks referred to cases over the past few years (confirmed via media reports)\footnote{Media reports are not referenced because these stories could identify the networks studied.} where individuals associated with their networks had been arrested for their roles in bringing illegal guns to market in Boston. These cases shared the general patterns described above: undocumented secondary sales to prohibited purchasers (or in some cases straw purchasers who would immediately transfer guns to prohibited persons) in loose gun control states, followed by transport back to Boston where guns could be sold for approximately three times their purchase price. For instance, in an example known as a cautionary tale across all three networks and beyond, an individual associated with a Boston gang smuggled crack cocaine from Boston to drug sellers in southern Maine. While in Maine, he purchased secondhand firearms from private sellers via want advertisements and had arranged for several local residents to straw purchase handguns from pawnshops for him. He was eventually apprehended and convicted of being an unlicensed dealer who illegally diverted more than 70 handguns to criminals in Boston.

Respondents from the gang networks described in varying levels of detail “trips” they
had taken to acquire guns with their friends from their network. Such trips were frequently not specialized gun trafficking ventures. This was especially the case for those who had family in states with weaker gun laws. For example, when a gang conflict intensified over the summer, a young man from Network A heeded his family’s requests to get out of the city for a while until things calmed down. After staying several weeks with family in Florida, he returned with a 9mm pistol he procured with the help of his cousin. Similarly, one respondent from Network C went on a family vacation to Mississippi and ended up purchasing a .380 from his cousin. Getting a gun was far from the purpose of his trip. “It was just a family visit. I saw the opportunity to get something and I took it.” This opportunity was too good to pass up even though he already had four guns back at home in Boston. “I paid $300. It probably would’ve been cheaper—but [my cousin] didn’t want to come up off it—but I had to offer him an amount that would make a difference as far as Christmas money.” These examples underscore a universally understood piece of knowledge among those in the high-risk networks under study: you need not wait for guns to become locally available; if you have family or friends in the right places, you can always go get one yourself.

Two Cases of Gun Trafficking Operations

Two individuals with extensive experience trafficking guns from “down South” to Boston were interviewed during the course of field research. Surprisingly, one of these traffickers was a respondent from Network C, who over the course of meetings gradually revealed his involvement (and that of his network) in gun trafficking. The second individual was a friend of a Network B respondent, who agreed to be interviewed after the respondent assured his friend of the researcher’s intentions. These two trafficking cases are detailed in turn below.

A few individuals in the group of friends that made up Network C began trafficking guns
in the early 2000s, seizing an opportunity that began when one of the group members enrolled in college in Virginia. Their method for acquiring guns was simple. They would purchase a paper copy of a local “want-ad” publication called the “Trading Post”\textsuperscript{44} and scour the “guns for sale” listings until they found a gun that interested them. Typically the student (who did not have a criminal record) would then call the seller, arrange the meet, and legally purchase the gun.\textsuperscript{45} One afternoon, in the wake of explaining that a Taurus revolver in the network originally came from Virginia, the Network C respondent offhandedly noted, “85% of the guns we ever got came from Virginia—the Trading Post [laughing]! I think you need to make a point to talk about this in your study: How many people use guns—sell guns—to help them get through college? And [they] don’t think they’re doing anything wrong as long as they ain’t shooting nobody! I bet you find a correlation between northern kids going down south for college and trafficking guns.”

Guns were generally driven back to Boston directly by the friends associated with Network C, although the respondent did note that he once took a duffle bag filled with four guns back to Boston via Amtrak. Sometimes the college student would drive them back himself during college recesses and sell them to friends, but often members of Network C would plan social trips to visit the college student around regular college events (i.e. spring break) and then pick up a gun or two from the Trading Post before heading home. Less frequently, the friends from Network C would hire a third party to drive guns purchased by the college student via the Trading Post back to Boston. On such trips, they would contract a driver from a high-end moving company specializing in art and antique automobiles that they met through their work in the drug trade; this driver had been a reliable mode of transporting high-grade marijuana up the east coast.

\textsuperscript{44} See http://tidewatertradingpost.com/ and http://midvatradingpost.com/.
\textsuperscript{45} Virginia recommends, but does not require that sellers record relevant details of a private gun sale such as date of transfer, name and address of the buyer, and the make, model, and serial number of the gun being sold. The experiences of respondents in Network C suggest that the sellers they encountered had little interest in following this “recommendation.”
from a source in Florida. The friends would find out when this driver was passing by Virginia and augment his existing shipment with recently purchased guns. The general pattern of gun acquisition presented by Network C, however, was one where individuals from the network would directly source their own guns by means of private secondary sales, transport these guns north by driving them on their own, and finally selling (or keeping) the moved guns within their immediate social network as their needs dictated.

Network B respondents described a different pathway of gun trafficking. Respondents from this network described a “civilian-type” they knew that was interested in talking about how he trafficked guns from the south to Boston as long as protections were taken to conceal his identity.46 In contrast to the ad hoc model of trafficking presented in Network C, this individual followed a highly routinized method for trafficking guns from the south to Boston. An African-American man in his 40s, this respondent noted that he was a college graduate that owned his own home and car. Apart from his involvement in trafficking he reported having no other involvement in criminal activity, and no criminal record. He spoke thoughtfully and seriously about his activities.

He had been involved with what he called “bringing back” guns for four years and estimated that he had imported approximately 80 guns back to Boston over that period. He takes ten trips per year, returning with precisely two guns on each trip. He reported that he never brought back more than two guns on any trip. The guns he reported smuggling to Boston were a mix of new and high-quality used guns (“they’re used but in excellent condition—like maybe they’ve been test fired or something”). The last five trips yielded six new guns and four used

46 Respondents arranged the meeting with this trafficker at the home of their mutual friend. It was agreed that I would not learn the name (even the first name) of the individual interviewed. I received permission to record the interview on the condition that the recording was transcribed within 24 hours (and immediately deleted) and all sensitive and identifying information was scrubbed from the transcription.
guns, although he notes that a couple of the used guns came in their factory boxes. The net income from each of these trips ranges from $800-$1,200. Considering how frequently he takes these trips, this income has become an important part of his financial goals, with the proceeds earmarked for paying off his mortgage and buying additional rental property in and around Boston. In spite of the financial boost his activities offer, he views his involvement in trafficking as temporary. “Nothing lasts forever,” he says. “Stick to the plan, and don’t get greedy. When you get greedy, you lose.” He reasons that his law-abiding profile, small-scale operation, and discrete and risk-averse approach will help him avoid detection until he gets out of the business.

His trips down south follow exactly the same formula. The respondent works for a company that does business up and down the east coast, so all his trips begin as regular work trips. He usually flies down south and drives back—all paid for by his company. Explaining this seemingly odd arrangement, he tells his co-workers that he prefers to drive and doesn’t like flying, but medical problems prevent him from enduring a two-legged trip in the car. Sometimes they accompany him on the north-bound voyage in his rental car, unaware of the two guns he has stashed in the trunk. As part of the planning process for his trip he checks the NRA website for the gun show calendar in a particular southern state. He has made a longstanding contact that he calls “his friend,” who is a gun dealer\(^47\) in this southern state, and he can always count on him to

\(^47\) The interviewee did not know for sure if his gun show dealer was a Federal Firearms Licensee (FFL). This status is important because an FFL would be required to: a) officially record the details of the purchase, including identifying purchaser information via ATF Form 4473 as well as conduct an FBI background check via National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) as part of this process; and b) additionally submit ATF form 3310.4, mandatory when an FFL sells two or more guns at one time or within a period of five days. FFLs are required to complete these steps even at gun shows. Private sellers “not engaged in the business” of selling guns would not be required to conduct the NICS background check and record paperwork of their transactions. Two clues suggest that the contact was likely to be a FFL. First, the respondent reported purchasing many new, unused guns from the seller. In general, the sale of new guns is the domain of FFLs and not “private party” sellers. Second, the seller remained a regular presence selling recent vintage guns (not collectibles and memorabilia) at shows within the state over a period of years; following federal law, such a person would be compelled to obtain a federal license for continued and consistent sales of guns. According to ATF investigations into gun trafficking, corrupt FFLs are rare, but are the largest source of trafficked guns due to their large-scale access to guns and their ability to circumvent regulations (ATF 2000).
be present at gun shows in the region.

Every gun he purchased has been from this one dealer. They met four years ago at a gun show, an opportunity that he sought out prior to committing to trafficking guns because “everything is off the books” at these shows. The respondent “felt out” the dealer for a bit, visiting his display at the gun show several times for conversation, and things moved forward when he told him that he “might be interested in selling the guns when he got home.” He was pleased with how the dealer responded. “You gotta go slow with them. Some people might hear that [you want to resell guns] and be like, ‘What do you mean you’re gonna sell them at home?’”

After establishing intentions, the dealer began by suggesting options for “what will sell”—all handguns, mostly higher-powered semiautomatics—a practice that the pair has continued to use throughout their working relationship. The respondent, for all his involvement with guns, prefers to let the dealer select guns for him. In fact, he projects an image of wanting to have as little to do with the guns as possible. “I don’t get personal with it,” he says, noting that he has established a routine with his dealer where the dealer “packs up” the guns in boxes for him so that he never even has to touch them. Guns that don’t have a factory box are secured in a standard cardboard gun box, and the dealer provides a larger box to hold the individually boxed guns. For our respondent, not “getting personal with it” also means that he has surprisingly little familiarity with gun makes and models; he describes wanting to know as little as possible about the details of the process—just enough to facilitate sales. This recipe has worked for four years and has come to be seen by our respondent as part and parcel of his successful plan. After the guns are purchased, he packs them inconspicuously in the trunk of his rental car. The discrete container box provided by the dealer is buried underneath clothes, blankets and luggage for the duration of the trip back to Boston. When asked if he thinks that the dealer knows what is
happening with the guns, he replies, “He knows, but he doesn’t know.” He gives a long pause, before softening his voice and correcting himself. “He knows. He knows.”

Back in Boston, the respondent once again follows a strict routine in reselling the guns. He deals only with a single contact, someone who he calls his “broker,” about who he wants to discuss as little as possible, and about whose activities he claims to stay willfully ignorant. It was a chance encounter with this broker four years ago that gave him the idea of getting into the business in the first place. Acquaintances from growing up together in Boston, he bumped into the broker in a bar and in the course of conversation mentioned that he was considering getting his license to carry in Massachusetts.48 The broker “dropped lots of hints” that there was “a lot of money” in reselling guns on the street. While the respondent did not specify precisely how the relationship progressed, soon thereafter he began bringing guns to Boston to be sold to the broker. Even though the respondent had previously mentioned the broker illegally selling guns, when asked his thoughts regarding where he thinks the guns might eventually end up, he grows uncomfortable and conjures up improbable scenarios: “Who knows? Maybe he’s got a license. Maybe he’s a gun collector with a million guns in his house. That’s his business.”49

**CONCLUSION**

The research presented in this article offers some much-needed insights on the specific illicit pathways through which high-risk individuals acquire firearms. However, the inquiry does have important limitations. As in other research studies, analyses of ATF firearms trace data are limited by an inability to trace all recovered firearms to their first retail sale and, for those traced guns, a lack of direct information about intermediary transactions that may have occurred

48 He never obtained his Massachusetts License to Carry, in spite of his eligibility.
49 Respondents from Network B affirmed that this broker had a connection to Network B but were otherwise not interested in discussing his business.
between the first retail sale and recovery by law enforcement. This limitation is partly addressed by qualitative interviews with illegal gun market participants. Nevertheless, it is important to note here that the sample of gang members and drug hustlers and the illegal gun acquisition pathways they described may not be representative of the broader population of high-risk individuals and their gun acquisition modalities in Boston or elsewhere.

This research revealed that very specific supply lines made handguns available to three high-risk networks of gang members and drug hustlers in Boston. Relative to traced handguns recovered from individuals who were not gang-involved, traced handguns recovered from Boston gang members were more likely to be older handguns that were first sold by licensed dealers in New England states and I-95 southern states with weaker gun control laws. The increased age of traced handguns recovered from Boston gang members suggest that these firearms have gone through a series of transactions before being acquired by the current owner (Cook, Harris et al. 2015). Interviews suggest gun traffickers directly and indirectly, supply these high-risk individuals with secondhand guns purchased from licensed and unlicensed sellers in states with lax gun controls. In contrast to assertions made by a handful of researchers (e.g. Kleck and Wang 2009; Wright and Rossi 1994) and gun rights advocacy groups, very few guns in the networks were reported to be acquired through theft.

Relative to legal market prices for similar handguns, gang members and drug sellers reported paying inflated prices for their illegally-acquired handguns (mean price = $636, median price = $638, representing a near 200 percent mark-up over market value). While participants in these high-risk networks claimed stable access to handguns, these high prices suggest that friction exists in these underground markets (Cook et al. 2007). Most centrally, Boston is not a gun-rich environment. Strict in-state gun laws and low levels of legal ownership in
Massachusetts limit the general availability of firearms in Boston. Moreover, the BPD and its criminal justice partners focus their gun enforcement efforts on Boston gangs (Braga, Hureau, and Papachristos 2014) and on investigating the sources of new handguns recently diverted from retail sources (Braga and Pierce 2005).

The high prices paid for, and the older age of handguns recovered from, gang members suggest that policing efforts exert considerable pressure on the workings of Boston’s underground gun markets. This enforcement pressure seems to have diminished the attractiveness of new guns to criminal consumers and gun suppliers alike. Despite noted advantages, such as not being linked to prior use in violent crime (Kennedy, Piehl, and Braga 1996), gang members and drug sellers in our study did not pay higher street prices for new handguns relative to older handguns. Illegal gun sellers seek to avoid detection by exploiting unregulated secondary market transfers that are less vulnerable to law enforcement investigations. Interviews describe a variety of techniques, such as “off the books” sales by a seemingly corrupt FFL in a gun show setting and the purchase of secondhand handguns through advertisements by private sellers, that undermine law enforcement’s ability to identify gun traffickers through conventional analyses of ATF trace data (limited to records of first retail sales). In this sense, this research suggests that current enforcement and regulation policies aimed at primary market sources are not futile, as illegal gun sellers appear to be substituting secondary market sources to supply guns to prohibited persons.

The leakage of guns to prohibited possessors and crime through secondary market sources could be addressed through the passage of federal legislation mandating universal background checks and gun transfer recordkeeping requirements (Bloomberg 2013; Cook et al. 1995). The Obama Administration recently took a promising step in this direction by announcing
a series of executive actions that expand criminal background checks to include all transactions by prospective gun purchasers in secondary markets, require federal licensing of individuals engaged in the business of selling firearms in secondary markets, increase the number of ATF agents available to investigate gun trafficking crimes, and other actions designed to keep guns out of the wrong hands.\textsuperscript{50} It remains to be seen, however, whether any of these proposed actions will be implemented. The National Rifle Association has promised a vigorous legal challenge and has claimed that the need for such executive actions is not supported by evidence that these changes could save lives or meaningfully impact public safety.\textsuperscript{51}

The current enforcement regime in Boston, however, seems to be reducing the harms of gun violence by making it difficult to acquire illegal guns. Guns are scarce in Boston, as evidenced by the modest share of robberies committed with firearms (only 26.4\% of 1,544 robberies in 2015) and the relatively small number of yearly gun homicides (only 33 gun homicides in 2015). While time consuming and difficult given the lack of gun transfer records, focused investigations on the secondary market sources of guns to high-risk individuals are worth pursuing and expanding. The bulk of serious gun violence in Boston is generated by a relatively small number of highly-active people involved in gang and drug networks (Braga 2003; Braga, Hureau and Winship 2008). Higher levels of enforcement pressure on underground gun markets upstream of street users could further increase transaction costs, raise prices, and decrease availability of firearms to individuals in these networks. Such changes could, in turn, reduce gun violence, as gang members would need to further economize on gun possession and use. Given the staggering toll of urban gun violence, the time has come to develop, implement,


\textsuperscript{51} https://www.nraila.org/articles/20160108/obama-issues-executive-actions-on-guns\ (accessed February 6, 2016).
and test more powerful policy responses to illicit secondary market transactions that serve to arm those most likely to engage in, and fall victim to, violence.
Chapter Three

An Ethnographic Portrait of Concentrated Homicide in a Social Network
ABSTRACT

Social scientists have long documented the disproportionate concentration of homicide within black populations and neighborhoods, most recently showing how homicide accumulates most intensely within social networks. Drawing upon ethnographic fieldwork among a social network of young men exposed to high levels of homicide, this article presents a new way of looking at urban violence and its consequences, one that emphasizes how homicide is experienced within a web of social relationships. Above and beyond exposure to violence, the young men I studied repeatedly confronted the deaths of their friends and peers, leaving them to bear the burden of mourning. I find that the difficulties inherent in mourning within the context of disproportionate homicide exposure can lead to fundamental discontinuities in social life that deepen social marginality and inequality.
INTRODUCTION

What does homicide victimization do to a social network? What are the consequences of homicide clustering in the physical and social space of disadvantaged urban neighborhoods? How do those at highest risk of becoming the victim of a homicide live through the deaths of peers, friends, and loved ones? Social scientists have long documented the concentration of homicide at the population and ecological levels, generally concluding that black Americans’ disproportionate homicide exposure is largely the result of the interlocking forces of racial and class segregation. More recently, research has shown how homicide concentrates within disadvantaged minority neighborhoods and populations at the level of the social network. Homicides concentrate within social networks much more severely than within populations or places, and network position has been demonstrated to be the most important predictor of homicide exposure, above and beyond demographic, neighborhood, and individual-level measures of risk. To date, most research into the network concentration of violence has focused on the criminal justice or public health implications of distributions that describe a small number of people producing a disproportionate amount of murder. Implied, but unaccounted for in these descriptions, is the corollary concentration of death, traumatic loss, and mourning that have accrued in these small social networks situated in America’s black and brown disadvantaged neighborhoods. An understanding of how those most vulnerable to the threat of homicide victimization respond to the concentrated loss of peers and loved ones has yet to emerge.

To better understand how concentrated homicide victimization is experienced, I conducted an eight-year ethnographic study of a social network of young men disproportionately exposed to homicide in Boston, Massachusetts. Over this period I closely followed five to twelve
young men and their broader family and friendship networks as they carried on in the wake of the deaths of friends and peers. I find that the intense clustering of homicide victimization has structural and cultural significance within and beyond the small social networks in which it occurs. In structural terms, networks must be reconfigured after homicide occurs, friendship and family ties are often broken, and new material and social obligations are foisted upon disadvantaged young men struggling to cope with the loss of friends. Neighborhoods lose the services of businesses where homicides have occurred, friends and family lose jobs on account of grieving, and vulnerable families take on debt to provide a proper burial. In cultural terms, young men in these networks bear the burden of mourning friends, often without the support of others in their network, because discussing the dead runs the risk of spurring painful discussions that assign blame or prompt retaliatory action. At a time when most young men unconsciously consider themselves to be at the beginning of their lives, those living in network clusters of homicide are forced to reckon with the reality of their own mortality, a weight that produces fundamental discontinuities in their participation in everyday social life. The findings of this study hold several implications for our understanding of the impacts of urban violence and its role in promoting social inequality.

CONCENTRATED HOMICIDE, INEQUALITY, AND THE SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF DEATH

The disproportionate exposure of black Americans to homicide and serious violence is a core feature of American inequality. Social scientists have generally approached describing this inequality at three different levels: population, neighborhood, and social network.

Compared to other highly developed nations, the U.S. is not an exceptionally violent
country, but it does expose its citizens to an exceptional risk of homicide. Viewed against comparable high-income Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, the U.S. has a homicide rate roughly seven times the OECD average in 2003, driven by its gun homicide rate, which has approached 20 times the high-income OECD average in recent years (Richardson and Hemenway 2011). And while the “great crime decline” of the 1990s resulted in a nearly 50% reduction in the gun homicide rate since its peak in the early 1990s, trends in gun homicide have remained fairly stable since 2000. Over the last decade, more than 11,000 Americans have died in firearm homicides each year, with roughly four times that number each year seeking emergency room treatment for a gun assault (Cohn et al. 2013).

American homicide risk is not distributed equitably, and American blacks are exposed to the greatest risk. In 2010, blacks comprised 55% of all American homicide victims despite making up 13% of the U.S. population. While guns are used in more than two thirds of American homicides, between 1999 and 2009, 81% of homicides among men 15-34 (N=85,643) involved the use of guns; among black men this figure rises to 91% (Heinekens, Drowos, and Levine 2013). Although nationwide crime declines appear to have reduced the black-white disparity in exposure to overall violent crime (Friedson and Sharkey, 2015), black Americans still experience approximately eleven times the gun homicide rate as their white counterparts (author’s calculation, CDC-WISQARS tables 2010). Among particular demographic groups, the picture is even more bleak. For young men aged 15-34, the rate of gun homicide for blacks is roughly 35

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52 Such analyses are of course sensitive to the thresholds applied to “high-income” countries. Up for debate is the question of which countries should be considered appropriate reference groups for the United States. Recent analyses have also employed United Nations Human Development Indicators rankings (rather than OECD) as a threshold, finding the U.S. an outlier among “advanced” nations. Comparable rates of homicide can be found among lesser developed nations such as Lithuania, Estonia, and Argentina.

53 I recommend reading Jooyoung Lee’s “Wounded: Life After the Shooting” (2012) for more insight on the specific challenges facing those who have experienced nonfatal shootings.

54 For all homicides (not just gun) the current black-white disparity in homicide at the population level is approximately 8:1.
times that of whites (author’s calculation, CDC-WISQARS tables 2010). Such stark inequality in exposure to homicide affects not only the life chances of black Americans in an abstract sociological sense, but meaningfully alters the expectation of the longevity of life at the population level. While the black-white disparity in life expectancy has shrunk to its lowest level ever recorded, homicide still explains more than 18% (more than one full year) of the life expectancy gap between white and black men (Harper, Rushani, and Kaufman, 2012).55 Over the last three decades homicide has accounted for between 15.6% and 18.8% of the overall disparity in life expectancy between black and white men (Harper et al., 2007; Harper, Rushani, and Kaufman, 2012).56 Virtually any way they are analyzed, these data demonstrate that the risk of violent death among blacks and whites, at the population level, is practically incommensurable.

These population-level disparities are situated within the unequal ecological conditions facing blacks and whites in the United States. Hundreds of macrosocial studies exploring the geographic concentrations of violent crime since the 1960s at various ecological levels (i.e. counties, states, etc.) have shown a strong relationship between violent crime and the concentration of black—and to a lesser extent, non-white—residents (Pratt and Cullen 2005; Peterson and Krivo 2010). In fact, above and beyond poverty and disadvantage, the presence of black residents in an ecological unit has been one of the strongest macro-level predictors of violent crime within this voluminous body of research. A multitude of studies further demonstrate that this relationship holds within cities at the neighborhood level, however defined. Homicide and violent crime is significantly greater among neighborhoods with high

55 The current black-white life expectancy disparity is 5.44 years among men and 3.71 years among women. Homicide’s role in explaining this gap among women is much more modest than for men, representing between 3.4% and 5.8% over the past three decades.
56 It is worth noting that in these analyses homicide’s contribution to explaining the homicide gap among black and white men was the same in 2008 as 1993 (18.8%). In 1993 this percentage equated to 1.59 years; in 2008, 1.03 years.
concentrations of blacks—as well as lower in areas featuring high concentrations of whites (Morenoff, Sampson, and Raudenbush, 2001; McNulty 2001). More recent studies have shown this pattern to hold across multiple cities, suggesting that severe inequality in rates of violent crime between majority white and majority black neighborhoods is the norm among American urban areas (Peterson and Krivo 2010; Hipp 2007).

The theoretic orientation of these contemporary macrosocial studies has drawn inspiration from Sampson and Wilson’s (1995) racial invariance thesis, which suggested that the disproportionate involvement of black Americans in violent crime was not the product of any factors intrinsic to race, but rather the result of the vastly different ecological circumstances of blacks and whites. While providing the impetus to examine concentrations of violence as varying with structural conditions—and not simply by race—much contemporary research produced in this paradigm has served to underscore the idea that the social ecologies of blacks and whites are so dissimilar as to be practically incomparable. In a nationally representative sample of American cities, Peterson and Krivo (2010) showed that there is little overlap between the distributions of violent crime across majority black and majority white neighborhoods; the least violent black neighborhoods observed had levels of violence equivalent to the 90th percentile of the most violent white neighborhoods. Sampson (2012), analyzing the concentrated disadvantage theorized to cause such concentrations of violence among Chicago neighborhoods, found that the entire distribution of per capita income for white neighborhoods was above the mean per capita income for black neighborhoods.\(^5^7\) This result led Sampson to conclude that efforts to estimate a causal effect of concentrated disadvantage for whites are “tantamount to estimating a phantom

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\(^5^7\) Peterson and Krivo (2010) using a composite measure of disadvantage instead of income, observed roughly the same pattern (although less extreme than the Chicago case) in their nationally representative sample of American cities.
reality,” and further, that the larger research project of estimating a single causal effect of disadvantage for all racial groups (as implied by the theory of racial invariance) was impossible. As neighborhood-level studies have gained greater appreciation for the extent of ecological dissimilarity between majority white and black neighborhoods—particularly the enduring and multigenerational nature of advantage and disadvantage—greater emphasis has been placed on explaining this dissimilarity in terms of a racialized hierarchy held in place by longstanding patterns in American social policy (see Sharkey 2013; Sampson 2012; Peterson and Krivo 2010; Omi and Winant 1994).

While social networks have been implied in many explanations of neighborhood exposure to violence (e.g. Patillo-McCoy 1999), the social network itself has recently become a key domain for understanding the concentration of homicide and gun violence. Supported by the development of formal analytic methods and the increased availability of network data, social network research has aimed to explain concentrated homicide in ways that provide analytic leverage over demographic “risk factor” and neighborhood level approaches. Specifically, social network studies have noted that demographic “risk factor” studies struggle to explain variation in homicide in racially homogeneous areas, and neighborhood level studies find it difficult to integrate the social fact that only a small number of neighborhood residents participate in violence—limitations that can be overcome through the analysis of social networks. These studies have made use of police arrest and observation data to show that large shares of gun violence (at both the neighborhood and city levels) cluster among small social networks, and further, that individual risk of shooting victimization is strongly correlated with gun violence exposure within one’s network (Papachristos, Hureau, and Braga 2012; Papachristos and Wildeman 2014; Papachristos, Wildeman, and Roberto 2015; Papachristos, Hureau, and Braga
While research has emphasized the importance of gangs and gang networks for their role in promoting group processes that “spread” violence through social networks (see Papachristos 2009), individuals not associated with gangs appear to face increased risk of shooting victimization by means of their social connection to gang members (Papachristos et al. 2015). Overall, social network research has generally shown that homicide and gun violence—within neighborhoods, cities, and even seemingly homogeneous populations—concentrates within small social networks and are further structured by the distribution of risk within these networks.

Given these accounts of concentration, particularly within social networks, one can understand why the phenomenon of gun homicide—in the fashion of one classic criminological statement (Wolfgang, Figlio, and Sellin 1972)—might be understood simply as a problem of a small number of people producing a disproportionate amount of death. Yet homicides don’t just affect those that are victims and participants, their consequences reverberate through neighborhoods, families, and friendship and institutional networks. How common is it to be personally affected by homicide? From 1988 through 1990, during the time that American gun violence was peaking, the General Social Survey asked its nationally representative sample of adults if they knew someone that had been the victim of a homicide in the last year. Among whites, 7.9% reported knowing a homicide victim, compared with 23.9% of blacks. What is more, while 2.1% of whites knew two or more homicide victims, more than 14% of blacks did (author’s calculation based on Smith et al. 1972-2014). More recent (2004) national probability samples of young adults aged 18-26 found that 9.6% of all young adults had ever experienced the homicide of a family member, friend, or loved one; within this total 5.9% of whites and 27.2% of blacks reported knowing a homicide victim (author’s calculation of tables in Zinzow et

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58 Among “other” races, 13.7% knew a homicide victim in the past year, although this estimate should be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size for non-black and non-white respondents. Further, it should be noted that these estimates were collected during a time when gun homicide was near its peak.
The 2006 *African American Men Survey* reported that 61% of black men had experienced the murder of a close friend or relative over their lifetime, compared with 29% of white men. On balance, this literature indicates that losing a friend to murder is a common lifecourse event for black Americans, perhaps more common than not for black men at the population level, and almost certainly more common than not for black men growing up or living in disadvantaged areas.

These survivors of homicide—those who have been left behind after the killing of a loved one—face a host of mental and behavioral health problems. A large number of psychology and public health studies have associated homicide survivorship with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, substance abuse, anxiety, grief distress, and a host of other difficulties (see Rynearson 2012; Smith 2015). Those studied have most often been women, parents and siblings of homicide victims—few have integrated friends/peers—and this research has been slow to consider the potential impacts of multiple exposures to homicide that could be born of neighborhood and network context. A notable exception is Smith (2015), who interviewed 40 young black men from disadvantaged neighborhoods in Baltimore, finding that exposure to homicide was a common lifecourse event, with the typical respondent exposed to three homicides—mostly of peers.

With a few important exceptions (Kearl 1989; Fulton and Bendiksen 1965 [1994]; Faunce and Fulton 1958), the sociological imagination has generally not extended into the

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59 This study, a follow-up survey, suffered from common problems of attrition that likely biased estimates of homicide exposure downward across groups, but particularly among disadvantaged young black men. In particular, only 43.6% of youth who completed Wave 1 of the survey participated in Wave 2, with significantly lower rates of response from non-whites, males, lower-SES individuals, and those who had been victims of a crime in Wave 1.

60 See [https://kaiserfamilyfoundation.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/7526.pdf](https://kaiserfamilyfoundation.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/7526.pdf) (cited January 30, 2015). These vast differences in lifetime exposure to homicide among black and white men exist within a context of relative parity regarding exposure to violent crime. Among black men 25% had reported being the victim of a violent crime at some point in their lives compared to 18% of whites. Among women, 54% of black women had lost a friend or family member to murder, compared with 18% of white women.
domain of death. Most sociological interest in the subject of death has focused on hospital settings, concerning questions of how medical professionals and institutions shape death outcomes and processes among the elderly and the chronically ill (see Glaser and Strauss 1965, 1968; Christakis 2001). Sudnow’s classic Passing On (1967) not only highlighted the fundamentally unequal medical care offered by public hospitals with respect to their private counterparts, but further argued that death and dying were not unambiguous physical facts but “social states” differentially defined and produced by actors within medical institutions. While Sudnow made some important—but preliminary and tentative—observations of death interactions outside the hospital among families, he ended his work with a call for the sociological study of bereavement and social processes that occur in the wake of death. In general, however, the field has overwhelmingly ceded this territory to anthropologists.

If sociological studies of death have typically been situated within the hospital, the locus for anthropological inquiry has most often been the mortuary ritual, particularly those that occur outside of the United States and in non-western societies (Metcalf and Huntington 1991). Drawing from the foundational work of Durkheim (2001 [1912]) and Malinowski (1948) among others, this research promoted the understanding of mourning rituals as essential mechanisms for reintegration in the wake of death, both for the collective—whose bonds become stronger through ritual interaction in spite of the subtraction of a member—as well as the individual—who after incurring loss requires stability and comprehensibility. Yet Geertz’s (1957) observations of a Javanese funeral showed how, under conditions of social transformation and tension, mourning rituals could be fundamentally disintegrative. Geertz (1957: 53) argued that functionalist analyses like those of his predecessors failed to appreciate that “man’s need to live

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61 Written not by an anthropologist—but a multidimensional investigative journalist—Mitford’s The American Way of Death (1963), in addition to advancing an argument against the exploitative and predatory practices of the American funeral industry, serves as a rare study of the distinctly American mortuary ritual.
in a world to which he can attribute some significance… often diverges from his concurrent need to maintain a functioning social organism.” Geertz thus drew a distinction between the “independent but interdependent” processes of integration that occur at the levels of culture and social structure. Making use of these insights, Rosaldo (1984 [1989]) warned of the blind spots caused by anthropology’s overemphasis in studying the funeral ritual as a means for understanding both mourning processes as well as social organization. Just as funeral rituals can provide healing cultural wisdom for attendees, they can also serve up platitudes that alienate. Furthermore, the funeral event does not necessarily “contain” fundamental insight into the structure of a society, or for that matter, even the core features of mourning and bereavement. Rosaldo thus forwarded an image of the funeral not as an encapsulation but as an intersection—a place where broader social and bereavement processes crowded together temporarily, but then necessarily continued upon separate trajectories that required following to understand.

“Apart from death rituals,” wrote Norbert Elias (1985: 28), “dying is at present a largely unformed situation, a blank area on the social map.” Elias’ claim rings particularly true for the case of homicide. The homicide concentration observed within neighborhoods and networks clearly implies a corollary concentration of death, mourning, and bereavement processes that have heretofore remained largely undocumented. As my findings suggest, what has most often been conceived of as a problem of criminal justice or public health—concentrated homicide—intersects with bereavement and post-death social processes in unrecognized ways that further exacerbate social inequality. This case renders visible how even those at the center of a city’s problem of ongoing gun violence are impacted by the accumulation of death in their everyday lives; in a network such as this, deaths do not merely consist of network alters or peers, but friends, siblings, and loved ones. Three substantive sections follow a description of my fieldwork
and a cursory overview of the social ecology of violence in Boston. The first addresses the spatial concentration of homicide from the perspective of those whose lives intersect with homicide events, showing how mourning can emerge through the routine navigation of space. The second analytically describes the concentration of homicide within a social network, drawing attention to the consequences of different streams of homicide exposure. The third illustrates the difficulties inherent in mourning and moving on from the death of a friend in a social network disproportionately exposed to homicide. The paper concludes with a discussion of the theoretical and practical importance of integrating the understanding of death and mourning in larger debates of urban violence and social inequality.

THE SOCIAL ECOLOGY OF VIOLENCE IN BOSTON & FIELDWORK WITH TMC

*Boston’s Social Ecology of Violence*

While it may seem incomprehensible to many of the residents of its disadvantaged neighborhoods, Boston is known for being a low violence city. Between 2004 and 2014, Boston experienced 678 homicides—74.9% of them perpetrated by gun. The city averaged 61.63 homicides per year over this period, for an average homicide rate of 9.98 per 100,000 residents, roughly twice the rate for the United States as a whole, but comparatively low among major cities. Indeed, when viewed against the homicide rates of similar sized cities such as Baltimore (35.60), Columbus (11.26), Detroit (50.70), Indianapolis (13.12), Memphis (19.48), Milwaukee (15.50), Portland (3.76), and San Francisco (9.38), Boston’s reputation as a relatively safe major city appears deserved. Yet these citywide rates mask considerable population heterogeneity in

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62 Author’s calculation drawing from: 1) a detailed homicide dataset furnished by the Boston Police Department; and, 2) 2010 U.S. Census data furnished through the City of Boston’s Data Portal, https://data.cityofboston.gov/ (accessed November 14, 2015).

63 Homicide rates for these comparison cities were calculated by the author using data extracts from the FBI’s UCR
risk of homicide. Non-Hispanic whites, making up 47% of Boston’s population, accounted for just 64 (9.44%) of the city’s homicide victims from 2004 through 2014. In contrast, non-Hispanic blacks, who make up 22.36% of the citywide population, accounted for 480 (70.8%) of all homicide victims.

Hidden beneath the veneer of Boston’s low overall homicide rate (9.98 per 100,000) lies an intense racial inequality. While the average white homicide rate from 2004 through 2014 was 1.75 per 100,000, the average black rate over the same period was 29.01 per 100,000, over 16 times the white rate. Among the demographic group most likely to experience homicide—men between the ages of 15 and 34—this racial inequality deepens. From 2004 through 2014, the average homicide rate for black men aged 15 through 34 was 151.16 per 100,000; the equivalent rate for white men was 3.19 per 100,000. As such, even within the American city most renowned for the violence of its white men in the public imagination, the rate of homicide for young black men stands at more than 47 times that of their white counterparts.64

It is axiomatic that Boston’s homicides—so concentrated among its black population—would be spatially concentrated as well within the city’s majority black disadvantaged neighborhoods. Of Boston’s 12 police districts, 67.4% of all homicides took place in just three

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64 In addition to the vast difference in scale between black and white homicide in Boston, there is also a difference of kind. Blacks in the city are generally murdered by guns, while whites are most often murdered by means of blunt trauma and stabbings. Among black homicide victims, 85% (408 of 480) died from gunshot wounds compared to 23.44% (15 of 64) of white victims, who were comparably more likely to die from blunt trauma and knife wounds. Among other demographic groups, “white Hispanic” victims were mostly likely to be killed by gun (64.04%), followed by knife wounds (23.6%). “Black Hispanic” victims—a term that BPD appears to use almost exclusively to code for Cape Verdean victims—were most often killed by guns (84.85%). This rate is almost exactly the same as non-Hispanic blacks, with whom Cape Verdians generally share neighborhoods. Notwithstanding the fact that many Cape Verdians do not consider themselves black or Hispanic (they generally speak Cape Verdean creole, English and Portuguese), such a coding scheme further suggests that an unknown portion of black Hispanic victims (such as the city’s sizable Dominican and Puerto Rican populations) were likely coded as “white Hispanic.”
districts that cover the city’s three majority-black neighborhoods of Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan. Previous research into violence in Boston has further underscored the intense spatial concentration of gun violence at particular places within these disadvantaged areas (Braga, Papachristos, and Hureau 2010), the concentration of gun violence within gang networks embedded in these areas (Papachristos, Hureau, and Braga 2012), and perhaps most importantly, the interaction between spatial and gang network processes in shaping gang violence (Papachristos, Hureau, and Braga 2013). The latter showed that shootings between gangs could be particularly well explained by institutionalized patterns of conflict between gangs as well as their geographic proximity to one another. Harding’s (2010) study of teenage boys demonstrated that Boston’s inner-city violence was structured largely by longstanding “beefs” between neighborhoods that ossified over time; the challenges inherent in navigating the social and physical fault lines of gang conflict constrained the social opportunities for even the vast majority of boys not involved with gangs.

As Harding’s research makes clear, while fewer than one percent of young people in Boston are estimated to be involved in gangs (Braga et al. 2001), those living in the city’s disadvantaged areas must come to grips with the subtle and overt symbols of neighborhood gangs in order to protect themselves. Perhaps the most potent symbol employed by these groups is the professional sports logo, most commonly deployed in the form of a hat, with each neighborhood group adopting a particular logo to represent themselves. There are few neutral hats in Boston’s disadvantaged neighborhoods aside from the traditional blue and red Red Sox hat, and while young people can and do make use of the hats and clothing of other teams, they risk sending the signal of gang affiliation to interested onlookers such as other gang members and police focused on disrupting gang activity.
Fieldwork, TMC, and the Thames Street Neighborhood

Data collection for this project is based on approximately eight years of participant observation and interviewing with a group of young men that called itself TMC, or The Magnificent Collaboration.\(^{65}\) TMC is a network of young men who identify with two geographically and socially proximate neighborhoods: Thames Street and the nearby Stone Park housing development. During my time in the field I closely followed a rotating cast of between five and twelve individuals. Most of my attention was dedicated to the men from Thames Street, but I also spent considerable time with individuals from Stone Park, and the broader friendship and familial networks of both groups. The young men I spent the most time with tended to be in their early- to late-twenties, although my research exposed me to individuals ranging from their mid-teens through their mid-forties who identified with TMC. Over time many of the young men I met spread out to places outside the neighborhood, and I followed them throughout the greater Boston area as they sought work, searched for decent places to live, met romantic partners, had children, and generally managed the ups and downs of life.

Prior to enrolling in the doctoral program in sociology at Harvard, I had done fieldwork with a group of Boston streetworkers\(^{66}\) for approximately two years while working as a Harvard researcher. In the summer of 2007, a former streetworker whom I had befriended, Sharon, started a summer program for youthful offenders run out of a community center, and she asked me to volunteer. That summer I met Kimani, age 15, one of the youngest of a crew of 15-20 young men who called themselves the Thames Street Bullets. Because the program was based in the Bullets’ neighborhood, Kimani’s participation in the program allowed Sharon and me to meet

\(^{65}\) The names of people, groups, neighborhoods, and streets are fictitious.

\(^{66}\) Streetworkers are detached gang outreach workers tasked with mediating gang conflicts and engaging young people involved with gangs. Streetworkers typically were involved with gangs or other street activity in their past and draw upon their street experience, reputations, and life histories in attempt to influence the behavior of the (mostly) young men that they serve away from street activity, particularly violence.
several of his friends, particularly Spades (age 16), Jazz (age 16), and Skyline (age 20), who would frequently come to the community center to wait for Kimani. In the summer of 2008, Sharon decided to shift the focus of the summer program directly toward engaging young men from the Thames Street neighborhood. She was especially interested in working with Kimani’s friends from the Bullets and another crew from a few blocks over known as the Stone Park Astros. Perhaps because of the longstanding friendship and familial connections between the two groups, movement between the two neighborhoods was relatively fluid—particularly in a context where rigid neighborhood boundaries circumscribed social opportunities right down to the block level. The uncommon and durable relationship between the two groups and their neighborhoods was recognized by name in the mid-2000s, when the moniker The Magnificent Collaboration (TMC) gained currency. In the summer of 2008 Sharon hired Kimani and several of his TMC friends (then between the ages of 16 and 24) to participate in a 20 hour per week program that blended elements of workforce development, cognitive behavioral therapy, and community organizing. My involvement with the program deepened that summer when I moved into an adjacent neighborhood and began spending more time at the community center and getting to know some of the TMC young men outside of program hours.

In 2008, I spent time almost exclusively with the younger generation of the Thames Street group, especially Spades and Jazz. I got to know them slowly, at first by sharing meals with them and giving them rides to places they needed to go after they finished work at Sharon’s program. My outreach to them was met with a mix of curiosity and suspicion. While bridges

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67 Sharon had raised money from local foundations to pay the young men a small stipend for their participation in the program.
68 The term “generation” is locally used to refer to a cohort of individuals who began hanging around with the group at approximately the same time. While not always correlated with age, in practice generations generally reflected bundles of individuals within a 3-4 year age bracket (i.e. those 18-21 would typically be considered a generation, those 22-25 would be considered another generation, etc.).
were built through conversations over families, relationships, music, and neighborhood dynamics, my whiteness and association with Harvard were often sources of nervous questioning. For Jazz—the most openly suspicious of me during this period—my knowledge of local street crews and their conflicts, gained through years of research on violent crime, was cause for concern and not a source of common ground. After all, from his perspective the only white men who had any knowledge of this sort were cops. In 2009 and 2010, Kimani and Jazz got locked up and Spades moved out of the state. Around the same time I became introduced to a much broader set of people associated with TMC as I began hanging out with an older cohort of TMC in their early- to mid-20s. This cohort was returning from prison and Sharon hired them to be part of her program. After 27-year old Breeze from the Astros co-signed on my presence around various TMC affiliates and at crew events such as birthdays, parties, memorials, and funerals, I began to regularly spend time with him, Skyline, Uncle (age 21), Tidbit (age 28), their new streetworker Theory (age 27), as well as their individual and overlapping social networks.\footnote{This should not be interpreted as belief that I achieved some sort of acceptance into the network. I did not, nor did I try. I did achieve the maintenance of longstanding relationships with several of TMC’s most central actors, managing these relationships imperfectly across not only the gulf of race, power, and privilege, but also against the everyday challenges of work schedules, new intimate relationships, periods of incarceration, the birth of children, changing phone numbers, and residential moves.}

I conducted observations around Thames Street dating back to 2007, but it wasn’t until 2010 that I was able to maintain a steady presence in the field. While keeping consistent contact in person and by phone with the young men from 2010 through 2014, I spent intensive time in the field from May through August 2011, and May 2012 through January 2014, averaging 20 to 60 hours of weekly observation. Although many observations took place around Thames Street, during winter months, times of conflict with rival crews, or periods of intense police activity, it was impractical and unfruitful to conduct observations at this site. And because most of the young men lived outside the neighborhood, I had to maintain flexibility in my fieldwork.
routines, following key actors wherever they went in the city and beyond, and tracking themes and stories that emerged in fieldwork that played out over weeks and months. As such, the data presented in this article should be viewed as ethnography of a network of individuals, and not necessarily of a field site, although the Thames Street neighborhood certainly left an indelible imprint on both the research and the network of individuals I studied.

By 2012, all of the young men from TMC with whom I was in regular contact understood that I was planning on writing a book about the group and were not shy about sharing this information with others. Almost all of what is conveyed here was observed directly or drawn from conversations and interactions I had in the field. Although much of my data was generated through participant-observation and recorded via field notes, I also conducted several different types of interviews to complement this ethnographic material. To provide additional context, I conducted life history interviews with 15 individuals who served as my primary research subjects at various points during my time in the field. I also conducted an additional 34 interviews specifically focused on experiences with death. Nineteen of these interviews were focused on TMC individuals, and 15 were conducted with their family members or romantic partners. All of these interviews were recorded with a digital recorder, and interview respondents were paid $50 for their participation. Finally, I regularly recorded field interactions with a handful of individuals who were comfortable with allowing me to use a digital recorder in private settings, typically when having conversations while driving or hanging out in the places where they stayed.

The geographic heart of TMC was located in the middle of Boston’s densest concentration of disadvantage, in the areas of Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan, which cradle

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70 Field notes were always written outside of the field on a personal computer, typically on the morning after a session in the field.
the eastern edges of the city’s historic Franklin Park. Almost all of the Bullets grew up on a few side streets that ran off of Thames Street, a small but important through-street that bisects the neighborhood. Thames Street is largely residential, with single- and multiple-family wood-framed homes lining its narrow shoulders. While some of these homes boast meticulously maintained stained glass and ornate wooden detail, others are plain triple-decker structures in the classic Boston style that sag with the burdens of time and disrepair. A few commercial blocks are scattered along Thames Street, with the most active of these blocks—known in the neighborhood simply as The Block—featuring a Dominican bodega-style grocery store, a West Indian restaurant, a barbershop, a laundromat, and a liquor store. The Block served as a meet-up point for the Bullets not only because of its central location, but also because it was one of the few places where those who had moved out of the neighborhood could return to cross paths with old friends and acquaintances. According to data from the 2010 U.S. Census, the blocks that immediately surrounded Thames Street had a population of approximately 3400 people; 73.4% were designated as non-Hispanic black, 20.1% were designated as Hispanic/Latino, and 1.5% were designated as non-Hispanic white. Nearly all of the young men I met who identified with the Bullets were non-Hispanic black, and reflecting the Thames Street neighborhood, many had Jamaican or other West Indian roots.

That Thames Street was located in the heart of Boston’s black ghetto seemed natural to the young men that grew up there. But aunts and uncles recalled stories of being the first—or among the first—black families on their streets in the late 1960s. At that time, Thames Street remained a predominantly Jewish neighborhood, albeit one in transition as Jewish institutions and wealthier residents had begun moving to the suburbs (Levine and Harmon 1992; Gamm
Upwardly mobile black Bostonians, like Tidbit’s grandparents, came to Thames Street seeking a home in a safe and integrated neighborhood, but found these hopes dashed only a few years after buying their home. Jewish departure from the area hastened as discriminatory mortgage lending practices (in large part underwritten by the Federal Housing Administration) that concentrated opportunities for home ownership for blacks in the city’s traditionally Jewish areas around Thames Street. A spike in home sales to blacks in the area in the late 1960s did not offer blacks the traditional benefits associated with home ownership. Declines in neighborhood businesses, institutions, services, and white residents added insult to the injury of sharply declining home values. While Tidbit’s grandparents were able to hang on, most of their black neighbors who bought homes in the area lost them to foreclosure or abandoned them altogether within a few years of purchase. The neighborhood was not what they had hoped for, and with little equity in their homes it made increasing sense to walk away from an inflated mortgage. Tidbit’s grandparents, seeking to escape the segregated ghetto, found themselves on its newest frontier. And in this context they, and their neighbors, raised the parents, uncles, and aunts of the young men from Thames Street that I came to know.

Most of the Astros grew up a few minutes from Thames Street in the Stone Park housing development, but in recent years very few of them maintained official residence in the neighborhood. Due to a major renovation a few years earlier and subsequent regime change in the management of Stone Park, most of the Astros were issued trespass orders from the development and specifically targeted by the property manager, housing security officers, and district police in an attempt to rid the development of problem people and tenants. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, just over 1,000 people lived in Stone Park and its immediate adjacent

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71 This paragraph is indebted to the research of Gamm (2001) and Levine and Harmon (1992), which provided essential context for the reports of numerous elders from Thames Street, including two of Tidbit’s aunts and Benny’s mother.
blocks: 42.7% non-Hispanic black, 50.6% Hispanic/Latino, and 1.5% non-Hispanic white. While the Stone Park name lived on through the network of individuals that hung out with the Astros and TMC, over time Stone Park itself grew to be an unviable location for the Astros to hang due to the constant threat of arrest. As such, when the Astros hung in the neighborhood, they would frequently locate themselves at the margins of Stone Park on nearby residential side streets, or often down on Thames Street and its side streets with the Bullets. Like the Bullets, the Astros were a mostly non-Hispanic black crew, although they had several Dominicans and Puerto Ricans integrated within the group.

Aside from Sharon’s program—which shuttered in 2011—and city-subsidized summer jobs in their teenage years, few within the TMC network had experience with employment, let alone a steady job. Skyline scraped by selling high-grade marijuana, with many of his customers being his friends from TMC and around Thames Street. But his supply wasn’t always steady, and people always owed him money. He held five temporary jobs during my time in the field, ranging from manufacturing sinks to emptying houses that had been condemned by the state because their occupants were hoarders. But none of them stuck. One day he’d call in sick and then never show up again. Uncle too sold weed when he could, and like many of the TMC boys, dabbled in small-scale crack dealing. He worked with his cousin unloading wholesale fruit from trucks “with a bunch of immigrants” for a few weeks one summer before he tired of it, installed insulation for a few days before his supervisor disrespected him and he walked off the job, and worked in a hardware store for a couple of months until he was fired for fighting a coworker in the bathroom. Weeks spent carefully preparing an application to join the local Ironworkers union came to nothing when he “had to take care of some gangster business” on the day the application was due. Tidbit was 28 when he received the first official paycheck of his life from Sharon.
Although he sometimes sold weed and talked a lot about pimping, he mostly lived off of his disability check, which began coming after his third shooting, and the support of his children’s mothers. In his capacity as a streetworker, Theory took advantage of organizational and personal connections to get jobs for at least six of the TMC regulars, but only Bruce from Thames Street lasted more than a couple of weeks. He lost his job at a pizza shop after he was arrested for stealing a motorcycle that the Bullets had used for riding around Thames Street. Breeze alone kept a regular job, a position at a local bakery that Sharon arranged for him in 2011. By mid-2012 Breeze wasn’t coming around Thames Street very much. He was too busy with work, had met a girl, and was looking to move in with her in a quiet part of the city away from Thames Street and Stone Park.

Most of the young men lived with female partners or relatives, although these living arrangements could be brittle and tenuous. Skyline lived with his grandmother in an adjacent neighborhood but sometimes stayed with female friends around Thames Street. Uncle lived with his girlfriend’s family in an apartment they owned near Mission Hill, and bounced around when she kicked him out. Until Breeze met his girlfriend, he toggled between his female cousin’s Section 8 apartment in the nearby city of Chelsea and the apartment of an older friend from Stone Park in the suburb of Braintree. Some nights when in the neighborhood, he crashed in Mattapan on the couch of a female friend he knew from growing up in Stone Park. Tidbit, who spent his entire life in his grandmother’s house immediately off of Thames Street, became untethered after his grandmother died and her house was lost. He passed the last several years

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72 Tidbit would be shot twice more during my time in the field, for a total of five shootings in his life as of early 2016. Two of these shootings produced life-threatening injuries; the fifth shooting further contributed to his existing physical disability, as he sustained serious nerve damage to one leg and foot due to the amount of blood he lost. The nerve damage left Tidbit with a limp and an inability to stand for more than few minutes without pain.
73 Bruce was shot and killed in the latter stages of my fieldwork. Bruce’s death was a huge blow to the men of TMC, especially those that grew up with him around Thames Street because of his longtime efforts to promote harmony among his friends and people in the neighborhood.
cycling through the homes of the mothers of his many children and other female friends that would take him in, burning countless bridges in the process. Aside from Kimani—who was incarcerated during almost all of my time in the field—only a handful of the Bullets still lived in the immediate Thames Street neighborhood; those that did, like Kimani, Spades, and Bruce, were able to maintain their residence there through the long-term home ownership of grandparents and parents.

SPACE, NETWORKS, AND MOURNING

Place and Mourning: The Deaths (and Memories) that Thames Street Holds74

“I could tell you how many steps make up the streets rising like stairways, and the degree of the arcades’ curves, and what kind of zinc scales cover the roofs; but I already know this would be telling you nothing. The city does not consist of this, but of relationships between the measurements of its space and the events of its past... As this wave from memories flows in, the city soaks it up like a sponge and expands... The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls.” (Calvino 1974: 10-11)

There is an oft-used cut street that allows a knowledgeable driver to navigate quickly from Blue Hill Avenue—the central artery of Boston’s black and brown disadvantaged neighborhoods—directly into the heart of Thames Street, just a few short blocks from The Block itself. Here at this intersection with Thames Street, Skyline frequently crosses himself, sometimes kissing his hand too while saying something barely audible. He’s not communicating

74 The description of Skyline’s interaction with the space surrounding Thames Street was informed by the entirety of fieldwork, but particularly by one summer’s routine of picking him up in the afternoon from his temporary job downtown and dropping him off on or around Thames Street. Without a car, and with people actively searching to kill him at the time, Skyline couldn’t risk taking public transportation. Over that summer, I negotiated the daily chore of giving him a ride with Theory (who bore the brunt of the burden, but I usually went with him twice a week during this period) and Yungjay.
with another passenger in the car, but rather to Gabby, \(^{75}\) one of the few women ever regarded as being part of Thames Street. A fixture around The Block, she died here a few years back, accidentally struck in a shootout between two nearby crews unaffiliated with Thames Street.

After making the turn onto Thames, Skyline’s attention flows with traffic toward The Block, a zone that he’s mastered through years of studying its patterns—interpersonal, traffic, lighting, the hard geometry of sight lines, escape routes, and ballistic trajectories. On days when there are people out there, he breaks off his sullen engagement with his smartphone to manufacture an enthusiastic greeting out of the car window, sometimes directing the driver to pullover so he can “bullshit.” On days when no one interesting is around, he still looks up from his phone, silently taking in the spot where his best friend Tony was murdered. Skyline was one of the last people from the Thames Street crew to see Tony alive, parting with him at the take out restaurant just before he was shot and killed inside. Some days Skyline seems to accept Tony’s death as just another piece of bad luck that has littered his life. On other days, he’s haunted by the idea that

\(^{75}\) Gabby’s slight figure was a regular presence along Thames Street during the first summer Sharon’s program was in operation. Afternoon work breaks usually revolved around a walk to the bodega, and Gabby would often be seen along the way. Taking up position on an unstained porch or the gap in a chain link fence where a house’s walkway met the sidewalk, Gabby shared easy jokes and greetings with some of the Thames Street men when they passed by. In fieldnotes from the time, I was struck by the affection extended to Gabby, as well as the Bullets tattoo inked onto her forearm. A mother of four, Gabby was often seen orbited by small children, as she was during a video interview recorded on Thames Street—a remnant of an unfinished project from Sharon’s program seeking to document neighborhood perspectives on violence. In the interview, recorded just a few months before Gabby’s death, she is seen shepherding two of her children off of Thames Street’s sidewalk before Skyline—holding the camera—commenced his interview. Seeming uncomfortable on camera, Gabby balked at Skyline’s first few questions, but then the following exchange occurred:

Skyline: Do you feel safe in your community?
Gabby: Yes.
Skyline: Why?
Gabby: Because! [She waves to a car off camera that beeps at her.] I’m safe over here.
Skyline: Where do you see yourself in five years?
Gabby seems totally perplexed by the question, and her eyes search in several different directions while in thought, before it seems like she gives up after about fifteen seconds, her face settling into a genuine ‘I have no idea’ expression while she shakes her head. Especially in the context of the rapid-fire question and answer format of the interviews, Gabby’s prolonged silence causes discomfort. Someone off camera finally breaks it by yelling, “with a real nigga like me!” generating widespread laughter. Of course, it was probably sheer coincidence that in this moment Gabby couldn’t envision her life in five years time, just as it was understood that her death a few months later was a tragic coincidence of her being at the wrong place at the wrong time. But it is no coincidence that accidents like this happen along Thames Street and not in the city’s whiter, more affluent areas.

\(^{117}\)
maybe there was something he could have done to alter the events of that day.⁷⁶ Maybe Tony would still be alive. Maybe Skyline would be dead. Every time he passes by, the question could be raised anew.

Almost every key neighborhood institution along The Block holds its own history of violent death, each with varying degrees of relevance to the Thames Street crew. The Dominican corner store was where Chino died. He was embraced by the men from Thames Street for his everyday friendliness and willingness to let them buy things on credit, plus, he would not call the cops when they would hang out in front of the store. Few from the neighborhood knew he was involved in a gang from the other side of town until he was shot inside the store one night. He had gotten caught up in an ongoing conflict and had been hunted down by rivals who had tracked him to the bodega. With Chino’s death, the neighborhood lost the services of its main store, as it closed for several months while Chino’s family tried to figure out what to do with it.⁷⁷ For elder members of the network and neighborhood, the liquor store is the site of another enduring memory. It was the place where one of Thames Street’s own killed the store clerk after an argument, in the process reshaping the features of the neighborhood for those growing up at the time, like Tidbit. “That caused a big rift between the store and us. We didn’t go in there for like four or five years. Older niggas banned it.”

Several other deaths happened right on this block, but they don’t get mentioned much, or they occupy a secret space on the ledger. Some died under mysterious circumstances that don’t

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⁷⁶ Skyline, in an interview discussing his friendship with Tony asserted, “Our relationship… It’s like we just clicked instantly.” He still feels guilt over leaving Tony just before he was killed. “But something told me—Yo, if I’m lying, I swear to God right now I will get struck dead. Something told me to tell him to come to the crib. I swear to God. Something told me to tell him to come to the crib. But I never said nothing.”

⁷⁷ The store closing was a particular burden on those from the neighborhood that used EBT cards to purchase food and other household items through SNAP or other cash assistance benefits. An alternative store simply did not exist within walking distance. While there were stores that were slightly closer, during this period of time I often gave rides to a store 12 blocks away that was deemed safe.
get discussed. Some got hit by a bullet that was not meant for them, maybe because they looked a bit too much like someone who “deserved it.” This was likely because The Block was the first choice place for rival crews to reply, when they believed that Thames Street had shot at one of their own—and whoever was on The Block might suffer in return. As the symbolic heart of the neighborhood, it was a strategic place to strike. For decades The Block has been one of the places in Boston where bullets regularly fly and sometimes they kill people—the wrong ones and the right ones. Thames Street contains the stories of all these people, but not all of them get told. When death is a regular occurrence, only certain deaths can matter.

There are no physical markers to commemorate Thames Street’s deaths—memory of these events is conjured by the correspondence of the place they occurred and the people that lived through them. Street memorials—most often comprised of votive candles, notes to the dead, flowers, stuffed animals, and liquor bottles—do pop up from time to time, but their presence is necessarily short-lived. In recent years the City of Boston has adopted an unofficial policy of working with the families of homicide victims to dismantle these memorials approximately 30 days after they appear. Along Thames Street, modest memorials would emerge as temporary accompaniment to a gathering celebrating the birthday or death anniversary of one of Thames Street’s own, like Gabby or Tony. After candles were lit, prayers were said, and stories were told, these memorials were simply left with no care for their maintenance. Most

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78 For the young men from Stone Park, even this correspondence is fragmented. When Stone Park was renovated several years earlier—as part of an effort to remake the development (and erase much of its violent past)—spaces that held memories were lost. While the basic locations of past events can be roughly triangulated, they cannot be indexed in memory in the same way because the physical spaces do not hold the same form as when these events transpired.

79 This policy serves as but one reminder that the spaces that TMC occupies are contested. The removal of a memorial is a blunt reminder of this contestation—a claim on space by the city itself, ostensibly in the service of intervening in one of the many complicated ongoing negotiations between a gang and its neighborhood (see Suttles 1968; Patillo-McCoy 1999; Venkatesh 2000). Certainly part of this conflict stemmed from the contestation of memory; Tony’s memorial was understood differently by the TMC men than by the storeowners along The Block who had to repair store windows after a harrowing and confusing event. But others—like one of the pastors I interviewed for this project—saw the city’s policy as stemming from a much more instrumental concern: resident concern for a memorial’s effect on property values.
simply disappeared a day or two after these gatherings, never intended to serve as any sort of enduring marker. But, if properly attuned to the signals, one could see faint hints demarcating a place of loss even after memorials were gone, like constellations of dripped wax on the sidewalk or a deflated balloon tethered to a street post by a ribbon. Of course, for the men of TMC, like Skyline, such hints were redundant. Memories of the dead were core features of the space of everyday interactions.⁸⁰

Figure 6. A snow-dusted temporary memorial site, the day after a candlelight vigil in celebration of the dead’s birthday. Photo is not from Thames Street, but from another nearby Dorchester neighborhood. (Photo by author)

⁸⁰ Most memories of the dead inscribed in the neighborhood were not associated with death or violence. This was plainly obvious in field interactions that captured joyous memories of dead friends that were linked to neighborhood places (i.e. first fights, ridiculous clothing decisions, the unique phrases a friend used). But these exuberant memories of the transitions of growing up together coexisted alongside the daily navigation through places where friends died.
Exposure to Death in the TMC Network

DH: What was going on right before [the shooting] happened?
Breeze: Niggas was just talking. Talking about their funerals.
DH: What do you mean?
Breeze: Like talking about life, death, and what niggas would want to happen the day that niggas die. Like the day of the funeral. Well not ours because I wasn’t talking about my shit. Goodie was talking more or less about his shit. Like, you don’t want any fake niggas there, you don’t want anybody that showed fake love, you want real niggas there, whatever whatever, you know what I mean?
DH: So dudes were actually in a conversation about their funerals—?
Breeze: About death. That’s how fucked up society has niggas. That we come from a funeral thinking about our shit. It’s kind of like how a little girl pictures her dream wedding. We out here in the streets picturing our dream funeral. How we want our funeral to look like. It’s crazy. That’s fucking crazy.

The above exchange was drawn from conversation with Breeze on a boring summer afternoon before he got a job.\textsuperscript{81} We had been driving around running some errands in a mostly white neighborhood socially and geographically distant from Thames Street and Stone Park when we made an impromptu side trip, effectively retracing steps to the site where he had been shot a few years earlier. He had little occasion to travel out to this part of the city, and had not been back since the day of the shooting. Breeze, however, was not the only one hit that day; two of his best friends, Goodie and Spokes, were also shot. The three had caught a ride with a friend’s mother after attending the funeral of a friend from Roxbury—the friend had been murdered the week before. A few minutes after leaving the funeral, while the car was waiting at a red light, bullets came cracking in to the backseat where they were huddled. Goodie, Breeze’s roommate at the time, “died instantly,” while his friend Spokes escaped with a single shot to the leg. Breeze was struck five times in his arms, shoulders, and chest, suffering near-fatal injuries and permanent disfigurement to one arm that was shattered by a .45 round. While Spokes and Breeze still aren’t fully sure what happened, they know that there were two shooters that jumped

\textsuperscript{81} This was not an interview but rather a case where Breeze agreed to allow me to use an audio recorder to capture our conversation while driving around.
out of the car that trailed them based on the number of shots they heard and the different caliber shell casings that were at the scene. Breeze and Spokes consider it obvious that someone at the funeral they had attended notified O-Side, a crew with whom they had a longstanding violent conflict, of their presence. This alert set in motion a series of events that led to their car being followed and targeted. To recap, the three friends had just come from a funeral and had been discussing expectations for their own funerals, when all three were shot and one was killed.

Quite apart from the spatial concentration of homicide that marked the neighborhoods surrounding Thames Street and Stone Park, as the vignette above makes clear, the TMC network was saturated in the experience of homicide. Dating back to 2008, when I first started keeping track of TMC, six people that were core actors in the network (including Goodie) were killed by gun violence. This count refers strictly to people that were widely acknowledged to be central actors within Thames Street or Stone Park, and does not include those obliquely involved in the network or others that died before 2008. These deaths were part of the common experience of TMC, and while each one differentially affected friendship cliques within the network, all six were accounted for as common losses. But these six deaths—as meaningful as they were as common experience—represent only a small fraction of the network exposure to homicide during this time period, let alone the lifetime exposure of TMC individuals. For example, in addition to the death of his brother Goodie, a few years later Chains had to deal with the murder of his other brother, who grew up out of state under the care of a foster family. Uncle was depressed for months when his best friend from school, involved in a gang from across town, was murdered just when it seemed he was leaving the streets behind. Skyline’s cousin, “a good kid who wasn’t in the streets,” died at a party when a shooter missed his intended target. While

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82 This count also does not include the surprising number of deaths by accidents, undetected health problems and heart attacks, and suicides.
involvement with TMC went a long way in explaining much exposure to homicide, the extreme social marginality of these young men connected them to other disadvantaged networks that carried their own risk of homicide exposure, including family members, neighborhood figures, school classmates, friends from other gangs, and social connections from detention facilities.\textsuperscript{83}

**Figure 7. An afternoon visiting dead friends in Fairview Cemetery. (Photo by author)**

Thus the young men of TMC were perched at the apex of a series of social contours

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\textsuperscript{83} A side note on the saturation of death in the TMC network: The dead of TMC are overwhelmingly buried in two cemeteries, Mount Hope (in Mattapan) or Fairview (in Hyde Park), two of the three city-run cemeteries offering “low-cost” burial services for city residents. As the shaky-voiced elderly caretaker of Mount Hope cemetery once told me, “Put it this way, if you get murdered and you are a black or Spanish youth, chances are 85 to 90 percent that you’ll end up in a city cemetery.” While going on visits to the gravesite of friends, I was consistently amazed at how many people buried in the cemetery the TMC men knew. Names—and often faces (for those headstones that featured them)—would simply “pop up” and draw recognition while walking through the cemetery to or from our destination. One day, while visiting Billy’s gravesite, Breeze took a side trip down a row of graves, pulled into the row upon noticing a friend from high school. Of the 40 people buried in the row (20 on each side), Breeze knew eight of them, in some cases matter-of-factly narrating the circumstances of the deaths, and in other cases expressing surprise about deaths of which he hadn’t previously been aware. Because plots are arranged by the date of death, Breeze had stumbled upon a cluster of young men that he knew that had all died in 2008, when Breeze was 22.
progressively associated with homicide risk, a position that left them vulnerable to an unparalleled amount of violent death. The net result of such exposure was that Boston’s aggregate violent crime statistics were made up of people known to TMC, many of the city’s historic shooting hot spots comprised of the life experiences of those in the network. Benny, whose wiry and energetic frame supported a round face capable of limitless expression, and whose confident, thoughtful, and humor-laced speech seduced assent from even the most skeptical listener, could find no other way to describe his exposure to homicide as a fundamental social inequality that he lived and breathed. Benny lost three of the most important people in his life in the span of a few years: his sister, a bystander killed in a gang shootout in Mattapan; his good friend Tennessee a few years later; and, most recently, Bruce—a friend since childhood. Maintaining control of tears that welled in his eyes—but never fell—Benny, still raw from the death of Bruce just days earlier, found a moment to reflect upon his experience of living through such intense accumulation of loss.

I’ve been to 32 funerals. I thought about it all day yesterday, anticipating this [discussion]. I’ll be 25 tomorrow. Tomorrow is my 25th birthday and I’ve attended 32 funerals. Four of them were people over 30. I’m not in the army, I’m not in combat—like, I don’t even know what to say—I don’t even know what to attribute it to. Like, this shit is crazy. I know people who grew up in Massachusetts, and they don’t even know someone that’s been shot before, and they live less than ten miles from where we live at. Most of them don’t even know somebody who knows somebody that’s been shot. And they can’t even fathom—when I talk they’re like, ‘you know someone that’s been wounded before?’ [Benny laughs, temporarily breaking the intensity of his speech.]… I envy their happiness. I’m their age. Why do I have to go through so much stress, and you don’t?

Similar to Breeze’s comments at the top of this section describing the unequal conditions that prompted young men to outline details of their own funerals, Benny used the word “crazy” to characterize the amount of death he has lived through. Living this near to death as a young person was never normal by any standard, whether the comparison group was peers in the inner

84 Benny’s exposure to death was not unusual, particularly among those TMC men that had advanced to the age of 25 and beyond. Skyline had attended the funerals of 14 friends and peers that died from street violence alone—all of them under the age of thirty. Breeze estimated he had been to at least 30 funerals where the cause of death was murder, while Tidbit had been to over 40.
city or in Boston’s majority white suburbs beyond. But the craziness of losing multiple friends to violent death was reality for the men of TMC, and confrontation with it brought knowledge and skill in its navigation that, on its face, might seem absurd in another social context. Regular and routinized experience of the death of friends was what influenced Breeze to liken a funeral to “a boring birthday party,” what gave Benny reflexive knowledge of the names and locations of all of the public cemeteries in the area, and what gave Skyline confidence in assessing a mortician’s open-casket make-up work.

While the scale of this total exposure to death—produced by multiple network streams—was understood to be extreme, the deaths of TMC friends held special consequences for the lives of the TMC men. In fact, an important distinction can be observed between homicides that occurred within the TMC network and those that did not. Research has most often conceived of homicide exposure as having known a homicide victim, or, sometimes, witnessing a homicide. Such a definition is generally aligned with the majority of cases of homicide that the young men of TMC experienced from outside the TMC network, such as the deaths of friends from school or prison. However, as the case of Breeze and Spokes at the top of this section suggests, exposure to homicide within the TMC network was often intertwined with co-occurring violent victimization. When Goodie died, Breeze was not only present (Goodie’s head came to rest on his shoulder in the back seat of the car), but he too almost died from his own injuries. Similarly, when Tony was killed on Thames Street, the shooter first fired several times at Jovan, who was walking up the block from the liquor store. Even when not present for, or directly victimized in, the killing of a friend from TMC, there could be a powerful sense of linked vulnerability to the forces that caused this death. This vulnerability could assume many forms, such as Skyline narrowly avoiding the convergence of space and time that would have placed him with Tony at
the time of his shooting, or even Benny’s permanent discomfort with the knowledge that
Tennessee was wearing his jeans when he died.

Tennessee and Cream were friendly with each other but were not especially close. The
two were involved in different cliques within the larger TMC network that had little overlap.
Cream, who grew up in Stone Park, rarely spent time on Thames Street, and usually hung out
with friends from Stone Park outside of the neighborhood. In contrast, Tennessee was a fixture
on and around Thames Street, one of the main conveners of a group of younger Thames Street
men that would hang for hours each day on Elizabeth Avenue—a side street just off of Thames.
When Cream, a cocky but charismatic former basketball star, showed up to Tennessee’s funeral,
many were taken aback by both his presence and appearance. This was the first time most had
seen him since he was shot a few months earlier, requiring several surgeries and many weeks in
the hospital before there was assurance of his survival. Given his physical condition at the time,
he was not expected to attend. The lanky but muscular frame that had previously defined his
physical appearance had been whittled down to skinny limbs incapable of filling out the suit he
was wearing, making his movements seem angular and wooden. After the funeral service ended,
Cream sat in a pew by himself, deep in reflection, long after almost everyone had left the church.
By this point it had become common understanding within the network that the same person who
killed Tennessee had also injured Cream several weeks earlier. Shot by the same person, and
perhaps even the same gun, by mere chance alone Cream survived while Tennessee did not.
Sitting in the pew that day, Cream was not only mourning the loss of a friend, but was witnessing
a surreal procession of the ceremony that could have marked the end of his own life.

Skyline had a similar experience in the wake of Tennessee’s death. Two days after
Tennessee was shot, Skyline had just finished letting me in to his grandmother’s house when he
silently handed me his phone, punctuating the handoff with a solemn look. On the screen was a popular social networking platform “private message” from the person rumored to have killed Tennessee. It read simply, “You’re next.” The message itself was bold and ominous, but its threat was not idle. Yet Skyline—who had for several years exasperated friends, family, and even police by assuming an intransigent stance toward caution itself, lest it be understood as fear—required more than one chance to grasp its seriousness. In the months to come, Skyline would receive more messages, some describing in detail the address and exterior features of his grandmother’s house, even going so far as to list the color and models of neighbors’ cars under which the would-be attackers had laid under waiting for him to make an appearance. On a rainy evening a few months after Tennessee’s death, the threats against Skyline were made real. While chatting with Uncle and another man from Thames Street in Uncle’s car parked just off of Thames Street, the three noticed a familiar car approaching. Before they could react, the car had pulled alongside them and the driver fired two shots. One shot penetrated the car but missed the occupants, while the other whistled inches past Skyline’s head, bringing with it a torrent of glass

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Skyline was often described by friends as the “heart” of TMC; he was the network’s most central actor, maintaining unparalleled access to Thames Street, Stone Park, those that were incarcerated, and other crews with which TMC were friendly. But during this time, he also appeared to take on the role of TMC’s “face,” taking pride in showing it at times and places that were inherently risky, such as concerts or events where he knew O-Side would be present. Skyline’s social media use served to enhance this role. Reasoning that he would never hide from his enemies in real life, he refused to “hide” from them in the digital domain, openly “friend”ing his rivals or giving them access to follow his online profiles. While the consequences of such online relationships were manifold, for the present discussion it is important to note that Skyline seemed to enjoy playing to this new demographic of his online audience. In addition to posting images, subtly directed to rivals, of himself and his friends living life without fear, he also posted overt taunts or challenges. Most of these posts directly revealed his location (often one that might be embarrassing to rivals, such as a place they were known for hanging out), accompanied by an invitation for rivals to come visit. Field notes from this period document numerous conversations with Theory, TMC’s gang outreach worker at the time, lamenting Skyline’s unwillingness to move himself out of harm’s way. In one representative example, Theory’s supervisor, who regularly had contact with individuals from O-Side in an effort to mediate conflicts, pleaded with Theory and me to relay a message to Skyline, emphasizing many times the urgency of his request. “Please tell him to stop standing on The Block. Please. They know he’s out there. They are going to fucking kill him. They want him fucking dead, bad.” Privately, his friends too expressed concerns, more than one likening his behavior to that of his best friend Tony, who died several years earlier. On one hand this comparison was made in reference to the fact that both were (often) jovial big men, wearers of loud colors, centers of the action and the lives of the party. But the likening had a clear macabre angle as well; a sense that Skyline was too carefree and flippant about the threats facing him, eerily walking the same path as Tony.
shards and severing one of Uncle’s arteries before finishing its flight. The three men survived, but they considered themselves exceptionally fortunate. The shooter’s gun jammed after firing the second shot; the consensus was that if it hadn’t, all three probably would have been killed.  

While research has emphasized that those exposed to homicide undergo a loss of their general sense of safety, the men of TMC experienced this loss many times over, additionally burdened by very specific threats that manifested through the deaths of those in their network. Beyond experiencing homicide as a global threat to their safety, or even as a more particular threat affecting their gang, very often the forces of homicide took on tangible forms that were proximate and personal to the TMC men. A friend’s death could often be complicated, directly, by one’s own victimization, or indirectly through not only one’s social proximity to the murdered friend, but also to the social processes that produced the murder. In some cases, like that of Cream, these connections could be so powerful that it would be impossible to avoid seeing one’s self in the dead. In this way, the lives of the young men from TMC were made more dangerous through a friend’s death. However, the loss of safety was but one consequence of a murder in the TMC network; the loss of friends came with burdens of mourning that created discontinuities in many other facets of life.

The Burdens of Mourning and Troubles of Moving On

Trees is a 22 year-old light-skinned man of Jamaican descent whose family roots in the Thames Street neighborhood extend back to the 1970s. He presents an interesting mix of

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86 Stretched out on a large recliner in his girlfriend’s apartment on the morning he was released from the hospital, Uncle’s relaxed (sedated) demeanor, muscular physique, and bandaged bicep made him look more like an injured athlete than someone who had nearly lost his life just hours earlier. Uncle explained how he expected to die during the course of the shooting—and not from the gunshot wound he suffered, but rather the ones that never came. In particular, while the incident was unfolding, he was perplexed as to why more shots didn’t come after the initial volley. “I thought to myself, ‘what the fuck is this nigga doing? Why did he stop shooting?’” After a few seconds passed, Uncle decided to look up again and could see the shooter “doing something with the gun,” presumably attempting to unjam it, before the car sped off.
qualities: quiet and aloof, but quick with a joke; tall and lanky, but with a touch of pudginess; his speech toggling between the insular slang of TMC and Jamaican patois. Although he frequently called Tennessee his brother, the two were not biological brothers, but were close friends since boyhood that went through periods of inseparability in the years before Tennessee was murdered. But Trees has had a very difficult time finding his way back into the rhythm of life after Tennessee’s death. Breaking from the rhythm of the story he’d been sharing, he says flatly, as if rediscovering the fact, “Since Tenn[essee] died, I haven’t really been myself. [Long pause] Only around my daughter, but other than that, it’s just—[shakes his head and makes a tsssk sound].”

Trees had been in the midst of explaining how he had gone to the place where Tennessee had been shot in search of connection with him, but ended up disappointed with himself for not being able to feel anything on account of his distraction and numbness.

I was trying to feel him. Because I’ve got a lot of unanswered questions, you know? And I was trying to feel him out, to see if I could—to see if he’d talk to me, say something to me. Because, it’s like, I wanted to know who did this to you. How did this happen? Talk to me, tell me something. Give me a sign. But it wasn’t there on that day—not at all.

In an interview conducted a few months after Tennessee’s funeral, he reflected on the difficult period that ensued in the wake of his friend’s death.

It was real painful. I cried for weeks. I cried for at least three weeks straight, every night… Me thinking about it all the time, it was slowing me down. After that first week I realized how bad it was slowing me down. I didn’t want to work, I didn’t want to do anything. I just wanted to sit there and be sad.

Trees ended up losing his job with a newspaper distribution company due to the time he missed

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87 This was not a case of Trees and Tennessee “going for brothers” (see Liebow 1967); that is, Tennessee and Trees did not present themselves as brothers during the time that Tennessee was alive. As several from Thames Street noted—some with skepticism—Trees did not begin calling Tennessee his brother until after he died. Sudnow (1967), in his observations of bereavement astutely noted that public recognition of the right to grieve was limited almost exclusively to family members of the deceased; regardless of how close a friend might be to the dead, in face to face interactions as well as negotiations with institutions (work, school, etc.) the death of a “brother” would always be taken more seriously than the death of a “friend.” As I understood it, Trees’ use of the term “brother” served to: a) connote closeness with Tennessee (something that no one around Thames Street disputed); and, b) limit the degree to which he would be called to account for how much he was affected by Tennessee’s death.
grieving and being slowed down. Wizzo, only seventeen at the time and one of Thames Street’s youngest members, was one of the few from TMC that made repeated attempts to check on Trees in the weeks after Tennessee’s death, but he couldn’t break through; he found him distant and disconnected. “I was talking to Trees, trying to keep him cool, but he was just out of it. He didn’t want to deal with people, really. I think it was just because of their bond.”

Breeze felt compassion for Trees, as he knew Tennessee was his closest friend, and Breeze himself went through a similar loss when his best friend Billy was murdered a few years earlier in Stone Park. In addition to recognizing the pain that Trees was going through, Breeze—like Trees—understood his friend’s death as a moment that halted the forward progress of his life. In a conversation at his cousin’s apartment in the nearby suburb of Chelsea, one that was entirely unrelated to Billy’s death and focused on Breeze’s ongoing life challenges, Breeze began to explain why he wasn’t “where [he was] supposed to be right now” at this stage in his life. In charting the distance between the reality of his life in his late 20s (broke, jobless, on probation, without a permanent place to stay) and the unlimited promise of his life a few years earlier (optimistic, flush with drug money, recognized for his music), he located Billy’s death as the most important waypoint.

Breeze: But, Billy’s death—Tsssk--Cut all of that short. [Breeze markedly shifts his tone here; his voice softens and becomes more matter of fact—in stark contrast to the joyous reminiscing he had just been engaged in.]. [When] Billy died—[I] didn’t feel like hustling. Hustling was the shit. I was spending all of the money I saved up. Just [spent] it all out…

DH: Why did you feel like not hustling when Billy died? What was it about that—

Breeze: Too emotional, dog. Like somebody I do something with everyday and they be like… It got to the point where every corner I been that I remember walking with this nigga, I’ll cry. Walking to the store, I’ll cry. All the time I just cry, nigga, cry. Anything I do, that remind me of the nigga just cry, nigga just—[He makes a PHHHST noise like a soda bottle opening, exhaling heavily.] Crying… like a girl, nigga. Like… That’s my dog though. Feel me?

So it’s like all of that, and then, everybody calling me. Like, “Yo, say word, it happened?!?” And me having to break the news to everybody, it’s like reliving the moment over and over and over and over. And I had to do it, I had to break the news down to at least, at least, fifty people. At least, my nigga. My phone kept blitzing, “Yo bro, tell me that—Yo, yo, when my nigga?! Yo
man—” Like, to the point where every time I talk you hear that—that lump [pointing to his throat], yo, I can’t even get this out, my nigga, like yo, I’ll hang up on niggas, like—tsssk. Like, “yo nigga hanged up, he couldn’t get it out.”

Breeze and Trees’ did not simply lose a peer, someone they knew from the neighborhood, someone from their extended social networks—each had lost their best friend, their reference points for childhood and adolescent memories and the fulcrums of their day-to-day routine activities. Alongside the pain that came with the death of their friends came the disorientation of having to restructure patterns of daily life and redefine relationships with the larger TMC network as individuals, rather than as part of a dyad. At the same time that their world had become more dangerous and unstable, these processes accelerated quickly, and Breeze and Trees were cast into a difficult new status within the network: bereaved.

Bereavement, the socially prescribed “formal status to those experiencing legitimate grief” (Kearl 1989: 478) may at first seem an ill-fitting word to describe those that lost a close friend to homicide, particularly because friends, at least in American society, have not usually been granted formal access to this status as it has been reserved for immediate family (Sudnow 1967). In fact, the men of TMC were steadfastly denied the formal rights of the bereaved in their interactions with institutions—and sometimes the family of the dead—in ways that excluded them from official mourning rites and compounded the pain of their loss. For example, because they were not “immediate family,” Uncle and Veez were prevented from seeing Tennessee in the hospital before he died,88 Spades couldn’t attend Bruce’s funeral—for which he was supposed to serve as a pallbearer—lest he be sent back to prison for violating the conditions of his parole, and incarcerated members of the network were denied temporary leave from prison to attend funerals as a matter of course when the cause was homicide—even when the victim was immediate.

88 In most circumstances friends are of course granted the ability to see dying friends, but not in the case of a violent crime. When there is a safety risk to a patient, Boston’s major hospitals only allow for a small number of visitors on a list created by the victim’s family. Although his injuries were grave, Tennessee was conscious and able to speak for some time before his death.
family. In one case that stung much of the network, after details of Tennessee’s funeral were made public, two members of his family announced—including multiple social media posts—that his funeral was to be private and for family only. But within the TMC network itself, the close friends of homicide victims were given their own bereavement status in a mourning process that operated in parallel to, but overlapped with, the mourning process overseen by the dead’s immediate family. This bereavement status, however, did not necessarily assist in the resolution of grief or reduction of stress.

The contours of this distinct bereavement status are implied in Breeze’s comments above; as Billy’s best friend he is called upon to be the source of death confirmation and information, as well as the primary receptor of condolences from those in the network and beyond. While Breeze’s case is special in that he directly witnessed Billy’s killing—and thus had additional difficulties in “reliving the moment over and over”—his stress in fielding requests for information and expressions of condolences was typical for those in his position. In the same speech event referenced above, Breeze bemoaned the lack of consideration given to Billy’s family, further highlighting the distinction between the mourning processes at play within the network and the broader family.

And it’s fucked up how motherfuckers call me. Niggas show me more love and have more sympathy for me than his own brothers. And it’s like, yo, it be having me fucked up, cause like yo, these is his brothers right here. And they from the hood, like... I was gangbangin but everybody else was from the hood. [His older brother] Victor is from the hood, niggas know him, from back in the days and shit like that, you know what I mean?

Breeze’s relationship with Billy’s family might have also allowed him to play another key role

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89 The details of this case are complex, but for the purposes of the current discussion, it is enough to say that in the period immediately following Tennessee’s murder, several members blamed TMC (directly or indirectly) for his death.

90 Here Breeze isn’t making a simple case for his friends from the TMC network to extend condolences to Billy’s family. If that were the case, he would have certainly included Billy’s mother and his baby’s mother (both of whom he knew well and spoke of extensively in this conversation). In a sense, Breeze is criticizing his peers for not recognizing Billy’s brothers as two of Stone Park’s own, and thereby deserving of sympathy.
as the conduit of information being shared between the TMC network and Billy’s family, but in this case he was too overwhelmed to help. Like Trees with Tennessee’s death and Skyline with Tony’s death, Breeze struggled with the demands of the intense facework required in breaking the news of his friend’s death with peers and participating in the heated discussions around the assignment of blame for what had happened, and ultimately, as the bereaved friend, being the first to be called upon to answer a most consequential question: what do you want to do about it?

Uncle’s discussion of Tennessee’s death illustrates just how reflexively this question emerged for the best friends of the dead. Shortly after Tennessee’s death, Uncle was simply asked to identify Tennessee’s closest friends. He directed his comments immediately towards Trees’ hesitation to participate in retaliation for his friend’s killing.

Trees. You know Trees. [Tennessee] was always with him. He’d be with us, but that was his main man, he’d always be with Trees. But we felt as though, like Trees, that’s like your best friend [that got killed]. We’re not encouraging you to go do no stupid shit, but that’s your man, that’s like your best friend. If something happened to one of my best friends, there wouldn’t be no talking. Tenn was my friend, but he wasn’t my best friend like how they had a relationship. You react different [based] on the closeness of your relationship. Like me, when Tennessee passed away, of course I felt like I wanted to do somethin’ to somebody. But, when the relationship ain’t like those two, you sit back and think about the consequences for a second, you know? You don’t—We don’t want you to do nothing dumb, but at the end of the day something has to be done. We’re not condoning you going out and doing no stupid shit, but you sitting back, smoking weed, talking about going to see this chick over here—that should be the least of your worries. That was your man. Now Trees, he’s not like that type of dude, but—just say that, just leave it alone. Don’t say, “aw that’s my man, and I’m gonna do”—

[My question to Trees] was like, “Are you going to play a part in this?” If you’re not, that’s cool. It don’t make no difference to us. Someone from around my way is going to do something regardless. They’re not going to sit back and wait on Trees. You’d be waiting on Trees until we’re 67 years old. But there’s nothing wrong with saying, I don’t want to do anything. Because nobody is going to put a gun in your hand and say you better do this. You better do that. But we just felt like, that was your man. What are you going to do? Not what you should do. What are you going to do?

While he struggled to conceal his disdain for Trees’ inaction, Uncle’s overarching problem with Trees was his failure to commit—one way or the other—to being involved in retaliating against Tennessee’s killer. Uncle had watched Trees carefully in the weeks following Tennessee’s death, had been taken aback by the intense grief he displayed over that period, and was ultimately
disappointed when he determined that Trees was unlikely to use his pain as rage to fuel retaliation. While Uncle was right that the retaliation process would develop with or without Trees, his general sense of the immediacy and automaticity of close friends involving themselves in retaliation processes was mere perception.\textsuperscript{91} Although close friends acutely felt the need to “do something” for their friend—and their bereaved status put them at the unavoidable center of discussions about what to do—retaliation was but one line of action available to them.

When Goodie died, his brother Chains struggled with the question of what to do. Chains, who was infamous for his explosive and fickle temper,\textsuperscript{92} seemed the perfect candidate to engage in rage-inspired retribution. Yet Chains lived with profound uncertainty over the question of retaliation. One summer afternoon during Sharon’s program, with the lights off and blinds drawn to assist the multipurpose room’s feeble air conditioner in simulating the feeling of coolness, Chains brought the room to a halt by speaking candidly about Goodie’s death, laying bare the pain of his loss and his inability to find answers. Chains explained that before Goodie died, he had specifically tasked Chains with retaliating on his behalf if something happened to him.

Goodie was concerned that, given the problems he had with some people from Stone Park in

\textsuperscript{91} In a twist of fate, Uncle would face a similar situation to Trees, as approximately two years later he would lose one of his best friends (not involved with TMC, but a gang from across town) to homicide. He took no retaliatory action.

\textsuperscript{92} Chains’ temper could be so disruptive and destructive that his friends developed a shorthand saying for him that served as both a warning and a post-facto lament: “You can’t take the kid anywhere.” Chains’ sensitivity, thoughtfulness, intelligence, and keen observations of social situations could be overlooked by his peers, but these same attributes could be weaponized in service of one of his tantrums, which could singlehandedly end social situations. In one representative example, while out to eat one afternoon with a group of eight people from TMC, Chains loudly and aggressively berated our server, then the cook, and finally the restaurant’s general manager for the way that his steak was cooked, leading to the entire group being asked to leave the restaurant before the police were called. In spite of the damages his temper could cause—and he made efforts to calm his temper in the latter stages of fieldwork—Chains was given the benefit of doubt, especially among those who grew up with him in Stone Park, who took the long view on his life. These friends watched him grow up bouncing in and out of foster care—mother struggling with addiction and father incarcerated—and watched as he lost two brothers and numerous close friends to gang violence. As Breeze succinctly put it after Chains’ good friend Bruce was killed, “Everything that he has ever loved has been taken from him. Dudes say that they lost their brother. He really lost his brother—twice. Bruce was not his nigga, that was his friend. He said it last night: ‘My last real friend is gone.’ I know what he means. You’ve got a hundred niggas and only five friends.”
recent years, they wouldn’t retaliate for him—so the job would have to belong to Chains. The thing that bothered Chains was, in spite of the clarity of his brother’s directive, he could never be really sure if Goodie meant what he was saying. After all, with no other family to count on, who would make sure Goodie’s daughter was taken care of? With concrete knowledge of the situation, would Goodie have really wanted Chains to risk his own life—through murder or incarceration—and the potential well being of their families, to avenge him? The answers were unknowable, but the questions would persist.

Aside from participating in retaliation, and—as Chains noted—providing support (financial and otherwise) to the family of the dead, the men of TMC found another way of “doing something” for a friend that had been murdered. Some tried to better themselves and share their successes with their dead friend, living their life in dedication to their friend. These lines of action alongside retaliation—familial support and the sharing of success—should be considered non-mutually exclusive and overlapping strategies that could be adjusted as individual and situational circumstances changed.

The week of Bruce’s funeral Skyline had been agonizing about going to see Bruce’s mother. He had planned on visiting her on at least three different occasions, but it never happened. His particular aim was to give her money to help with funeral expenses, but he just didn’t know how much he could afford. Living as a single father working a temporary job, there was no excess in his budget—any amount that he would give to Bruce’s mother would set him back. Aside from the thousands of dollars he owed to friends, the cable had recently been turned off—which had begun to interfere with his son’s ability to do his homework—and he owed $600 for his son’s travel soccer program. As Bruce’s funeral let out, with mourners’ eyes still adjusting to the bright morning light upon the sidewalk and while cigarettes and blunts were just
being lit in between hugs, Skyline sprung to action. Holding up $100 of his own money, he yelled out to the crowd of approximately 60 TMC associates gathered on the sidewalk that he was collecting money to help out Bruce’s mother, “and no donation is too small.” Within minutes, and after calling out about one third of the crowd by name to match his donation, Skyline had accumulated $710, which he presented to Bruce’s mother at the reception. Without Skyline—a trusted source—organizing the effort in that moment, when so many were present and could see what others were giving, it is unlikely that any comparable amount would have been raised. Skyline’s efforts to coordinate financial support for Bruce’s family might have been a lesson hard learned from Tony’s death; “the kid doesn’t even have a headstone,” he said dozens of times when reflecting upon Thames Street’s inability to pull together to help Tony’s family. Years after Tony’s death, Skyline would become enraged—sometimes even at himself—when assessing the frivolous purchases made by those in the network. When new Nikes and True Religion jeans made appearances on The Block, Skyline couldn’t help himself from weighing their expense against the cost of providing his best friend with a simple marked grave.

As Skyline figured out, when someone took charge of coordinating, providing immediate financial support to the family of the dead could be relatively simple, even under conditions of financial constraint. But in spite of the best intentions, attempts to take care of the family members of the dead—particularly direct and indirect support of children—were difficult to maintain. Tennessee’s family received substantial help from TMC to help with funeral and burial costs, but even Tennessee’s closest friends—who had a relationship with his daughter—did little to support her in the years following his death. While conceding that this was regrettable, each of these friends blamed Tennessee’s baby’s mother for this arrangement—from the moment he died she had been acting “funny” toward them, as if she blamed them for Tennessee’s death. But the
pivotal issue was that she never came by the neighborhood to see them. As one friend put it, “Of course you want to help out [with his daughter], but it’s like her mother, where has she been at? I haven’t seen her since the funeral.” Thus it was implied that it was the responsibility of Tennessee’s baby’s mother to drive from the suburbs west of the city to bring her daughter within a couple blocks of where her father was killed in order to maintain (financial) relationships with her father’s friends. In their early twenties and in extremely difficult financial circumstances themselves, these responses have the ring of anticipation—and post-facto accounts—of failure in meeting expectations. Older, more mature, and formally linked to his friend’s child, Breeze took a different perspective on the problem of not meeting the expectations ascribed to him and that he ascribed to himself. Serving as godfather to Billy’s daughter, Breeze was doubly pained by his inability to do more for his goddaughter and the disappointment he sensed from her mother for not chipping in as much as she hoped for. Even though his circumstances—including periods of incarceration, probation, joblessness, homelessness, etc.—limited his ability to provide even for himself, Breeze always held Billy’s daughter in his hopes for the future, counting contributions to her and Billy’s family among his key goals once he was able to get his money in order.

Wizzo’s efforts to live his life earning success that he could share with Tennessee

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93 Wizzo was the child of Thames Street in the first couple of years of my fieldwork. A tall baby faced boy draped in a long white t-shirt when I met him, Wizzo was perhaps the only boy from the neighborhood that would receive any recognition from the Bullets in public—usually in the form of being (gently) made fun of. Due to my interest in the structure of the Bullets, Wizzo was a compelling figure because I wanted to understand how young men became integrated in the gang. At the time, Wizzo stood out as the only potential recruit. The men from Thames Street, over a period of years, insisted that they had no “young boys” in the gang—Jazz and Spades (then in their mid-late teens) were it—Wizzo was “just a kid from the hood.” In hindsight, the claim that Thames Street had no younger members seems like a hopeful wish. In one instance during the summer of my second year in the field, Tidbit—a Thames Street legend—was holding court on the steep steps of a house on Elizabeth Avenue, his nephew Jazz off to one side, and a crowd of pre-pubescent neighborhood boys on bicycles (including Wizzo) watching him adoringly from the sidewalk below. Tidbit’s humorous, crowd-pleasing delivery put forth a clear message: Though he loved the gang, the Bullets were fundamentally destructive to the neighborhood and the lives of the young men in it. Pointing to his nephew Jazz he said, “After this right here, there is no more Thames Street. That’s it.” Several years later I
perhaps best illustrate how such lines of action could comingle with the prospect of retaliation. Tennessee’s death was Wizzo’s first experience with homicide. Too young to know Tony or Gabby, and still too untraveled beyond the back streets off of Thames to know those that died from Stone Park, Tennessee’s death came as a shock to Wizzo. Tennessee, Benny, and Trees represented a younger clique from Thames Street that regularly hung out on the back street of Elizabeth Avenue, where Wizzo grew up. In addition to being the street of residence for several of the Bullets, Elizabeth Avenue had strategic importance; because it offered far better vantage points, sight lines and escape routes, when the threat of violence or police activity was high, the residential Elizabeth Avenue was preferred to The Block as the place to congregate in the neighborhood. It was on Elizabeth Avenue, during a prolonged period of tension with rival gangs, where Wizzo and Tennessee met. Wizzo was impressed by Tennessee’s assertive way of speaking, his humor, and his care for his family and the people around him. This care was actively extended to Wizzo and his group of teenage friends from Elizabeth Avenue—something that the older men from Thames Street just didn’t take the time to do. In part, Tennessee showed his affection by playing the role of protector. As an established member of Thames Street, he was entrusted with guns from older members of TMC who understood the dangers posed during times of conflict to those like Tennessee (and Wizzo), who stayed out on the street for long stretches of the day and night. But Tennessee did more than protect Wizzo and his friends, he taught them how to watch out for themselves and each other, and he brought his own brand of “positive energy” to Elizabeth Avenue. He really got to know the younger men from the neighborhood, encouraging them to follow their dreams, strive for better lives for themselves and their families, to be their own men, and to resist following others into the negativity of the

would recognize some of the faces of the boys on bikes—as sad faces of young men—underneath the Bullets hats they wore to Tennessee’s funeral.
streets.

For Wizzo, a talented rapper beginning to garner attention beyond the neighborhood, Tennessee’s death was a push to take his music and his life goals seriously, an imperative to try and finish the lines in his life—unlike those that remained undone for Tennessee. He has thrown himself into his music over the last couple of years, attempting to regularly release high quality songs and videos in an effort to attract followers on social media and the attention of local hip hop promoters. Many of these songs and videos feature Tennessee in one way or another—some show Wizzo and his friends huddled around Tennessee’s grave, some refer to the pain he feels from Tennessee’s death, and others simply shout Tennessee’s name out into the ether.

Summarizing the perspective he has tried to adopt, one he attributes to Tennessee, Wizzo says:

But what we do, we just go harder. That’s our boy, it’s like, we had stuff planned to do—which was basically get money and all be straight—when he was here. And now that he’s gone, it’s like, we’re going to do this for him. He ain’t here, so it adds more dedication and determination to the situation.

I’ve got to do stuff for him. I got to put it in my head that he’s watching down over me, he wouldn’t want me to be a certain way, do this, do that. So it kind of changes my mood because it’s like I’m trying to feel his energy on how he would want me to do certain stuff—I try to live as if he were still here talking to me.

In referencing changing his mood, Wizzo is referring to the challenges inherent in using Tennessee’s death to push himself toward positive ends. Even three years after Tennessee died, while positivity may be Wizzo’ set course, he admits to regularly getting lost in storms of both sadness and anger. Knowing that Tennessee would “probably want [him] to go war it out” with the people that killed him doesn’t help, even if he is also sure that Tennessee wouldn’t want him to do anything he wasn’t comfortable with. “But it’s like sometimes you just want to be negative about it,” he says. “But negative will bring you to where he’s at, or to jail. It be hard to balance out what you really need to really do for him.” This duality—the respect and admiration for the pursuit of the positive and innate sympathy and understanding for the negative that had to be
done—was in part what Tennessee himself had represented for Wizzo. But Wizzo, like Chains, struggled with the uncertainty. His friends from TMC generally weren’t positive—many were angry and searching for opportunities for revenge. Following the murder of one of Thames Street’s own, attempts to be positive met practical limits when entering the sphere of a network in mourning—something the pragmatic Tennessee himself likely would have recognized.

DH: So when the negative stuff is there, how do you cope with it?
Wizzo: You cope with it, like, you go with it. You know what you signed up for… Yeah, there’s a lot of people that are negative. That’s basically what the hood is. You go to the hood because everybody relates to everything that goes on… Yeah, there’s a couple of them in my generation, that’s like, we just still on that same stuff. Me, I ain’t going to lie, I’m still on the same stuff too, but I’m trying to change. But I just need the right guidance. But I’m stuck in the hood. I live in the hood.

Given the many ongoing difficulties inherent in mourning the murder of a friend, it might reasonably be assumed that the connections between the young men within the TMC network could be activated in the service of social support, providing opportunities to process a shared loss. While friends did find ways to support one another, talking about the dead—and particularly one’s related emotions—was not one of them. Even during funerals and memorial events—times when it would seem appropriate, and even a social obligation to say a few words about the dead—the men of TMC were overwhelmingly willing to let others do the talking. But it was talking about the dead in day-to-day social situations that was perceived to carry the greatest consequences. The following exchange with Benny lends some insight as to why only one of the 19 TMC-affiliated individuals interviewed regarding the death of a friend reported

94 In my third year in the field a few of the men from TMC were getting ready to attend a funeral later in the day, which prompted Chains to launch into a set of observations about funerals. In particular, he was upset that “no one ever talks at funerals”—by which he meant that none of his friends from TMC ever speak at funerals—a fact that I would observe in the coming years. For Chains, this created an awkward and unfortunate situation, where those that know the dead best are silent and forced to sit, while preachers—who often never even met the deceased—and random attendees talk about the dead in terms that could be foreign and alienating. Chains challenged his friends to imagine that scenario playing out at their own funeral. A man of his word, when friends were invited to speak at Bruce’s funeral, Chains broke the silence and gave a tribute to his friend that touched Bruce’s family as well as those in attendance from TMC.
talking with friends about the situation.

DH: You mentioned that this was the first time that you’ve ever really talked about this with anyone. Why do you think that is?

Benny: Everything we go through, even between us, a lot of the shit is just an unspoken thing. I know you’re in pain, you know I’m in pain, it’s like let’s not dwell on it. It’s almost like extra, we don’t want to ruin the moment, we don’t want to talk about it. And it’s not easy to talk about, and everybody sees it different ways, and things come out of it and arguments and all types of shit. And at the end of the day, he’s still dead. So no matter how much we talk about it, how much we dwell on it, how much we say this and that, it’s not going to bring him back. Sometimes you just got to move on with it. That’s the only way you can get over it, you know? Because if you keep doing the regret, and the “I wish we would have done this,” it’ll ultimately kill you. So you just got to keep going. It sucks, and it feels bad, and you even feel bad doing it, but you have got to let shit go or it’s going to kill you.

It’s also like a pride thing, it’s the masculinity thing a little bit, and then a lot of anger comes out of it. Because we start talking about it, then it’s like, “Aight, what’s niggas doing?” These niggas are like, “let’s ride.” [Adopting an accusatory voice for the purpose of imitation] “What’s niggas doing for his family?” “What’s this and that?” “Why was y’ all not here when this happened?” “Hold on, let me hear the story again!” and this nigga is questioning me. I almost got into a fight with a couple of niggas who were just asking me too many questions [about Tennessee’s death]. And I feel like they didn’t even have the right to ask, you know what I mean? Questioning me like I had something to do with it, you know what I mean? That creates tension… Sometimes it’s like talking to a wall, you know where the conversation is going to go at. Me, I just avoid a lot of things. I mean a lot of people, when you’re dealing with people that aren’t logical, who don’t deal with things in a logical way, this shit can end up violent—between each other. That’s how real the situation can get, even shit that’s been unresolved for years!

While the young men of TMC shared the losses of friends, their inability to talk with one another inhibited the development of shared understandings that could assist them in moving forward. In the limited literature dedicated to the social dimensions of grieving, regular talk about a loved one’s death has been shown to help family members construct meaning from the event and assist the entire family unit in constructively coping with grief (Nadeau 1998). When shared understandings of homicide did exist, they were stock understandings that required no talking and provided little assistance to the bereaved. For example, Uncle “was on the same page” as several others in his generation regarding how to understand Tennessee’s death. It was a fundamental injustice that required corrective action. “In my age group, the dudes that get it on, our mentality was the same even if we had different emotions. And it’s like, there wasn’t nothing to really talk about.” But for Trees, who had lost his best friend and in another context might
have shared this understanding, this way of seeing things did little to help him find his footing in returning to the world.

For those in the TMC network that experienced the death of a close friend, a number of interlocking processes complicated their ability to resume their lives. First was the irreducible emotional pain that they felt upon losing a friend, a rupture that took away an important part of themselves that could only be accessed by means of their relationship with their friend. The emotional force of this loss could be enough to interrupt life as it was known; social networks were disrupted, ways of making a living were forgone in the fog of grief, and life trajectories were permanently altered. Close friends of the dead also carried the burdens of bereavement, occupying an interstitial location between the official bereavement process of the dead’s immediate family and their network’s own bereavement process, over which the threat of retaliation constantly loomed. Within their social network, their status as bereaved set them as the uncomfortable focal point for both the expression of sorrow and a retaliatory process that harnessed rage at the expense of the broader range of emotions felt by the grieving. Efforts to “do something” for a dead friend apart from retaliation often came with high expectations, the risk of failure, and had to be weighed against the uncertainty of what friends might have wanted. What is more, in spite of these complicated circumstances, mourning friends found little support in talking through their situation with those that would understand it best, even years after death, lest they run the risk of spurring interactions that could lead to blame, retaliation, or even violence within their own social network. In this manner, those in the TMC network—although bound to one another—were left to do most of the work of grieving on their own.
DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

“The attitude to dying and the image of death in our societies cannot be completely understood without reference to this relative security and predictability of individual life and correspondingly increased life expectancy. Life grows longer, death is further postponed. The sight of dying and dead people is no longer commonplace. It is easier in the normal course of life to forget death.” (Elias 1985: 8)

At the core of philosophical writings on death in modern Western society, evident in the texts of Elias (1985), Becker (1973), and Aries (1982), is the idea that contemporary society’s unfamiliarity with, and even repugnance of, death, has increased with civilizing trends—especially developments in medicine—that have increased life expectancy and made life more predictable and less brutal. Death has become increasingly hidden from public view, with the vast majority of deaths occurring in hospitals and other medical settings, while the dying have come to serve as a distasteful reminder of the mortality of the living. For the more fortunate, death can be unseen or functionally ignored across broad spans of the lifecourse. Surviving at the margins of broader society, the men of TMC stand as an important exception to this narrative. As American life expectancy continues to rise, the truncated lives of their friends and peers—young, black men like them—serve as one of the principal anchors weighing down its ascent. And while aware of the actuarial improvements in their chances of survival relative to those who lived through the crack era of the late 1980s and 1990s, and even their relative good fortune of living in Boston versus Chicago, this is small consolation to those who have borne witness to the deaths of a dozen friends upon reaching adulthood. The fact of having to see death, within arm’s reach—often repeatedly—while others simply do not have to, is a core component of living through one of America’s most pernicious racial inequalities.

This study offers an alternative perspective on the problem of concentrated homicide, drawing attention to the concentration effects of human pain and suffering that flow from violent
death. In recognizing this pain and suffering, an aim of this research has been to build a theoretical and empirical case for broadening and extending the understanding of inequalities that flow from concentrated homicide, especially by highlighting the intersection between homicide and related post-death social processes. In this way, this work has drawn inspiration from an extensive literature in the study of concentrated homicide and social inequality, and has attempted to consolidate the findings of this research and follow its implications. At the level of resolution provided by this study, when victims of a homicide are contextualized within the web of their social relationships, the interdependency of homicide events—a central feature of network studies of homicide—comes into sharper focus. But what is also made clear is the obvious but largely unexamined unbreakable connection between homicide and death, and in particular the social process of mourning by those in a network left behind after the violent extraction of a loved one. While homicide has been most often analyzed as an event, through the lens of mourning the processual character of homicide for those that must live through it is revealed. Pain, traumatic loss, and mourning—while distinct from homicide—concentrate alongside it and merit consideration in their own right when taking stock of the impacts of homicide.

Within the context of social inequality, what weight should be assigned to the repeated exposure of the men of TMC to death? To date, research into the effects of homicide exposure has concerned itself principally with the mental health outcomes of homicide exposure at the individual level. But what about the social features of this repeated exposure and its broader consequences? Confrontation with death, as has been recognized by several scholarly traditions, is a disruption without equal for individuals as well as their collectives, standing as social life’s greatest challenge. Geertz (1957: 47), summarizing Malinowski (1948) referred to the emotional
disruption caused by death to survivors as threatening “[to] both the psychological and social foundations of human existence.” Death’s threat has been taken no less seriously by those at the core of sociological thought, most compellingly articulated by Berger and Luckmann (1967), who conceived of death as nothing short of a force that imperiled social reality:

Needless to elaborate, death also posits the most terrifying threat to the taken-for-granted realities of everyday life. The integration of death within the paramount reality of social existence is, therefore, of the greatest importance for any institutional order… All legitimations of death must carry out the same essential task—they must enable the individual to go on living in society after the death of significant others and to anticipate his own death with, at the very least, terror sufficiently mitigated so as not to paralyze the continued performance of the routines of everyday life (1967: 101).

Under the best of conditions, then, death presents a foundational challenge. Under conditions of repeated exposure and out of sync with typical events in the lifecourse, it becomes all the more apparent how the very material of which social relations and reality is built can be eroded by death’s intrusion. Such ruptures, when death’s challenges cannot be contested and the possibility of social life seems tenuous, were concrete social problems for the men of TMC, as Breeze expressed in the days following Bruce’s death.

Let’s think about this real quick. In the last two months I’ve lost three people—one person every three weeks. Is life fucking serious right now? I had a meltdown a couple of days ago. You know how Chains copes with it his way, drinking more, smoking more? That wasn’t working for me anymore. It was like the thoughts about death got a grip around my neck, where I am in my life right now, all that shit. It had me crouched in a corner—a breakdown—I had to leave work and everything… I had a conversation with two friends from the hood this past week, and they said they’ve gone through the same thing. Like damn, is there something in the water?

Through such psychic burdens, capable of threatening basic intersubjective and social functioning and spurring recognition of one’s own death in the death of another, the men of TMC bear resemblance to other social groups that confront concentrated early death, such as the social networks that bore the brunt of the early AIDS epidemic of the 1980s. The TMC network thus represents a case not only of concentrated homicide victimization, but one of concentrated death, showing exposure to death itself can be constitutive of social marginality.
Yet other psychic burdens carried by the men of TMC were born directly out of the intersubjective connections produced through carrying on after homicide, and thus represent cultural consequences tied to concentrated homicide victimization. In no small part, these consequences can be observed through the fatalism that framed the understanding of a wide range of social interactions. In an everyday example that profoundly upset Sharon, one Friday afternoon as her program was coming to an end, she asked Kimani, then 17, what he was going to do that weekend. He glibly replied that he would be out on The Block gangbanging. Pointing to the memorial button for Tony that Kimani had affixed to his hooded sweatshirt, Sharon, her voice strained with urgency, asked what was wrong with him—did he want to end up on a button? As long as the picture looks good, Kimani replied with a laugh as he walked out of the door. Even through Kimani’s half-joke, it can be observed that the fatalism that permeated everyday life did not precisely resemble passive resignation. Through the envisioning of funeral programs, the selection of pictures for memorial buttons, and the pre-death conversations specifying how to respond in the case of death, the experiential knowledge that came from exposure to homicide was harnessed for action, specifically the psychological and material preparation for an outcome whose likelihood ranged from possible to probable. When he was arrested on a gun charge just a few months after the death of his close friend Tennessee, Benny himself saw this preparation in a completely new light, through his family’s achingly sober assessment of what was possible and probable for his own life prospects.

Benny: Perfect example. My mother and my father, the money they were putting aside for my funeral, they put in my canteen. They were planning to bury me.

DH: So—hold up, hold up, hold up, so your parents were—

Benny: Waiting on the call. When I got locked up, the first visit when my mother came to see me, my mother and my father were so happy I was in jail. It was tears of joy. They were so happy I got locked up. They could see me, and they know that I was in Nashua Street [Jail]. They were literally—how do your parents tell you that they were already planning your funeral? It’s crazy.
DH: Did you know—

Benny: No! No! None of that. My brother didn’t even know that. They were already starting to put money together, to the side, like I said, they were just waiting on the call.

Having recently buried a daughter—killed by a bullet that was not meant for her—and fully aware of the death surrounding Benny and his friends from Thames Street, Benny’s parents could not help but prepare themselves for the worst. Accustomed to his parents serving as a deep source of support and encouragement, always driving him toward a better future, Benny was stunned by the type of investment they had made in his future—even if he agreed that it was probably a smart one.

The burdens that the men of TMC carried did not simply come from repeated confrontations with violent death, but flowed from challenges inherent in mourning—reckoning with the losses of particular people within their social context. Taking a broader view, the focus on mourning presented in this research cuts against the grain of the modal ways of seeing and analyzing concentrated homicide in its abstracted and aggregated form, throwing into relief the loss of a particular human and their loving, but imperfect relationship with another. From this perspective we are reminded that mourning is a social process undergirded by social relationships, whether the analytic frame for understanding mourning is focused on formal mourning rituals of the collective or is instead honed to capture the mourning of an individual for a significant person in their life. With respect to formal mourning rituals, this study has, in conjunction with other research (i.e. Geertz 1957; Rosaldo 1993) advanced the view that mourning rituals do not necessarily serve to heal and reintegrate social groups. For example, while many features of Tennessee’s funeral made it a practical case study in the potential disintegrative nature of mourning events, it was during the pastor’s funeral sermon that the communal coherence of the service broke apart entirely. When the pastor forcefully drove home
the point that young black men in the community were “dying over nothing!” the front two thirds of the church, made up mostly of regular churchgoers and some family, signaled strong agreement. In contrast, the back third of the church, made up almost entirely of TMC, began to grumble about the idea that Tennessee died “for nothing.” By the time the pastor had labeled the violence that claimed Tennessee’s life “senseless,” earning shouts of agreement from the front of the church, several from TMC began to talk back, and a few others left the church altogether, drawing the pastor’s ire for disrespectfully exiting before the casket. At a time when the men of TMC were experiencing pain and vulnerability, the funeral itself not only offered few useful resources for making meaning from their peer’s death, but it further underscored and intensified their social marginality.

The process of mourning, however, extends far beyond the moments of formal memorial events, and can cause unrecognized discontinuities in everyday life long after a homicide occurred. As this paper has shown, mourning can arise even through the negotiation of one’s neighborhood and regular face-to-face interactions. For Skyline, who wakes up every morning looking at two t-shirts pinned to his wall bearing Tony’s face, his friend’s death cannot quite be put in the past. Like other men from TMC, Skyline’s relationship to his dead best friend spans the past, present, and future. In the routine of his everyday life, even moving through his neighborhood, Skyline is confronted by questions—his own, as well as those he receives and can knowingly can anticipate from his peers—about what could have been done differently to prevent Tony’s death. What is he doing now to help Tony’s family? Why does Tony still not have a headstone? Who killed Tony, and what can be done about it? How can he live his life for Tony? While many of his friends struggle with these same questions, Skyline accepts that it is up to him to figure them out on his own—talking about it will not bring Tony back, but it could set
in motion forces that could be harmful to him and the fragile equilibrium he has gained in his life that he has dedicated to his son—and Tony. Skyline is engaged in what Derrida (2001) called “the work of mourning”—coping with the personal loss of a friend while at the same time facing up to the responsibility of faithfully honoring a friend’s memory—but his labor is dangerous in ways the philosopher probably never imagined.

The findings of this research, I hope will stimulate additional sociological research into death. Despite death’s centrality to social life, the study of death has languished outside of the frame of mainstream sociology, gaining little attention beyond those interested in death’s influence on social identity and medical decision-making. My research represents one step in approaching the study of death—and, importantly post-death social processes—in a manner that highlights the importance of the relationship between death and social marginality and inequality. In addition to recognizing the import of death experiences—especially repeated death experiences—as key challenges to social life, this research has called attention to the processes of mourning and bereavement. Aside from the obvious implications these topics have for those concerned with human pain, suffering, and emotions, I have attempted to show that they are processes that can be generative of inequality and social marginality. Beyond young black men exposed to homicide, the socially marginal more generally are disproportionately exposed to all matter of deaths, and understanding responses to these events can be revelatory of many areas of interest to sociologists. While there is much to learn about mourning and bereavement, one line of potential inquiry involves identifying the conditions under which these social processes can be integrative or disintegrative. As universal problems in social life, mourning and bereavement—unlike concentrated homicide victimization—can be studied across a wide range of social and socioeconomic positions.
What can the experience of concentrated homicide victimization in TMC network tell us about urban violence more broadly? This study has tried to draw attention to the deep human pain and suffering that is caused by concentrated homicide victimization, particularly for those whose suffering is often ignored in media portrayals and policy debates of urban violence: the gang-involved, violent offenders, the tough young men whose lives are most frail in the face of homicide. If, as numerous theorists have argued, criminal homicide most often begins with a real or perceived grievance (Black 1983; Katz 1988; Luckenbill 1977), the grief that those in social networks of high homicide have experienced must be understood as a key ingredient in ongoing cycles of violence. While a full examination of the process of retaliation itself is beyond the scope of this article, I have shown that the possibility of retaliation is a core feature of the social process of mourning for the young men of TMC. In this sense, space has been opened for considering the broader investigation of the relationship between mourning and urban violence.

The pain associated with death may also play a role in the reproduction of gangs and street crews. While scholars have noted the role that victimization can play in gang joining, observations of TMC have suggested (see note 93) that Tennessee’s death might have advanced the acknowledgement of several young men from the neighborhood as being “part of” Thames Street; indeed, after losing Tennessee they too experienced a pain that had to be recognized by older members of the gang. These young men joined the ranks of those that had lost someone important to the street, sharing in the collective loss of the network. A fruitful area of inquiry for those interested in street gangs, group processes, and urban violence would be the examination of street gangs as repositories of shared loss, pain, and memory.

If the young men of TMC—acknowledged broadly as being central to their city’s ongoing problems with serious violence—are struggling to come to grips with the pain of
traumatic loss and the discontinuities involved in mourning, what does this imply for public policy response? In a larger sense, it requires a reimagining of the problem of urban violence, one where the pain, vulnerability, and basic humanity of these young men can be acknowledged and regarded as legitimate—not simply discarded on account of their threat to public safety. Necessary police efforts to “stop the next shooting” in the wake of a homicide event could be augmented by the deployment of outreach workers skilled in addressing not only trauma, but grief, who could help in addressing the short- and long-term difficulties involved in making sense and moving on from the homicide of a significant other. Even if such policy responses fail to stop retaliation—as they often would—such efforts would still be important in assisting those struggling to recover from the death of a loved one. Material assistance and human capital training for those enmeshed in networks of violence—popular, but controversial efforts—could be improved through attempts to frame such efforts as opportunities to “do something” meaningful in the service of the memory of a peer that has been lost. These resources, often understood as temporary salves to stop violence, could be better leveraged as tools for helping a friend’s family or realizing one’s chance to do better for one’s own friends and family—something a dead friend did not get to do. Finally, this research has uncovered a deep ambivalence about the idea of retaliation for homicide, often among those friends that are closest to the dead. The retaliatory process is not necessarily one that is the product of group consensus over what to do for a friend, and further, for many mourners it can imperil safety and complicate grief. This view stands in stark contrast to those projected by popular policy efforts to curb gang and group-based violence, such as Boston’s own Operation Ceasefire (Kennedy 2012), which seeks to hold gang members jointly responsible—through various enforcement channels—for the violent actions of individuals within the gang. While such an approach has produced evidence of
crime control benefits, its logic rests on questionable notions of group cohesion and collective action and certainly does not represent parsimonious punishment. In the case of TMC, after a retaliation for Tennessee’s death such an approach would be as likely to punish the sad and isolated Trees who refused to participate in retaliation, as Uncle, who fanned its flames. In fact, because he had open drug cases at the time, Trees likely would have been among the first to receive punishment.

In highlighting how those within TMC have experienced concentrated homicide victimization, I have identified one consequential dimension of their lives that has typically been ignored in favor of representations that have emphasized criminal behavior. While the experience of living through concentrated homicide victimization is the product of a structural context marked by intense racial and social inequality, the young men of TMC are not hapless victims of this social context even as they experience victimization and the loss of numerous peers and loved ones. Ralph’s (2014) recent research into the consequences of violent injury has argued that injury—often identified in the service of reifying fictional images of the socially isolated ghetto—is frequently used by those who experience it as an opportunity to heal, overcome, and dream vivid futures for themselves and their community. The experiences of the men of TMC, marked by injury to both the body and the spirit, offer both support and challenge to Ralph’s narrative of resilience. First, these young men serve as a reminder that the ability to dream, respond, and even react is predicated on the ability to survive. The first job for the men of TMC is surviving—ontologically prior to dreaming and resilience—a lesson hard learned by the deaths of those close to them. But those that survive certainly do dream—only the dead are key characters in these dreams. In the space of dreams, the men of TMC pull dead friends out of the past, push themselves through a painful and confusing present, and envision a future where the
dead somehow share in a full and meaningful life.
Conclusion

The three papers in this dissertation provide empirical images of facets of urban violence that have heretofore remained poorly understood. Paper One sheds new light on the effectiveness of streetworker gang-outreach programs in reducing serious violence, generating important new evidence on the effects of these programs on the groups and individuals most proximate to gun violence. Paper Two provides a description of the guns available to those most exposed to cycles of urban violence, in the process identifying some of the pathways by which guns move from legal commerce into social contexts marked by gun violence and illegal gun carrying. Paper Three draws attention to some of the under-recognized effects of concentrated homicide, showing how regular exposure to violent death can exacerbate social marginality. While these images put forward by these papers are distinct, when viewed together, they offer some overarching implications that are consequential for theories of crime and the construction of social policy interventions intended to ameliorate urban violence.

A theme present in all three papers is an interest in how social networks influence the contours of serious urban violence. Networks—whether considered explicitly or implied—are central features not only of major theories of crime (i.e. differential association, social disorganization, etc.) but also of broader theories of urban poverty and inequality, particularly with respect to how networks can reproduce inequality and/or be employed in service of day-to-day survival (see Stack 1974, Small 2009, Desmond 2012). The findings of this dissertation have implications for both of these theoretic orientations to the study of social networks. The results of Paper Two raise a provocative question for the relationship between networks, crime, and inequality. Patillo-McCoy (1999) has argued that the urban black middle class has been disproportionately exposed to violent crime relative to its class position due in large part to its
physical and social proximity to disadvantaged black neighborhoods. Physical proximity to disadvantaged black counterparts has been shaped by overarching patterns of racial segregation that have produced income graded “black belts,” leading to related social proximity shaped by social networks (especially familial and institutional networks) that feature unusual levels of connection between the poor and the middle class. While Patillo-McCoy’s argument emphasizes the peril this social arrangement creates for middle class blacks due to their increased exposure to violence and crime, Paper Two of this dissertation prompts consideration of the idea that blacks living in disadvantaged neighborhoods also may not always benefit from their proximity to middle and working class blacks. In particular, Paper Two provides evidence of upwardly mobile social actors that make use of social networks that connect to, as well as reach beyond, predominantly black urban areas (via universities and professional travel opportunities) to facilitate the movement of guns into disadvantaged neighborhoods. While the findings from Paper Two are tentative and not intended to be generalizable, they are suggestive of other sorts of consequential social relationships made possible by broader patterns of racial segregation wherein comparatively advantaged blacks are positioned to leverage social networks in ways that could contribute to the disadvantage of their more marginal counterparts (i.e. landlord-tenant relationships, employment relationships and referrals such as those described in Smith 2007).

Social networks are implicated, albeit less directly, in the inability of streetworker programs to generate meaningful violence reductions, as described in Paper One. One important mechanism proposed for driving these results is the role that gang outreach workers play in increasing group cohesion among the gangs they serve. While cohesion has been defined in various ways in the gang literature, the method of social network analysis offers a straightforward approach for future research to consider cohesion: as network density, or the
proportion of potential ties within a network that manifest as actual ties (Wasserman and Faust 1994). Such a measure would allow for measurement of the key concerns of streetworker program theory—that streetworkers generate iatrogenic effects by bringing together those who would otherwise stay separate from one another. In future research I will make use of existing Boston Police co-arrest and field observation network data to formally test whether Boston gangs that received StreetSafe treatment became significantly more dense/cohesive over time when compared to similar untreated Boston gangs. If hypotheses of streetworkers’ role in increasing gang density/cohesion are valid, this would suggest that gang outreach interventions have made the important error of treating gangs as undifferentiated social groups rather than variegated social networks complete with cliques and sub-networks. Streetworker programs would not be unique in making this mistake, however. Law enforcement interventions targeting gangs—including the much heralded Operation Ceasefire and other “focused deterrence” efforts—frequently punish members of gangs for the sins of one of their fellow gang mates, taking for granted that members of the same gang are sufficiently connected so as to allow for meaningful influence on one another’s behavior (or else such punishment would not only be unjust but ineffective). The increased availability of social network data, particularly in large cities such as Boston, Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles, means that functional proxies for networks—such as gangs—should be replaced or augmented with actual available measures of social networks. Interventions that employ the logics of social networks as part of their theories of social change—whether law enforcement, public health departments, or private foundations sponsor them—must begin to incorporate formal network measures to plan and evaluate their work.
Yet, as suggested by Paper Three, social actors may be meaningfully influenced by those who cannot be observed. In the case of TMC outlined in Paper Three, young men describe the ongoing influence in their lives of friends that are no longer among the ranks of the living. In this situation, even the highest quality observational network data would fail to account for some of the “presence” that the dead maintain within social networks— influencing individual trajectories, serving as unseen nodes between seemingly disconnected people, or even playing a mediating role across relationships. Following Orsi (2007), I take the position that the above should not be understood as an example of the failure of network science or empiricism more broadly, but rather as an opportunity to bring this empiricism forward while allowing for the possibility of the influence of the unseen on social behavior. While referenced obliquely in the current version of Paper Three, future iterations of this research must attempt to integrate respondent reports of conversations with the dead, strong feelings of their presence in certain situations, and their role as protectors during the unfolding of violent events alongside empirics built upon ethnographic observation, interviewing, and social network analysis. The social scientific challenge inherent in this effort is to take seriously these unexplained and largely unobserved—but highly meaningful—social interactions without doing disservice to respondents by discounting them as epiphenomenal.

Taken together, the empirical images put forward by the three papers in this dissertation help to develop a clearer understanding of how violence shapes the lives most exposed to its influence— particularly young black men living in urban areas marked by concentrated disadvantage. How might these images help to reshape policy responses to urban violence?

Viewed critically, Paper One reveals the relatively humble aims of leading non-law enforcement anti-violence interventions. By and large these interventions have forgone the idea of broad-
based community structural change in favor of the perceived efficiency of data-driven efforts to
target the most violent offenders, and have thus ended up sharing their client base with (as well
as often losing it to) law enforcement agencies. The most intense of these interventions, like
StreetSafe Boston, offer a dosage of approximately 20 hours per year of contact between a
streetworker and gang-involved individual. For those not in this target population, public health
interventions have levied public campaigns aimed at changing “norms” of the acceptability of
the use of violence to settle disputes. While there remains a strong moral imperative to address
the needs of those caught up in cycles of retaliatory violence, if social policy efforts are
unwilling or unable to take the radical step of investing in restructural efforts at the community
level, then an intermediate effort should be made to disrupt the pathways by which
disadvantaged young people ascend into the ranks of networks that expose them to serious
violence.

In revealing the connections between guns recovered in violent crime in Boston and their
origin in places like New Hampshire, Maine, and Virginia, Paper Two draws attention to how
disadvantaged black neighborhoods marked by violence, far from being isolated, remain deeply
influenced by social policy currents that originate from far beyond their borders. In comparison
to the seemingly distant and/or invisible policy and structural factors that have shaped the
patterns of racial disadvantage and affluence, the systematic disadvantage created by federal and
state gun policies in poor black neighborhoods seems crystal clear. While some important share
of the enormous and ever-increasing stock of guns in the United States will continue to find its
way to disadvantaged black neighborhoods for the foreseeable future, federal legislation
mandating universal background checks and record keeping requirements for the sale of all guns
would prove to be an important first step in reducing the relative ease of trafficking guns into these areas.

Relative to the above, the policy implications of Paper Three are more subtle—but no less important. Specifically, Paper Three has attempted to show how those who are most often considered society’s greatest threat for engaging in violent crime are also the most exposed to the threat of falling victim to it—and they frequently bear an accumulation of physical and psychic scars as a result of this exposure. Such a population necessarily poses a difficult problem for criminal justice in the United States. On the one hand police agencies have become more sophisticated in identifying this population and face intense public pressure to stop the damaging cycles of violence in which this group is implicated. On the other hand, policymakers are grappling with the problem of dismantling—or at least meaningfully reducing—mass incarceration, an effort that cannot be done without restructuring societal punishment for involvement in violent crime. While difficult to imagine at the present moment, my hope is that the policy images provided by Paper Three—and other research like it—will play some role in generating a set of policy responses that recognize the deep vulnerabilities present among those most exposed to violence, prioritize the protection of this population, and work to ameliorate the conditions of disadvantage in which violence flourishes.
APPENDIX A.

ALTERNATIVE MATCHING APPROACHES

We strongly believe that the theoretically-informed matching (TIM) approach, which draws on the deep local knowledge of the research team, produced the strongest possible matches of SSB groups to comparison gangs. As a robustness check, we also matched SSB groups to comparison groups using two other methods familiar to social scientists. The first is propensity score (p-score) matching, which is a common method used in policy and evaluation research. The second is Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM), which is a newer method that offers some advantages over the p-score approach. The basic premises of these approaches are described below, along with the results they produced when we applied them to the SSB data. In large part, the p-score and CEM findings reinforced the conclusions we reached using the TIM analysis, bolstering our confidence in those results.

As with the TIM approach, we aimed to match SSB groups to comparison groups on the following seven characteristics: pre-treatment shootings, gang size, number of active conflicts, historicity, housing project status, gang race/ethnicity, and neighborhood disadvantage. We selected comparison cases from a pool of 46 Boston groups that were not involved in SSB for which we were able to obtain information on the seven characteristics used for matching.

Propensity Score (p-score) Matching

Propensity score matching (Rosenbaum and Rubin 1983) functions by regressing the treatment variable (being an SSB group) on the set of characteristics on which we would like to match. Based on these regression estimates, a propensity score (or p-score) is calculated for each
of the treatment and potential comparison groups reflecting how likely the group was to have been selected for treatment in the SSB program based on its unique set of characteristics. The intuition behind the p-score is to summarize the information about the seven covariates into a single measure. Each SSB group is then matched to one or more comparison groups based on this p-score.

There are a wide variety of matching algorithms that can be used in selecting the comparison cases. For this analysis, we used two methods: 1) nearest neighbor matching, and 2) radius matching with a caliper = 0.1. Nearest neighbor matching selects the best comparison case for each treatment case, regardless of how different the propensity score of that nearest neighbor is. Radius matching selects all comparison groups within the caliper. This allows for the inclusion of multiple comparison groups for a single SSB group when multiple strong comparisons exist. However, if no comparison case appears within the caliper, no match is made, reducing the risk of weak matches (Caliendo and Kopeinig 2005).

Our nearest neighbor model matched the 20 SSB groups to 14 comparison groups, with some comparison groups used more than once. Our radius model matched 18 SSB groups\textsuperscript{95} to 46 comparison groups, with somewhat higher levels of bias across the covariates. Table A1 shows the balance on each of the seven covariates post-matching for both methods.

\textsuperscript{95} Two StreetSafe groups were not matched because they were off of support (i.e., no comparison groups were within the 0.1 caliper).
Having matched the groups, we then examine the Average Treatment effect on the Treated (ATT). The ATT is the average effect of the SSB treatment across the 20 (or 18) groups that received SSB services. Table A2 presents these findings. The ATT statistics reveal that receiving SSB services was associated with a slight increase in total shootings relative to comparison non-SSB groups of between 0.80 and 1.06 shootings per group per year (differences of 3.2 and 4.22 total shootings across 4 years), but this difference was not statistically significant (t-stat = 0.94 for nearest neighbor matching and 1.43 for caliper matching). In short, the nearest neighbor method relied on more SSB cases and fewer comparison cases than caliper matching and produced matches with less bias on the covariates—yet the two methods produced similar findings.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SSB</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>t Statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unmatched</td>
<td>17.35</td>
<td>7.87</td>
<td>9.48</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nearest Neighbor ATT</td>
<td>17.35</td>
<td>14.15</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radius Caliper ATT</td>
<td>16.72</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE A3.
StreetSafe Boston Impacts on Gang-Motivated Shooting Incidents: Growth Curve Regression Models for Propensity Score Matching (Nearest Neighbor)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Suspect</th>
<th>Victim</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>StreetSafe impact (Interaction)</td>
<td>.162 (.182)</td>
<td>.118 (.197)</td>
<td>.136 (.145)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>StreetSafe gang (1= Treated)</td>
<td>-.190 (.167)</td>
<td>-.085 (.145)</td>
<td>-.125 (.136)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period (1 = Intervention)</td>
<td>-.850 (.203)**</td>
<td>-.824 (.231)**</td>
<td>-.831 (.168)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trend</td>
<td>.097 (.028)**</td>
<td>-.004 (.027)*</td>
<td>.049 (.021)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trend-squared</td>
<td>-.002 (.001)**</td>
<td>.001 (.001)</td>
<td>-.001 (.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 2</td>
<td>.286 (.142)*</td>
<td>.593 (.152)**</td>
<td>.465 (.112)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 3</td>
<td>.812 (.133)**</td>
<td>.918 (.146)**</td>
<td>.867 (.108)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 4</td>
<td>.360 (.143)**</td>
<td>.081 (.169)</td>
<td>.309 (.117)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propensity score</td>
<td>1.958 (.297)**</td>
<td>1.138 (.246)**</td>
<td>1.726 (.239)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-1.974 (.284)**</td>
<td>-1.142 (.267)**</td>
<td>-1.154 (.226)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-1240.898</td>
<td>-947.772</td>
<td>-1596.115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wald $\chi^2$</td>
<td>112.03**</td>
<td>111.40**</td>
<td>157.14**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wald df</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations (gangs X quarters) | 868 | 868 | 868
Number of gangs                  | 31  | 31  | 31

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. Quarter 1 is the reference category for the seasonal dummy variable.

* = $p < .05$
** = $p < .01$
## TABLE A4.
**StreetSafe Boston Impacts on Gang-Motivated Shooting Incidents: Growth Curve Regression Models for Propensity Score Matching (Caliper)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Suspect</th>
<th>Victim</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>StreetSafe impact (Interaction)</td>
<td>.136 (.202)</td>
<td>.122 (.217)</td>
<td>.145 (.158)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>StreetSafe gang (1= Treated)</td>
<td>-.078 (.190)</td>
<td>.071 (.182)</td>
<td>.008 (.156)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period (1 = Intervention)</td>
<td>-.700 (.229)**</td>
<td>-.782 (.259)**</td>
<td>-.744 (.184)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trend</td>
<td>.074 (.031)*</td>
<td>-.026 (.029)</td>
<td>.033 (.023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trend-squared</td>
<td>-.002 (.001)*</td>
<td>.001 (.001)</td>
<td>-.001 (.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 2</td>
<td>.320 (.150)*</td>
<td>.518 (.169)**</td>
<td>.453 (.120)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 3</td>
<td>.651 (.144)**</td>
<td>.902 (.161)**</td>
<td>.784 (.117)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 4</td>
<td>.140 (.159)</td>
<td>.203 (.180)</td>
<td>.240 (.127)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propensity score</td>
<td>2.075 (.347)**</td>
<td>1.428 (.344)**</td>
<td>1.907 (.294)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-1.856 (.316)**</td>
<td>-1.899 (.411)**</td>
<td>-1.109 (.259)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-1044.805</td>
<td>-816.316</td>
<td>-1357.703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wald $\chi^2$</td>
<td>74.63**</td>
<td>86.35**</td>
<td>115.39**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wald $df$</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations (gangs X quarters)</td>
<td>1792</td>
<td>1792</td>
<td>1792</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of gangs</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. Quarter 1 is the reference category for the seasonal dummy variable.

* $= p < .05$

** $= p < .01$

---

**Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM) Approach**

Increasingly popular in the social sciences, coarsened exact matching (CEM) is an alternative to propensity score methods. Unlike p-score methods, CEM guarantees improvement in the balance of each covariate ex ante rather than having to rely on post-matching balance checks and repeated specifications (Iacus et al. 2012). The basic premise of this approach is that each covariate is first “coarsened” into bins. For a binary variable like housing project status,
exact matching is possible: project-based groups are in one bin, and non-project groups are in another. For a count variable, however, the researcher needs to assign cutoff points within the distribution to create the bins. For example, with neighborhood disadvantage, we could set the cutoffs at the 33rd and 67th percentiles to create 3 groups with high, medium, and low levels of disadvantage.\(^96\)

After covariates are coarsened, matches are made among groups that appear in the exact same set of bins. (Groups that match on all bins are referred to as being in the same “cell.”) Unlike propensity score matching, the CEM approach will match all treatment groups with the same coarsened characteristics to all comparison groups with those same features. A single SSB group can be matched to multiple comparison groups, and multiple SSB groups can be matched to a single comparison group. If an SSB group has no exact matches, it is excluded from the analysis (i.e., assigned a weight of 0). Our research team views CEM as producing somewhat more rigorous matches than the p-score approach but at the cost of increased pruning (i.e., fewer cases being included in the final sample).\(^97\)

The CEM approach produces a vector of weights that can be used in impact analyses. These weights give equal importance to multiple treatment groups matched within the same cell and ensure that all treatment groups sum to the total number of matched treatment groups. For example, if a total of 20 treatment groups are matched across 10 cells, the sum of the weights of the treatment groups in each cell will be 2.\(^98\) Likewise, all comparison groups matched with a given cell have the same weight, and the weights on all matched comparison groups sum to the

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\(^96\) In the ideal case, we would set bin cut points at values that are substantively meaningful (i.e., at values of 12 and 16 if our variable was years of schooling). In other cases, the researcher must make cut-point decisions based on the distribution of the variable in question to ensure like-for like comparisons.

\(^97\) An additional advantage is that the CEM matching process is nonparametric, so we are not forced to make assumptions about the nature of the relationships between covariates and assignment to the SSB treatment.

\(^98\) If only one treatment group is matched in a cell, it has a weight of 2; if 2 treatment groups are matched within a single cell, each have a weight of 1; if 3 treatment groups are matched within in a cell, they each have a weight of 0.667; and so on.
total number of matched comparison groups.

Because CEM requires exact matching across all bins, using a large number of covariates produces very few matches. For this reason, we trimmed our set of seven covariates and matched only on the five most important variables: pre-treatment shootings, gang size, number of active conflicts, housing project status, and neighborhood disadvantage. In our final CEM model, we matched 12 SSB groups to 15 comparison groups. Table A5 shows the balance on the five covariates pre- and post-matching.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE A5. Coarsened Exact Matching, Mean Covariate Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-Matching</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSB Groups (N=20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Treatment Shootings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gang Size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Active Conflicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project-Based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N’hood Disadvantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison Groups (N=46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Matching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison Groups (N=15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Improvement in balance also can be measured using the multivariate L1 statistic (see Iacus, King, and Porro 2008), which ranges from a value of 0 denoting perfect balance across all covariates to a value of 1 denoting perfect imbalance. In our models, the multivariate L1 decreased from 0.878 to 0.694 as a result of the matching process.

We then used the weights produced by CEM to calculate the ATT. Results are presented in Table A6. As with propensity score matching, the results of the CEM analysis reveal that SSB treatment is associated with an increase in total shootings (an average of 1.09 per group per year); but this result is not statistically significant.

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99 We did not match on historicity or gang race/ethnicity, which were highly correlated with other controls but less predictive of receiving the treatment.
TABLE A6. Coarsened Exact Matching, Average Treatment Effect on Treated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SSB</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>t Statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unmatched</td>
<td>17.35</td>
<td>7.87</td>
<td>9.48</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEM ATT</td>
<td>17.17</td>
<td>12.82</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**TABLE A7. StreetSafe Boston Impacts on Gang-Motivated Shooting Incidents: Growth Curve Regression Models for Coarsened Exact Matching**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Suspect</th>
<th>Victim</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>StreetSafe impact (Interaction)</td>
<td>0.169 (.227)</td>
<td>0.191 (.230)</td>
<td>0.173 (.231)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>StreetSafe gang (1= Treated)</td>
<td>0.201 (.230)</td>
<td>-0.026 (.259)</td>
<td>0.021 (.215)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period (1 = Intervention)</td>
<td>-0.531 (.259)*</td>
<td>-0.328 (.165)*</td>
<td>-0.491 (.201)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trend</td>
<td>0.029 (.032)</td>
<td>-0.059 (.033)</td>
<td>0.001 (.025)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trend-squared</td>
<td>-0.001 (.001)</td>
<td>0.001 (.001)</td>
<td>-0.001 (.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 2</td>
<td>0.292 (.168)</td>
<td>0.837 (.192)**</td>
<td>0.533 (.136)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 3</td>
<td>0.596 (.161)*</td>
<td>1.044 (.188)**</td>
<td>0.804 (.132)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 4</td>
<td>0.051 (.178)</td>
<td>0.523 (.204)*</td>
<td>0.275 (.145)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.759 (.280)**</td>
<td>0.847 (.229)*</td>
<td>0.713 (.233)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-819.422</td>
<td>-660.574</td>
<td>-1068.980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wald $X^2$</td>
<td>42.30**</td>
<td>54.26**</td>
<td>70.93**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wald df</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations (gangs X quarters)</td>
<td>756</td>
<td>756</td>
<td>756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of gangs</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. Quarter 1 is the reference category for the seasonal dummy variable.

* = $p < .05$
** = $p < .01$
APPENDIX B.

Citywide Shootings, Baseline and Treatment Periods

Boston Shootings, All Versus Gang-Motivated

Bar chart showing the comparison between total shootings and gang-motivated shootings from Baseline 1 to Baseline 4 and Year 1 to Year 4 for July 2006 to June 2013.
References


Smith, Tom W, Peter Marsden, Michael Hout, and Jibum Kim. General Social Surveys, 1972-2014 [machine-readable data file] /Principal Investigator, Tom W. Smith; Co-Principal Investigator, Peter V. Marsden; Co-Principal Investigator, Michael Hout; Sponsored by National Science Foundation. -NORC ed.- Chicago: NORC at the University of Chicago [producer and distributor].


