

3-25-2014

Resources Matter: The Role of Social Capital and Collective Efficacy in Mediating Gun Violence

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Resources Matter:

The Role of Social Capital and Collective Efficacy in Mediating Gun Violence

by

Jennifer Dean

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Sociology
Department of Sociology
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Date of Approval:
March 25, 2014

Keywords: Gangs, Activism, Life Skills, Trauma, Poverty

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Dedication

Dedicated to the kids in Chicago and anyone working to improve the quality of life for our future generations. Also to my family, thank you for your continued support, encouragement and love.

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Abstract

This study explains how community activists make use of available social capital and collective efficacy while attempting to mediate gun violence. It specifically focuses on twelve in-depth interviews of activists' perspectives, processes and rationales to alleviate community gun violence, based on informal social control models. Findings suggest activists must establish trust and respect with youth they work with before mediation begins, which is established through similar life experiences or backgrounds. Once a strong bond is established with youth, activists identified five core processes to reduce violence: 1) improve the mindset, 2) provide life skills, 3) assist youth as their liaison between networks, 4) expose and provide tools to other opportunities such as college or jobs, and 5) activists challenge system policy that they feel contributes to Chicago's gun violence.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explain how community activists make use of available social capital and collective efficacy while attempting to mediate gun violence. It specifically focuses on activists' perspectives, processes and rationales to alleviate community gun violence based on informal social control models. Quantitative research has focused on the availability, determinants and dimensions of social capital (Sampson et al. 1997), while the current study examines meaning and value attached to interrelated forms of social capital and collective efficacy through activism (Putnam 2000; Rosenfeld et al. 2001). This research emphasizes the importance of social capital and necessitates expanding resources that provide social networks to combat gun violence, as quantitative literature has identified a lack in numbers of these resources (Putnam 2000; Sampson et al. 1997).

In order to examine the role of social capital and collective efficacy in mediating gun violence, 12 community activists working to reduce violence in Chicago were recruited for in-depth interviews. This study identifies the characteristics of activists that allow for bonding to develop between youth and the activists, thus increasing the chance of behavioral change. Five core processes that activists utilize to reduce violence have been identified. However, only focusing on changing behavior places responsibility and the blame on youth for their actions. Thus, this research further highlights the activists' role in challenging systematic policies that may contribute to violence.

The research site is Chicago, known to have significant gang problems, with an estimated membership at around 130,000, among 70-100 different gang organizations (Kirby et al. 2012). In 2011, the primary form of homicide was individuals being shot by guns (n=362), as this accounted for 83.4% of those murdered in Chicago for that year (Please note Table 1.) Communities often concentrated in poor urban neighborhoods are prone to gun violence; victimizing residents, as well as decreasing their sense of safety (Bell and Jenkins 1993). Homicide totals have remained high for the past three years (2011= 433, 2012 = 506, 2013 = 414); one high school on Chicago's south side reported 29 out of 500 of their current and former students fell victim to gun violence over the course of one year (This American Life 2013). These numbers indicate a need for continuing research on combating gun violence (CLEARpath).

Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics: City Wide Chicago Murder Analysis

	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Demographic Characteristics</i>	
Murder Victims Found Outdoors	82.40%
Murder Victims Found Indoors	17.60%
Total	100.0
Murder Occuring on Weekend (Fri. Sat. Sun.)	
	49.20%
Murder Occuring on Weekday (Mon-Thur)	
	50.80%
Total	100.0
<i>Murder Method</i>	
Shot	83.40%
Stabbed	6.70%
Assault	6.50%
Strangulation	0.90%
Blunt Force Injury	1.20%
Asphyxiation	0.20%
Other	1.20%
Total	100.0
<i>Murder Motives</i>	
Altercation Non-gang Related	23.40%

Table 1. (Continued)

Altercation Gang Related	27.20%
Burglary	0.20%
Gangland Narcotics	6%
Narcotics Territorial Gang Related	0.60%
Robbery	8.40%
Assault of Women	0.20%
Other: Child Abuse, Mental Disorder	6%
Undetermined	28%
Total	100.0
Victim Male	90.10%
Victim Female	9.9%
Total	100.0
Offender Male	88.40%
Offender Female	10.4%
Other	1.2%
Total	100.0
<i>Race of Murder Victims</i>	
Hispanic	18.90%
Black	75.30%
White	4.60%
Other	1.10%
Total	100.0
<i>Race of Offender</i>	
Hispanic	24.30%
Black	70.50%
White	3.50%
Other	1.70%
Total	100.0
Murder Victims with Prior Arrest	76.90%
Murder Victims with No Prior Arrest	23.10%
Total	100.0
Offender with Prior Arrest	87.30%
Offender with No Prior Arrest	12.70%
Total	100.0

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Links Between Violence, Social Disorganization & Anomie

In *The Truly Disadvantaged*, Wilson (1987) implied that the concentrated areas of violence in Chicago were a result of the long term deindustrialization of US cities, which fostered joblessness and the social isolation of black communities from the larger society; changing neighborhoods from communities with opportunities and a working class into impoverished communities with little opportunity for employment. At the neighborhood level, without employment, poverty grows and festers, bringing along with it higher crime rates (Wilson 1987).

Massey and Denton (1993) agreed with Wilson, (1987) and affirmed that shrinking economic opportunity and de facto racial segregation in American cities led to concentrated communities of poverty and crime. Some Chicago neighborhoods correspond with residential environments traditionally considered *socially disorganized*, the signs of which include numerous abandoned and boarded-up homes, vacant lots outnumbering occupied homes, uncollected trash and abandoned cars; and of particular importance to this study, high crime and violence rates (Wilson 1987; Patton and Johnson 2009; Wacquant 2008).

Similarly, Wacquant's (2008) ethnographic research on the "Black Belt" (south and west sides of Chicago) conveyed prevalent violence and low organizational density in some

communities on the South Side of Chicago as result of institutional abandonment, withdrawal of markets, and government policies that fostered racial segregation and hindered upward mobility. For example, 63rd street in Woodlawn used to be a primary commercial strip in Chicago nicknamed the ‘miracle mile’, with around 800 businesses during World War II (Wacquant 2008). The current 63rd street, no longer has repair shops, banks, manufacturing factories, etc., leaving a market of only ninety commercial establishments, most of which consists of barber shops, liquor stores, currency exchanges, laundromats, and secondhand furniture stores that do not provide mass employment or sufficient economic revenue (Wacquant 2008).

When Wacquant (2008) asked residents how many men were working within their Chicago communities, almost half replied with ‘very few’ or ‘none’. A third of those residents reported they did not expect to see improvement, but saw conditions continuing to deteriorate. Without institutions that provide employment, opportunity or services these poverty- stricken communities appear to be *socially disorganized*, and the perceived *anomie* of residents reinforces illegal behaviors, while socially normative, middle-class “safe” community models of behavior are presumed to be apparently absent (Durkheim 1897; Wilson 1987; Massey and Denton 1993).

Durkheim (1897) defined *anomie* as normlessness, a lack of understanding of what the norms actually are, resulting in this case from a rapidly changing social condition, such as the Great Migration of African-Americans that took place from the post antebellum South to Chicago’s South Side Community, followed decades later by the abandonment of the types of industries the community relied upon for jobs (Wilson 1987). Durkheim’s (1897) stance on *anomie* suggested a breakdown of social bonds, specifically folkways and mores, between people, which may result in a *socially disorganized community*.

Venkatesh's (2008) ethnographic work in the south side of Chicago provided key examples that further explain the link between poverty, social disorganization and anomie. Similarly to Wacquant's (2008) research in Chicago, Venkatesh (2008) found a common theme among residents living in the Robert Taylor Homes; feelings of isolation and abandonment from larger societal institutions. Many residents expressed they had little access to "mainstream" opportunities for education, employment, and services that middle class communities typically have. The environment Venkatesh (2008) described was extremely inhospitable; consisting of littered buildings with no trash removal; in addition to poor building maintenance by the housing authority, the result being boarded up windows and missing doors. Police were reluctant to risk their own safety by entering these communities, which then combined with a general fear of police among residents, resulted in self-policing through violence and vigilantism. Violence often became a normative solution to daily issues such as theft, domestic abuse, and general conflict that would otherwise be handled by the police, leaving the community Venkatesh (2008) explored in a dangerous state.

The primary reason linking poverty and violence in Chicago, according to Venkatesh's (2008) and Wacquant's (2008) research, was that some residents felt they did not have economic opportunities often provided by institutions located in middle class communities. The residents interviewed by Venkatesh (2008) had to obtain some form of income to survive, whether through illegal activity or government benefits. Welfare support often left residents with inadequate support for families, as government benefits often barely covered the cost of living (Wacquant 2008). With high unemployment, income was generated by illegal activity, such as drug dealing, hustling (working without taxation), prostitution, etc., which resulted in unsafe neighborhoods and imprisonment (Sampson 1999). When living in unsafe neighborhoods, anomie becomes

ubiquitous, as residents have to adapt their behaviors in order to survive dangerous conditions such as the daily shootings ‘war zones’ in Chicago (Venkatesh 2008).

Anomie becomes reinforced as residents were aware of the high possibilities of everyday violence within their own neighborhood, thus, often did not have the desire to travel into other neighborhoods, or even down the block, because residents did not have the street knowledge of which blocks to avoid or where rival gang members may be present (Venkatesh 2008). Furthermore, after leaving a set of housing projects, there was no longer a sense of protection from friends or family (Venkatesh 2008). The desirable familiarity within residents’ own immediate environment often left them socially isolated within a few square blocks; their unawareness of the larger world again representing an anomic condition. Thus, by being isolated, there were few opportunities to experience model behaviors from middle class communities where violence is socially unacceptable; violence within impoverished communities became not only acceptable for survival, but also actually required at times (Venkatesh 2008).

While trash, abandoned buildings, crime etc. are all indicators for Wilson of a socially disorganized community, the concept should not be interpreted to mean the community has no internal organization. One of the highlights of Venkatesh’s (2008) book was his praise over the residents’ social networks and dependency on one another. The communities Venkatesh (2008) explored were highly organized *in their own way*, which may be underappreciated or not understood by current scholars, as strong social networks allowed opportunities for families to set up free day care (reducing child neglect), car- pooling to the grocery store (reducing malnutrition), and protection by gang members.

Another example of organization in Venkatesh’s (2008) Chicago Robert Taylor Homes sample, occurred as a response to the Chicago Housing Authority’s ignoring tenant maintenance

requests; several resident families joined together to optimize use of the existing infrastructure, poor as it was. Instead of three families requesting repairs for three refrigerators, etc., one family asked for a refrigerator repair, one asked for oven repairs, and another for heat. All the families would then come together and allow each other to use what utilities were available and working properly, since the likelihood of fixing everything was slim to none. Ultimately, Venkatesh's (2008) work illustrated that residents living in poverty were forced to not rely on institutions and services that middle income communities have, especially in conditions prone to social disorganization and anomie. The social networks among residents highlight the apparent organization in an otherwise labeled socially disorganized community.

Mediation of Violence Through Collective Efficacy & Social Capital.

Durkheim (1897) was concerned about how individuals could once again feel tied to one another in an industrialized, individualistic society experiencing extensive anomie; he suggested a form of collective efficacy and social capital to readdress social control bonds, and bridge differences between individuals (Durkheim 1915). While the form of guild socialism that Durkheim (1915) advocated was a way of uniting those involved in similar industries and business activities might not be directly feasible, a variation of his suggestions tied to tangible community resources that rely upon social capital and nascent collective efficacy, might be available to intervene and ultimately reduce the type of anomic violence typified in large post Rust Belt cities like Chicago. The types of organizations and interventions discussed in this project suggests social capital might already be present in communities, but sometimes remains nescient until put to use by residents or activists. *Community organization, thus, allows for social capital to be utilized.*

While the consensus in the literature is that *socially disorganized* communities, in theory, create conditions prone to high crime, it has recently been recognized that correlation between community disorganization and violence can be mediated through targeted programs that rely upon community-level collective efficacy and social capital (Sampson et al. 1997). Sampson et al. (1997) defined community-level collective efficacy as “social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good” (p. 918). Sampson et al. (1997) explored collective efficacy through a quantitative approach, utilizing surveys in 343 Chicago neighborhoods. The authors assume residents share a set of common values, such as the desire for safety within neighborhoods, thus social control (defined here as the capacity to regulate residents based on common values) can be implemented through local networks to reduce violence. Sampson et al. (1997) recognized two types of social control relating to collective efficacy: informal and formal (external). Informal control refers to when a group regulates behaviors of its members within that group, as opposed to formal control, which is forced regulation by institutions to promote conformity. An example of informal social control is a community activist organization intervening in a gang fight within the activist’s own neighborhood.

While Sampson et al. (1997) conducted research on collective efficacy using a multilevel level quantitative analysis, this research will explore similar concepts, but in a qualitative manner, focusing on the potential development of a community based anti-violence perspective emerging from the work of Chicago non-profit activist groups. While this research focuses on individual members from such groups, collectively they can have greater impact, in effect, perhaps a variation on Durkheim’s concept of collective effervescence (Durkheim 1915). A limitation of Sampson’s et al. (1997) study is the authors failure to explore in-depth the activists’

interventionist perspectives, processes and rationales, specifically the underlying importance of social capital. Mediation of gun violence by activists may be through interventions that are verbal, physical, or through youth programs, etc. Thus, this research is interested in interpreting the complexities of the various non-profit resources and social networks within the community, and their potential mediation of gun violence. Furthermore, even though some communities have higher levels of collective efficacy, it is important to focus on the collective efficacy of so-called “socially disorganized” communities, as the impact of collective efficacy is often dismissed or assumed to be ineffective in quantitative research studies. By highlighting what these communities have actually put in place to assist with their own social problems, one can understand the influence that social networks and collective efficacy have on a neighborhood, to address how these communities are responding to gun violence. This may encourage other communities to mobilize informally against gun violence, while being reinforced through agencies of formal and informal social control.

Sampson et al. (1997) embraced geography, rather than solidarity or identity, as the major criterion identifying community; therefore, the current research will focus on specific geographic locations within Chicago, instead of group identity or solidarity. These localized strategies of social control need to be considered, and not neglected as in past quantitative research that typically have underestimated the value of social capital in violent communities.

Definitions of Social Capital

The term social capital has been conceptualized and applied in numerous ways in sociology and related disciplines such as criminology. Consequently, it will be important to cover the array of definitions associated with social capital in order to address where past

research overlaps but has ultimately fallen short of including discussions of real people actually at work in the community striving to improve it. Some sociologists have made the term into a macro-level concept (Bourdieu 1985; Fellin 1998; Coleman 1998), by asserting social capital to describe a community in an abstract term relating to the sum total of relationships, while others defined the term as a micro-level concept (Patton and Johnson 2009; Putnam 2000), exploring interaction between individuals. The overall importance of examining social capital lies in the belief that social networks have value. Thus, social networks might influence productivity, or in this study, influence how the community is responding to gun violence.

Macro-level Concept of Social Capital

Bourdieu (1985) described social capital as being constituted by social networks and relationships. He (p. 248) defined social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition". Bourdieu (1985) distinguished between social networks that an individual is embedded in and out of, and the outcomes of those social relationships. Similarly, Coleman (1988) defined social capital as inherently functional, allowing people or institutions to act, primarily through resources. Therefore, social capital is a neutral resource, but allows actions to take place by providing social networks; it is then up to the individual to utilize the resources of social capital to gain benefits. For example, an afterschool youth center provides a resource for teachers to tutor students and keep them off the streets, allowing youth to have benefits of extra schooling and safety provided by the building. However, unless the youth attends the afterschool youth center, the student will not benefit from the resources available, and this form of social capital lies dormant until utilized.

Fellin (1998) identified social capital as the resources people have access to by virtue of being socially integrated into solitary groups, networks, or organizations. Similarly, in reference to the example above, if the student belongs to an after school youth center, they have access because they are integrated within the organization. The forms of capital include norms and sanctions, mutual reciprocity and mutual trust. Fellin (1998) hypothesized that problems of social organization and social control are associated with lack of social capital. Sampson et al. (1997) aligned with Fellin (1998), who previously noted an unequal distribution of institutions in low-income communities that provide social capital.

Micro-level Concept of Social Capital

From a micro-level perspective, Patton and Johnson (2009) defined social capital as “mutually constitutive links between non-material resources (informal, advice/guidance, emotional support, etc.) and the social relationships within and through which these resources are provided, accessed and received” (p. 57). Through those organizations or resources, mutual aid and support help build social capital among residents (Fellin 1998; Patton and Johnson 2009). For example, former gang members, who are now activists in communities prone to gun violence, might provide a social relationship with current gang members, providing them with guidance and mentoring to avoid a life of crime. The social links between the former and current gang members allows for positive influences that are derived from social capital.

Correspondingly, Putnam’s (2000) definition of social capital began with two general forms of social capital: trust and social participation. Trust may then be conceptualized in two forms: bonding trust and bridging trust (Putnam 2000). Bonding trust, or thick trust, includes the immediate friends, family, coworkers, and neighbors of individuals, while bridging trust or thin

trust, relates to extended relationships that may not be within an individual's closeknit circle of relationships (Putnam 2000). Residents in communities that express high levels of bonding trust reciprically have high levels of bridging trust (Rosenfeld et al. 2001).

According to Putnam (2000), social networks form the foundations of social capital. The relations that lead to social capital include religious participation, civic participation, political engagement, workplace connections, educational participation and informal social ties (Putnam 2000). When these forms of social capital are high, social interaction increases, which allows individuals to resolve problems collectively, often creating positive outcomes for community problems. Through positive social networks, positive behaviors are encouraged through role models or mentors, who provide emotional or financial support (Putnam 2000).

On the other hand, Putnam (2000) discussed the impact of declines in forms of social capital, especially in poverty stricken communities, which ultimately is reflected in an increase in crime. Without resources present to provide social capital, bonding and bridging is unlikely to occur among positive role models and youth. However, just because Putnam (2000) focuses on decline in social capital, this does not mean it is not present. Thus, this research will be exploring social capital that is present, even if in minimal form, to highlight the value associated with the benefits one may receive from social capital, particularly when social capital mediates crime. Small (2009) suggested one must understand the complex mechanisms underlying social ties, and the network inequalities that may prevent youth from utilizing resources such as school (or non-profits), linking micro-level processes (interaction among peers) to macro-level structures that have direct impact on youth, and their future chances of success.

DeFilippis (2001) conveyed the importance of keeping the term social capital connected with the economy; otherwise one is not speaking of capital (in a Marxist sense). The researcher

critiqued Putnam's (2000) take on social capital, in that he did not connect the term to the economy, which weakens the possible application to community development. In Putnam's (2000) definition, social capital is not associated with power relations, and makes the assumption that all social networks are healthy or positive relationships (DeFilippis 2001). While Putnam (2000) suggested a decline in social capital, there was a gap in Putnam's (2000) literature on negative forms of social capital (DeFilippis 2001). For example, negative social networks resulting from inadequate social capital may include gang membership, which may place an individual in a deadly situation.

Wilson (1994) described the types of social capital missing from Chicago neighborhoods such as non-broken families, social networks, social cohesion, mutual trust, participation in informal and formal voluntary associations, stability of formal organizations, collective supervision of children and presence of neighborhood institutions. However, the South Side of Chicago does have some of the neighborhood initiatives described as missing by Wilson (1994), and these create social capital, including block clubs, youth programs, and non-profit organizations. Thus, this research will be exploring how neighborhood initiatives, specifically non-profit organizations in the South Side of Chicago, create social capital, even if such resources appear to be largely nonexistent.

Multidimensional Conceptions of Social Capital

Portes (1998) conveyed the importance of exploring the multidimensions and complexities of the causes and effects of social capital among communities. While the benefits of religious participation (Lederman, Loayza, and Mendendez 2002; Foster 2009; Portes 1998) and educational participation (Ozer 2005; Small 2009; Patton and Johnson 2009; Portes 1998),

have been researched in previous literature with regards to reducing violence and increasing trust, to narrow the scope of this research, this project will further explore civic participation, informal social connections, political engagement and activism in regards to social capital and collective efficacy as a potential mediator for gun violence.

Civic Participation

There are multiple forms of civic participation, which may include membership in community organizations, participation in events, community activism, or social services (Rosenfeld et al. 2001; Putnam 2000; Portes 1998). Kennedy et al. (1998) affirmed the connection of social capital to mediating violence by conceptualizing levels of social capital via degrees of trust and *civic engagement*. The researchers established that trust and civic engagement have a significant influence on reductions of gun violence (Kennedy et al. 1998). However, when those forms of social capital are low, gun violence increases (Rosenfeld et al. 2001), even when controlling for levels of poverty (Kennedy et al. 1998).

When there is an increase or presence of crime, often there is an increase in civic participation attempting to combat violence (Skogan and Lurigio 1992; Conklin 1975). For example, the high levels of gun violence in Chicago made the setting appropriate for the establishment of the Cure Violence organization, whose main goal is to intervene in potentially violent situations (Crime Solutions 2013). If there was no gun violence, the formation of such civic participation through social services would be unnecessary.

Informal Social Connections

Putnam (2000) asserted informal social connections are forms of social capital, which may take place through the relationships between neighbors, friends, and family. The socializing that takes place among these informal social networks represents different forms of civic involvement, thus possibly linking collective efficacy to social capital. Previous literature did not fully examine resources utilizing these combined concepts, which will allow this project to be a unique extension of current research. Again, Sampson (2001) predicted that collective efficacy and social capital have the ability to mediate violence. If there is strong collective efficacy, youth tend to have positive relationships with adults who may serve as a positive role model for youth behaviors, and may intervene in possible situations of gun violence (Sampson 2001)

In communities where there is a general lack of trust, there is a reduction in both informal sociability and civic involvement among community members, which is associated with higher levels of homicide, and reciprically, higher levels of homicide reduces trust (Rosenfeld et al. 2001; Galea et al. 2002; Putnam 2000). Therefore, decreased social capital mutually reinforces violence, which is illustrated by an increase in murder rates across several areas in the United States (Putnam 2000; Rosenfeld et al. 2001; Galea et al. 2002). Without positive forms of social capital, youth may have a higher probability of committing crime, or forming destructive forms of bonding social capital (gangs), since supervision and healthy networks are not present (Putnam 2000).

Political Engagement and Activism

Political engagement includes voting, joining local organizations (NAACP), and the knowledge of how to impact larger system structures (Rosenfeld et al. 2001; Putnam 2000). Political activism refers to behaviors attempting to make change or impacting the community, such as protests, rallies, campaigning and electing candidates for office. Communities with high rates of homicide tend to have higher levels of social activism, in addition to lower levels of trust and informal socializing (Rosenfeld et al. 2001). Rosenfeld et al. (2001) proclaimed that this may be due to the communities' lack of trust in mainstream structural interventions of crime, and taking the challenge of change (fighting crime) into their own hands, through community activism. While discussing communities prone to violence, Hope (1988) affirmed that the presence of crime is a necessary component for social activism to occur, as social activism would be unnecessary without a cause to fight for. While social activism is not always related to anti-violence efforts, the focus of this project will be taking place in Chicago where there is a presence of violence, signifying a need for anti-violence engagement and activism.

An example of resources that provide political engagement or activism are non-profit organizations (NGOs); as these organizations provide several major functions such as “needed services”, while responding to government or market failures described earlier by Wacquant (2008). NGO's create social enterprises that combine both commercial and charitable goals such as building economic capital and sense of safety. Lastly, non-profits have the ability to mobilize citizens for politics, ultimately building social capital (Frumkin 2002). Non-profits (NGO's) support social welfare organizations like the NAACP and National Organization for Women (NOW), which brings mobilization to groups allowing greater influence over policy, lobbying

and campaigning. This was the primary suggestion from Reed (1995) on how to bring social change and justice (Frumkin 2002). These organizations have the ability to collectively bring immense attention and possible solutions to issues such as gun violence. Non-profits remain beneficial for communities, since the organizations deliver needed services to disadvantaged populations and are able to meet otherwise unmet social needs (Frumkin 2002)

Gaps in the Literature and Current Study:

While the availability, determinants and dimensions of social capital have already been documented in studies that analyzed demographic and household data, the current research seeks to address and explain through in-depth interviews the meaning and value attached to interrelated forms of social capital and collective efficacy through civic participation, activism, and informal social connections (Putnam 2000). This research builds upon the ongoing inquiry into the value of social capital and collective efficacy, specifically when intervening in aspects of social disorganization. The purpose of this study is to examine how community activists make sense of social capital and collective efficacy when mediating gun violence. The specific aim is to explore activist's perspectives, processes and rationales to community gun violence based on social control models.

This research is unique in that social capital will be linked with collective efficacy, by finding resources of social capital in the form of non-profit organizations that provide activists whose joint actions enhance the community's collective efficacy. The primary focus of non-profits is not to generate money or stock interest, which allows for freedom of ideas and remains efficient when delivering social services, while maintaining a strong moral ground (Frumkin 2002). Furthermore, non-profits have the ability to promise its clients that no investors will

benefit from cutting corners, or delivering unnecessary services that some for-profit, social services businesses may do to generate extra money (Frumkin 2002). This research chose to target non-profit organizations since they have the ability to establish a form of volunteerism, and the moral ground reflected in collective efficacy theory. This research represents a crucial step missing from previous research, which has lacked specificity and underestimated the value of collective efficacy and social capital. Researchers have already identified that low levels of social capital correlate to socially disadvantaged neighborhoods; however, it seems observable that poverty stricken neighborhoods are prone to a lack of resources.

This research focuses on what those neighborhoods have at their disposal, even if it appears minimal. The resources present within poverty stricken neighborhoods, especially non-profits, are vital to providing positive social networks within communities. This study hopes to emphasize the importance of resources that provide social networks to combat gun violence, in the hope to call for more monetary investment and comprehension on what these organizations provide for the community. If quantitative work has highlighted the lack in numbers of these resources, qualitative work might better address the importance of these resources.

This project will aim to encourage future research highlighting increases in positive social capital that should create a pathway for safer neighborhoods, allowing for more economic capital and cultural capital to develop, further halting the cycle of violence (Bourdieu 1986). Without resources, communities suffer, exemplifying the importance of understanding the complex value and benefits of creating social capital in socially disadvantaged neighborhoods through tangible resources such as non-profit organizations.

Chapter 3

Methods

Overview

The current research attempts to address the following questions: how do community activists use social capital and collective efficacy when mediating gun violence? How do activists experience and respond to community gun violence based on informal and formal social control models. (Please note Table 2 for a complete definition list and the measures created for the current study to determine meaning behind social capital and collective efficacy.)

In order to examine the research questions, the research began with location selection. South Chicago neighborhoods in general are often reported to have gun violence problems, therefore, the current research did not focus on one neighborhood, but a region of neighborhoods located on the South Side. For the current study's neighborhood demographics and district classification please note Table 3. This project was primarily conducted within the boundaries of combined neighborhoods, which as a whole are considered the South Side region where 32% of Chicago homicides occur. In order to obtain accurate crime statistics for these communities, the locations of neighborhoods represent Districts 2, 3, 7, and 9 as classified by the Chicago Police Department. Neighborhoods selected for this study were based upon the project's theoretical concerns, and in particular had characteristics of socially disorganized neighborhoods with

significant levels of violence. Neighborhood violence profiles produced by The Chicago Police Department were used for the selection process (Chicago Police Department).

The neighborhoods investigated were mostly gang occupied, high crime areas, particularly in the rates of homicide and related shootings (Please note Figure 1). The red circle indicates the targeted communities focused on in this gun violence related project. Based on Chicago Crime Commission reports, areas of high gang activity are correlated to areas of high gun violence (Kirby et al. 2012). The recognized neighborhoods that make up the South Side include: Armour Square, Fuller Park, Grand Boulevard, Bridgeport, Douglas, Oakland, Kenwood, Hyde Park, Washington Park, Woodlawn, South Shore, Greater Crossing Area, New City, McKinley Park, and Englewood. The South Side Population is 855,529, of which 93% is African American (Social Explorer).

A majority of the activists interviewed were consistently ‘on the go’ when mediating gun violence, not being tied down to one specific neighborhood. Several activists gave presentations, or networked with youth in multiple south side neighborhoods. Two activists in the study reported working in Rogers Park, Little Village, West and East Garfield Park, in addition to navigating the south side when mediating gun violence. While these neighborhoods are outside of the south side boundaries, the neighborhoods contain high homicide rates (Chicago Tribune 2013). These communities collectively have high rates of gun violence, poverty, and unemployment, all considered indicative of socially disorganized neighborhoods (Wilson 1987). Please note Figures 2, 3, and 4 for illustration contrasting the North Side and South Side of Chicago pertaining to segregation, poverty, and unemployment.

As a way of analyzing existing social capital within these communities, the study focused on community resources, specifically targeting 12 activists from the non-profit sector perceived

to be directly involved in reducing homicide rates, ultimately to build safer communities. Specific participants (activists) were recruited for the study through snowball sampling similar to Venkatesh's (2008) approach while conducting research in Chicago. As Venkatesh (2008) used community "gate keepers" to establish a level of trust with participants and to assist with the recruitment of residents, this project similarly targeted community gate keepers, or respectable figures within the community, to help the researcher establish connections with activists which begin the process of snowball sampling (Jacobs 2008). Additionally, this study utilized existing community connections between local religious groups and residents to help the researcher establish rapport with activists, and to assist social networking with non-profit leaders. There were a balanced number of male (7) and female (5) participants ranging from the age of 27 to 56. In regards to race, 6 activists identified as Black, 3 Latino, 2 White, and 1 Mixed.

After recruiting organization activists, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews, and open-ended informal interviews (Loseke 2013). The interviews lasted approximately 1-3 hours, resulting in 853 minutes of recorded data. Data was audio taped and transcribed producing 191 single-spaced, (or 382 double spaced) pages of data. Jacobs (1999) notes benefits of open-ended questions when interviewing vulnerable populations, in that it allows for topics to be covered that were not anticipated. After asking similar questions, the researcher noted repetitious responses that then indicated the topic has been fully covered.

Interview questions were developed by the researcher, in the hope of determining local activists' perspectives about the problems of gun violence within their neighborhood, and how they are responding to gun violence. Interviews examined multiple questions pertaining to social relationships with youth, which included the experiences of their jobs, successes, failures and personal stories. To address collective efficacy and social capital themes, the study focused on

asking questions about attitudes regarding intervening in situations of possible homicide, why they feel they are responsible for intervening, and if they feel the neighborhoods are safer because of their particular interventions. Ultimately, the researcher asked semi structured, open-ended questions on the process of intervention (physically or verbally), and if they felt it has been valuable to the community. At the end of the interview basic demographic information was collected from the activist.

Once the data had been collected and transcribed, along with field notes, the researcher read the transcripts multiple times, and then examined key themes through coding using Atlas software. While the Atlas software was useful in organizing codes, there was a feeling of disconnect from the researcher to activists words on a computer screen. The researcher then printed the transcripts, re-coded and utilized those, as physical data were easier to manage versus analysis on the computer. Physical data, allowed the researcher to take notes faster by having the ability to write versus typing, having to click and navigate sections by scrolling and opening numerous documents of separate interviews. In physical form comprehensions of the documents were easier and readability. Repetitious, important themes found in the data were then connected to literature taking an inductive approach. When quotations were included, they were reported verbatim.

IRB, Ethics, and Limitations

Institutional Review Board permission was obtained prior to conducting interviews and focus groups. Participants were given informed consent forms, which explained the benefits and risks of participation, the responsibilities and confidentiality of the participant's comments and interactions (Loseke 2013). A small explanation was given to the activists on the general

information of the project, and reassurance that after signing the consent forms, their input will remain completely confidential, as their names, organizations, and neighborhoods will never be associated with this study, all being replaced with pseudonyms (Loseke 2013). Due to the nature of this study, i.e. exploring social networks associated with “intervening” gun violence, this step is crucial, and was monitored with particular attention. The researcher chose to protect the identity of organizations associated with the activist, in attempts to avoid any consequences of leaking organizational confidential information. Furthermore, the researcher did not want to place more value on one organization over another, as this research will be published on a public site, which may influence future funding. The focus was on general activists’ perspectives, processes, and rationales; not on organization evaluations.

The interviews were recorded on a digital recording device, and transcriptions are password protected on the researcher’s personal computer, which no one has access to other than the researcher. Due to the limited sample size, these interviews are not intended to be generalizable to gun violence problems in cities nationwide, but focused specifically on Chicago’s gun violence. The interviewees were informed that the results of this study will be shared with the academic community, and possibly published for public use with all identifying information redacted, unless specific permission is granted.

Furthermore, attention was placed on where these interviews took place, as another concern of this study was safety. To minimize the risk of danger, if the researcher did not feel comfortable entering a neighborhood where the non-profit organization is located, the activist was asked to meet in a location more familiar to the researcher.

The Hyde Park area provided a convenient location for the researcher, and the activists, since this area is located in the middle of the targeted high crime neighborhoods. The ten

neighborhood blocks between 51st and 61st are considered a “safe zone” or “bubble” among residents, (often attributed to the location of the University of Chicago campus) providing a prime, relatively safe location for interviews or focus groups. Previous residency in the neighborhood allowed the researcher to be aware of which blocks to avoid, where gang territories lay, and the risk associated with residing in the community. The residence of the researcher in the south side made the researcher somewhat of an insider, which helped eliminate both safety concerns and problematic cultural barriers of the activist talking to an “outsider”.

The interviews never took place in home locations to protect the security of the activist and researcher, but primarily took place at local coffee shops, public parks, or the non-profit organization, which are considered areas private and intimate enough to record conversations clearly (Loseke 2013). As an incentive, the researcher treated activists to a moderately priced coffee or tea.

As a petite female, conducting interviews with strangers (some with a criminal backgrounds) on the south side of Chicago required extra safety procedures. While, most of the activists were genuine and posed no threat to the researcher, residing on the south side requires extra safety procedures in general when meeting unfamiliar individuals. The researcher never wore any jewelry or flashy clothes during the interviews, and always carried mace for worst-case scenarios. Check – ins were conducted with the researcher’s family, to confirm the interview was completed safely. Furthermore, interviews were conducted during early daytime hours, to reduce the chances of having to walk to public transportation or a vehicle at night. Street view on Google maps was utilized to pre-plan parking, as in a city this can be difficult. The goal was to know and prepare ahead of time if the researcher would have to walk several blocks in a high crime area, or if parking was provided at the site. Finally, prior to interviews, the researcher

googled each activists name to confirm the activists has not previously been convicted of crimes that might make the researcher feel uncomfortable.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, activists were informed that they had the right to “pass” on any information they did not feel comfortable sharing. At any time the activist could choose to terminate the interview, if he or she felt uncomfortable (Loseke 2013). Due to the sensitive nature of discussions on gun violence, the researcher paid particular attention to use of words, avoiding insensitive questions or comments.

As the researcher had been residing on the South Side, like many residents there, she had established relationships with individuals whose daily lives were constantly affected both indirectly and directly by gun violence. Gun violence was a topic constantly brought up among friends within the community, which has indirectly prepared the researcher for understanding multiple perceptions on this issue, allowing complex discussions on the topic with community activists. The study was conducted in a sensitive, unbiased matter, with the main goal of understanding the meaning of social capital through the activist’s perception.

Table 2 Definitions and Measures For Current Study: The following measures were created for the current study, and were used to determine meaning behind social capital and collective efficacy through interviews of the activist's perspective in relation to gun-violence.	
<i>Non-profit organizations:</i>	Place that provides social networks that form the foundations of social capital. Any anti-violence 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(4) non-profit organization located on the South Side (or high crime neighborhoods) that networks with youth in Chicago. While approaches to violence may be different based on the organization, this study is interested in non-profits that aim to prevent or intervene gun violence.
<i>Activist:</i>	Any individual who directly tries to prevent violent behavior, and who works for a non-profit devoted to reducing gun violence within the community. The activist must be from a similar neighborhood or have shared similar experiences to the youth that they work with to establish a level of collective efficacy.
<i>Youth:</i>	Any young individual that the activist works with, who lives in high crime or gang occupied neighborhoods in Chicago. Note: Not all youth in the activists network are gang members or involved with crime. Activists sometimes try to prevent violent behavior before it occurs.
<i>Gun Violence:</i>	A category of violence and crime committed with the use of a firearm. The activist chosen must network with youth whose environments make them prone to gun violence (victim or offender), or have committed gun violence due to either self-defense, self-protection, has intentionally harmed others by injuring or killing victims, or unintentionally injured or killed a victim. This will not be specific to gang gun violence, but will encompass all youth who are residing in the neighborhoods listed above. This variable was chosen because violence has been associated with both social disorganization (Wilson 1987) and anomie (Durkheim 1897).
<i>Social Capital: (Based on Putnam 2000)</i>	While social capital has numerous definitions, in relation to this project, it is defined as the value and benefits that are produced from the social relationships within the community at a micro level. The form of social capital will be operationalized in three parts for this context: 1) the resource (non-profit agency), 2) the activist (working for the non-profit), and 3) youth prone to gun-violence, which together create conditions for social capital to develop, through bonding trust and bridging trust (Putnam 2000). <i>Bonding trust</i> will be defined as the value and importance associated with the social network between the activist and the youth. <i>Bridging trust</i> will relate to the benefits of establishing extended relationships outside the individual's immediate network. This allows for upward mobility, as it extends to individuals and organizations that may not be present in the community (Putnam 2000). The bonding and bridging aspect will be of primary concern during the interviews and focus groups, to find the value of having social capital through the activist's perception. Through positive social networks, positive behaviors are encouraged through role models, who in this case are the activists (Putnam 2000). This provides a basis to find out how the community is responding to gun violence, as community non-profit organizations are the resources needed to produce social capital in this particular context.
<i>Collective Efficacy: (Based on Sampson 1996)</i>	Is the social cohesion among neighbors, combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good through social controls (Sampson 1996). The research has adapted this definition to fit the context of this study, which will be the willingness of the activist to intervene on the behalf of the common goal of the community, to reduce gun violence through informal social control. <i>Informal social control</i> is defined as when a group controls behaviors of its members within that group (Sampson 1996). This study recruited activists who would reflect the general composition of the South Side community.

Table 3.
Descriptive Statistics: South Side Chicago Neighborhoods 2010

	<i>Population</i>	<i>% in Poverty</i>	<i>% Unemployed</i>	<i>No Highschool Diploma</i>
District 2				
Armour Square	13,443	35.8	11.6	37.5
Douglas	18,238	26.1	16.7	16.9
Fuller Park	2,942	55.5	40	33.7
Grand Blvd	21,929	28.3	20.6	19.4
Kenwood	17,841	23.1	11	10.8
Hyde Park	25,681	18	6.9	5.3
Oakland	5,918	38.1	26.6	17.6
2011 Murder Total	15 (3.5%)			
District 3				
Woodlawn	23,740	28.3	17.3	17.9
Greater Crossing Area	32,602	25.6	18.9	17.9
South Shore	52,010	31.5	17.7	14.9
2011 Murder Total	36 (8.3%)			
District 7				
Englewood	30,654	42.2	21.3	29.4
2011 Murder Total	60 (13.8%)			
District 9				
New City	44,311	30.6	17.4	42.4
McKinley Park	15,612	16.1	11.9	31.8
Bridgeport	31,925	17.3	11.2	25.6
2011 Murder Total	28 (6.5)			
Murder Total For Districts 2,3,7,9	139 (32.10%)	$\bar{x} = 29.75$	$\bar{x} = 17.8$	$\bar{x} = 22.94$
Chicago				
2011 Murder Total	433	19	11.1	20.6
Total Victims Shot	2,217			

* Data obtained from ClearPath (2013); City Of Chicago (2013)

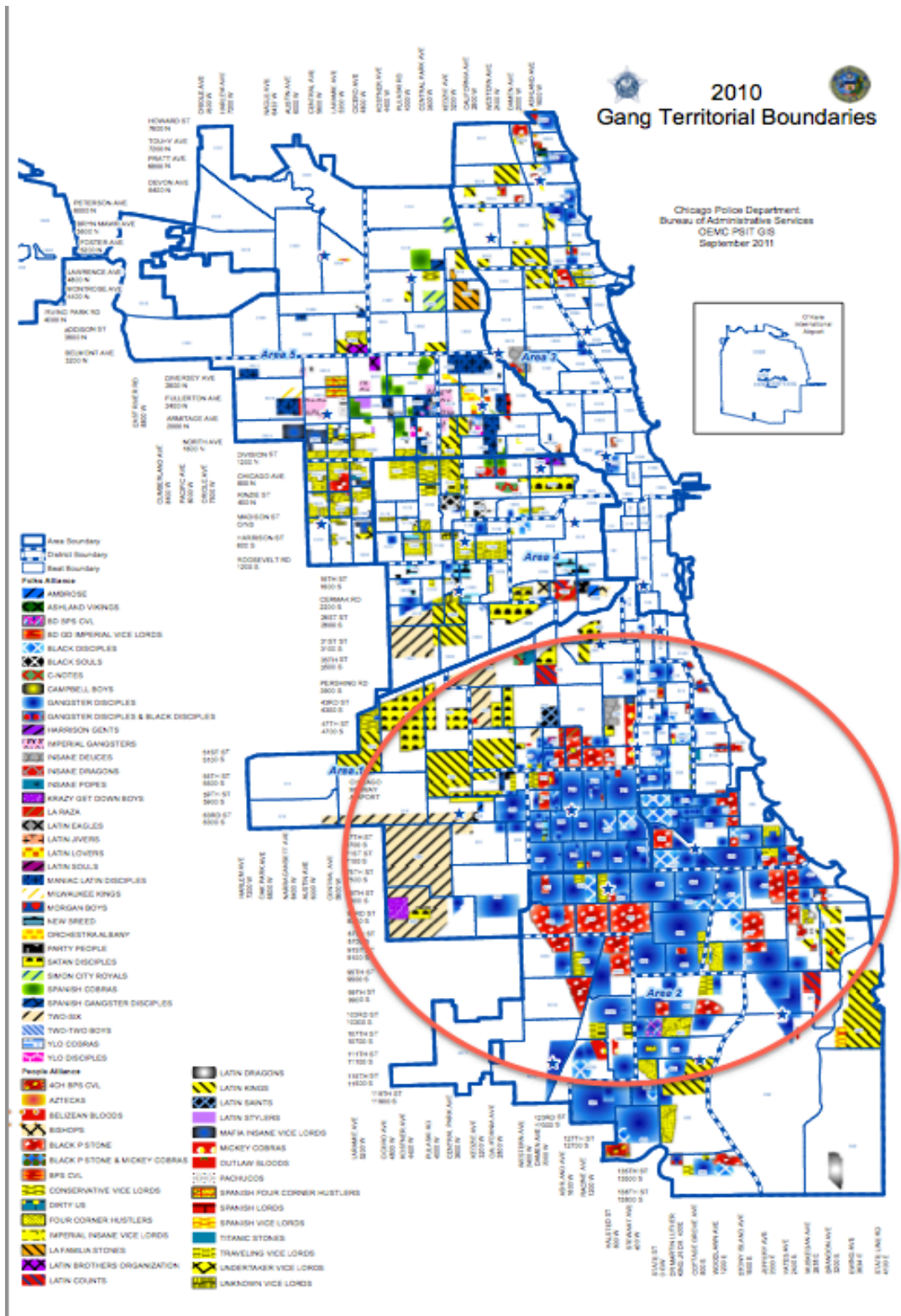


Figure 1. 2010 Gang Territorial Boundaries

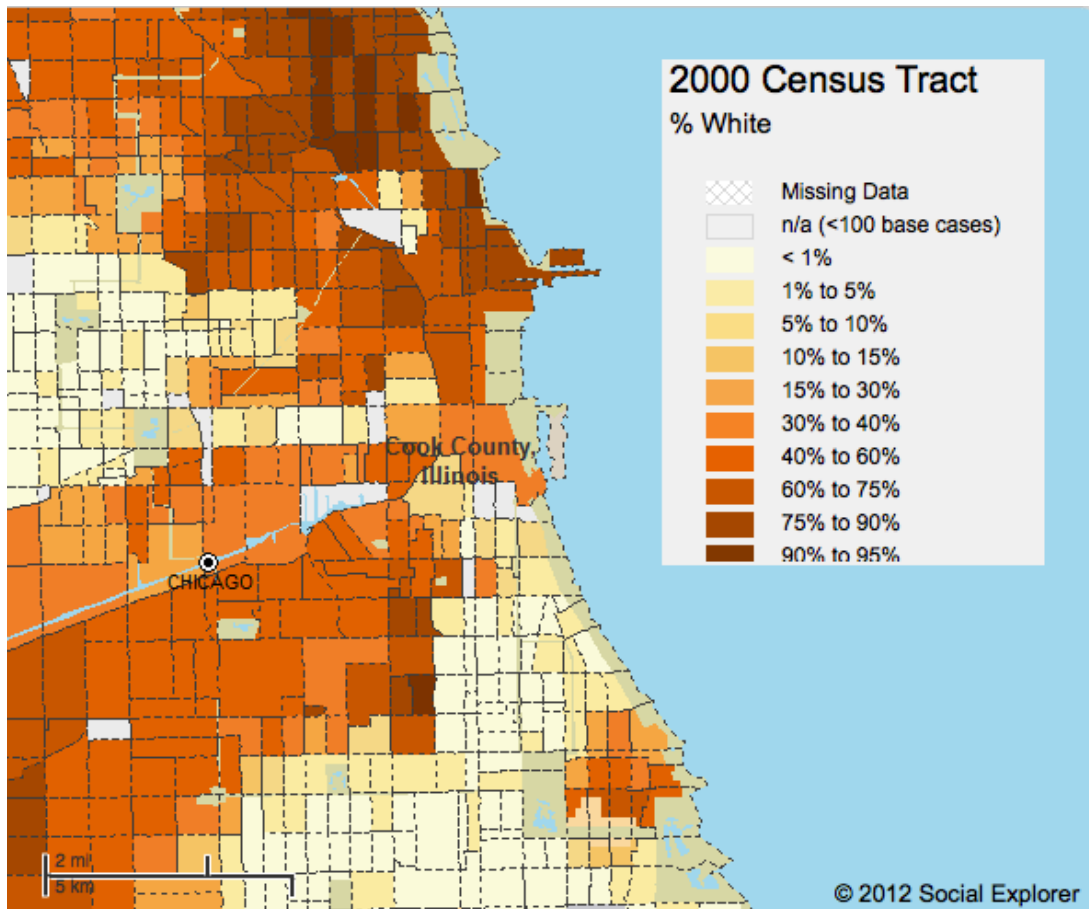


Figure 2. 2000 Census Tract of Racial Segregation.

*Map generated from Social Explorer (2012)

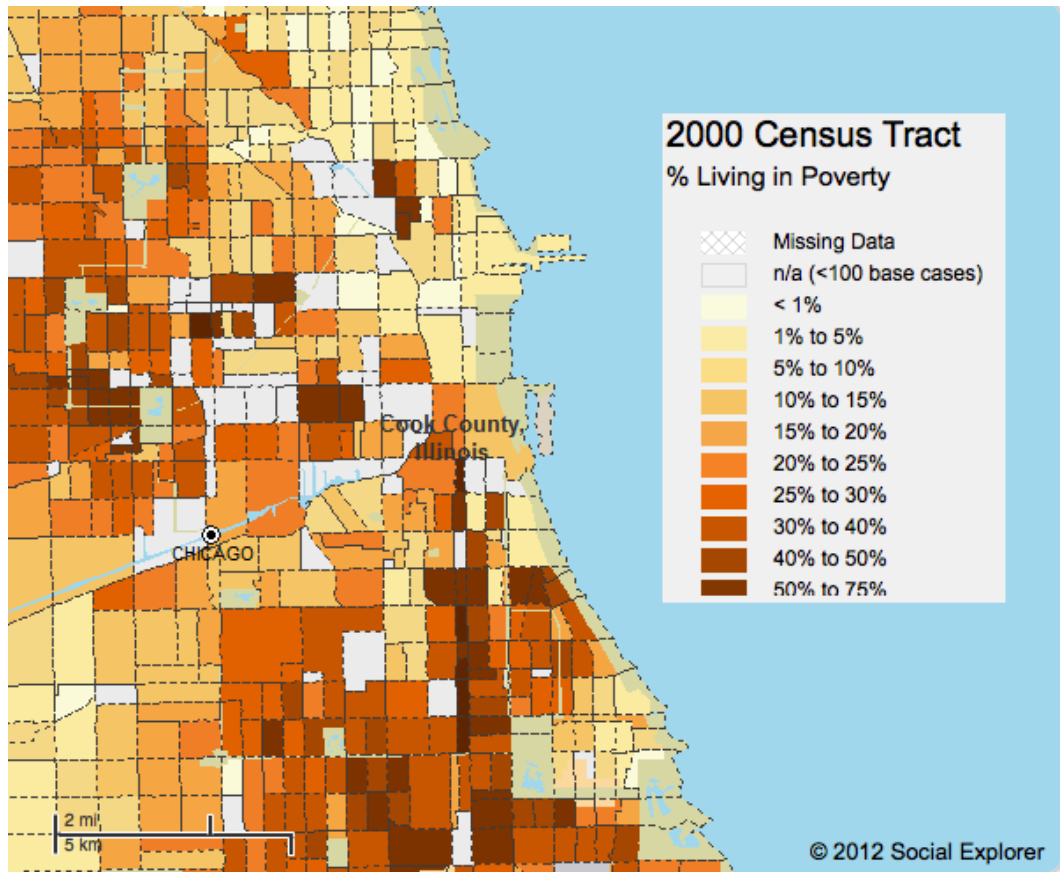


Figure 3. 2000 Census Tract of % Living in Poverty.

*Map generated from Social Explorer (2012)

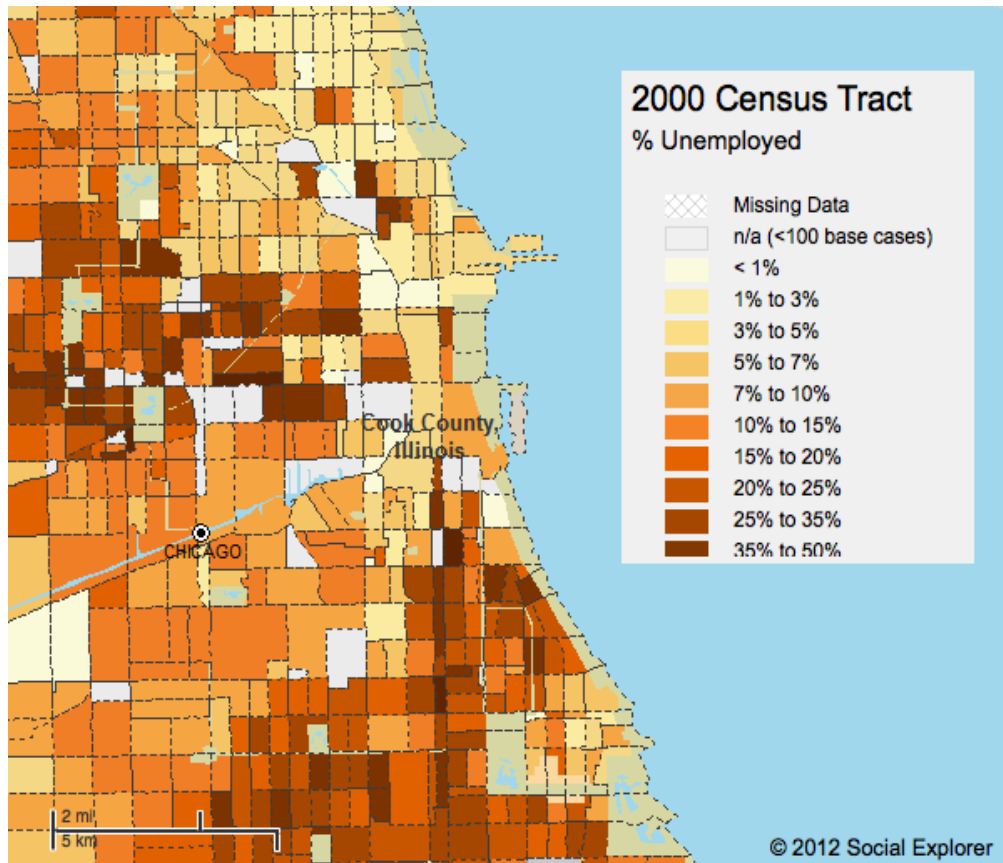


Figure 4. 2000 Census Tract of % Unemployed

*Map generated from Social Explorer (2012)

Chapter 4

Findings

Theme 1. The Activists

This study seeks to explain how activists make use of available social capital and collective efficacy while attempting to mediate gun violence in Chicago. Specifically, it examines how activists experience and respond to community gun violence, focusing on their processes and rationales for interventions, often missing from previous literature. The activists and youth in this study tend to share similar experiences or backgrounds, reflecting components of both social capital and collective efficacy, which increases the potential for reductions in gun violence (Sampson 2001 & Putnam 2000). Even though Putnam (2000) conveys informal ties of social capital are on the decline, the following will explain the value associated with activists' interventions. The activists' interventions to mediate gun violence are a prime example of the underlying importance of social capital missing from qualitative approaches examining social capital (Sampson 2001).

All of the activists interviewed explained that the first step in utilizing micro social capital (Putnam 2000 & Patton and Johnson 2009) is establishing *trust* and *respect* between the activist and youth before an intervention aimed at reducing gun violence can be successful. This research indicates *Bonding ties* (Putnam 2000) may be strengthened through shared experiences or backgrounds, which provide a platform for respect and trust, but must be complimented with

genuine care for both the youth and the cause when intervening gun violence. The activist's intervention techniques are prime examples of *informal control* reflected in collective efficacy theory, as compared to formal control (Sampson et al. 1997).

Sampson's et al. (1997) description of informal control is evident by activists in this study, through shared similar experiences or backgrounds with youth in Chicago. These experiences were highlighted by the first open-ended question, "Could you tell me a little about your background?" This prompted an array of responses; almost all had begun with a story of life experiences where gun violence had shaped their lives, or how growing up in similar environments as the youth provided them with a unique understanding of life that outsiders couldn't fully comprehend.

Bonding Trust Through Shared Life Experiences

An example of Putnam's (2000) bonding trust is provided by Herbie's response, as he gives this description of his *shared experiences* of gun violence which allows him to informally control (Sampson et al. 1997) youth:

Coming from the south and moving to the north at a young age, some of the elements of racism and violence, such is the case, one of the reasons gun violence is very personal to me is that at the age of 5...or 6 is when my favorite cousin who we called Billy, he had shot and killed his dad for putting his hands on his mom one time too many times. And that was the first time that I experienced violence up close; and I saw the body of my uncle on the floor, the blood coming out...I lost my mom, my dad at 13; he was shot and killed. And I lost my mom to a single gunshot wound at 14... What doesn't kill you makes you stronger, and you grow from it, and you utilize

it as an instrument of expression to try and help yourself and get good therapy and counsel to others. And after that, experiencing that, I got caught with possession and intent to deliver; possession with intent to deliver with unlawful use of a weapon. So you would think with all of my experience with weapons, you would think I would stay away from them, right? But you know with that we learn and grow as we go. Along with those things, and some other things I have experienced personally, and having to basically find my way through life, ups and downs, the roller coaster of life, you know, so that is a thing that has led me to being a champion for the cause, and other issues I confront.

Herbie's background generates bonding *trust* (Putnam 2000) and *respect* with youth because of his prior experiences, which he uses to form *bonding ties* with youth who may be dealing with similar life circumstances. He understands life without a mother or father, dealing with the death of family members, working through the trauma associated with seeing a dead body, the hustle of selling drugs and the consequences that led to his incarceration. Instead of giving up, Herbie learned from his experiences, and now utilizes his established bonding trust (Putnam 2000) to share his knowledge, to help informally reduce the chance of youth repeating the same mistakes, such as turning to gun violence:

One of my favorite success stories for me personally is the 23 years cocaine and crack free... To be able to come through all that and have enough of my self left to utilize those pitfalls and traps that I went through, and shine a spotlight on the pitfalls and traps today, so that young people can walk around those traps today instead of going through them...

Young people know when someone is being genuine and true with them, and knowing someone who has experienced and went through the struggle and experiences that they have as opposed to someone who comes from a different walk or level of life.

Here, Herbie indicates if he was from “a different walk or level of life”, youth may not be as trusting, because they would assume that the activist trying to intervene wouldn’t understand “the struggle”. There is an immediate level of respect established because both the activist and the youth have been through similar life circumstances and simply “understand” each other, providing a level of trust while expressing genuine concern. Therefore, the trust and respect component necessary for the *bonding ties*, associated with social capital to be utilized, becomes established through Herbie’s life story.

Similarly, Amalia provides her process of establishing bonding trust (Putnam 2000) with youth, allowing for informal control. She has a level of understanding with the youth she works with because of the *similar experiences* she had growing up:

I feel like people who are change agents really have had personal strife. I guess I came from a violent home, my father was abusing drugs, went to rehab two times; it was a lot of bad shit growing up. Sexual assault stuff, it was, it just was like one thing after another. My parents lost their house, I emancipated at 17, I was a chronic runaway my freshman year of high school; I was lucky because I was smart. And like my freshmen year, I remember sleeping in a neighbor’s back yard, and I came to school the next day and I forgot my English Honors final paper, and the teacher was like “Amalia, where’s your final?” And I was like “I don’t have it”. My parents weren’t the type to come bring

me my stuff if I forgot, and I didn't have it to show for it, and *she just chewed me out*. In front of the class. And I was a good student. And I stood up and said "fuck you, you have no idea what I've been through", and started being like my dad passed out and vomited all over. It was in front of the class. I was so infuriated, and she was like, "Amalia, you should go sit in my office." Then she got the social worker involved.

Amalia expresses a familiarity with family violence, sexual assault, and a lack of parental and teacher support. She went through personal hurdles herself, and learned to overcome them. Her statement, "You have no idea what I've been through", reflects the assumed lack of understanding between some teachers and students in urban areas, who may not have shared similar experiences, and are therefore unable to relate when issues arise. Several other activists confirm that a significant portion of the youth they work with are exposed to some form of family dysfunction, which, as a result, has been one of the many factors that influenced their behavior and cognitive development.

Amalia has an understanding of what goes on inside some homes, which again establishes a level of understanding and trust between her and "her kids" that she works with, serving as a basis for micro-social capital to develop. For example, when asked, "Do you ever share your story with them?" (the youth she works with):

If it is self-involving, self-disclosure, like if I am saying this because it will make me feel better, don't say it. But if I am able to say it, or hint, you know, "my friend" kind of thing, they pick up on that. Like, "I totally get it". We had runaway, I was like, "I get it, I get it", and I looked at her (gives wink) "but honey you're in 7th grade, and that puts you at

risk for all these other things, you know”, and so sometimes I share a little, but I almost always tell them I had a school social worker.

Amalia’s response reflects her process in establishing strong informal *bonding ties, trust* and *respect* through genuine concern, and understanding for the runaway child in a non-self – involving way. Her statement of “I get it,” presents a level of understanding where the child in her network may feel like she can open up to Amalia, and thus be ready to receive the assistance (*informal control*) Amalia is able to provide through social capital.

Bonding Trust Through Shared Environments

Not all of the activists confirmed they are direct victims of violence, but instead explained how growing up in a similar neighborhood as the youth they assist, or in some cases the same neighborhood, allowed them to utilize their shared background to establish trust and respect, which form the basis of positive micro social capital (Patton and Johnson 2009 & Putnam 2000). Patrick grew up in one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in the south side of Chicago. He came from a supportive, loving family, figured out a way to avoid a life of crime, and now has become a mentor to youth. Patrick’s aid and support towards youth allows micro-social capital to build (Patton and Johnson 2009), which may mediate gun violence (Sampson 2001) with youth in his network through informal control (Sampson et al. 1997). Here, Patrick explains his development of apparent strong *bonding ties* to youth that allows social capital to develop:

I think even now, when we teach in an all male class, and a lot of times you see the situation and you can understand, you know why people are doing it, because you grew up in that, you saw it. I think a lot of times they look at me, because I'm younger looking... 'oh, you look so young', but I think it's the fact they can look at me and my face and see someone that looks like them. Which is a factor I like; that I look young. And so they can see, like, he's doing it, or I can do the same thing. I think a lot of times it's a reassurance, because I have had guys, younger guys, particularly young black males, be like, I never really saw another black male like you - and there's a lot of us out there who are doing well, but it's just the fact that they say that I never saw someone who looks like you, that has a masters degree, bachelors degree and now getting a PhD. It's those types of things they don't see, and you know they only see the negative views.

Patrick's physical appearance and background allow for strong informal bonding ties to develop between him and the individuals he works with. Patrick understands where youth are coming from, because he grew up in the same neighborhoods, dealt with similar issues that arose from living in high crime neighborhoods, but successfully navigated his life in a positive direction that he hopes to utilize as a role model for young adults. Patrick conveys the importance of being a successful, young black male, in a community that he acknowledges lacks individuals that youth can look up to, reflecting Putnam's claim, these mentors are on the decline in urban neighborhoods. The "if he can do it, I can do it" rationale is then established, to help form strong bonds between youth and activists.

Similarly, other activists who grew up in dangerous areas of Chicago have the ability to establish *genuine connections* with youth, serving as the basis for social capital to develop,

because they have the mindset, “it could have been me.” Aaron reflects on his days growing up near notoriously crime ridden projects that provide him with bonding trust and informal control over youth:

Because of where I come from, and basketball credentials to back it up, that’s what really gets me in the door. If I was somebody from, like Naperville [suburbs], they are gonna be like “Come on dude.”

I did all you know, playing around with the guys playing basketball, and stuff like that was, you know, around the projects... *I could of been one of these kids*, I just happen to have basketball you know. When I was in elementary school, a few high schools came and saw me, came and gave me a scholarship to attend [a private] high school you know, a multiracial high school. Then [a] university. *That could have easily been me.*

Aaron is equipped with the both a background that gives him knowledge of what it’s like to grow up in a hostile neighborhood, and a shared interest in basketball. To gain respect, he pinpoints, “It is not hard for me because I come in with a basketball background and have the credentials to show them.” Aaron believes he is successful establishing bonding trust with youth because:

Everything I do, I do from my heart. Some people, they have all kind of hidden agendas, like I said I play ball, high school, college, some pro. I know how it is to be exploited, these colleges take advantage of you, and you know I am not trying to exploit anyone

because I know. I have been there. So yeah, just everything that I do, I do it from my heart.

Aaron reflects the components that are crucial for micro social capital and collective efficacy to develop: trust and respect, which are established through similar life experiences, and genuine concern to improve the quality of life of individuals he works with. Essentially, by *securing a strong and trusting bond, youth are more likely to listen to the activists, and therefore, activists can have a stronger impact on that child's life.*

Once activists establish a bond with youth, an intervention begins in an attempt to change behavior through *informal control*, and in this case, reducing the chance of that youth becoming a victim or perpetrator of gun violence. Five core processes to mediate gun violence through social capital and collective efficacy emerged from this study (Note, Figure 5.). The activists take a role in (1) changing the mindset, (2) providing lessons of life skills, (3) acting as a liaison, (4) provide tools for educational and job development and (5) challenge problematic policies that contribute to gun violence. By taking an active role in these processes, the activists interviewed observe a major reduction in gun violence within the sample of youth they network.

Theme 2. Changing the Mindset

Activists' approach to *changing the mindset* of youth begins with helping youth *work through life trauma, improving impulse control, realizing self-worth, and finally providing hope.* Through this process of increasing positive mental well-being, activists begin to mediate gun violence. Several of the activists who were interviewed pinpoint that the reason their youth turn to gun violence is because their mindset is not directed towards positive solutions when problems

arise, leaving them prone to becoming either victims or offenders of gun violence. Thus, the value associated with micro-social capital lies in the emotional support that is gained through established bonding ties between activists and youth (Patton & Johnson 2009, Putnam 2000).

Considerable agreement among activists suggests that positive mental well-being is a struggle for majority of youth (within their networks) who live in high crime neighborhoods. The focus on subjective well-being includes positive moods, happy emotions, rational cognitive decision-making, and overall satisfaction with one's life (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2002). One activist places the value of mental well-being as equivalent to the value of physically being alive. Here, Herbie expresses the *significance of changing the mindset of youth*:

One of the hardest challenges for me is when a young person, you have invested some time in, ends up getting caught up in the system; when you put forth some of the best of you and have poured it inside of them. And they still end up getting caught up, that's one of the worst parts, or even end up getting killed. Because your whole idea is based on trying to keep young people alive. Not only physically alive, but more importantly, mentally and emotionally alive. Because it's one thing to merely exist; it's another to live life to the fullest. Too often, we are more either spiritually or mentally dead, so it's the idea of trying to deal with young kids holistically, and helping them live life to the fullest, as opposed to merely existing and being among the dead.

Work Through Life's Traumas

According to activists, the assumed importance of changing the mindset begins with the idea that youth most prone to being the perpetrator of gun violence may have previously been

subjected to major trauma in their life, resulting in a negative mindset. While some activists in this study do not have the clinical psychiatric training to take a “text book” approach toward helping youth work through trauma, they did report *bridging* (Putnam 2000) youth to other needed services if trauma was severe. Respondents reported their role was mainly to provide support, and again to share a level of understanding that only someone who has experienced those traumas would understand. This is an outstanding example of the powerful impact of combining social capital (bonding ties) with collective efficacy (informal control) to mediate gun violence (Putnam 2000). It is then the activist’s role to help youth, who may be a future victim or offender of gun violence, to *work through life’s traumas*, increasing their positive mental well-being, and subsequently reducing negative behaviors. One must understand the pathways to violence to prevent future delinquent behavior and reduce chances of victimization.

The activists’ logic, and assumption that the youth they network with are prone to prior trauma is reflected in current literature. In one study, girls and boys exposed to family dysfunction, sexual abuse, maltreatment, relationships with delinquent romantic partners, and mother-daughter conflict were more prone to running away, *law violating behavior or delinquent behavior* (Zahn 2009). Sexual abuse was reported in 35% of female cases, versus 8% of the male cases. In addition, physical abuse was reported in 42% of girls as compared to 22% of boys who displayed delinquent behavior. However, sexual abuse among males is often under-reported, under-recognized and is often untreated. Both males and females exhibiting delinquent behavior are reported to have high instances of PTSD, depression and anxiety (Zahn 2009). Thus, some youth involved in gun violence may have been, or may currently be experiencing trauma in the form of abuse, which activists consider an important component to address while changing the mindset.

Aside from abuse, indicators of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder were repeatedly identified during the interviews, as activists attempted to detail their approach when helping youth work through PTSD issues. Respondents report that trauma may come from homelessness, witnessing the death of friends or relatives, or even in the emotional toll it takes for a student to walk to school through opposing gang territories, essentially risking their life to get to class five days a week. The activists are able to connect with youth because they know what it is like to witness “guts on the floor”, and afterward be expected to function normally for the rest of the day. While attending a summit on urban violence, one activist spoke of losing 22 people (in her immediate circle) to gun violence during her lifetime. That is a loss that “mainstream America” could not possibly fathom when trying to provide assistance to youth. A majority of activists report that death, sirens, and shootings are an everyday occurrence for youth they network, especially on the south and west sides of Chicago. Tamara indicates the presence of PTSD in the youth she works with, her goal to improving mindsets, and the lack of programs to treat mental health:

Especially our children, there was one of the schools we were working with... there was shootings that were there. There were guts still splattered on the floor, and kids had to walk over them. Do you think there was any type of mental health help services for the children? *Our children are suffering from PTSD, to the max, and they are not being treated at all.* What they did was close a lot of the mental health services, so, no. We are dealing with our kids trying to commit suicide; a little girl was being molested by her father, the mother walked in with her two children. There is all this other stuff and we are like, oh, Jesus Christ, I’m not even equipped... What they even deem as violence, as far as what’s affecting our children, and it’s really sad, it’s really sad there are all these

young beautiful children walking around with so much pain and so much hurt and so much violence that they already experienced against them. I don't even think they see the violent acts against the community as a violent act. And how it impacts peoples' understanding of themselves, and how they eventually see themselves, and unworthiness, you know. *They accept their reality and that's one of the biggest challenges, I would say, is fighting that, getting people out of that mind set.*

To further illustrate the topic of PTSD, Gregg remembers a discussion he had with a youth group that was reading Gabrielle Marcina Marques' *100 Years of Solitude*. The group discussed the quote, "You don't know how much a dead person weighs", as Gregg recounts:

It started getting very deep, because in a conscience you don't know how much the weight is after killing somebody. The character in the book killed someone, and he carries that weight throughout his life, and it doesn't let him live peacefully. We were talking about that, and we were like, when all the deaths in the city are happening, imagine the perpetrator of the crime, the weight on their conscience. *And that's why we have so much PTSD from this trauma; we have traumatized communities with no mental help.* That's one of the things when we take them to camp, a lot of these young people the first day, they are like this is weird. I am like, why is it weird? *They are like, it's too quiet, I don't hear sirens or gun shots...* Our young people have higher percentages of PTSD than our soldiers coming back home from war, and it's the same. At the sign of a shooting, they already know. They start trembling. A lot of the young people, when we first meet them, especially our intervention students, *they have*

problems sitting with their backs to the door. So basically, they have to sit facing the door, because they don't trust whoever is going to open the door, because they are scared of who is behind them. So those are things we have to be aware of, especially with young people, and meeting them for the first time.

Stein et al. (2003) were among the first researchers to study Post Traumatic Stress Disorder among students coming from impoverished neighborhoods. More specifically, this study was conducted in the Los Angeles school system. As indicated earlier, many students in disadvantaged schools are experiencing the same clinical symptoms as soldiers returning from war with PTSD. Unfortunately, the sympathy provided to veterans is often not shared with children when they act out, have sudden fits, or become depressed, and may instead be misclassified as a lack of caring, or an expression of defiant behaviors. Children that are exposed to violence commonly receive lower grades and become absent from school more frequently (Stein et al. 2003). This, in turn, adds to their time on the streets, increasing their likelihood of becoming victimized or becoming a perpetrator. The researchers in this study found that a ten-week intervention program significantly helped students and improved school performance. They focused on thoughts and feelings, fear, relaxation techniques, problem solving and exposure, etc. These same approaches were mentioned by a majority of the activists in this project. Stein et al. (2003) emphasized that any school can implement this highly effective program with the help of mental health counselors. If schools are not willing to put the effort into the ten-week program, then they must at least recognize the need for quality counselors within these schools, with all activists reporting a lack of services for youth.

To address PTSD and the mental toll it takes on an individual simply by living in these high crime areas, activists generally focused on coping and relieving pain through talk therapy, focus groups, and being a constant source of support. One activist depicts her role as the person “who relieves their pain; I relieve their stress and I am their daily band-aid.” Here, one activist will explain her rationale of offering students a safe space in schools to “relieve pain”, which is another component to building social capital through bonding trust:

I offer them the only place in school that is the safe place, a caring environment, a nurturing environment. I am, like, only feel good feelings in here. And I provide a consistent person who will always smile, or like, ask them what’s wrong or whatever. It’s very difficult because the bulk of issues and intensity of issues is so much. I just lend support, that’s really all that I do. I am the support person for everyone. You validate their experience, you validate. You know, one of the words that I use the most is "wow", because that indicated, that is truly something else. Allowing you to have a space to say whatever you want to say, and also allow for silence too. I think silence is very therapeutic; it allows a space to acknowledge. When you’re silent, you let the person acknowledge experiences, and I don’t really know how it’s done. I just think the most important thing is to provide them a space to talk about whatever, and the perspective I offer them is usually a perspective, is usually one that no one else has communicated. It’s not something teachers can talk to them about the way I can, or the parents either, usually in the way that I do. I’m just like a unicorn to these kids.

The activists are regularly available for youth to vent to, talk through emotions, provide spaces of silence, and act as a consistent person to rely on outside of the youth's family. A majority of the activists reported that the youth in their network usually have their personal cell phone numbers, are typically the emergency contact on forms, and are on call, throughout the night. Another approach employed by activists is rather than treating youth like they are traumatized, instead assist them with no longer seeing themselves as the victims by utilizing those life experiences. Gregg explains the typical viewpoint and how to combat this:

Oh, the poor kid from Englewood or from Austin who can't go to school, and has so much violence, and suffered so much because of this, you know, instead of looking at the young person from the Austin community who is able to do all of this, and able to go to college and have a job, and is providing community services to his own neighborhood. It's a different light you know. I think we have to stop thinking of our young people as poor little ones and see what they can be; all the possibilities. And start valuing experiences, like the adult mentors I have that came from criminal backgrounds, but they have so much street experience and with good management, they can do a good job. We have to start valuing that experience and putting a price on it. Someone who spent twenty years on the street might know more about the development of those young people in those streets than someone who went to school for four years, and is barely starting to practice what he has already been practicing for twenty years.

Tamara provides a similar rationale of overcoming the feeling of being a victim:

I guess I was blessed with optimism, and I share it with people, especially with the younger ones. You see it in their eyes when they feel like, oh my God, no, I could do this! It clicks; there could be a different way, and when they see it working, and see themselves as part of the change, I think that's when that transformation happens you know. And you don't see yourself as the victim anymore. But that's one thing, I think that's important; don't ever see yourself as a victim. Yes, we have been hurt. Yes, we have been abused, but I say to people, don't YOU continue victimizing yourself. What are we going to do to change the conditions, and how do we help others to get out of those conditions?

These activists take the approach of no longer allowing youth to view themselves as victims, despite their life circumstances. They attempt to empower traumatized youth through optimism, both validating and valuing their experiences. The activists focus on what these youth can do, versus fixating on the pain they've gone through. They find it important to acknowledge their life struggles, but just as important to encourage them to grow from it, and even share their experiences with others, to provide understanding and hope to someone going through the similar obstacles.

Improve Impulse Control

While attempting to change behavior, activists emphasize the importance of getting youth to better control their impulses, such difficulty to control impulses is sometimes attributed to PTSD (American Psychiatric Association 2000). The activists' justification regarding the importance of controlling impulses connects to literature on Self Control Theory, by Gottfredson

and Hirschi (1990), who suggest individuals with low self-control are more likely to commit crime, assuming crimes are often spontaneous or impulsive acts. The researchers propose that the offender is often a risk taker, physical, lacks patience, and is self-centered. In regards to gun violence, the Chicago Police Department reports half of gun-related homicides were the result of a physical or verbal altercation (ClearPath 2013).

Poor impulse control is associated with sudden outbursts (i.e. not rationally thinking situation through before pulling the trigger), or continuously not having the ability to refrain from behavior that is harmful to oneself or society (American Psychiatric Association 2000). Data for lower socioeconomic youth indicate more “symptoms of *attention deficit, opposition, conduct problems*, separation anxiety and depression than higher socioeconomic youth” (Karen, Johnson and Cohen 1990:173), validating activists’ assumptions that some youth within their network, living in high crime neighborhoods, may experience symptoms of PTSD such as poor impulse control.

Respondents noted issues of impulse control takes place if an argument begins, and that impulse control can determine if the outcome of that argument is life or death. It is the difference between letting the situation escalate to the point of grabbing a gun because “you stepped on my shoe”, or walking away. Activists’ believe that youth are less likely to pull the trigger with better impulse control if they *have anger management skills and positive anger expression*, which therefore reduces risk-taking, or violent behaviors. Amalia further elaborates on impulse control:

I see it in my kids, in the parents; everyone is very defensive, you know, it’s the general attitude. If someone is gonna show some aggression toward me, I am going to react, and it’s not thinking things through. So many of our kids are born with a bad hand, because of

cyclical poverty, and how folks cope with all those issues. Like how they cope with depression; things like that. There is a lot of drug abuse, and as a result, I know that a lot of our kids are born drug exposed. A lot of our kids are born with learning difficulties, lower IQs, things like that. I think sometimes by definition, someone with a lower IQ, they have a harder time with executive functioning, thinking through problematic situations. I think when something happens that they aren't able to verbalize 'how do I get myself out of this situation?' 'How do I think through it?' 'This isn't supposed to happen.' *When those mental faculties are taken away, then the person just reacts back...* you know, violence is a learned behavior, so it just becomes contagious. Our kids see it on TV, with their parents; our kids see it with community members, like it's so socially acceptable, and it's almost a rite of passage for our Jr. High kids. Like everyone has to get into a fight; if you don't fight to defend your honor, then you're a punk. So people want to, want to fight, like it makes them tough. You see it in the 3rd grade students. We had a child two years ago in 3rd grade bring box cutters to school, and tried to use them against one of our other kids. Crazy things happen all the time. Kids just fight.

Gregg utilizes breathing techniques to address impulse control with youth in his network:

One of the things I do is if you're going through a stressful day, take some time to relax and breathe. And they would call me sometimes. I had a student who at UCLA (activist worked with student in Chicago prior to UCLA) and he was like, 'I'm just calling you because I need to breathe but, I need to breathe with someone together.' I'm like, ok,

cool, ha ha. So it works, it's just good to know whatever I had to offer, they are using it at some point.

Build Self-Worth

An example of the value that comes from micro-social capital, established through bonding trust of activists and youth, is when activists help youth *build their own self-worth as they attempt to change the mindset*. Most respondents spoke of attempting to build confidence, dignity, pride, self-esteem, and essentially guiding youth to realize/recognize their own abilities. Several of the activists believe that when youth have a stable and positive mental mindset, and value themselves, then they are likely to exhibit positive behaviors and actions and inhibit negative ones.

Activists rationalize that after a child has dealt with traumatizing situations, and has continually dealt with turmoil, they need someone to help build them back up. Motivation may not come from the child's family, as lower income parents discourage their children about three times as often as they encourage them (Hart and Risley 1995), sometimes leaving the task of building self-esteem and confidence to the activist. Respondents convey to youth that their lives are valuable, and "even though they have many obstacles in their lives, there is a way to get through them". When someone feels optimistic, they are more likely to display positive actions and behaviors. Some approaches the activists use to build self-worth are through art, writing, literacy, poetry and open-mic nights:

Some of the initiatives you know, writing and literacy through poetry that I used myself trying to deal with some of the issues, you know tornadoes of the storm of my life, you

have to go into yourself. You have to get to know yourself, and as I often say, that you know when you go deep within, you will be surprised what can come out of yourself, from deep within. So knowing thyself helps you build a good foundation, and self-esteem and confidence in who you are, and a sense of self-pride knowing your culture, knowing your heritage, knowing the very roots of what you come from gives you a sense of pride that helps compel you through life.

Herbie's rationale:

There are not a lot of places geared towards self-help and teaching them how to deal with their minds. Too often, they are rubbing their head through life. It can be tough if you really don't have a sense of what's going on inside of you. Life can be very frustrating, so that's what I do.

Providing Hope

While attempting to change the mindset, activists address trauma, provide tools for controlling impulses associated with the trauma, help build self-worth, and finally provide hope. Almost all of the activists explained the youth they work with have feelings of hopelessness. Several activists expressed that youth feel they are stuck in their current situation, and that nothing can possibly change. Respondents report it is almost impossible to change the behavior of a child if they (the child) do not think they will be around to see tomorrow. The mindset of many youth involved in gangs, or living in high crime areas, is not focused on the future, but instead is focused on getting through the day, or in the long-term, the week. One respondent explained, "I mean I had a kid tell me, he saw a friend of his get killed in front of him. I am

trying to tell him like, ‘this is what you need to do’. He was like, ‘for what? I’m gonna die anyway. I’m gonna get killed anyway’. He is 18. He is like, ‘I’m gonna die anyway’.”

Life is typically not focused on long-term goals, because some of the youth within the activists’ networks do not feel like they will be alive long enough to experience it. It is a concept that is difficult to grasp unless one has experienced that level of hopelessness. Activists emphasized there is no point in explaining consequences of actions, and providing all the tools necessary to avoid a life of crime, if the youth does not have *the hope* to experience change in their lives. The activist’s role becomes providing hope to the hopeless, despite the obstacles and trauma(s) that have taken place in their life:

A lot of the violence that we find and see in street comes from the very nature of that [not having pride], if you don’t have someone to teach you who you are, to instill in you a sense of self-pride and who you are, then anybody can tell you who you are, or maybe even use your mind against you. So it’s important to have enough confidence in yourself, and believe in yourself, to use your mind, to use it wisely and effectively, ‘cause if not, then someone else can come along and use your mind against you. You know, have you selling drugs, have you doing things that will get you in trouble, while they’re not in trouble. So it’s important to teach our young people who they are, because that way it’s instilled in them: *a sense of self-hope, over hopelessness*. And that can be a very powerful thing. I’m speaking from experience. It’s often said how can you truly, generally reach out and love someone else or others, and/or someone else’s heritage, culture, or lifestyle, or them personally if you haven’t genuinely learned to love yourself? Love who you are; culturally, or as an individual.

When I asked what the most important thing he provided to youth, he replied with:

We have our mission. It's that we engage in schools and in the streets, so they can reach their educational or career full potential, and contribute back to the safety and well-being of our communities. But all of that is just summarizing one thing: *We give young people hope*, and not only young people, but the families of young people. We do youth council, and I still follow that mission. It's called LWD, the light within the darkness. So a lot of it, I think that's what we do, we work in the most at-risk communities, where they say, 'well there is a lot of activity going on, what are you going to do about it?' And we are the ones that go in there and try to work with all the different communities, especially with the young people, to create better generations. So, what I say our organization does, in a nutshell, is give that *sense of hope*, and it's like, 'look you have assets, and you can use those assets to make you better and your community better.'

The role of the activists to mediate gun violence begins with changing the mindset of the youths they encounter. This is accomplished by supporting youth through life trauma, managing impulse control, building self-worth and finally, providing hope. According to the activists, changing the mindset is at the root of the plan that allows mediation of gun violence to begin. The next step in the process to reduce gun violence is building life skills, followed by acting as a liaison, enhancing educational and job development and then challenging problematic policies contributing to violence.

Theme 3. Lessons of Life Skills

The second component of the activist's role in mediating gun violence is providing *lessons of life skills* to youth within their network, primarily focusing on *accountability and goal setting*. The lessons of life skills obtained from activists is another example of the value associated with micro-social capital that is gained through established bonding ties between activists and youth (Patton & Johnson 2009, Putnam 2000). Activists theorize youth are better equipped to resist violence when positive social networks are utilized to enhance the life skills of youths. Putnam (2000) conveys similar ideas, claiming social networks form the foundation of social capital, collectively solving problems, relating to more positive outcomes. Since activists either come from similar experiences or environments as the youth in their network, this is an example of informal control (Sampson et al. 1997).

While some activists intertwine life lessons during general conversations with youth, or when conflict arises, others have designated set times for specific activities such as basketball to implement their life lessons of accountability and goal setting. One particularly successful basketball league is comprised of 80 players, affiliated with four different neighborhood area gangs. They come together every Monday, and *peacefully* play basketball together over a 12 week schedule. Those participating in the league have been reported to have consistent attendance and a "sustainability of seeing so many guys a year ago still here is evidence... over a year's period I can say they have been consistent." The first hour of the program is devoted to life skills training and dinner, while the second half is devoted to basketball. Tori reported that this league is partially responsible for significant reductions in shootings within that neighborhood, and further confirmed, "The police commander of our district has let us know

there are significant reductions.” When I asked what makes this basketball league unique, Tori reasons:

Its purpose is to assist the community area gang members to learn a different way of life, and to make some different choices for themselves. So far, it has been awesome! We have had a serious reduction in gun violence in the area, and we are hoping to keep it funded and keep it going...it’s more than just basketball, it [basketball] is the carrot, the carrot allows them to bring a humanness to the people in the community for the most part. We have life skills classes an hour prior to the games. Some of those classes are conflict resolution, substance abuse, parenting, critical thinking; a variety of things that would help them to make different choices.

Some of the activists identify using basketball as an activity that not only connects youth with individuals outside their immediate network, but also acts as an incentive to get youth interested, involved, and committed. The activist who takes part in this organization explained that the basketball league would be just basketball without the life skills lessons, and would not be nearly as effective of an intervention without them. Here, Tori elaborates about the critical value of having all the components, in particular the life skills classes, for a successful program:

If all of the components aren’t there, it will not work. And that is evident, like I said, there are other basketball leagues throughout the city, but they are missing components to it. And we understand it now, *because of the success rate that we have had*. And so we have the opportunity to reflect, and say how are we’re different, and now we understand

what makes us different. Without that component [Life Skills Class], I don't think it can be duplicated in another neighborhood. And if people that want to do it aren't willing to have the key components, *then what would be the point? It would be just basketball...* I think it's a combination of relationships, developing relationships with the guys, assisting them with employment and education. And I think that's what singles us out from everyone else, because it is more than just basketball....Make sure the components to it work, and have a track record that they work.

The life skills component for reducing violence is highly valued and extremely important to several of the activists interviewed. The key for this organization is to get youth interested (basketball), and next provide life skills lessons such as accountability and goal setting. The rationale is that the youth within the activist's network (gang members in this case) may not have been taught these life skills at home or in school. The activists then become responsible for providing these tools, and teaching these skills. Ultimately, wiser decision-making through life skills training becomes the goal of activists, with the hope of mediating gun violence.

Accountability for Oneself

Several activists pinpoint accountability as an essential component of building life skills for youth. While some respondents highlight value in *bonding ties* (Putnam 2000) associated with their mothering role that provides structure, others emphasize talking with youth about the dangers of allowing circumstances to dictate their lives. Strong relationships with positive adult networks may help alleviate gun violence by having adults serve as a positive role model for behavior (Sampson 2001). The broader picture is getting youth to the point where they are

“doing what they say”, which evolves into better decision making; following through with healthy actions to avoid gun violence. Here, Tori identifies her process of teaching accountability:

We try to have a high level of *accountability* in terms of attendance...twice a week we give them a reminder call. Games are on Monday, be there at such and such time. We try to hold their feet to the fire. Ok, life skills starts at five, you need to be there... trying to change their mindset on preparation for appointments as well, and you know they need to be on time for work.

Conveniently, Tori received a phone call from one of the players while discussing accountability:

"Hey dear, how are you doing? Today is Thursday, not Monday, young man. No, I don't want to hear it; I don't want to hear it. So I WILL see you on Monday, I'm in a meeting right now. No, no, I will see you Monday. I want to see you on Monday, alright bye bye"

Tori's phone call further highlighted her notion of accountability. She begins the conversation in a loving, mother-like tone, referring to the player as “dear”, and then asking them how they were. She held the player accountable to be there, because they have a responsibility and commitment to the team. She did not want to hear the excuses; she demanded that the player be there, because “she wanted to see him.” With a level of love and concern reflected in her voice, it would be difficult for someone to stand her up mothering personally, let alone the rest of the team.

Likewise, she is teaching this player accountability and responsibility through being on time, and showing up when you say you will.

The female activists in this study all had “mothering” characteristics in their approach to accountability, suggesting a form of informal control over youth to change behavior (Sampson et al. 1997). Female respondents indicate they are not trying to be anyone’s mother, however, all activists displayed a good deal of genuine love for the youth they work with, combined with *providing structure*. One activist identified a crucial element *of her rationale* for utilizing a mothering role that teaches accountability while providing structure, “some of the players have it... *parents*, some of them don’t.” While healthy, strong families are present in high crime neighborhoods, a majority of activists report working with several youth who have been homeless, without parents, a ward of the state, or in foster care. Therefore, these specific youths may have lacked healthy parental structure that would otherwise teach the child accountability for their actions. Respondents reason that without accountability and structure, youth are more likely to become involved in gun-violence.

The population in Tori’s specific network is composed of affiliated gang members, who may be partially responsible for gun violence in Chicago, since 33% of gun related homicides were reported as gang related (ClearPath 2013). It is likely that affiliated gang members have been involved in the criminal justice system, or are predicted to be the most at risk for being incarcerated. The lack of parental structure relating to crime is reflected in a recent California study, where researchers identify that within their prison population, 70-75% of inmates were at one point in the foster care system; the themes of foster care and homelessness appear in the activists’ accounts as well (McCarthy and Gladstone 2011). Another study in the Midwest confirmed one third of former foster care children ended up involved in the criminal justice

system by age 19 (Courtney et al. 2005). Thus, those who are incarcerated may have lacked the parental structure that “healthy” families provide, suggesting again the value of activists who take on that missing role in the child’s life. The literature reinforces the importance of a ‘mother figure’ providing structure within the immediate network of these youth, because without structure they are more likely to commit crime, resulting in incarceration, further perpetuating the cycle of violence. Tori elaborates:

You know I’m not trying to be anyone’s mom, as much as there’s the mothering element behind it. It’s a caring piece. It’s a structure piece. It’s a discipline piece. You know I can observe a difference, from when we first started to now. The guys used to come in with "special" cologne on, and we can’t tolerate that. And so if it’s coming from a man, it’s different than coming from a mother image. So I don’t have that as an issue any more. You know, if I smell that special cologne, I’m going to mention it, and say you gotta go. So it’s not trying to replace anyone, but core values of what a mother represents are what we are trying to do. Some of them have it... parents, some of them don’t.

The mothering element is crucial for her connection to youth. She demands respect, but in a caring way. She is the type of woman one would answer “Yes Ma’am, no Ma’am”, and will not tolerate behavior reflective of the street lifestyle. *Tori provides discipline, but in a non-punitive approach.* She allows youth to take accountability for their actions; if they want to show up smelling like marijuana then they will simply be asked to leave, and will miss out on the game. Her approach to discipline is not punitive, but allows youth to make the connection, “If I behave this way, here are the consequences.”

Furthermore, activists emphasize teaching about the importance of accountability despite struggles in one's life. Several activists reported that they encourage youth to take control of their lives and their futures, even though they are often dealing with traumatic situations. Activists have the ability to *bridge* (Putnam 2000) youth to other resources of social capital that can assist them becoming more accountable for their lives by changing their problematic conditions. One respondent explains "We try to look at different aspects that make up a person, and at the end of the day, you're the only person who can liberate yourself. I'm not gonna empower you, I am not gonna liberate you. I'm not here to do either. I'm gonna help facilitate, and provide tools that you may need, but it's up to you at the end of the day if you wanna change your conditions."

The following story reflects the underlying importance of helping youth become accountable for their life by becoming self-sustaining individuals, either by finding shelter, jobs or going to school. In this case example, the activist did not allow one of the children in his network to remain homeless after his family no longer accepted him in the house, but made him find shelter and take accountability for his survival, instead of staying on the street. The activist provides the *bridging ties* (Putnam 2000) needed to get this youth off the street and into a healthier lifestyle:

There have been some young people who have called me in the middle of the night and have nowhere to sleep. And then there was this one young person who was a thief; he had been in jail for robbery his family didn't want him in the house because he would always steal. So even his own family turned their backs on him, and he had nowhere to go, and he called me, and I'm like, what happened? He's like, I have nowhere to sleep, and it was

during the winter. I was like, well, you can't stay out. So I took him to a shelter; the shelters were full, so I ended up staying the night with him at the hospital, because in Chicago you can go to a police station, fire station or hospital and they will find a shelter for you. So I ended up going with him, and he was like "man, Gregg, you don't give up do you?", and I was like, why? He was like, "you just, you are talking to me as if nothing is happening and I was like, hey you will get out. So there was nights he didn't have anywhere to sleep, and I had to be able to find him shelter, but it's *like he understood that I was the connection to find him shelter and I had to, to the point where I had to teach him, I was like, look you know what you have to do, and do all these things*, and I got him involved in the program. There is a shelter that you get to live in, but they only have a certain amount of beds and spots. So I got him on the list, ... he started living there, and *you have to be responsible for your own things and go to school* ... he was like, yeah, I will, and *he started doing it on his own*.... His own family members, were like, you need to be careful with him, he will still steal your things. ...And then, he was like, you have helped me so much that I would find it disrespectful, I would kill myself if I ever did something to you. I would never do something like that to you... I have done a lot of wrong and they are not willing to forgive me...I went back to the family members, and I was like, I leave everything with him: my phone, my laptop, and he takes care of them, he has never stolen anything from me, and they didn't even believe me. Up till now they still don't believe me; ... he was like, well you helped me, why would I do that to someone who genuinely cares for me? So he was able to, he doesn't live at the shelter anymore, because now he has his own apartment. He's going to school and has a job.

Goal Setting and Planning

In conjunction with accountability, all activists identified goal setting as an essential life skill for their youth to acquire. As mentioned previously, youth within the activist's network may have difficulty planning for the future, as some do not expect to live past 18, or in some cases, are primarily concerned with surviving day to day. Activists assume a role in helping youth envision their future, and then assist them with taking the steps required to obtain those goals.

Activists generally reported they have to place a great deal of effort in having youth envision their future in a positive light, instead of focusing on the negatives of their current situation; simply settling for life on the streets. To illustrate that their approach of goal setting and planning is successful, several activists mentioned that the youth they work with not only have graduated from high school, but have obtained their goal of attending college. One particular organization reports assisting 1,410 youth with planning their continuing education after high school, with 76% of them enrolling in college. The activist's role is helping to identify possibilities that youth may not envision without their help. Patrick reveals the discouragement often prevalent in these individuals' lives, suggesting the need and value for positive social networks that activists provide:

Some people, like I said, have situations at home; I had one guy tell me his mother told him, "You will never be anything". You know, when you have your own family members, your mother or father, your aunt, telling you, 'you aren't going to be anything', and they really aren't doing anything. So it's all that you see, it brings in a negative reinforcement. So if you can have someone say let me show you something different, let

me show you who you can be, which is why I believe in mentorship. I believe if you have the right people around you, it makes a difference.

Sometimes, the activists are the only person in that youth's immediate network telling them they have the ability to achieve their goals, and have options of different life paths outside of a life on the street or in the gang. Some youths expressed goals of graduating from school, while others wanted to find employment in the hope of making money legally, instead of through hustling, thus removing themselves from dangerous, sometimes deadly situations associated with gun violence (Anderson 1999). Activists help provide alternatives, with the goal of keeping these individuals away from the gun violence scene, often associated with street lifestyle:

So we know what the need [goal] is, and we try and meet the need from there on. We have a form that they complete, you know, whether or not they have been convicted of a crime, those kinds of things. Do they have their GED? Are they interested in college, or a trade? And from there we progress, to help them meet the need or their goals...[By] Following through with what we say, we are gonna do. So, if I said to one of the young men I see, you have to get your GED on your form. Then I would have to follow through, and get them in the class. And you know if he doesn't follow through, then that's one thing, but if I don't follow through, then it's another. Then when they come back, and I say well, you missed your appointment, what happened? And they say, 'oh I forgot', then it's not like I failed them, they failed themselves. But we start there, we try to do what we say, and mean what we say as well.

Similarly, another activist identifies her role and process of goal setting and planning with youth:

When I see so many children who feel like there is nothing you can do, this is our condition, and I am like, NO! So I feel a sense of responsibility, because when I was that child, there were people around who showed me different. When my father was incarcerated, there was a saga, 'if the sun should stop shining, I won't lose my faith, and everything will be ok.' Living in the darkness, there is always hope, light, and faith, but you have to stay active, because hope itself don't mean shit. You could just hope, but you have to be active. So, part of what we do with young ones is visioning, and its like, 'envision yourself, see it being different' and from that vision we create the work plan. So what would be stopping you from this goal, and how do we break down those obstacles? And then people are like, Oh, OK, 'what do you wanna do a year from now?' this and this, then they say all the reasons 'why you can't' come out, instead of the 'why you could', and 'how it could happen'.

The activist takes a role in helping youth envision their futures, and how to take the first steps required to obtain their objectives. They address the concerns and pessimistic thoughts that youth have, and work with them to turn their ideas into attainable goals. The activist's rationale is that when someone has an idea of where they are going, it is much easier to get there, versus living day-by-day, focusing on their present life on the street. Part of the activist's role in mediating gun violence is providing life skills to youth within their network, primarily focusing on accountability and goal setting. By enhancing these life skills, youth are better equipped to resist violence.

Theme 4: The Liaison

The third major role activists utilize to mediate gun violence is becoming the youth's liaison, which helps them strengthen bonding and bridging ties (Putnam 2000) when navigating three primary networks: their family, other youths (sometimes rival gang members) and the police. Activists help facilitate communication between youth and these primary networks to enhance family engagement, introduce humanity between youths who may be "the enemy," and helping youth become self-advocates.

Youth and Family Bond Building

While some of activists brought youth and their families together during activities (basketball and volleyball) to cheer them on from a distance, a majority focused on building more interpersonal relationships with youth and their families, with the hope of reducing violence. Activists indicate they build *bonding trust* (Putnam 2000) between youth and their families by hosting family events at the organization, and by facilitating communication to build a sense of belonging to their biological families to reduce family disconnect. The rationale most activists have is that youth are less likely to commit crime (gun violence) with supportive families that communicate well, or at least, getting families more involved with their child's life. This reflects Sampson (2001) literature conveying that positive social relationships with adults may mediate gun-violence.

Family events are one method activists utilize to try to assimilate families. By doing family events, not only are the parents exposed to the organization where their child is spending productive time, they are exposed to other parents within the neighborhood. The activists' adage,

‘it takes a village to raise a child’, begins by expanding the parents’ networks with other parents, reflecting collective efficacy theory (Sampson et al 1997). Here, one respondent highlights family workshops that allow activists to *bridge* parents to resources that may be beneficial for relationship building with their child, or improving their quality of life:

What we try to do at [organization] is do family events. So we invite the communities to come along, we invite young people to bring parents so they can meet each other.

We do workshops for parents so they can meet each other. A lot of times resources are there helping families out, but it’s so hard sometimes because parents obviously have to work. So it’s challenging, but it’s worth it.

When responding to “what are some of the reasons contributing to Chicago’s high level of gun violence?” Several activists’ responses related to family disconnect. According to this activist, one reason youth join gangs, is to obtain the sense of belonging that is sometimes absent from their biological families (Vigil 1996). When a child feels like they do not have a family, they may seek that ‘familial supportive behavior’ from a gang (Vigil 1996):

The big factors, one is obviously family disconnection. A lot of the young people see gangs as a way of life, and providing a sense of family that they do not have at home. So, when the gang member is there for you on the street, and is able to feed you and clothe you, then you are gonna call them family; so they are your family. And especially if a young person is going through a lot of hardships in their own biological

family, obviously, they are gonna look for family somewhere else, and the gang is a good place to be.

While literature claims gang members are initiated between the ages of 12 to 13 (Vigil 1996), respondents remark gang recruitment begins around age seven, which is a time in that child's life when they are highly vulnerable to outside influences or negative networks of social capital that is missing from Putnam's (2000) research (DeFilippis 2001). Thus, positive forms of social capital may have the ability to reduce influences of negative networks involved with social capital. These negative outside influences may interfere with the proper development of rational decision making processes unless activists are present to help youth and family build bonds.

Aside from gang membership, several activists report another consequence of weak family bonds (or when young children do not feel like they belong or are accepted by their families), is youth running away from home, placing the child in a susceptible position to everything that comes with living on the street. While the following stories are examples of two children who ran away from home after not feeling like they belong to their families, the two children in this example did not feel like they belonged to their families because they were gay. The issue of being gay is one of a number of possible reasons some youth may not feel like they belong to their families. Other issues that lead to youth not feeling like they can turn to their families for support, include abuse or neglect, drug or alcohol addiction, or if they are lacking a close communicative relationship.

The ten year old in the following story, like many other children, is faced with life changing decisions, and is alone without familial support, which in this case led to his running away. Gregg further highlights the substantial amount of children, gay or straight, who are

forced to make major life changing decisions alone, at a very young age, without strong family ties:

...Especially in the LGBT community, who are very homeless. I had a young person, a very young person, 10 years old. He was like, I am gay. He had all these ideas of suicide because he wasn't going to be accepted, and all these things, and this little kid one day ended up running away. We couldn't find him, we went to the police, and it had me out till 2 am looking for him. Until I was like, ok, I'm acting in emergency mode, I have to think, I have been with him, where is he? And sure enough, I found him where I thought he would be. And we had a long conversation that day. He was like, I don't know, I don't know what to do. So I just had to help him. So I helped him, but it made me realize how many of these kids are going through the same thing at such a young age. *It's no longer like, oh, you're in your teens, 13-18, no, you have young kids who are traumatized at 9 years old. They're making grown-up decisions so early in life.*

Next, the respondent provides an example of the activist's liaison role when working within the child's family, to prevent one child from living on the streets, and ultimately developing a sense of belonging to his family after leaving the gang. The activist revealed an unexpected, but enormously important dynamic that is not discussed in current literature: the intersectionality of being gay, belonging to a gang and the family's response.

So, I work with a young man who is gay, but he had not come out to his family or friends, basically because of the fear, he comes from a very culturally machismo family

where you're the man of the house, you're a man! You need to have a girlfriend at 15, and all these things and he is like, I can't come out [to his family], *they will kill me or kick me out*, and he is afraid. He always lived with this sense of not belonging, and as an outcast. The most interesting thing is he is also in a gang. And in a gang, it's like you're a man, no matter what, you know. So, he didn't come out to anyone, he always felt like he was in the shadows. He obviously talked to me...And he was like, I trust you. .. I did my best to provide my advice. But a lot of the time he needed resources that [our organization] could not provide, and I had to connect him to other resources, and that's the other thing we do very well, is work with everyone, and connect them with other community organizations that have resources that we don't have. We know we don't have everything, so we need to connect them with other organizations. And he needed counseling, but aside from that, he needed resources. So I started connecting him with other youth groups that had a big LGBTQ community, or served a big LGBTQ community. So, he just started finding ways, and would come to [our organization] saying I did this, and I would be, like, great. And I would just get him involved in community service programs and programs at [organization], and sure enough, he started gaining confidence to speak about that stuff, and not be afraid. *So he ended up dropping out of the gang, and he was like, I was in the gang because it was my form of protection, you know. I wanted to belong somewhere, and that was the easiest thing to belong to, they offered me protection as well, you know, so now no one will mess with me*, and if you really look at me I don't scream "GAY", like I am very straight acting, but I don't want to keep feeling like I have to suppress my feelings. So he dropped out of the gang;

he was doing good in school but still having fights with teachers because he was dealing with personal problems, he would call them inner demons.

The machismo culture associated with some communities instilled a fear of coming out for this youth. He believed he would be killed if anyone found out, and thus did not know where to turn. In this case, the activist's role was to provide activities and programs for this youth to build confidence, which eventually led to his dropping out of the gang. When the individual felt ready to talk to his family, the activist was there for support. Gregg's role as the liaison provided social support and assistance, to facilitate the conversation between the family and child, which led to breaking down barriers of mistrust between the family members.

Then came the point in which we had to tell the family. That's where my job is so important. Even though it's not us doing the talking, we provide the support and have young people believing us. We build our relationship with young people so much that we are invested in them, and we don't look at them like we are helping them. We don't help anyone, you can't help someone who doesn't want to be helped; *we assist them* with whatever they need. *We are just a liaison, what do you need, how can I get it to you?* OK. Let's work. That's what we do, but that relationship aspect is super important. So I became his source of strength... So when the time came that he had to talk to his family, he was like, please come with me, and I was like, ok, I'll go. And he was like, just to be there, because I was his source of strength, just being there meant the difference, you know, and I was able to talk. So I told the parents we need to talk, and this is a conversation, so sure enough, because I talked with the parents first, then the boy came

and he did his speech. And it was a very emotional place, but at the end of the day the dad was like, I still love you, and you're my son. And the dad and the mom thanked me, and I am like, why are you thanking me? And they were like, well, I don't think my son would have had the strength to do it himself, and you allowed him to trust his parents; it's just great. So that is some of the things we do, and we do it in different ways based on the relationships we build, which takes a long time, especially when they are so marginalized and they are distrustful of adults.

This relates to gun violence because the child may have originally joined the gang to feel the acceptance he felt he would not have from his family, even though the gang did not know his sexual preference. The confidence gained from utilizing the programs tailored to LGBTQ youth was the catalyst for getting out of the gang, and beginning to focus on his "real" family. While the primary issue surrounding this scenario was "coming out to the family", there are countless other "issues" that youth may have with their families which hinder relationships. The general point is that activists have the ability to further enhance these family networks, by supporting youth to trust their family and begin working on a closer relationship. Activists feel that strong family structures relate to reductions in gun violence, and they focus on building family relationships.

Youth and Youth Mediation

Activists have the ability to take a neutral stance between rival gang members, which puts them in a unique position to bridge (Putnam 2000) and facilitate communication between youth who would otherwise remain separated and hostile. The high crime neighborhoods, which

are the foci of this study, have distinct territories for some of the youth living in them, especially if they are gang affiliated. Activists generally attempt to facilitate youth mediation in safe, neutral settings, where youth can begin to build compassion for one another.

One activist exposes specific *types of segregation* within his community. Segregation in this example may be a territorial gang group phenomenon that gangs themselves create and sustain: “yes, and even more segregation amongst ourselves, you know, you have borderlines, gangs, and gang violence, and it’s tough times here in Chicago.” The segregation from gang territories of different gang groups keeps individuals (in the community) separate from each other, and leads to isolation, leaving little chance of civil interaction between rival gangs. Often the gang group is derived from these territories further isolating networks of youth and solidifying gang identity based on location. By residing on one block, youth were reported to typically belong to the gang occupying that space, leaving little choice of affiliation simply due to residing in one area. Thus, activists not once reported gangs to be bad, or have attempted to dismantle any gangs; because they know affiliation is not frequently a choice for a majority of youth they work it. Instead, they focus on mediating interpersonal individual violence.

Respondents convey, that sometimes violence emerges after a grievance between individuals who may be from different groups, which intensifies the conflict. For example, someone may step on someone’s shoe, or steal someone’s girlfriend. The hostility between rival gangs previously present, combined with lack of impulse control between youth, escalates interpersonal conflict that is sometimes resolved by gun violence.

This coincides with previous studies that have indicated general gang violence among gang members to be spatially clustered around gang territory borders (Baller et al. 2001; Tita, Short, Reid 2012; Decker and Curry 2012). Certain “places” such as blocks, corners, or parking

lots attribute meaning for gang members, which they are willing to defend and compete for at all costs. Within these places, resources are present, whether it is respect, the block corner 'set-space' to distribute drugs, or a set of basketball courts reserved only for those within the gang. Furthermore, gangs may defend their territories for symbolic reasons such as "street cred" (Maxson 2011; Anderson 1999), defined by levels of honor, respect, prestige, and reputations (Papchristos 2009; Bourdieu 1966; Gould 2003, Joe and Chesney-Lind 1995). When an organized system, or gang, competes over resources or set-spaces, violence emerges (Brantingham et al. 2012, Tita, Cohen, and Engberg 2005; Tita, and Ridgeway 2007).

One activist's organization provides resources to rival gang members, allowing them to interact in a controlled, safe setting outside designated territories. Providing a neutral safe setting is part of the process of mediating gun violence, as this is the catalyst for activists to facilitate healthy communication between individuals who come from different groups. Then, as activists *bridge* youth to one another in the controlled setting, respondents hope these relationships extend outside the organization and into the community. Here is an example of the activists' role of the liaison between youth that allows them to "cross borders" without physically having to cross them. In this case, the self-recruiting basketball league mixes all the players (gang members) in a draft-like way in a controlled, safe setting:

Technically, there are 4 area gang leaders that are involved, and as a result of that, we started out with them just playing against one another, and working on some camaraderie. *You are less likely to harm someone that you know, that you break bread with.* We also feed them. So for the first hour, they are eating and have life skills training. And from there, we progressed on, over this past year. This season, we have the gang leaders

coaching the teams. We tried to structure it in a way that now they aren't just playing with people they know. They aren't just coaching people they know. They have a draft just as you would in the NBA; you have to do warm-ups and all that, then the coaches select who they want on the team.

Prior to the games, any issues of conflict between rival gangs are discussed, and worked out through conflict resolution during life skills groups. The activists "squash" any issue that comes up before letting players mix. There is a major risk associated with mixing individuals who may have in the past had orders to kill one another, and likely would fight if their paths crossed in the street. Below, Tori responds to the question "when you guys first started, were you on your toes at all, kind of nervous about mixing all these people together, or were you confident the whole time?"

Oh, we had some reservations, no doubt. Certainly the city and police commander from the district, everyone thought it couldn't be done, but you know, with prayer and love and perseverance it worked. We have not had one incident after 34 games. [Not one?] Not one.

To further attest to building a safe environment [mediating gun violence between rival gangs], even with 4 different area gangs, comprised of 80 players/members in the same building, Tori remarks, "We started out having police officers, and now we don't need them. We don't need them. I can't tell you the last time a police officer came." The organization's personal security does search the players before entering the building, because, "I never want to get lax in

certain things, and I want them to understand the significance of that. But no, we have not had any incident like I said, with no police.”

This program has successfully mixed networks of youth who otherwise would view each other as enemies. This is a neighborhood-based program, thus, these players are likely to run into each other outside the league. Within the league, Tori relates, “the league has grown more into a family than anything. You know, now these guys know one another and admire one another’s skills, if you will. And you know, so there is a different kind of appreciation for life in general.” The liaison, or activist’s role, is to help establish situations that allow youth to see each other fully as human beings, rather than adversaries, putting a name to a face. They are less likely to shoot the person they just played with on the same team.

The activist’s neutral position between gangs, or youth in conflict, places them in a position that allows possible mediation between youth. Therefore, it seems likely that more civil interaction between rival gang members would bring humaneness to each other that could transfer to the streets outside the organization. Here, Gregg explains one scenario where two of the youth he worked with ended up crossing paths on the street after the activist helped bridge a bond between rival youth:

There were these two kids, when I first started working with them they couldn’t see each other, and the reason was because they are from two different gangs. And at that time, those gangs were in a war, so basically the orders were, if you see someone, you better fight them or do something, but you cannot just let them walk away. They knew where they couldn’t walk, so I don’t know what my idea was at the time, but I had them both in the same place. We were doing something that was part of the program, and I had them at

the same program, but I am like, oh, nothing will happen. Sure enough, the minute they see each other they start fighting. So we had to separate them, and we had to talk to them, at [our organization] you do not do that, and when it comes to build, you need to respect them... So with these two guys, we started working separately with them, and we brought them in for another event, and sure enough, they were boxing, fighting again, and they couldn't see each other. Until the point where I had to get them to work. So the best thing to do was to take them away from the city, and we do camps at [organization] and one of the things with the camps is we are very specific about what we want to do, we have a purpose even before the camp starts.

While Gregg initially had difficulty establishing a connection between the youths, he provided a solution to get them away from their territorialized environments by bringing them to a neutral location: a summer camp. One of his rules at camp is no cell phones, which disconnects youth from their peers who may be sources of negative social capital. Gregg reports gang banging through Facebook is possible, and happens, further highlighting the importance of disconnecting youth from digital technologies when removing them from their natural environments to secure a neutral setting. Gregg has the ability to take phones away from the youths he works with because of his previously established bonding ties (Putnam 2000). Here, he describes the disconnect that is sometimes necessary for youth to build new relationships with each other:

I know they needed to disconnect. When they are in the neighborhood, they are so connected to everything going on in the gang, to friends, to everything. Facebook and

everything, and now you have seen a trend of online bullying. And basically, if you are part of the gang then you post what you are doing, pictures, or just random posts, killer this, killer that, so you can now gang bang on Facebook. So we needed to disconnect them, and I took them out to the camp... [When asking for cell phones] I wouldn't be able to tell them these things unless I have a relationship with them, so that relationship, that's something that we undervalue in young people. They will hold to the greatest value, a good relationship, if you have been there for them, they will value that relationship and honor it. So, because of that relationship, they are like fine. So I took them out, and the moment they [two boys] entered that car or bus, it was like, HE IS HERE, HE IS HERE! And I'm like, yeah, you guys can sit apart, and he is like, 'I'm not going', and I was like, are you going for me or for him or for yourself? He is like, 'myself, no I wanna go'. Alright then, you don't have to talk to him, you don't have to like him, just be cool. He is like, alright, we go... and at the camp I am kind of like the devil's advocate, I make them work together. I was like, you need to put this up and work together, because I am not gonna help you, I gotta do some other things. At first they are like, I don't need to talk to you, don't talk to me, don't come near me, don't come near my space, but we need to do this because they told us we need to. So, first day, second day, by the third day they were like, ok, I need this, and they started communicating.

While telling the story, the activist reported he takes a similar approach to conflict resolution outside the camp space, and into the organization's safe set space. Once youth feel like they are in a safe, non-judgmental environment, they are more likely to open up emotionally, expressing feelings over the current conflict. The activist then explained each individual is

provided the opportunity to reflect on the current issue, addressing people, interactions, and all the processes of the conflict. During this step of conflict mediation, the perpetrator, the victim and mediator would know the full story from everyone's viewpoint. This provides a reflection from all parties for understanding the events that took place, what they could have done better, and if necessary, and if it has a remedy, to think of a solution they can all participate in.

Gregg's process: initially getting the two opposing youths to communicate was not forced. He respected the current relationship between the two boys because he has an *understanding* of the value the boys place on their gangs' ideals, and the reality of the 'current war between the two gangs'. He did not try to make the boys talk, but focused on getting the boys in the same room or area together, without physical confrontation. He took them away from life's distractions, and online gangbanging, and provided a mutual space that neither boy had territory/authority over. The camp is a space that allows the youths to let their guard down, and not worry whether their gang is going to catch them associating with rival gang members. Therefore, their relationship began to build after conflict mediation:

They started working and talking, and part of the team building that we did, talking about the activities we were doing. We teach them workshops on cultural diversity and cultural values and the power of the community, and all that. They started just talking about their experiences, and we were doing a ceremony where you had to let go of something, and give thanks for something. They started telling their stories, and everyone was crying because their stories were so sad, they came from difficult backgrounds, but both their stories were similar: they didn't have a dad, only mom and sister, and it [the gang] was a way out, for making money, and all these things. So it's like, wow, kind of a break

through, and we come back to the city, and you can see the minute they stepped out of the car it was like, wait, are we going back to how things were? They had this kind of revelation, now they are listening to their own conscience, like questioning, what do I do? I am able to work with this guy, but you know, what now? Do I go back to whatever I had to do or not?

Gregg was able to facilitate a discussion between the two boys that allowed for the realization that they shared similar experiences. Like the previous activist, the boys found compassion for one another after realizing they were not that different from each other. Furthermore, once arriving back in the city, there was a *change in mindset*, as a new found “conscience” was reported by Gregg. The boys began to question their actions, and not impulsively reacting, as they previously would have started fighting. The new network established between the two boys set the catalyst for their future encounters, as Gregg continues:

One day, a few months after, the war was still going on with the two gangs, and one of the boys was walking on the “wrong” street, and the other boy was in a car with a couple of his friends that were part of the gang too. They see him, and so one of the guys in the car has a gun, and they jump out of the car, and they surround the other boy. But the boy that was in the car didn’t know that was the other boy he met at [organization]. They surround the other kid, and they put the gun in front of him, and were about to shoot him. The other boy recognizes him, and was like, ‘no, no, no, no, don’t shoot! It’s cool, I know him! I know him! Don’t!’ He talked to his chief, and he was like, ‘don’t do this, I know him! He has been working with Gregg, and we have been doing this.’ *So they let him go.*

They let him go. And the other kids saw what the boy did for him, and at that moment created this pact of respect.

In all likelihood, without the intervention Gregg had previously established between the two boys at camp, the one boy would be dead today. Gregg's role as an activist, however, is not complete at this point. He has to make sure retaliation does not happen, since waving a gun in an affiliated gang member's face is a sign of disrespect (Anderson 1999). Literature indicates that retaliation or retribution occurs to maintain or restore a gang's reputation or social standing, and to solidify gang identity or structure, if a rival gang crosses borders or threatens the gang, (Janowski 1991; Papachristos 2009). The boy, who had just escaped death with the help of the other, has two options. First, he can get his gang to retaliate for waving a gun in his face, as this is a sign of disrespect. The second option is walking away, and letting the situation calm down. Gregg concludes the story here:

He goes and he runs, and the other guys get back in the car, and the kid in the car calls me. He was like, you gotta go see this kid! This just happened; you need to see where he goes. We don't know where he's gonna go. And so I go to the house, he is at the house, and he is just thinking, like, man I was about to lose my life. And he told me the whole story, and I asked the other guy the story. And it's like *that in itself just saved a life*. What we did at [organization], this simple thing that people think is just so simple, has so much power in terms of changing a person's life. So after that incident it's like, whatever we do, and everything we do, saves lives. Now I have them in [program name], they are still able to work together, while keeping the image of like, look, don't talk to me, we are

from different gangs, we don't have to talk, but we can work together. So I just put them to work together, and they do. Every week, they come to plan things, or try to set up for the event, so they work and work together. It's great, this respect, to go from those two boys that would always fight, and wanted to fight to the death, to two people that can work together, and are doing something positive for the community. And now they are teaching other young people, so they are doing workshops.

Gregg sums up the entire process of mediating this violent situation when he says, "these simple things, that people think are just so simple, have so much power in terms of changing a person's life." Establishing a safe space, where Gregg could facilitate healthy communication between two rival boys, saved one of their lives. Most of the activists work in organizations that provide assistance to neighborhood-based youth increasing the chance for interaction. The mediation of gun violence begins sometimes just by allowing these simple interactions for relationships to develop, which can then be transferred outside the organization's space, and into the neighborhood setting. Activists, in theory, desegregate some of these neighborhoods by allowing youth to "cross borders" without having to physically cross rival gang territories. Thus, when activists employ their role of facilitating communication between youth, mediation of gun violence becomes more possible.

Bridging Youth, Law and the Criminal Justice System

Activists indicated several important ways they serve as a liaison between youth and the police. While half explained their role as child advocates, helping youth understand their legal rights and the law, others networked with local law enforcement to work on solutions regarding

poor relationships with youth and police. Several activists in this sample highlighted the problematic consequences of allowing entrenched, unconstructive formal control (Sampson et al. 1997) dynamics between law enforcement and youth to perpetuate.

The overall goal of these interventions is to reduce the chances of future arrests, which ultimately can lead to school dropout, make obtaining future employment difficult, and in some cases, change family structure by taking the father out of the household. In a cyclical pattern, higher arrest rates, dropouts, and fatherless homes increase the likelihood of violence within the neighborhood (Sampson 1999).

The activist utilizes his role in educating youth on the law, with the hope that they will not commit future crimes after learning the sentences associated with that crime. This presumes a rational choice approach to crime prevention; suggesting youth have free will and rationally decide to commit crime based on self interests (Beccaria 1764). This can be problematic, as this places blame on the victim if they irrationally decide to commit crime. Harvey explains why he feels it is important to educate youth on the law:

While I was incarcerated in federal prison, I had an opportunity to meet and greet the incarcerated. And I was doing research on them; they didn't even know it...So when I was incarcerated, I heard a lot of men say the same thing, and the quote goes like this: "man if I knew I was going to get this much time I would not have been doing this." So, after hearing this repeatedly, I went to the law library, and started to look up crimes that we commit in urban communities... After doing my research, I designed a program around it. I worked with everyone in the city. I'm running into a stumbling block right now, they don't want to stop this. Chaos creates opportunities. If they wanted to stop this

madness, all the stupid activity, with our youth, they could stop it by creating opportunities for them. So, I'm going against the grain. My program is designed to reduce, but they don't want a reduction. They say they want a reduction, but they support programs to put band-aids on it. They don't support programs that can actually make a difference. My program is one; I firmly believe it has something to do with the reduction of high school drop outs on the south and west side, especially in the schools that I have spoken to.

Even though Rational Choice Theory (Beccaria 1764) has been debated as being problematic, it is evidently grounded in this activist's approach to educating youth on laws. Harvey's prison "research" implies incarcerated males did not know the sentencing associated with crimes that routinely take place in urban communities. He insinuates that if offenders had known how many years sentence committing a certain crime would get the individual, they likely would not have committed it.

This activist has had some apparent success, which runs counter to the argument that knowledge of the law is not enough in itself to overcome factors that lead to crime involvement. Partial success is evident in the following case of one student's decision to not carjack; which if he had decided to, could have led him to lengthy incarceration. The unpredictability of individuals' actions living in high crime areas in Chicago could have placed this individual in a deadly situation, especially if the person he decided to carjack had a gun. While Harvey provides the tools for that individual to make wiser decisions, his impact on reducing violence was further supplemented through his binder of references. His references included pages of

gratitude from various sources for his outstanding work reducing violence in the community, by sharing his knowledge with youth. Here is an example of Harvey's success story:

I was speaking at a high school, and in one of the segments of my presentation, I was talking about vehicular high-jacking. It's 4-15 years, plus you have a 15-year firearm add on. You're looking at 4-35 years. A gentlemen came up to me after my presentation and said I am so glad you came to this school today, because I had no idea you get that much time carjacking; that's what I do. I take sound systems and run. We were gonna get somebody tonight. I'm not ever gonna do that again, and I can't wait to tell them it's off. I didn't know we could get that much time for that.' That's why on my brochure it says, "If more knew, less would do." It brought tears to my eyes, because that's what I work for. To educate our youth on illegal activities and try to give them additional info, which will allow them to make wiser decision in the future, because of the knowledge and data and statistics that I just shared with them. You know, they need it.

Similar to Harvey's approach of educating youth on laws, another activist, serving as a child advocate, educates her youth on their legal rights when interacting with law enforcement. This activist, and several others, highlighted the struggle associated with navigating the role of child advocate and maintaining good relationships with the police and school administrators. Their role is to educate youth on their rights, but sometimes that may be portrayed as not being cooperative, or even working against "the system" of formal controls described by Sampson et al. (1997). The criminalizing stigma associated with urban youth may place activists in a guilty

by association position while attempting to be a child advocate. This further hinders the relationships with the police, between activists and youths:

The police hate me because I helped the child become a self-advocate... When the police came to arrest the child who came to school high, and had drugs on him. Before the police went in, I went in there, because the child was also a Special Ed student, and I have a relationship with him and I'm a child advocate. I told him I wanted to prepare him for what was going to happen, even though this was like the third time in two weeks he had been arrested. But I wanted to make sure he knew, especially because he was a ward of the state. He does not have to say anything unless his guardian is present, because he didn't have to say anything. And making sure he understood that, and he can request what charges he is being brought in for, and so he understood it. The principal came in, and saw me talking to him; she kicked me out of the room... The police were in there too, and they were questioning him, and he said, "Ms **** said I didn't have to say anything. So yeah, he was arrested. I was called into the principal's office, because of 'you interfered with our investigation, you're gonna have to talk to the superintendent tomorrow'.

Similarly, another example of an experience was where an activist had to navigate how to handle one of her youths being shot by police, and how her attempts to explain the situation to other youth was hindered by school administration:

Let me tell you this, we had a child who was shot by the police last school year. This child was one of the higher-ups in the gang... last year he was stabbed, because of some beef with a different gang. A few weeks later, he was shot by the police. He survived. I guess him and a couple of our students were doing a home invasion, or whatever, and the police saw a gun, and he was running away, and they shot him three times. So the week before, when he was stabbed... in critical condition. And I had so many kids in my office wanting to talk, and I was the band-aid, sending them back to class, like let's do this, let's process it, but ultimately get back to class. I remember that day because there was a student that was so emotionally a wreck she was making herself sick in the bathroom, and then we had another student who self-harmed at school, and there was a crisis on the elementary side... The [administration] came in the morning, 'you are to shut down all conversations of what happened, if students are upset do not allow them to go to the social worker; send them home. We are a school, we do not deal with this; we are here to deliver a public education.' Isn't that crazy? And the night before, when I heard it happened, I put together all these pamphlets, how to talk to students, you know, if you want to talk to parents, what to tell parents. Like how, ways to engage; if the student is upset send them to me. Just had this whole talk prepared for the staff meeting. The next morning and the [administration] was, like, no. And she ended up going into every classroom, saying this is what happens when you hang out with the wrong people. And

talking about cell phones, like if you text each other what happened, the police can subpoena your cell phone, so you can be an accessory to this crime. And scaring the shit out of students, you all, all need to stop talking about it. This kid is not a hero, just crazy. And that's how it was remediated. The news media reported it as a MAN, and didn't talk about the fact it was a 14-year-old boy who got shot 3 times in the back. In his back. Running away. I don't care if he had a gun. He was not coming at you in a threatening way; he was running away.

Several activists conveyed the importance of a child being able to advocate for themselves, especially with the well known issues of police brutality, and a lack of positive relationships between police and urban communities. Specifically, activists convey the importance of youth knowing their rights in instances of stop and frisk or anti-loitering. Few activists reported good relationships with the police. However, all of them indicated a desire for more effective policing, and working relationships between officers, youth and activists. Here, one activist explains his perspective on police relations, and his role as the liaison, building bridge ties to youth and the police:

The commanders, a lot of the police sergeants, they are responsive, and they know the needs of the community, but the message doesn't get across to the police officers on the street. They are on the street, that's their job; so there are a lot of instances where our young people do get arrested and do get treated in a bad way by police officers. And we are trying to do something about it, but a lot of the time they are not responsive, so that's the image that police have in Chicago. Especially with young people, but what we try to

do is work with police districts and provide answers and provide as much help as they need to work with young people. We are part of this new idea in which [a university] is trying to make a curriculum of how police officers should interact with young people, and how to connect in communities. We are a part of that, but it's in the process. But this is a process to the people in our community... it takes a lot from us to make those connections with the police districts. Now I know officer so and so, if I ever need anything we can call them, but it's only a few police officers we can count on; it's a work in progress.

Another activist expresses her concern over current police relationships with youth, and uses her son as an example of how she is the liaison for youth knowing their rights by providing a pamphlet that youth can refer to:

When you have to teach your child how to protect yourself from the police, that's a problem, you know. And that's a lot of moms, with sons of color. That's the main worry: it's not getting shot; you're worried about the police. You know, like stop and frisk, well, what is that message sending? And stop and frisk was deemed unconstitutional, and they revoked it, right. Well, here it's not really stop and frisk, but it's anti-loitering, which you know, depends on who you are to enforce it. So when that's our biggest concern as parents, the police, it's not who it should be. And you know, privatization of jails. In Illinois, if the beds are not filled the state has to pay for it. So why are we putting more money into jailing, instead of avoiding jail be an option? Or making sure these beds are filled. Why are these laws making it criminalizing people of color? I always tell my son,

him and his friends, I am constantly like these are your rights, you have to know them. And I said it's a sad reality, but I have them walking around with these little pamphlets, "know your rights". Like if you get pulled over, or if you get stopped, for whatever reason. That's why it's called the wild, wild west over here, because there is a sense, like, you don't protect me.

Targeting youth of color through anti-loitering laws in Illinois is Chicago's version of New York City's stop and frisk, which gives police the right to search for contraband and weapons without reason. This has resulted in disproportionate arrests of black and Latino youth after systematic racial profiling and excessive police force (Center for Constitutional Rights). The activists have scrutinized such policies that increase distrust among police and youth. However, aside from attempting to build a curriculum based on proper police interactions and providing assistance to the police, they did not report specific details regarding attempts to change police policies such as anti-loitering, or the privatization of prisons mentioned previously.

A consequence of strained relationships with the police is having youth solve problems themselves (Venkatesh 2008). Several activists report that calling the police is not acceptable among youth, because of the "no snitch" policy prevalent in the communities within the study. Ironically, if someone calls the police, their life could be in danger. Social problems are handled by youth themselves, while in "mainstream" society these problems would be remediated by the police. This coincides with Venkatesh's (2008) research, conveying that a lack of effective policing may result in youth turning to violence as a normative solution. Aaron provides an example linking to Venkatesh's (2008) theory:

The relationship between police and African Americans is shitty. It's like the dudes have to take the law into their own hands. I have heard of situations where the kid is laying there shot, you know, and its 20-30 minutes, or there is a fight and the police come and the fight is over...I'm pretty sure the police are scared themselves... There's a lack of respect, and knowing that sometimes the police don't have their best interest. Like when one of my police friends comes into the school, actually one of my kids in my mentoring program, we walked through the halls, and he was like are you a police? Yeah? Well I don't like police. He said I don't like them either. So what are you saying? My police friend was like, there are dirty cops, putting drugs on these kids.

Whether such stories are true or apocryphal is not possible to discern; nevertheless it is clearly known there are both good and bad police officers interacting with this at risk population. Activists seek to improve interactions with law enforcement, hoping that as a result youth will be less likely to settle disputes themselves, such as through retaliation after a friend or family member is shot. According to interviewees there is currently a lack of trust and respect for the criminal justice system within these neighborhoods. With only 20% of homicide cases solved in Chicago (ClearPath 2013), the police would benefit from stronger relationships with youth in the community who could provide assistance. More cooperation from both ends of the spectrum would seemingly reduce gun violence, but this would require changes in the "no snitch" policy, police brutality, and reducing disproportionate arrest rates.

Only one activist in the current study took into consideration the risks, and ultimately fears, associated with being a police officer, and how these factors impact policing in violent,

poverty stricken neighborhoods. Aaron notes, “I’m pretty sure the police are scared themselves”. The police are risking their lives while working in some of the most dangerous neighborhoods in the city, and for the most part, are trying to not become a victim of gun violence themselves. Police are likely well aware of the distrust among residents, and when cooperation is minimal, cases are less likely to be solved. However, activists are in a great position as the liaison between youth and the police, and can help bridge these relationships, to further enhance police effectiveness in reducing violence.

Theme 5: Activists Bridge Youth to Occupational or College Opportunities

Activists help *bridge youth to occupational or college opportunities* through exposure to professionals and new settings, while assisting them in obtaining the tools necessary for employment or secondary education. Part of the activists’ role in mediating violence is preventing circumstances where youth may end up in violent situations; frequently taking an active role in helping youth find jobs, or helping them enroll in college.

Activists reason that if youth within their network have an education or job to support themselves, they are likely to make better choices which help buffer them from a life of crime and risking their lives, either by becoming a victim or offender. This correlates with previous literature linking deindustrialization to joblessness, which creates conditions conducive to higher rates of crime (Wacquant 2008; Wilson 1987; & Venkatesh 2008). “Once they understand why they are in it [a gang], and once the need is met, their personal need is met, there isn’t a need to be involved in it. So, if you’re looking for security, be it financial or protection, if you know you have a place to go to get your protection and security, versus life, you know, choosing life rather than death.” Activists help youth meet their needs by providing pathways to jobs and

educational advancement, thereby reducing the chances of filling those needs on the street. For example:

Most of those students that dropped out of school, a lot of them want to do good, a lot of them want to make a difference. They made bad decisions, and they're caught in a situation that they Do Not Know How to get themselves out of. If you're in a place where no one has ever told you how to get out of this situation, then what do you do? If you don't know how to really read, or you don't really have an education, and the only way you know how to survive or to get money is to sell drugs, or sell your body, what are you going to do? Do you go home and starve? Or do you go out there and do what you gotta do to survive?

Part of mediating violence is keeping youths busy, as activists strive to get them a job or remain in school. Several activists emphasized that not all youth are selling drugs, or taking part in risky behaviors, since there are innocent victims caught up in gun violence, who unfortunately happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. Activists try to deter youth from "hanging out" on dangerous blocks, even if they are not doing anything wrong. The neighborhoods in this study do not have just a "few bad blocks", but crime that encompasses most of the outdoor space. Whether it is through mistaken identity, or when someone becomes a victim from stray bullets after a drive-by shooting, standing outside in these neighborhoods places youth at risk for losing their lives. The activist identifies such circumstances here:

Not even to make money, just doing stuff that is unproductive, you know. Because you have some kids who come from two-parent households; they're comfortable. But you know, the end thing is hanging out ... It's not all the time they're selling drugs, just hanging, you know, fucking around. *Acting gets you nowadays killed*. This is not like 25-30 years ago, when you can hang on the corner, or the park, or whatever.

When activists help youth obtain a job, they are essentially helping them build a healthy, productive lifestyle. With a job, young adults will have the money to buy food and provide shelter for their families, without having to look for money on the street (Venkatesh 2008). Activists and previous literature theorize that with less individuals looking for money to survive on the street, the chances of gun violence decreases, and healthier lifestyles emerge (Venkatesh 2008). Activist Tori further explains this perspective:

I would continue to do this the rest of my life for free, because of the reward that comes with it, and observing the change. Not just because somebody got a job, but knowing the need to get one. They need to take care of their family, you know, and seeing just the value of life. *It doesn't mean just a job; it's another whole mindset. A different life style, a different way people look at the world*. Oddly enough, many of the youth have never been downtown, having exposure and really seeing hope.

Exposure

With institutional abandonment (Venkatesh 2008; Wilson 1987; Wacquant 2008) and gang territories (Baller et al. 2001; Tita, Short, Reid 2012; Decker and Curry 2012) confining

youth to certain spaces, they were reported to have a tendency to isolate themselves within certain boundaries of their neighborhood. This further highlights the crucial role activists play in *exposing* or *bridging* youth to opportunities outside their neighborhood or immediate networks. Multiple activists support the notion of youth being scared to leave their ‘territories’, since this requires disengaging from the protection they have from friends and family within their “1-2 block radius”. This further limits youth to only being exposed to the few educational and occupational options available within their neighborhood, which can be viewed as a micro example of anomie (Durkheim 1897). This respondent conveys:

I had kids who haven’t even been downtown, and they are like 3 miles away. And they haven’t even been downtown, and it’s like they put they put themselves into a box, like, you know, 1 block, 2 block radius. You know, we are beefin’ with the block over here, so we can’t go over there. We are beefin’ with the people 3 -4 blocks away, we can’t go over there. We can’t. So you know, it’s just like they are prisoners. They’re stuck.

Activists take a role in exposing youth to opportunities outside their neighborhoods, *bridging* them to professionals who may otherwise be outside their network. Respondents imply youth within their network were not frequently exposed to professional role models, remarking that when people become successful they tend to leave their “high crime” neighborhoods for better living environments. Additionally, high unemployment rates leaves youth, particularly boys, to frequently observe males who aren’t suitable role models for a successful life. One activist indicates that reinforcement of this notion continues within the school system, where youth spend majority of their time. The male figures tend to be custodial staff, which is not an

idealized occupation (for making money), when compared to the glamorized life of rappers and drug dealers:

I think there are, but a lot of people don't see them. I asked some of my guys. I have a majority of African American males, some Hispanic. I asked about role models etc, and you know, besides athletes and rappers, they really don't, besides Obama. They didn't list any political people, doctors, lawyers, *no one personally*. People they make it, they are successful, and now they're living their life in the suburbs, and they aren't going back to the scene. They aren't speaking, so they come to a place where they don't see them. I spoke at an 8th grade graduation; the school was majority African American, Hispanics as well. But literally, principals, teachers, all women. I think when it came to the custodial staff, janitors were males. I think that's a large representation, when you look at our public school system; women represent it. When you don't have males, then kids are not seeing individuals that are not represented, that look like them. So, when they're looking at the males that are successful, making money, all this other type of stuff, then they are looking at rappers, drugs dealers, whatever. What happens is if they don't make it in basketball, then they crash, and they turn another way, because they don't know another way. I try and tell them you can do things other than basketball; you can still associate with sports and not play basketball.

The activists have the ability to expose students to life outside of their current situation, even if they had just dropped out of school, or have been labeled a gang banger. According to activists, that's not who they are. The activist's role is to remind youth that they can have a great

job, or go to college, and then provide opportunities for exposure. This respondent highlights his students were impacted more and responded better to him once they were taken out of the classroom and exposed to college life. By allowing youth to visually see, and be present, on college campuses gives them an experience they will not forget. In this case, it allowed something to “click” for the group visiting NUI:

I am more about the positive. I think sometimes people try to hammer home the negative. But if you can change a person’s life by showing them something different, you know. When I took a group of young guys down to NIU for the weekend, some of them have never been out of Chicago like that. They went, and you know, before I took them down there to NUI, I never forget that they were trying to act all hard, and not really talking, and you know they had the straight face on, real quiet. They are 17, 18, or whatever, but when I took them to NUI, I mean, they looked like young boys, that was having a good time: smiles, laughing, happy; I mean it’s just something that I hadn’t really seen when I was seeing them every day, coming for them to get their GED. So for me, it’s showing them the different side, telling people like, listen, you can, you have the ability to be successful, you have the ability to be a CEO, you have the ability to really own your own business. You have the ability to get your masters, your bachelors, your PhD. You can do that. So I think at the end of the day, you’re more than what you are told you are. You’re not a murderer, you’re not a killer, you’re not a gang banger, that’s not who you are. That may be what people told you all your life, and you just conformed to that identity, but that’s not truly who you are. That’s the aspect that I truly believe. If people truly have

someone that cares about them that's keeping them going, then it helps to make a difference to people. As opposed to hammering in a one-strike rule, if you get caught.

If the activist cannot afford transportation to bring all of the youth [in their network] to locations outside of the youths' community, activists will attempt to bridge them to professionals by bringing them into the youths' network. This, however, was problematic for one activist. The students in this scenario did not respond to the activist's attempts to bridge them to professionals, even when the occupation seemed like it would resonate interest with students, like rapping or basketball. The activist provided the bridge to professionals by bringing them into the classroom, but unless students *are ready to plan for the future*, the professional's advice may not be interesting to youth. This may further suggest that the messages from professionals may not resonate as strongly without the visual exposure provided in previous situations:

We were talking about stuff that impacts them, and they just didn't care. Like, for career day, I had some really cool professions come in, right, obtainable professions like a barber, personal trainer, an ATF agent, just really cool professions. Then we had a banker, and we had, like, an up and coming rapper and basketball player, a player who plays overseas. Out of all those cool things, not even the rapper, it was the basketball player, and they didn't care about how much practice, and camps, and how old he is, and how long he is playing; they just wanted to see him dunk. Come on now, you're in Jr. High. *They just aren't thinking. But developmentally, that's pretty appropriate.*

Provide Tools for Employment or Secondary education

While many of the activists expressed the value of exposure to colleges and jobs, some of the activists additionally provided essential tools necessary for obtaining employment or furthering their education. These tools primarily come in form of portfolios, resume's, applications, and advice on navigating the work atmosphere.

While attending one activist's male mentoring class, students were putting together portfolios, which included all the paperwork needed to apply for jobs and/or college. Some of the students do not have the privilege of accessing a computer at home' so they utilized portable memory cards, allowing them to save and print portfolios elsewhere. Then, if a job opportunity arises, the students will be able to apply, because they have the tools required. The activists, therefore, provide a starting point for youth if they decide to utilize their portfolios. While the activist checks to make sure grammar and spelling is correct in the portfolios, he/she additionally provides new career ideas, and raises questions to begin to help the student figure out where he or she would like to work, based on their interests:

I developed a specialized section, teaching urban males how to be successful in college. It's an all- male course; all minority males. I got about 30 guys... probably 25 that are still coming consistently. Guys in that class have been in jail, or dealt with drugs, and this and that. I work with them, trying to get them acquainted, and showing them to look beyond where they are at, and how to be successful... I try to do more interaction, so sometimes it may be PowerPoint, YouTube videos, something that relates to what the topic is. This upcoming week is writing and speaking effectively. Next week is career.

Next couple of weeks I want them to bring laptop cards, and I want them to write a portfolio, building a resume', cover letter, and print it out. They just need to have it, and if they need it, they have it. One of the guys at the GED program, I had them all work on resumes. I was like, listen, you're going to do this; send me something. And, you know, we worked on that. He is my friend on Facebook, and I see he has a job now. I'm thinking, I wonder if that started from when I helped him build his resume'. At least now you have something to start with. So I told them, what is your career choice? How do I get there? What're the requirements? What schools do I wanna go to? What is the salary rank for that school? What type of resume'? So what do I need to have for this type of position? And then I tell them to look at jobs they want now. So, this is what I wanna do for the next few weeks, so by the time they leave my class, they have something beneficial for themselves.

During the activist's class, one moment stood out: a discussion on looking professional. The activist guided the class to understand the importance of dressing for success, which was not an easy concept for some students in his network to comprehend. He asked how many of the students had work clothes right now, the class responded hesitantly. One student did not understand the point of work clothes, and he argued, "You shouldn't judge someone by what they wear." The activist then used himself as an example, and asked the students if they would have taken him 'seriously' if he had worn "street clothes", as compared to the immaculate business attire he currently wore.

Students then understood the point; if they want "mainstream, middle-class society" to take them seriously, then they must dress and act the part. Without the activist modeling proper

behavior conducive to obtaining employment (attire, language, non-verbal behavior), youth may be shut out of employment opportunities, even before the interview has started. Youth may not have had the necessity to dress professionally, or behave in a work-oriented setting previously, further highlighting anomic conditions resulting from isolated communities (Durkheim 1897).

The activist explains his perspective:

Another thing I do is a lot of self-image and self-reflection. One of the topics is critical thinking, and so I really talk about the media and culture. We don't really realize it, but we are affected a lot of times by what the rappers say, what the media says; when you're looking at the way you dress, talk, walk, and you know this is how pop culture affects us. These are the things I try to get them to think about deeper.

Theme 6. Challenging Policy

Activists within the current study frequently discussed their role in challenging unfair policy that may contribute to gun violence, primarily focusing on improving learning conditions, and reducing the school to prison pipeline for youth within their network. Policies surrounding deteriorating learning conditions were associated with charter schools replacing neighborhood schools, combined with systematic unequal distribution of quality resources within the public school system. The school to prison pipeline was addressed by activists as they advocate against overly punitive disciplinary measures, such as the zero tolerance policy. Several activists challenge these policies with solidarity, and provide workshops where youth can begin to understand unjust policies enforced in their community, hopefully learning how to avoid the injustice of those policies.

Improving Learning Conditions

Several activists focus on political engagement and activism (Putnam 2000; Rosenfeld et al. 2001), particularly improving learning conditions, based upon their examination of the poor quality of education that youth within their network often receive. Poor or lower quality education has been identified as one of the many contributing causes of violence. They reported lack of resources for public education has an assumed residual influence on violence reflected throughout institutional abandonment literature (Venkatesh 2008). Here, one respondent relates:

“We have to start looking at the root [of violence], you know we bring a bunch of people over here and you release them out here with no resources... You have to go to the root. Uneducated. Some people, when they are younger, they make mistakes, they do their time or whatever, and then they get out, and they are still being persecuted. You know, like for the rest of their lives, and it’s just like what are you gonna do? *You can’t get a job paying \$30 – 40 an hour ‘cause your not educated*, so you know, what am I, gonna lay over n die? I need to feed my family, I need to feed myself, you know you’re gonna do some things that aren’t legal. ‘Cause I mean its rough, you know, just me working, don’t have any criminal history, played basketball, know tons of people, just a regular job is hard.

Similarly, another respondent adds:

“Young people do not have or do not feel like they are being educated...So a lot of the young people do end up dropping out because they aren't finding resources at school, which adds to unemployment and violence and all that.”

A majority of activists identified two common frustrations while attempting to improve learning conditions, which they perceive has residual effects on violence: 1) the closing of public schools targeted in predominately Black and Latino communities and 2) Charter schools (that have replaced public schools) are draining public taxes that would otherwise go to neighborhood schools, which further diminishes the quality of public schools. This reduces the chance of students receiving the *free quality* public education that is necessary for upward mobility.

The activists who identified *school closings* as a contributor to violence and inequality are referring to fifty public schools that were targeted and closed during the summer of 2013, as part of the Renaissance 2010 plan, which replaces public with private charter schools (CPS.edu). 80% of the schools affected were on the south and west side of Chicago, where students are primarily low income and 90% African American (sometimes referred to as Apartheid schools), even though Chicago's total population of African American students is 40% (Caref et al. 2012). White, affluent schools were not the target of shutdowns, since these schools have continuously been provided the funding and resources to maintain a quality education.

Some may argue that the schools had to be shut down because of underperformance. However, if funding was allocated to underprivileged schools historically, the schools likely would not have reached the current levels of subpar performance. Another item of contention is that Charter schools did not perform better (33rd percentile) in reading scores as compared to neighborhood schools (43rd percentile) (Caref et al. 2012).

Furthermore, politicians who dictate where funding is allocated claimed there was not enough money to support those 50 public schools. However, according to the Chicago Teachers' Union, charter schools increased CPS spending by 624% between 2004 and 2012. "Even if the district closed 100 schools, annual savings of \$50-80 million constitute only 1-1.5% percent of the Districts' operating budget" (Caref et al. 2012). Activists expressed further frustrations when tax payer dollars went towards a new 54 million dollar basketball stadium in the affluent section of Chicago (Progress Illinois); money that could have been directed towards saving schools.

As a consequence of closing the schools, respondents report vacant buildings and relocation of students, which forces them to travel outside the neighborhood to receive an education. *This leaves them at risk for their safety, since they are forced to walk through high crime areas, or cross through known gang territories.* According to this activist, after the school closings, youth who attend those schools may feel like no one cares about them and their conditions, reducing their mental well-being:

With the school closings, all these schools are boarded up. That's a violent act to our community. There are also psychological implications when children are walking by and their schools are boarded up, and the resource centers are being taken down. It's like, you don't care about us. And people are like, why is it so violent? Its like, listen, let's really stop and think... One of the things is understanding your environment, and how the system works. The more you dismantle this stuff, and you see how things are done on purpose, by design, when you start to understand the world around you is sick... But I think that's the key, transformation, the way people see and understand and navigate the world.

This activist further highlights issues of charter schools collocating with public schools, particularly schools that have combined public and charter classrooms in the same school building, but have only renovated the charter school sections. Students are then subjected to participating in a building with quality school programs they cannot access on one side, while they continue to attend deteriorating programs targeted at the traditional impoverished population on the other:

It depends, we have had some, like 9, 10. It's been pushed; they are so next to each other, it's put in your face, some of these schools, it's sick what they are doing, they collocated. They brought in these charter schools and took over half of the school...fixed it beautifully, the other side which continued to be neighborhood school was falling apart, and the kids had to come in through the back. These kids in grammar school, seeing people took away their space, their land, gave it to some other kids, fix it up very nicely for them, and then they were subjected to these horrible, inhumane conditions. So, somebody to help facilitate what is happening, this shit is not right, you're telling us you don't have money for us, but you have money for them. And then this is our home, and you're making us come in through the back door, LITERALLY, because they were not allowed. One of the alderman's members, she was like, this reminds me of times of segregation, blatantly in your face. She stared crying, she is an 80 yr old black woman from the south.

Several activists highlight their role in improving these learning conditions by promoting solidarity; organizing the residents of the community, including youth, to discuss what they consider “violent acts on the community”. In this case, the “violent acts” are the school closings; activists then take action through workshops and protests. This directly relates to community level collective efficacy theory (Sampson et al. 1997), suggesting strong social cohesion among residents, combined with willingness to intervene, has the ability to make social change.

This is an important final component of the activist’s role: to both reduce violence and enhance learning conditions; because these societal issues require larger systematic changes in policy for change to occur. This role is reflected in literature; with political engagement and activism comes the knowledge of how to impact system structures, thus allowing change that impacts the community (Putnam 2000; Rosenfeld et al. 2001). If activists only work with youth individually, focusing on changing behavior, it can become a “revolving door”, since larger systematic institutional problems are not addressed. “Our job is so important, to be like, no this is wrong, this is not what you deserve. This is what you’re given, because of this...”

The communities on the south and west side of Chicago have experienced institutional abandonment (Venkatesh 2008; Wilson 1987; Wacquant 2008). In this case, it is the school system, where activists take an active role in attempting to change those policies that hinder youth development. This activist illustrates her role as the “translator” for changes that take place in the community between residents and policy:

We have to prepare and go back, and make sure everyone understands [the issue] and then show up in numbers... We have meetings in the streets, and in the summer we had meetings in the park, around the school closing, to understand. Really, they throw so

much at the community, and if we don't really understand, and we don't follow the money and read budgets... Most of the info is out there, so they can't say we aren't giving it to you, but it's out there, it needs to be deciphered and translated. So that's what they see in us. OK, so these girls will break this stuff down for us and translate. So that's how we see ourselves: as a resource and translator.

Here, a respondent takes on the role of implementing action through protests:

We were on a hunger strike for 19 days to get a high school there. We got the high school. He resigned, because the money that has been allocated for the high school, it came out that it was stolen from the community, and gave it to the magnet enrollment schools on the north side. We were like, oh hell, no. After 5 days no one was listening to us, so it turned out to be 19 days, but when we started we didn't have the faintest idea of the impact it would have nationally, in the community. People in the neighborhood were fed up; enough is enough of this disrespect. Our children deserve better, you are getting mothers, grandmothers, who know their children have been wronged, and that's exactly what it was. *That's the first step for some people. It's just grabbing people when they are angry and going from there.*

Addressing the Punitive Approach; Reducing School to Prison Pipeline:

While some activists focus on improving educational conditions, other activists directed their attention to challenging punitive policies, such as zero tolerance, that may contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. The school-to-prison pipeline is a consequence of a zero-tolerance

policy, which is defined as: a disciplinary policy that punishes non-violent behaviors that are perceived as disruptive, criminalizing student behavior and increasing the chance of incarceration (Robbins 2008). In several cases, activists confirm their role to act as the “voice” for students who may have to navigate these typically unfair, problematic policies. The activists expressed a concern over punitive approaches in some schools, which often result in expulsions and dropouts.

In one case, a respondent illustrates the link between punitive policies, suspensions and drop-outs. The activist portrays a story of one youth he networks with, who was punished because his family could not afford to pay for his detentions (a policy at his particular charter school). The school administrators took a punitive disciplinary approach, and were not sympathetic to the family’s financial problems, and decided to expel the student.

While the activist was not successful in mediating the expulsion, he still is a ‘voice’ for the student. The activist raises concerns over “drop out factories” or schools that have high drop-out rates, and the circumstances surrounding why students are dropping out. One reason students drop out is because administration and teachers are treating students like criminals, disciplining them with overly punitive policies. Several activists shared similar frustrations, feeling these type of policies block students from finishing school. Ultimately, this leads to unsupervised students on the streets during school hours, placing them at risk for violence, especially in high crime areas:

We have a very punitive approach, with young people even, and that’s not just the police; it’s the schools and teachers. And what is now becoming more standard are charter schools, and they are very punitive. There is a story of this kid I am working with; his

mom only makes \$8.75 an hour, and works a third shift. She doesn't make enough; she is the only provider and it's the boy and three other siblings. So 8.75 doesn't make much. However, their charter school asks them to pay fees, and for every detention they have they have to pay five dollars. His mom couldn't buy him shoes that he needed for a concert, and he got a detention. So, he couldn't go to the detention because he didn't have the five dollars, and if you don't go to detention, it's another fine and another detention. So it's no longer five dollars, it's now 10, and if you keep missing, they keep adding to it. So basically, the boy didn't have money, the mom didn't have money, until they called the mom and said you need to come because your son is going to be expelled: he has too many detentions. And the mom explained this is why, and they told the mom, well you knew the rules. So I had to go in there and explain to them why, and say listen, they don't have money, and you need to understand that. And instead of arguing with her about paying for detention, she could probably use that money to buy food, or the shoes you so desperately need for your school. And so I think that that punitive approach has to do a lot with it. There are a lot of charter schools who are drop out factories.

Similarly, another respondent provides an example of challenging the punitive approach by administrators, when a student was suspended for being a victim. The story begins with a conflict that happened outside of the school, which carried over to school grounds. One student, jumped at the train station, held resentment to the group who attacked him. The student, who was jumped, then hit another student in the face with a belt because he was associated with the gang who jumped him. The activist's role was the emergency contact for this student who was hit in

the face, and helped to mediate the conflict to reduce the chances of suspension or arrest, which may further perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline.

It came to the point his junior year; another kid hit him with a belt, and this kid who hit him with a belt, they had jumped him in the train station. So it begins this kid's friends, because he was part of a gang, jumped in and jumped the other kid at the train station. And basically he didn't do anything, but this kid had a beef with him. One day, during class, this other kid that had gotten jumped took a belt and struck him in the face, and they started fighting in the classroom, up to the point where they were both arrested in school. Which is another major problem when you're asking about issues of violence with young people. The fact is we have school-to-prison pipelines. So they say he was being transported to the hospital because he had an open wound. So I rush to the hospital on the south side, and I see him in the emergency room.

The activist highlights a role several of the other activists' share, being the emergency contact for students when issues in school arise. This allows them to challenge policies affecting youth in their network at the school. In this case, the school administration seemed to not look past the stigma associated with being a 'gang member', and immediately placed the student at fault for being involved in the fight by evidence of suspension, due to "zero tolerance" policies. However, as the activist pointed out, regardless of affiliation, the administrators were placing blame on the victim. In this case, self-defense seems to be mistaken for a mutual fight. The administrators did not understand the surrounding circumstances, which the activist tried to explain; but he was not listened to. The result was an automatic suspension. This is a common

issue brought up by activists: students being suspended for actions, such as self-defense, that do not support the punishment. The activists' goal is to keep students in school to graduate, but continually suspending teens on questionable policies makes this goal difficult to obtain:

We end up going back to the school, and the dean very rudely, that's the other part, like when I was talking about criminalizing our youth, and the way they are treated at school doesn't make them want to come back, and even teachers sometimes are being very disrespectful a lot. The dean was very disrespectful, and was like, to the parents I know your kid is in a gang and he is doing this, he is being suspended for 10 days. I was like, wait you're victimizing the victim, you're suspending someone for ten days because he got hit in the face with a belt for something that happened outside of school, that you have no idea what happened. It is very frustrating, especially when you are dealing with people like that who don't understand. They don't care about the young people, and I see it. I think its just discrepancies in the system some times...I was asking him questions, like how do you know he is in a gang? Do you have proof? How do you know what happened? You say you have video, have you shown the video? So I am like, doing the know your rights kind of training, and he walks out, and the principle comes out, and is like, I am sorry for his attitude, and he should start talking to the parents and to me, and he is like he can come back in ten days.

The activist's liaison role to the educational system focuses on keeping youth busy and learning from their experience if they are suspended from school. While the school administrators did not listen to the activist's reasoning surrounding the events of the fight during class, or recognize the

student as a victim, the activist's role did not stop after voicing his opinions on the suspension of the student. Instead of having the student drop out, or give up on his education, the activist helped the student utilize his experience and mentor other students who might experience a similar situation. The activist helped provide a path for the student that not only allowed him to educate lawyers on issues within the school system, but to obtain a full scholarship to continue his education:

During those ten days I got the young person working with me, and after the ten days he goes back to school. And it turns out they don't allow him to take a test, and I was like, why, what happened? And it turns out he was going to be expelled from the school. That has been something that happens a lot. Students are being expelled because the school doesn't want to work with them anymore, so they expel them for any reason that they can, and that's unlawful.

In response to where the students go after they are expelled, he replies:

To alternative schools. The alternative schools are full of the ones who have really committed bad things. But you're putting young people, who might be on their first offense, 'cause this kid didn't have a disciplinary record at school, he was always a good student, and after that one incident they decided to expel him. He went to the alternative school; we had to go to a court hearing with Chicago Public Schools. It looked like court where there was a lawyer, and they kicked them out of school. He was so mad, so mad. He just had lost all spirits, and hope was gone. And I told him, use your experience to

teach other young people that might be going through the same thing. You know what you are talking about, and you have been through it. So sure enough, he started to develop his own workshops and presenting at different events. And he started using his story of what happened to teach lawyers what to do, and what a young person goes through, and why is it such an injustice to the education of young people. I took him to speak at schools, to teach other young people. So even though he was only like 17 /18, he was speaking to other young people, and he started to see the value of speaking to other people through mentoring them... He became such a success story that he got a full paid scholarship, he got one through [our organization's] scholarship, through an organization like Latinos Excellence, got an internship. And just in a matter of less then two years he became a leader in the group at [organization].

A problematic trend reported is some school administrations do not take the time to get to know the students, and are lacking empathy for the circumstances surrounding issues of detentions or expulsions. In the example above, by placing a good student, who had never been in trouble before into an alternative school, it ended up allowing him/her to network with youth who may instigate negative behaviors. Immediate expulsions prompt dropouts, and place students in situations where they are unsupervised at home, unless they have activists in their network who keep them on track and learning from each experience, whether good or bad. The activists further expand their role in the student's life by being their support system in cases such as school hearings, which were compared to courtroom like settings. Youth alone are less likely to have their voices heard, but with an activist, they can help think through a situation, and provide solutions to prevent being expelled. Even if the activist was not listened to, there is a

need to challenge the school-to-prison pipeline, by keeping students in school. If, unfortunately, they do become expelled, activists have the ability and tools to help navigate productive paths for that student.

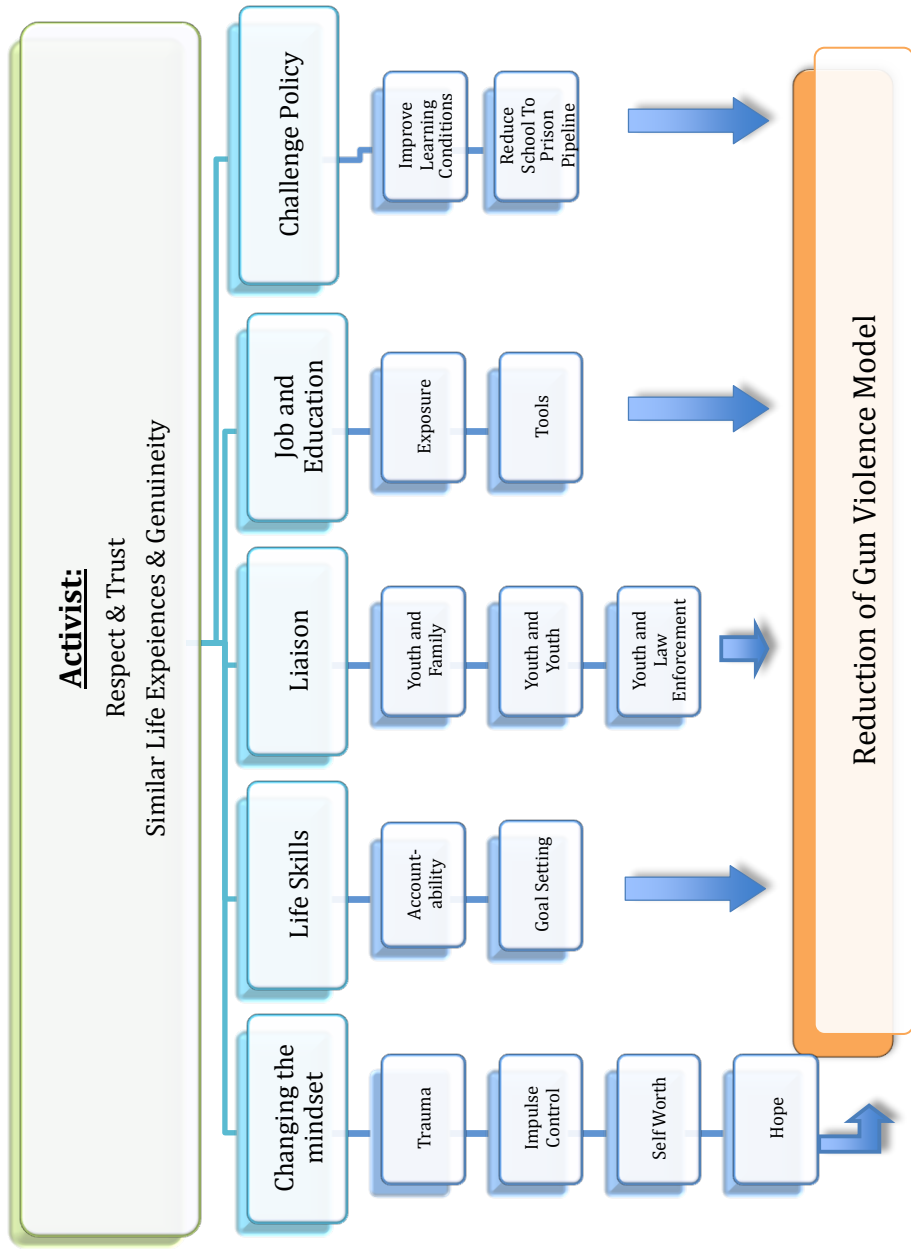


Figure 5: Model of Reducing Gun Violence

Chapter 5

Discussion

This research identifies substantial support regarding the immense value of social capital and collective efficacy for youth residing in Chicago. This study has explained how community activists make use of available social capital and collective efficacy while attempting to mediate gun violence. By exploring activist experiences and responses to community gun violence, the researcher has filled a gap in literature, as social capital is often addressed in a quantitative approach. This approach has lacked in-depth meaning behind the theory, and its application for applied solutions to crime. This study provides a detailed account of how activists work to reduce gun violence in Chicago, by establishing a *bonding* connection, which permits mediation to begin.

This research has uniquely combined aspects of both social capital and collective efficacy, in the form of activists and their role in mediating violence in the community. The *informal social control* reflected in collective efficacy theory is established by activists who share similar experiences or backgrounds with the youth, thereby regulating members of their own group. This allows trust and genuine care to be recognized, which is necessary for youth to *bond* with adults, who may otherwise be mistrusted. *Formal control*, established by law enforcement, was recognized as ineffective in getting youth to disengage from gun violence. Instead, formal control was reported to be detrimental to youth, in regards to harassment, targeted arrests, and police brutality. Determining different ways to build effective,

communicative relationships between youth and law enforcement may be beneficial in future research. Once activists establish a bond with youth, an intervention begins, in an attempt to change behavior through *informal control*. In this case, informal control is utilized to reduce the chance that youth become a victim or perpetrator of gun violence. By securing a strong and trusting bond with the activists, youth are more likely to listen to them, improving their level of communication. Consequently, activists can have a stronger impact on that child's life.

The study *emphasizes both the importance and processes of social capital* resources that provide social networks, utilized to combat gun violence among youth. The significance of social capital lies in the influence of procedures that activists take to mediate gun violence. This was identified through five core processes that emerged from the study: 1) Activists work to *improve mindsets* of youth, helping them through various life traumas, while helping with impulse control. They work to improve youths' self-worth, and provide hope for their future when they are hopeless. 2) Activists provide the *life skills* of accountability and goal setting to children who may not have had those lessons growing up. 3) When youth need someone to navigate relationships with their families, law enforcement and other youth (sometimes-rival gang members), activists help assist youth as their *liaison* between networks. 4) Activists expose youth to other opportunities, such as *college and jobs*, while providing the tools (resume', application, etc.) which are necessary to begin a successful life. 5) Activists challenge system policies that they feel contribute to Chicago's gun violence.

The final component, *challenging the system*, is exceptionally important. Focusing only on behavior modification places the blame of gun violence on youths' actions. However, gun violence is a social problem that is greatly exacerbated by systemic oppression of urban communities, *requiring a need for challenging the policies* that further perpetuate the intertwined

cycle of poverty and crime. One policy activists identified as being highly problematic is zero tolerance, which puts students at risk for the school-to-prison pipeline. Future studies exploring effective disciplinary procedures would be valuable to reduce the school-to-prison pipeline. Activists have taken a role in attempting to enhance school learning by addressing unequal educational conditions, which hinders students' learning.

By taking an active role in these processes, the activists have observed a major reduction in gun violence within the sample of youth they network. This study has highlighted the value of social capital that is present in communities, and calls for further attention on ways to increase the presence (in this case, activists) of social capital in communities. Quantitative work has highlighted the lack (in numbers) of resources in social capital, while this work has shown the value of these resources for social capital. Therefore, a suggestion for future research would be to explore different ways of increasing various forms of social capital in communities. The more activists there are in Chicago, or positive networks present in a child's life, the better their chances are to escape gun violence, as either the victim or perpetrator.

While not a theme one might have expected to emerge in this study, the intersectionality of being gay, belonging to a gang, and sense of belonging to family was addressed, and has yet to be explored at all in academic literature. Questions could be explored such as: Do youth who are part of the LGBTQ community join gangs because of family disconnect? How often are these youths involved in gangs and what is the reasoning behind their decision to join? How do they navigate identity and sense of belonging?

To increase the presence of activists in the community, funding is imperative for non-profits to function fully. Most respondents noted the difficulty in keeping the "door open" to their organizations, and paying employees (activists) adequately for their work, which is often a

job that requires attention outside of typical 9-5 schedules. Furthermore, hiring ex-offenders through these programs not only allows for restorative justice, but places a value on street life experiences, which can be utilized in a positive manner. With proper management, this provides employment opportunities for individuals who may have difficulty obtaining employment because of their criminal records. It also allows individuals who want to better their lives to assist youth (who are going through similar experiences) in developing more appropriate life skills, and attempt to reduce the chances of youth making the same mistakes as past offenders. This research has identified the difficulty of getting youth to think about their futures, especially if they sometimes feel like they may not survive the week. Restorative justice may give youth the optimism needed to get them to think about their future, even if they feel stuck in their current situation. All of the above can be implemented concurrently, with the ultimate goal of reducing gun violence in Chicago.

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