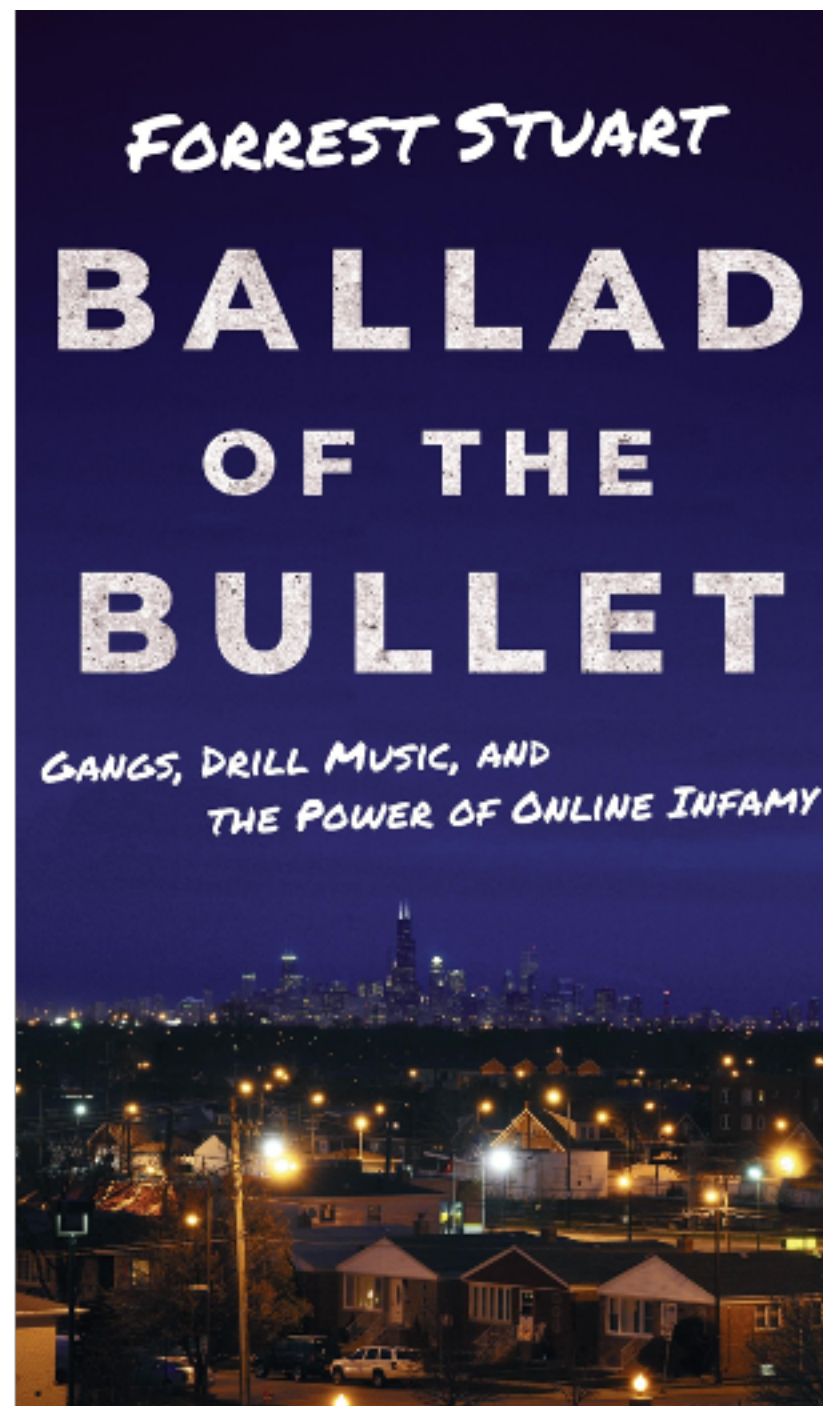
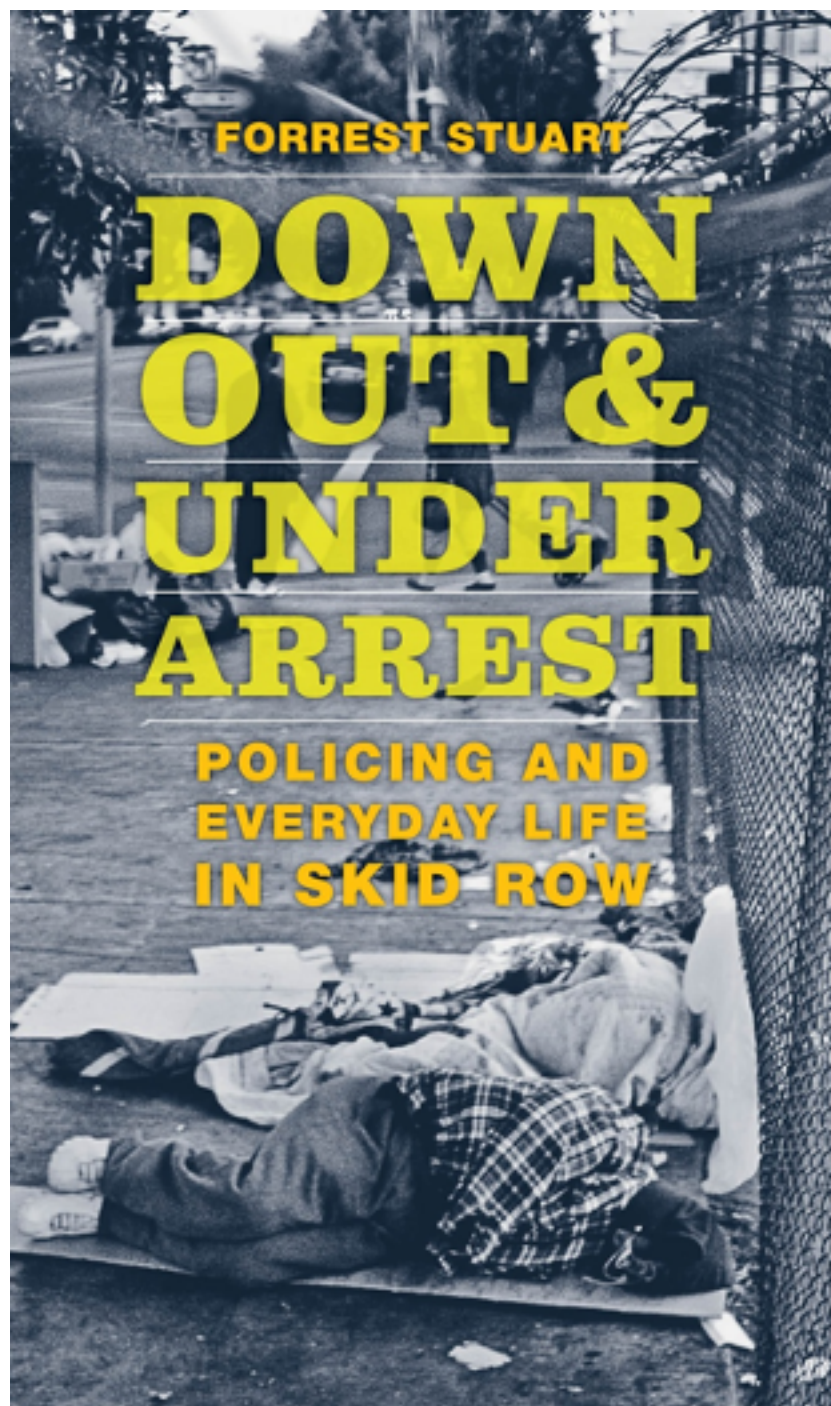


# SOCIAL MEDIA AND VIOLENCE

*Myths, Realities, Interventions*

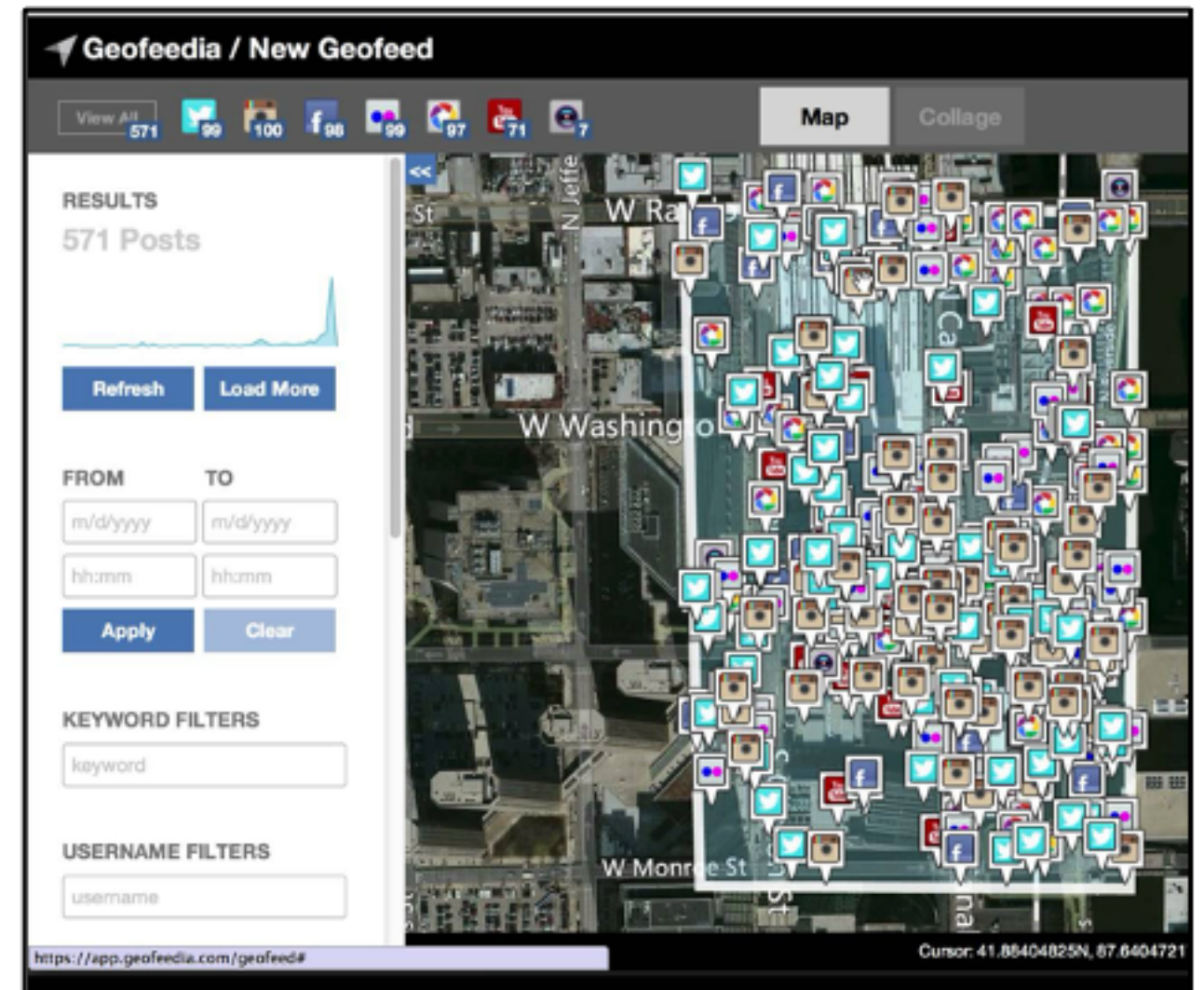






# THE GROWING PANIC

*Social media blamed for violence*





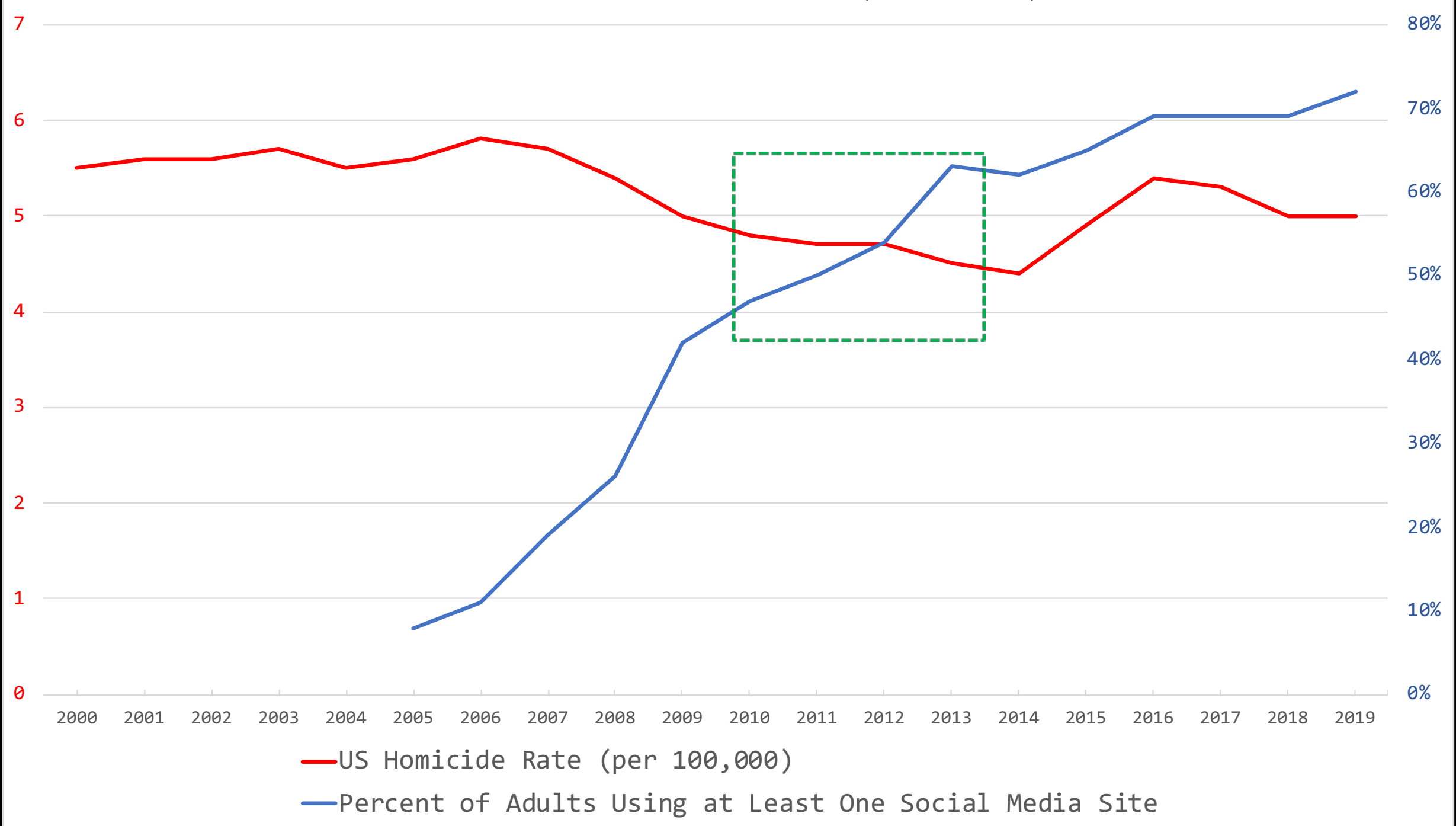
BEN AUSTEN CULTURE 09.17.13 6:38 AM

# Public Enemies: Social Media Is Fueling Gang Wars in Chicago





Violence and Social Media (2000-2019)



# *SOME KEY FINDINGS*

- Claims of a direct, causal relationship between social media and violence are overblown
  - Virtually all hostile social media content stays online
- Social media aggression may spill offline only under rare, particular conditions
- The content linked most directly to offline violence is not the kind we imagine—it's far more mundane
- Communities are using social media as a historically novel resource to prevent and de-escalate
- Social media provide a new tool for violence intervention
- **Social media introduce a complex mix of countervailing variables and forces**



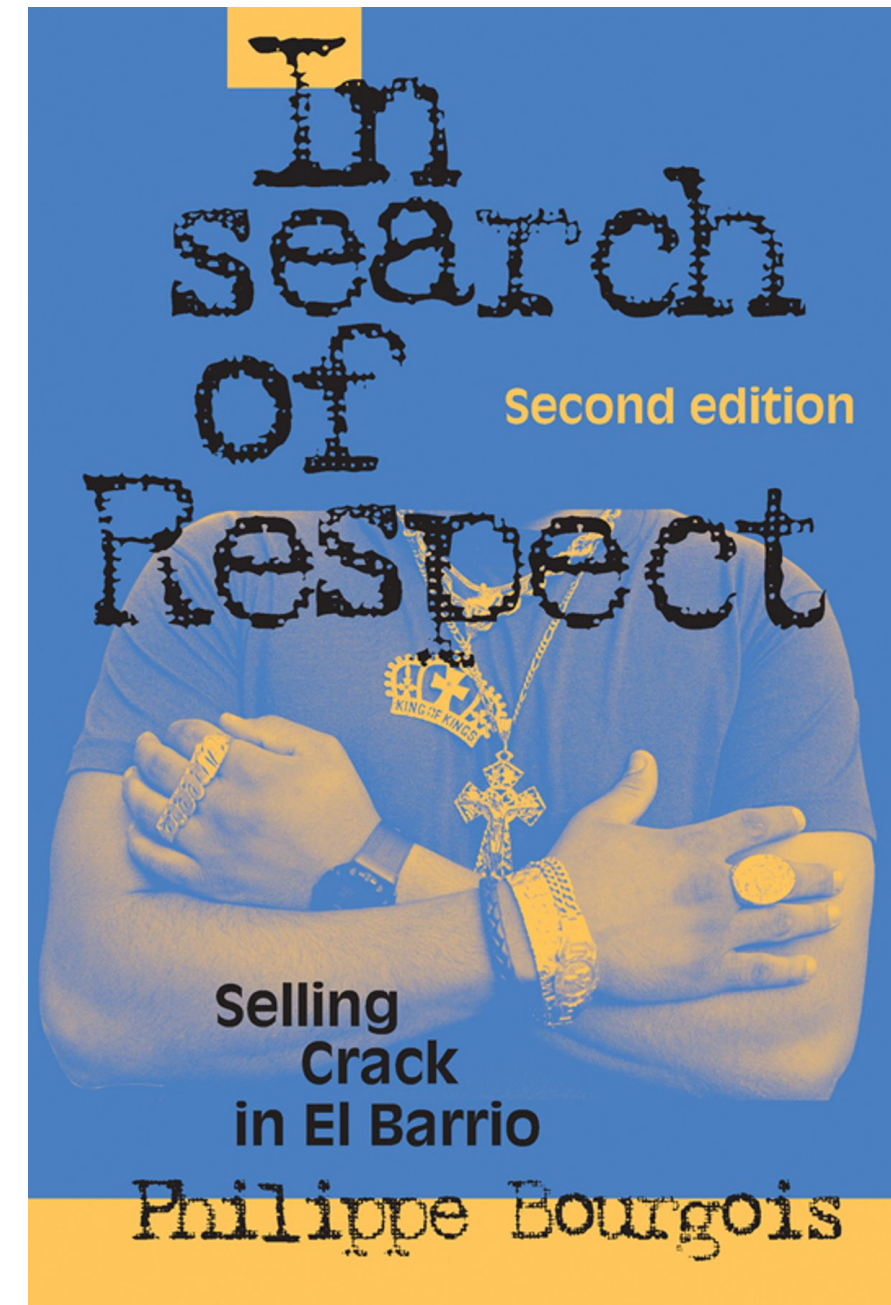
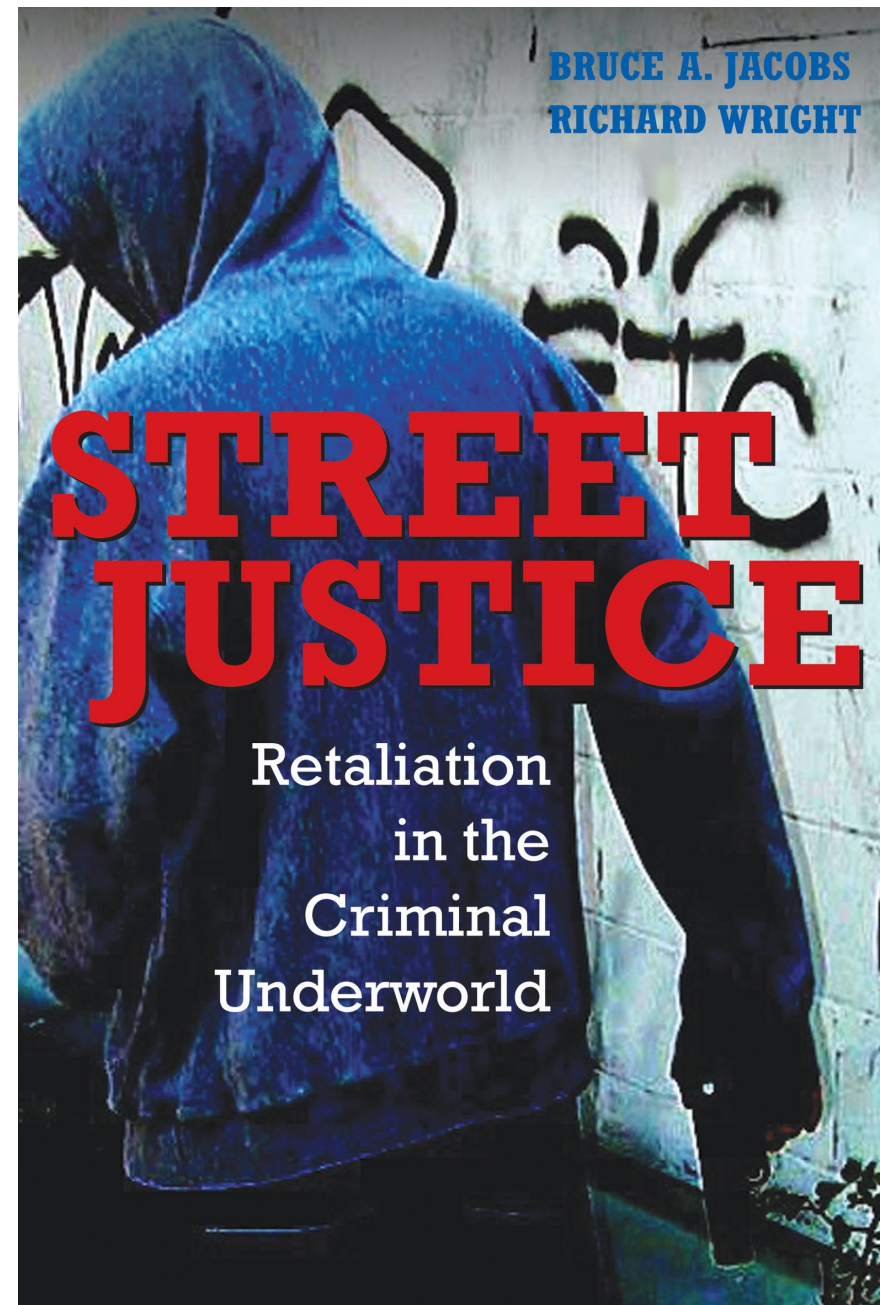
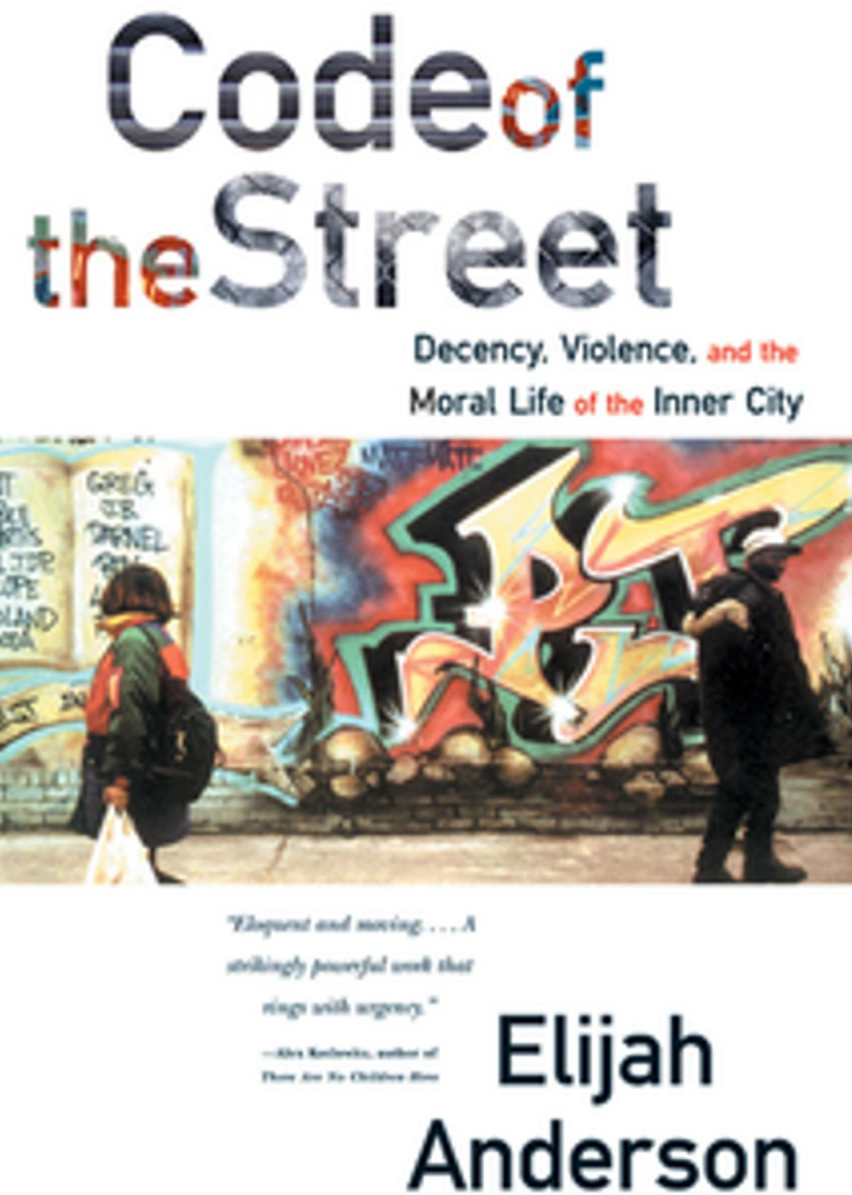
# SSYVPP

## *South Side Youth Violence Prevention Project*

- 5 years of immersive fieldwork and observations alongside Chicago gang factions
  - “Hanging out” at housing projects, court, school, family gatherings
- 2 years concentrated with “Corner Boys” (CBE) gang faction
- Over 150 formal interviews with gang-affiliated youth, family, community members
- Hundreds of audio recorded conversations

# FOUNDATIONAL THEORIES OF GANG VIOLENCE

## *Status-Seeking and Campaigns for Respect*

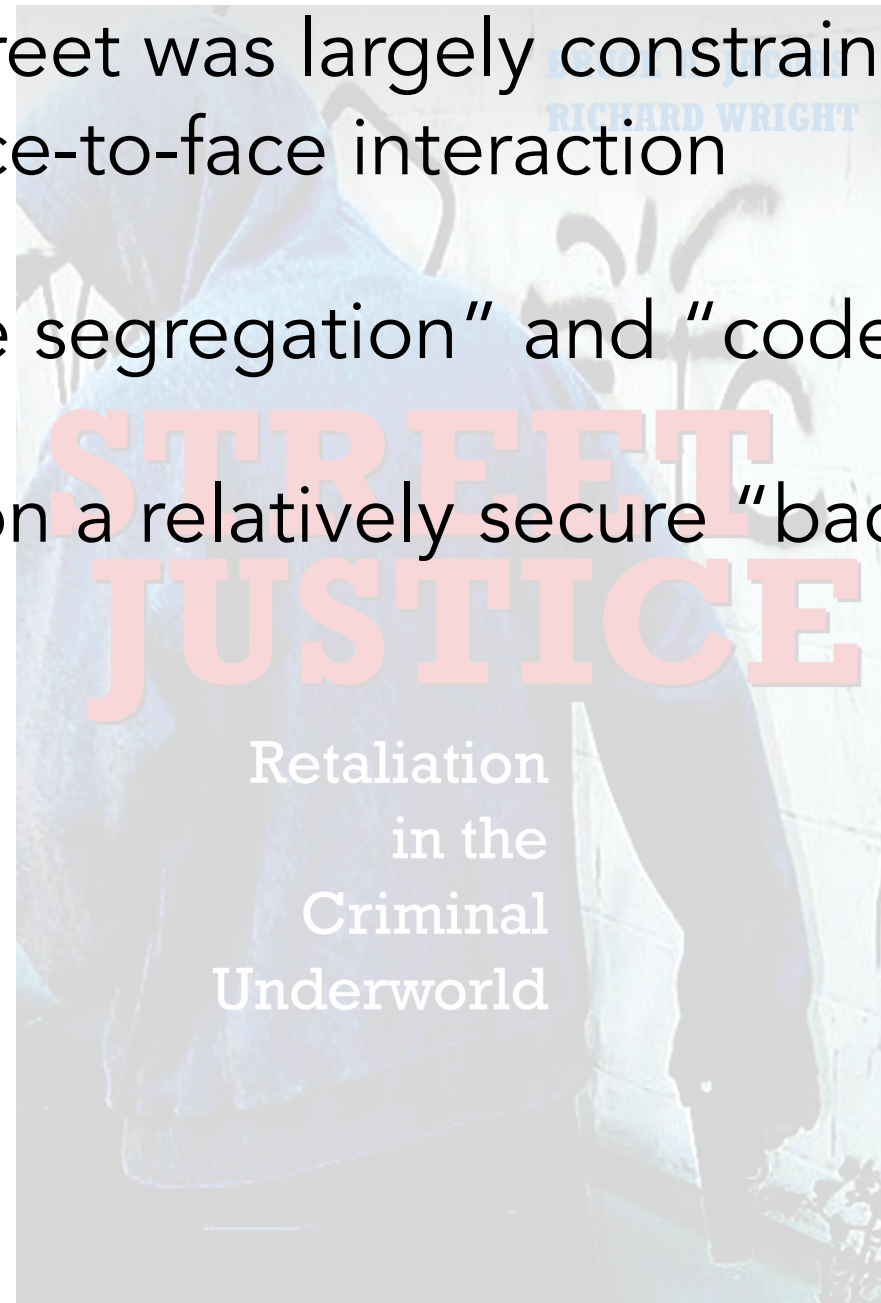




# FOUNDATIONAL THEORIES OF GANG VIOLENCE

## *Status-Seeking and Campaigns for Respect*

- The code of the street was largely constrained by the dynamics of place-based, face-to-face interaction
- Allowed “audience segregation” and “code switching”
- Parties could rely on a relatively secure “back stage”



# CONTEXT COLLAPSE

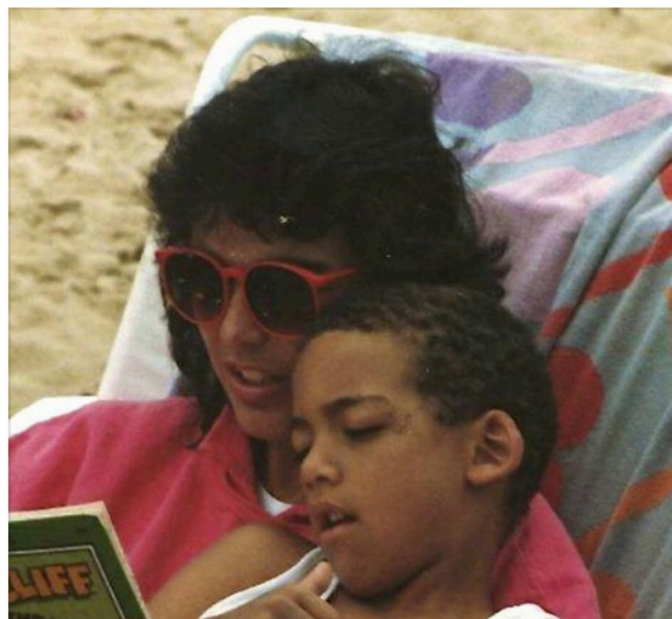
*Digital social media “collapse” multiple stages, audiences, and roles into a single, public sphere*



**Forrest Stuart** with Bobbi Ciriza Houtchens.

May 10, 2015 · 👤 ▼

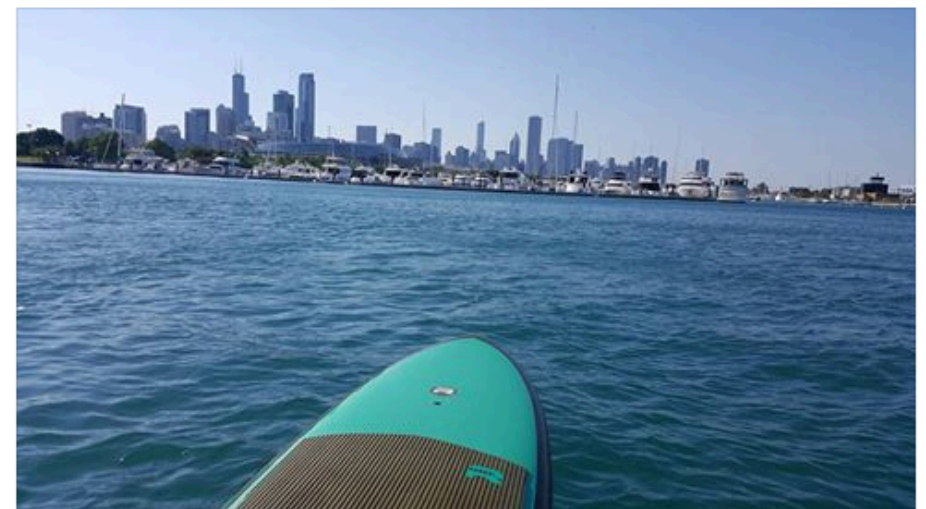
So thankful to be raised by the most wonderful woman in the world. Happy Mother's Day, mom!



**Forrest Stuart** is at 📍 Burnham Park Harbor.

June 10, 2016 · Chicago · 👤 ▼

Happy hour...



**Forrest Stuart**

December 28, 2015 · 👤 ▼

To my grad students:



👍 Like    💬 Comment    ➦ Share    📶 Buffer



# CONTEXT COLLAPSE AS LIABILITY

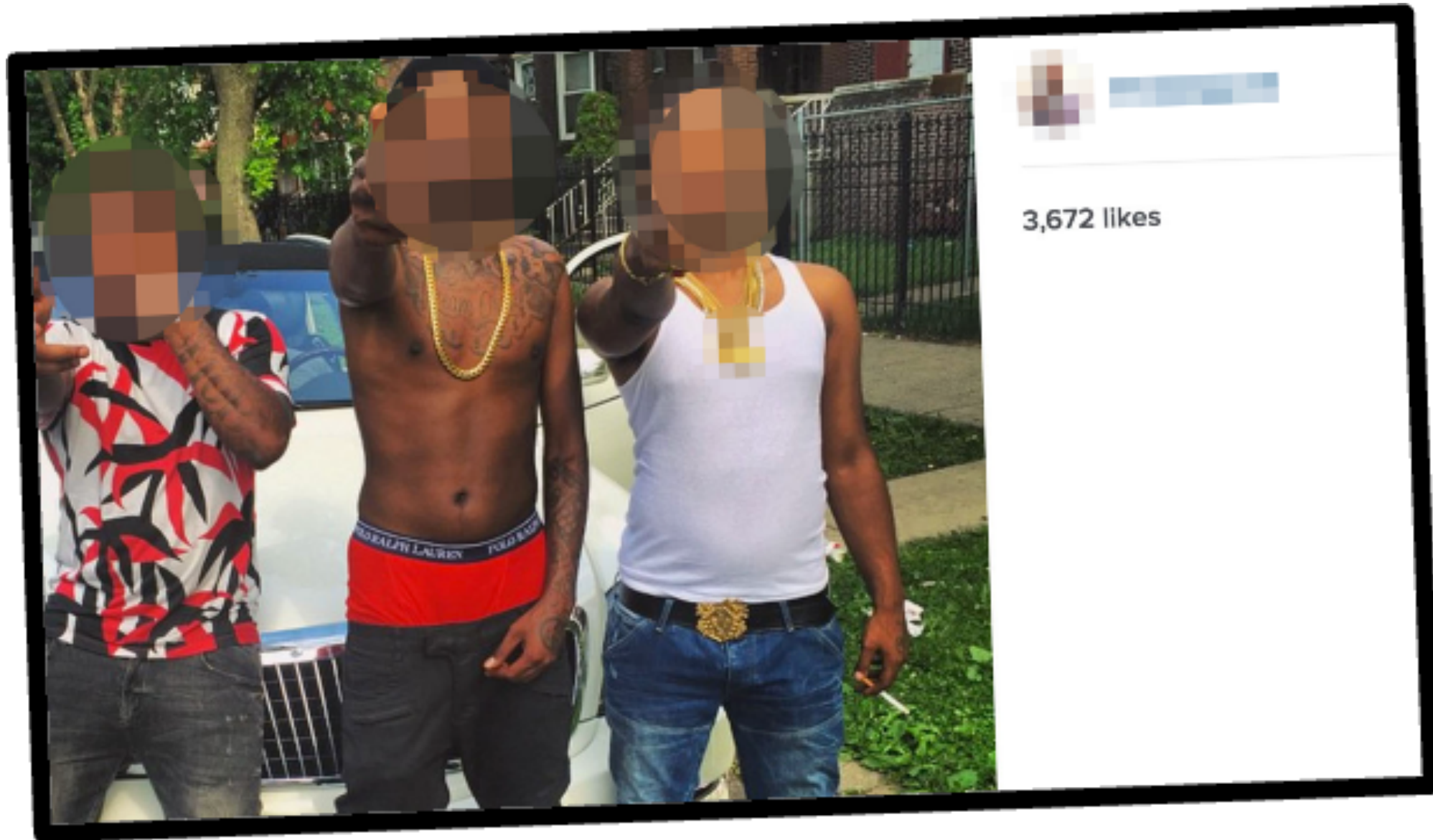
*The necessity of online misrepresentation (i.e., “flexing”)*





# *FLEXING*

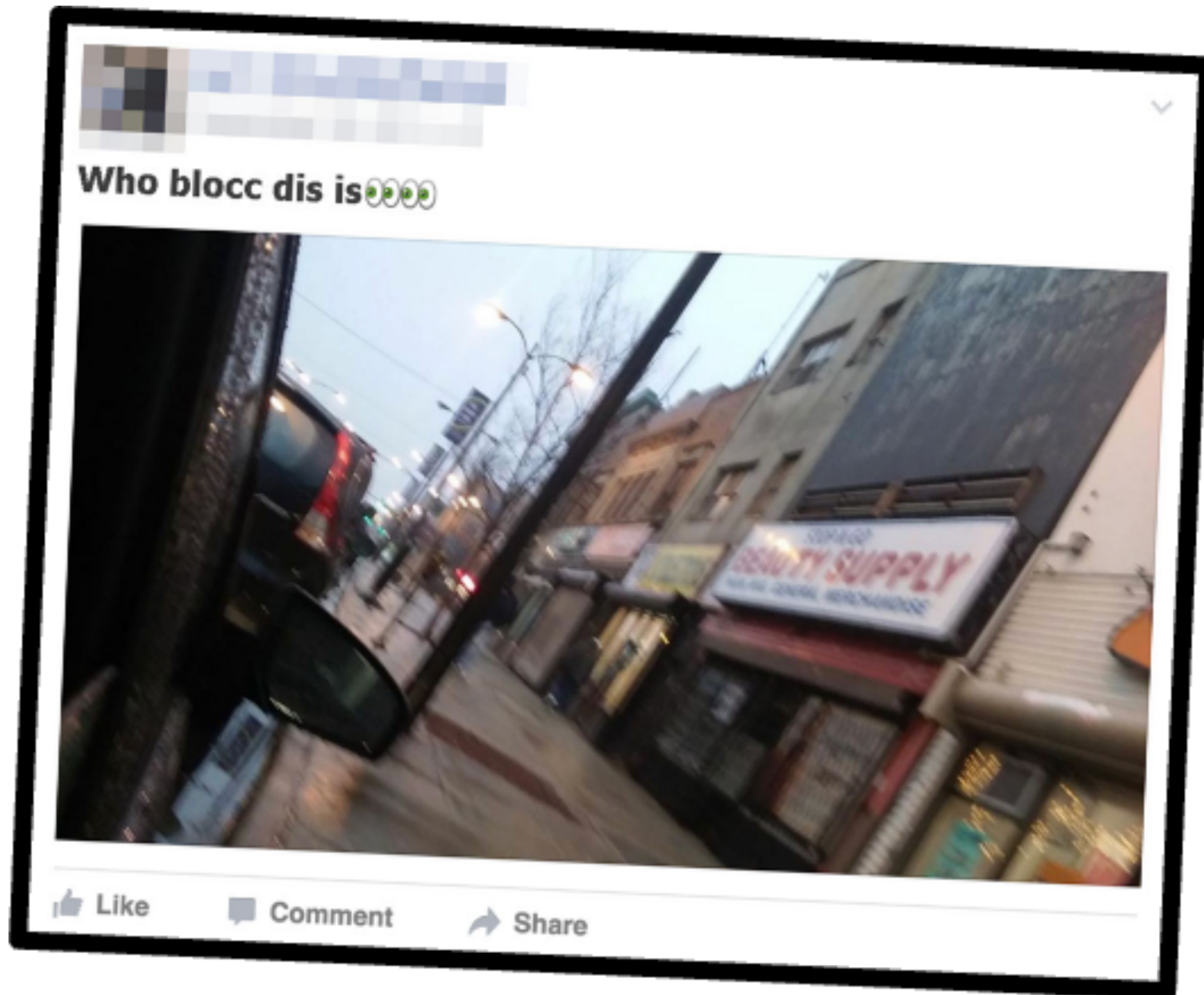
*Re-presenting mundane activities as violence-related*





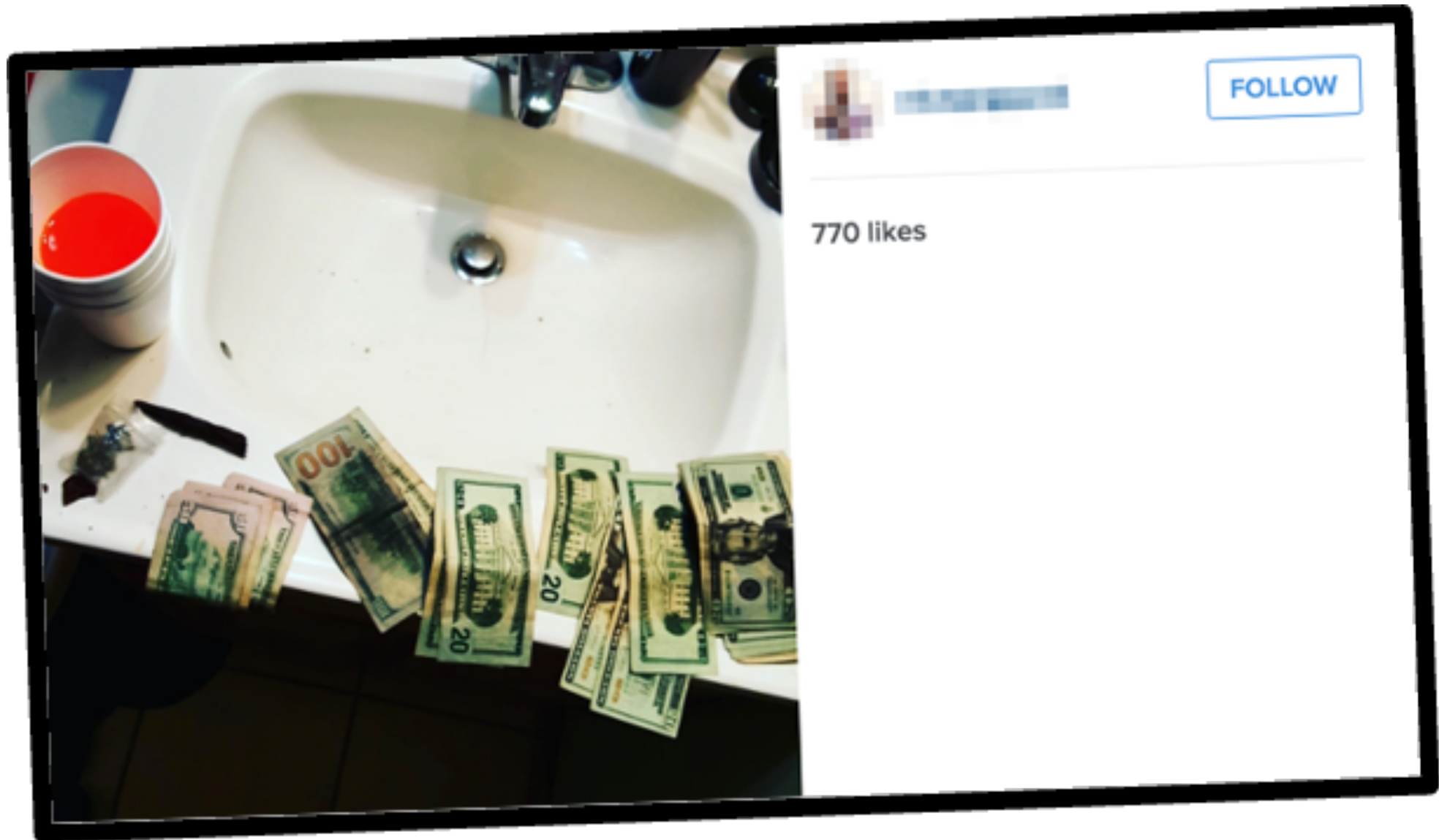
# SLIDING ON THE OPPPS BLOCK

*Innocuous car trips are presented as drive-by shootings*



# GETTIN' MONEY

*Staging drug profit dioramas*





# *THE POLITICS OF FLEXING*

*Weaponizing context collapse*



# *THE POLITICS OF FLEXING*

## *Weaponizing context collapse*

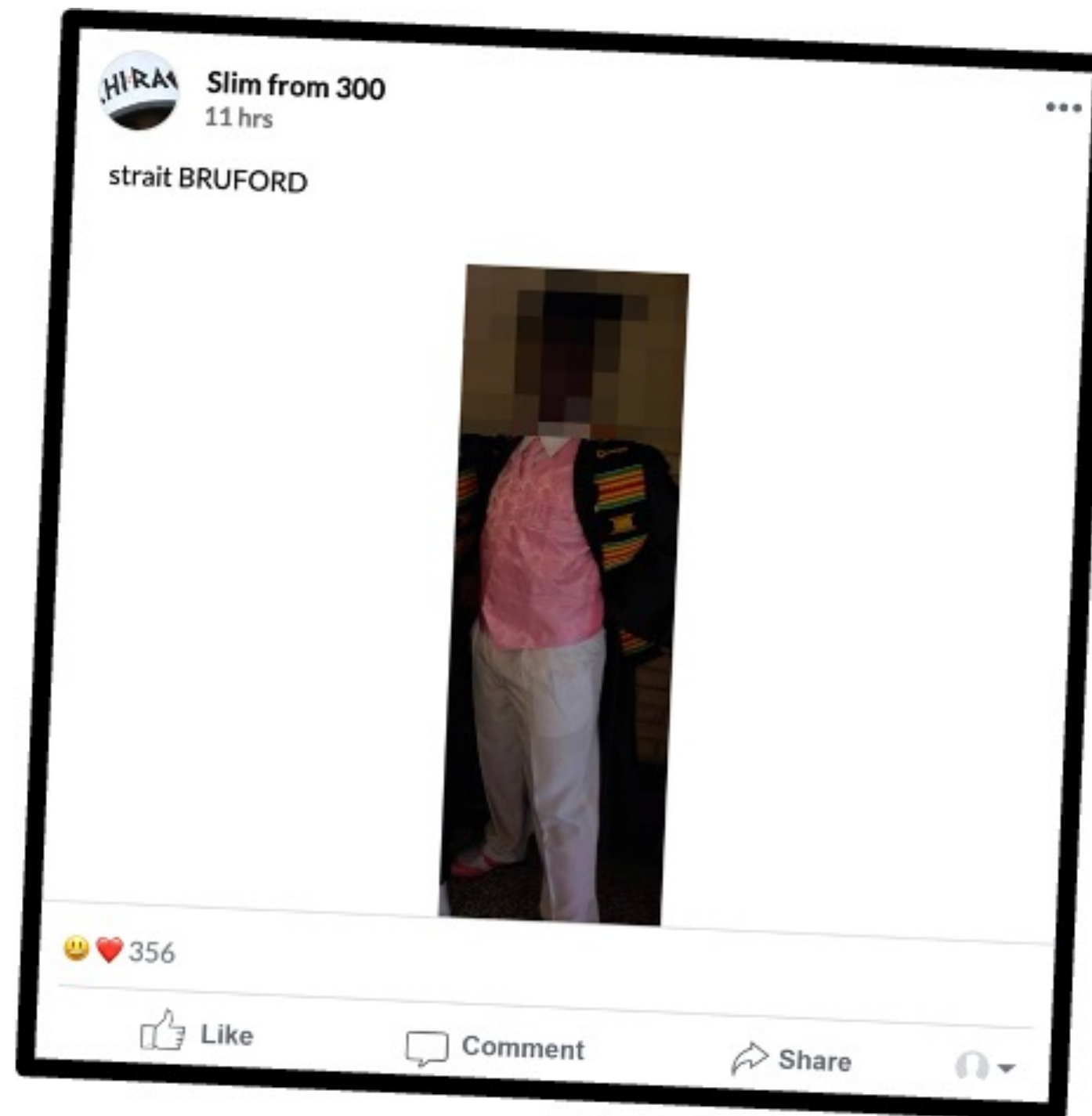
- Widespread assumption that rivals (“opps”) are also misrepresenting
- Leads to a new practices of reputational struggles
  - Attempts to publicize gaps between rivals’ online persona and offline identity
  - Proactively creating context collapse for rivals and enemies



# STRATEGY 1: CROSS-REFERENCING

*Cross-checking online content against other online content*



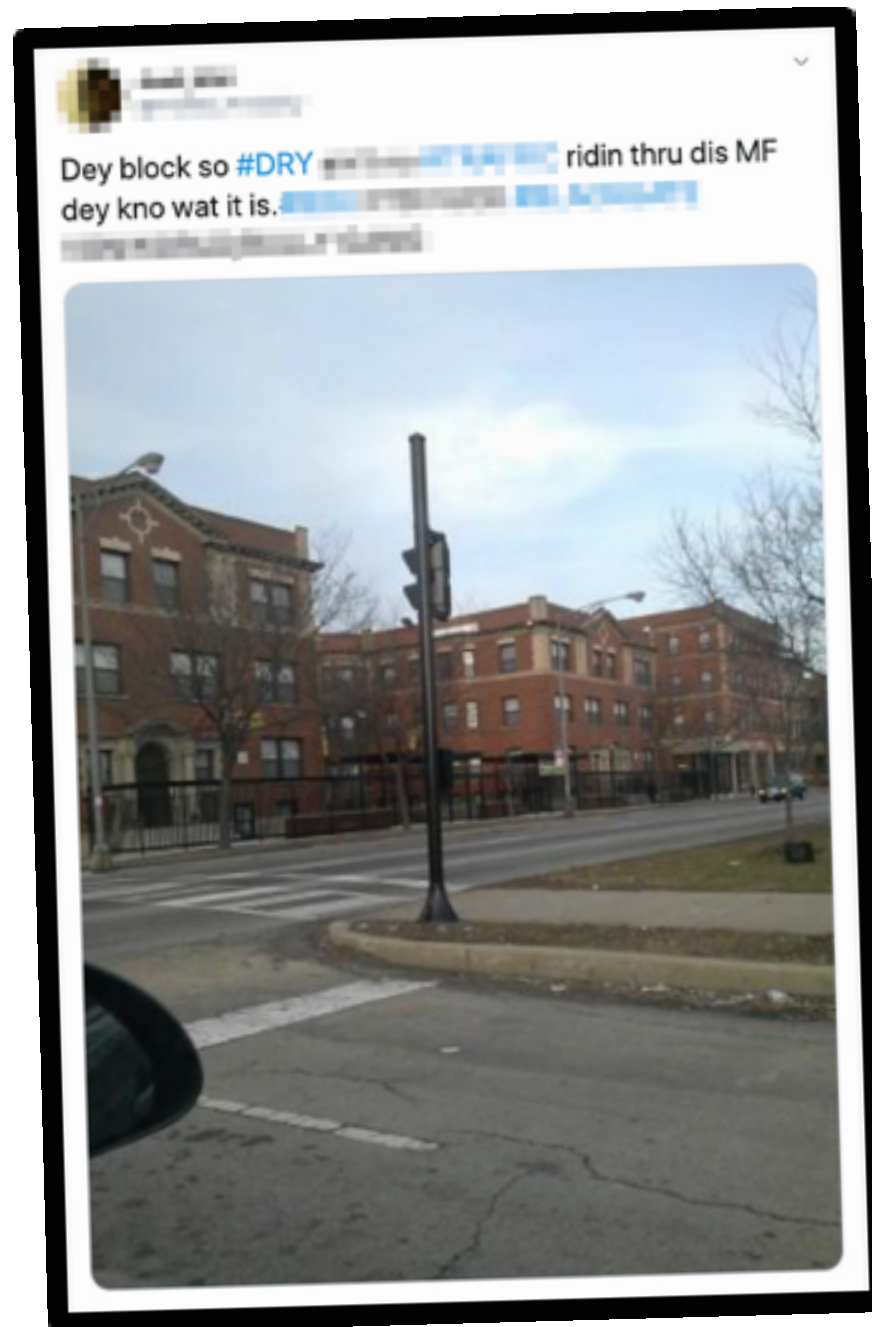






# STRATEGY 2: CALLING BLUFFS

*Challenging rivals to make good on online boasts*





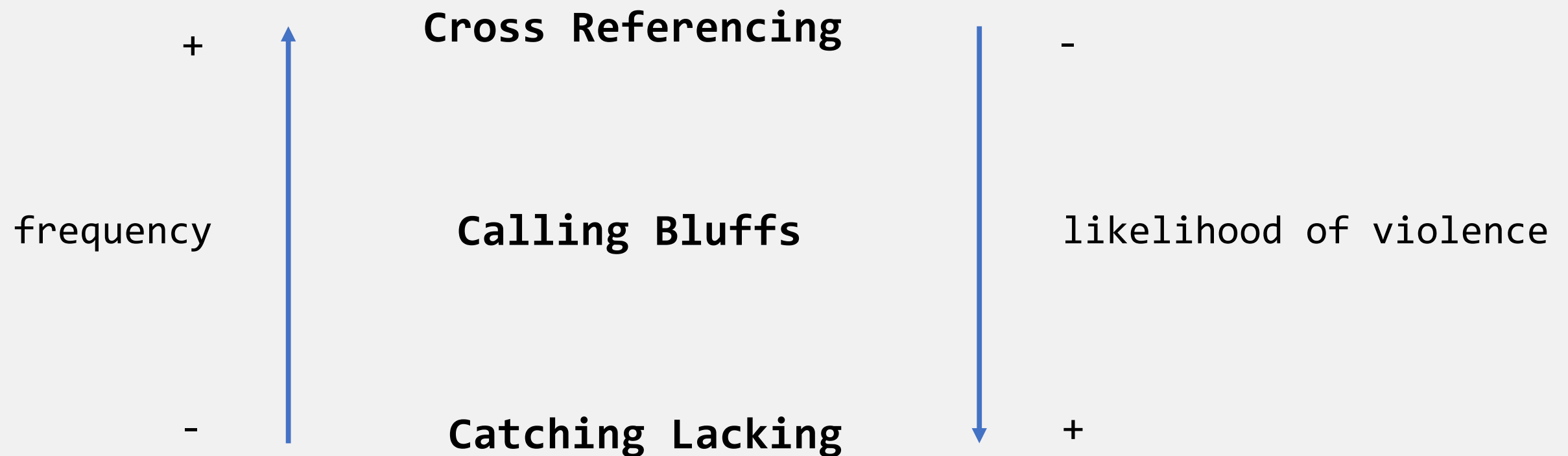
# STRATEGY 3: CATCH OPPS LACKING

*Attack and record rivals engaged in other roles*



# *PREDICTING OFFLINE VIOLENCE?*

*Some conditions seem to generate higher likelihood of violence*



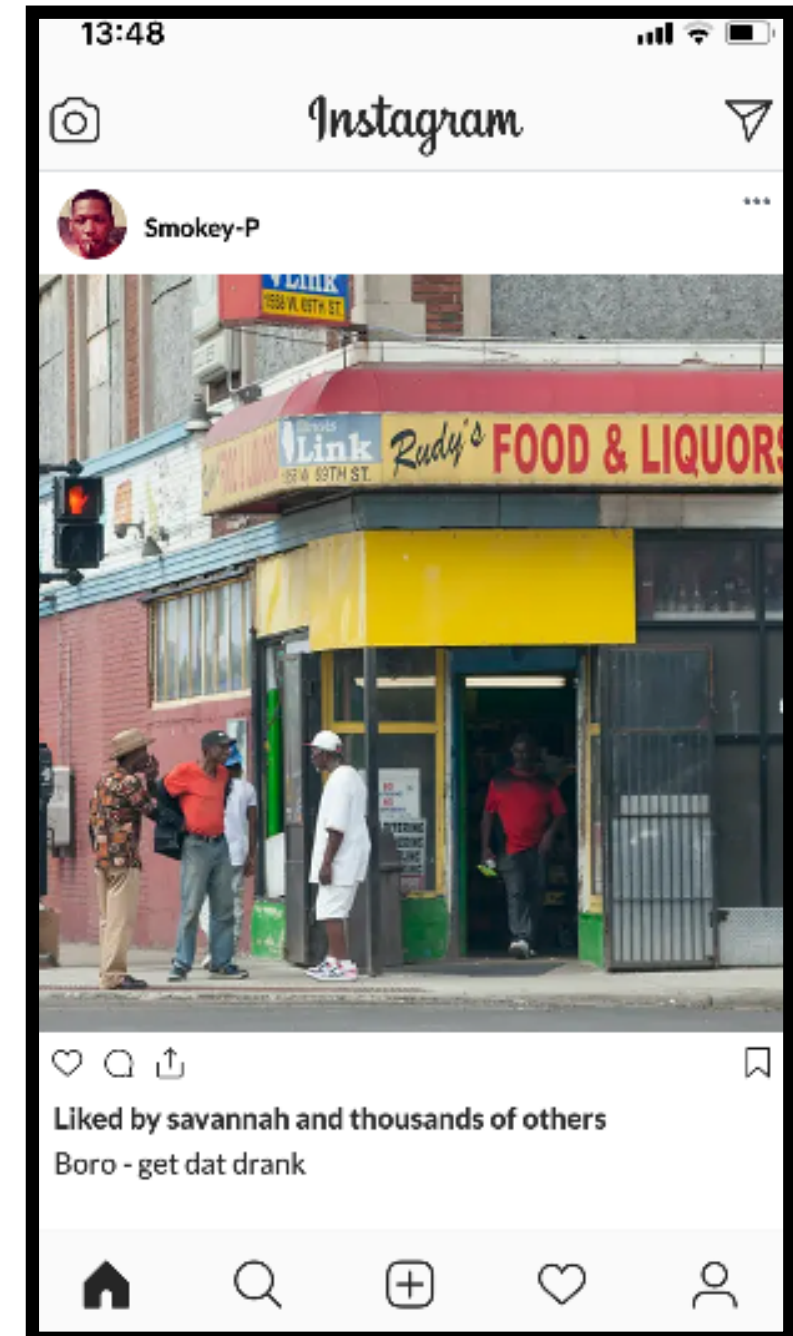


# THE DEADLIEST CONTENT?

*Mundane content may be most directly linked to violence*

Stevie (shooter):

“Right now, somebody is out there lurking somebody getting ready to put a bullet in ‘em. People know what you doing, what you eating, that you out in front of yo’ house. It’s mad easy.”



# UNEXPECTED AFFORDANCES

*"Communication visibility" allows third parties to act in new ways*

*Social Problems*, 2020, 67, 191–207  
doi: 10.1093/socpro/spz010  
Advance Access Publication Date: 27 April 2019  
Article

OXFORD

## Code of the Tweet: Urban Gang Violence in the Social Media Age

Forrest Stuart

Stanford University

### ABSTRACT

Academics, criminal justice professionals, and news outlets have warned that gang-associated youth use social media to taunt rivals and trade insults in ways that cause offline retaliation. But there is surprisingly little empirical research investigating how gang-associated youth deploy social media in gang conflicts. Criminal justice professionals routinely overstate the violent effects of social media challenges, which further exacerbates criminalization, racial stereotyping, and social inequality. Drawing from two years of ethnographic fieldwork on Chicago's South Side, this study asks how gang-associated black youth use social media to challenge rivals. Bridging traditional theories of urban violence with emerging media scholarship, I argue that social media disrupt the key impression management practices associated with the "code of the street." Specifically, gang-associated youth exploit social media to publicly invalidate the authenticity of their rivals' performances of toughness, strength, and street masculinity. Challengers do so through "cross referencing," "calling bluffs," and "catching lacking." Each strategy differs in its likelihood to catalyze physical retaliation, which is a function of the amount and depth of counter-evidence necessary to refute a given challenge. These findings carry important implications for addressing urban violence, gangs, and inequality in the social media age.

Qualitative Sociology (2022) 45:457–475  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-022-09510-w>



### How Social Media Use Mitigates Urban Violence: Communication Visibility and Third-Party Intervention Processes in Digital Urban Contexts

Jeffrey Lane<sup>1</sup> · Forrest Stuart<sup>2</sup>

Accepted: 23 May 2022 / Published online: 2 August 2022  
© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, part of Springer Nature 2022

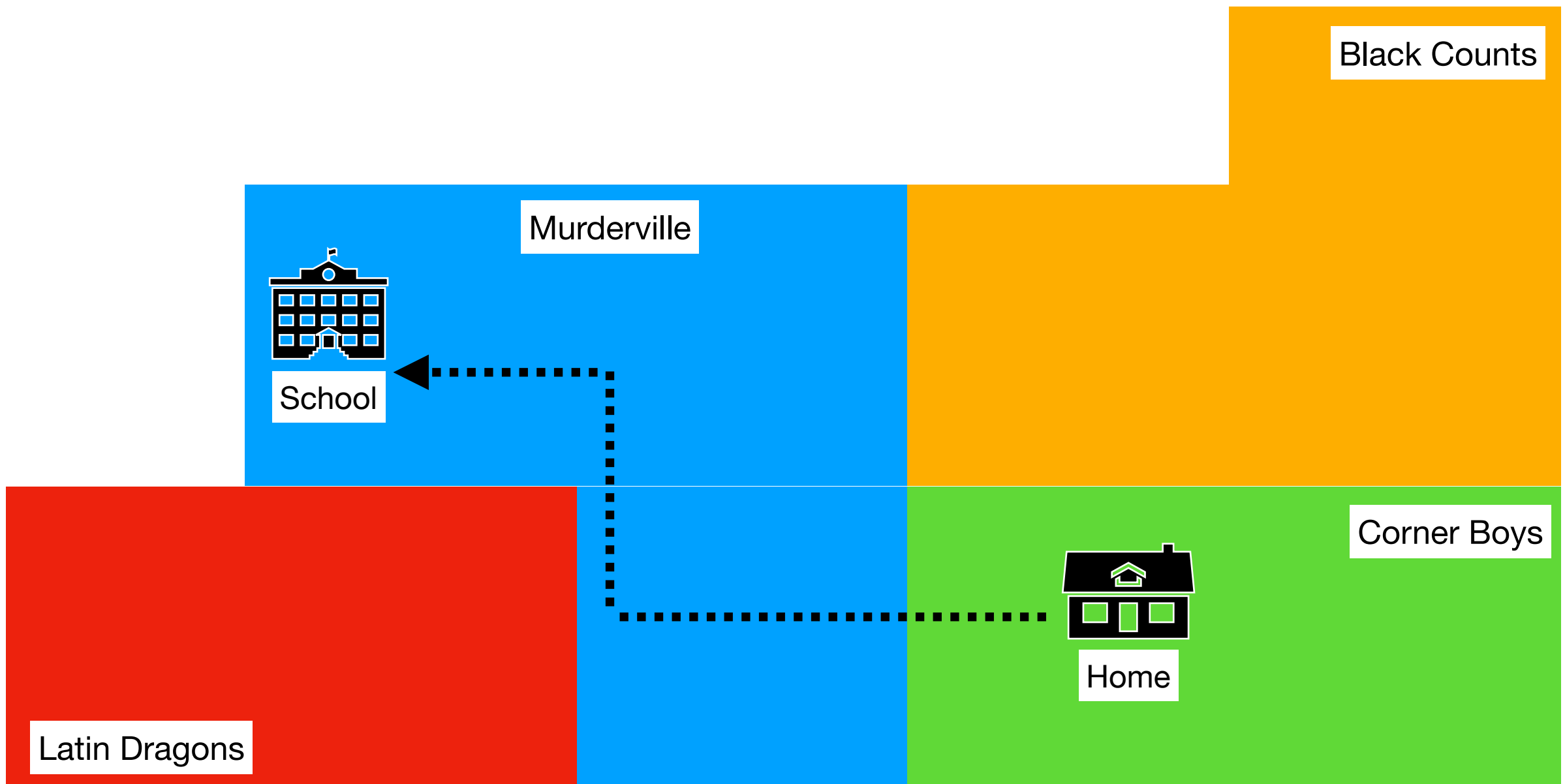
### Abstract

There is growing alarm among the media and public that digital social media amplify the frequency and severity of urban violence. Contrary to popular imagination, however, emerging research suggests that social media may just as readily offer novel tools for informal social control and de-escalation. Toward building an empirically grounded theory of urban violence in the digital age, we examine a key mechanism by which social media afford communities newfound capacities to mitigate conflicts. Drawing on digital, urban, ethnographic fieldwork in Harlem and Chicago's South Side, we argue that social media afford a historic level of what new media scholars refer to as "communication visibility." Specifically, social media allow onlookers to observe others' online behavior and, in turn, exert influence over subsequent relationships, exchanges, and actions in ways that can prevent and reduce violence. First, we examine how young women protectors and a street pastor exert *direct* third-party influence by monitoring and manipulating social media communication to extricate potential combatants from risky situations. Second, we examine *indirect* third-party influence whereby potential combatants, in anticipation of onlookers' intervention, proactively alter their own behavior in ways that encourage peaceful conflict resolution. These findings not only improve contemporary theories of violence, but also provide actionable lessons for enhancing the life-saving work of violence intervention and street outreach programs.



# EVAN'S DAILY GEOGRAPHY

*Using rivals' social media posts to chart safe passage*



# EVAN'S DAILY GEOGRAPHY

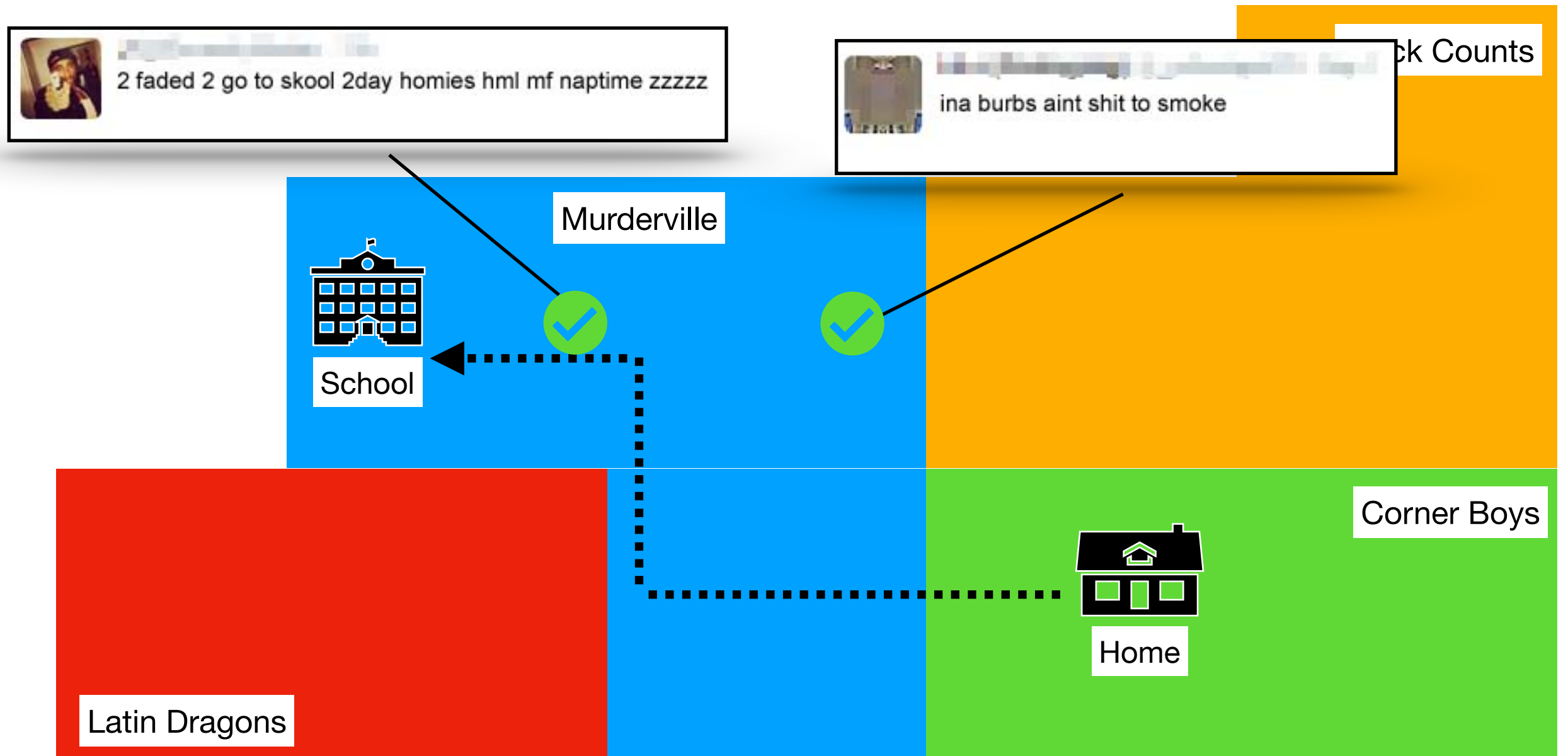
*Using rivals' social media posts to chart safe passage*





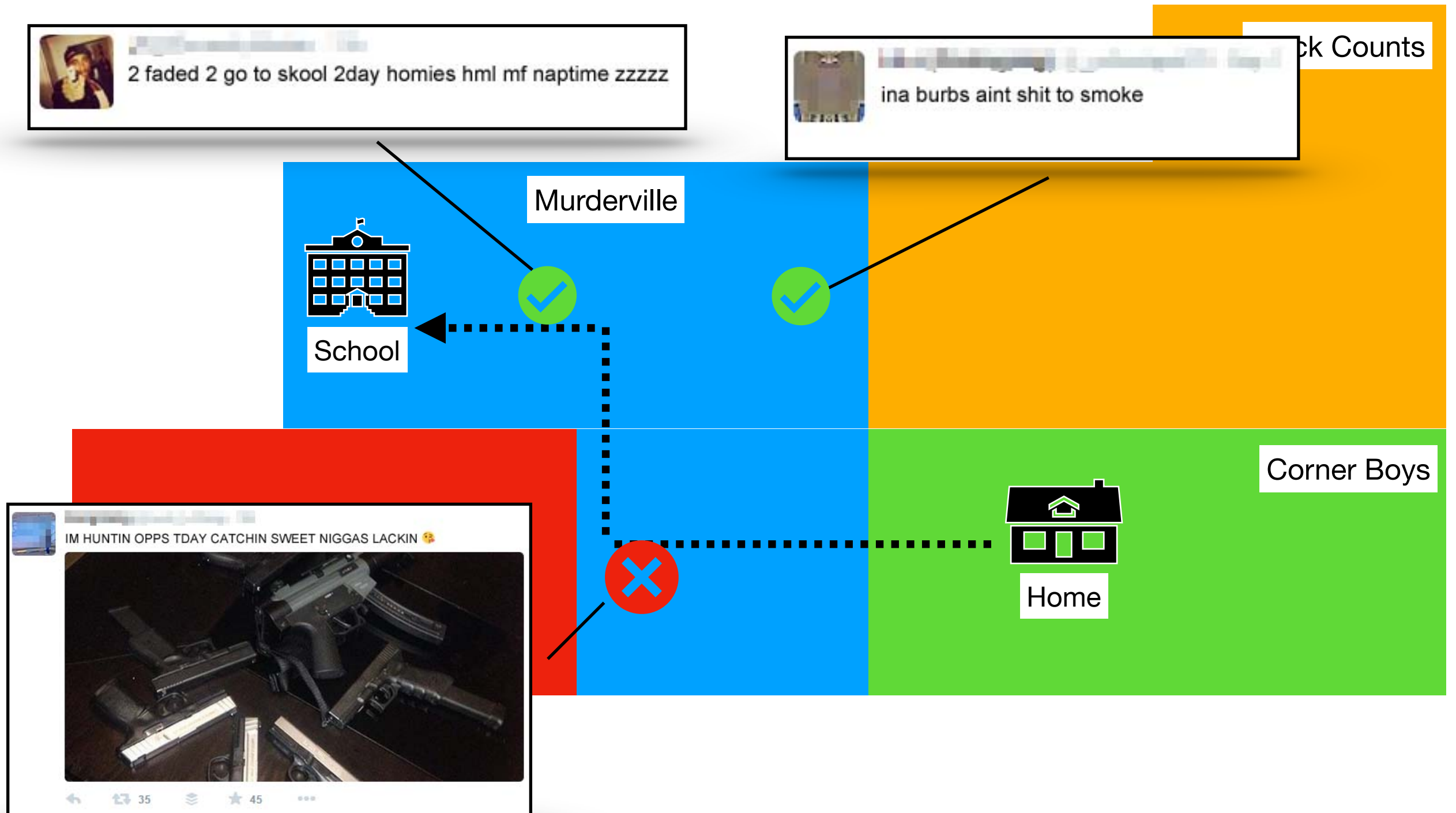
# EVAN'S DAILY GEOGRAPHY

*Using rivals' social media posts to chart safe passage*



# EVAN'S DAILY GEOGRAPHY

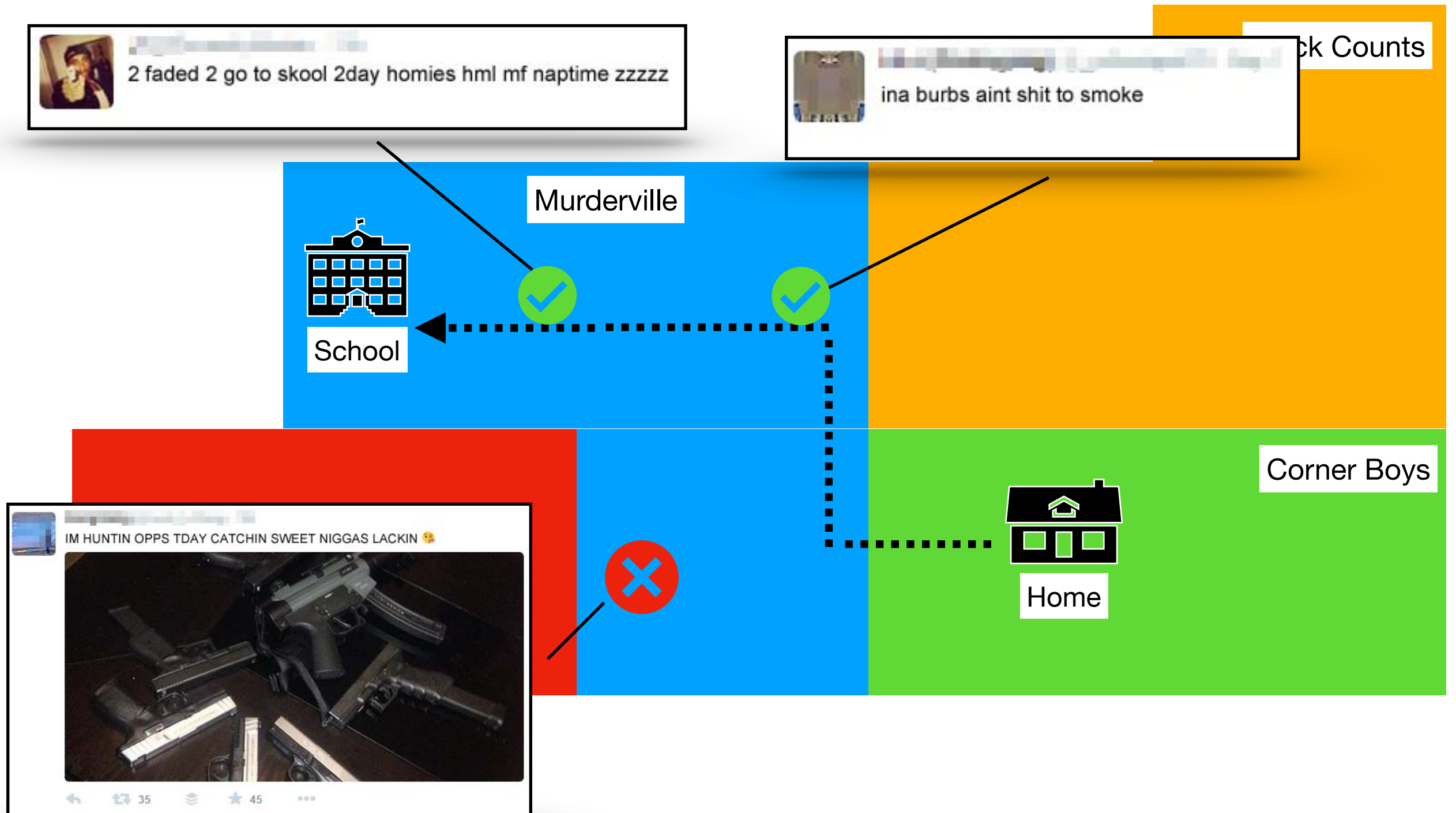
*Using rivals' social media posts to chart safe passage*





# EVAN'S DAILY GEOGRAPHY

*Using rivals' social media posts to chart safe passage*



# TEEN GIRLS AS GUARDIANS

*The role of young women is expanding due to social media*



SUBSCRIBE



## Why does no one talk about the impact of youth violence on women?

We rarely hear about the ways youth violence hurts women and girls. For his second All City column journalist and youth worker Ciaran Thapar investigates.

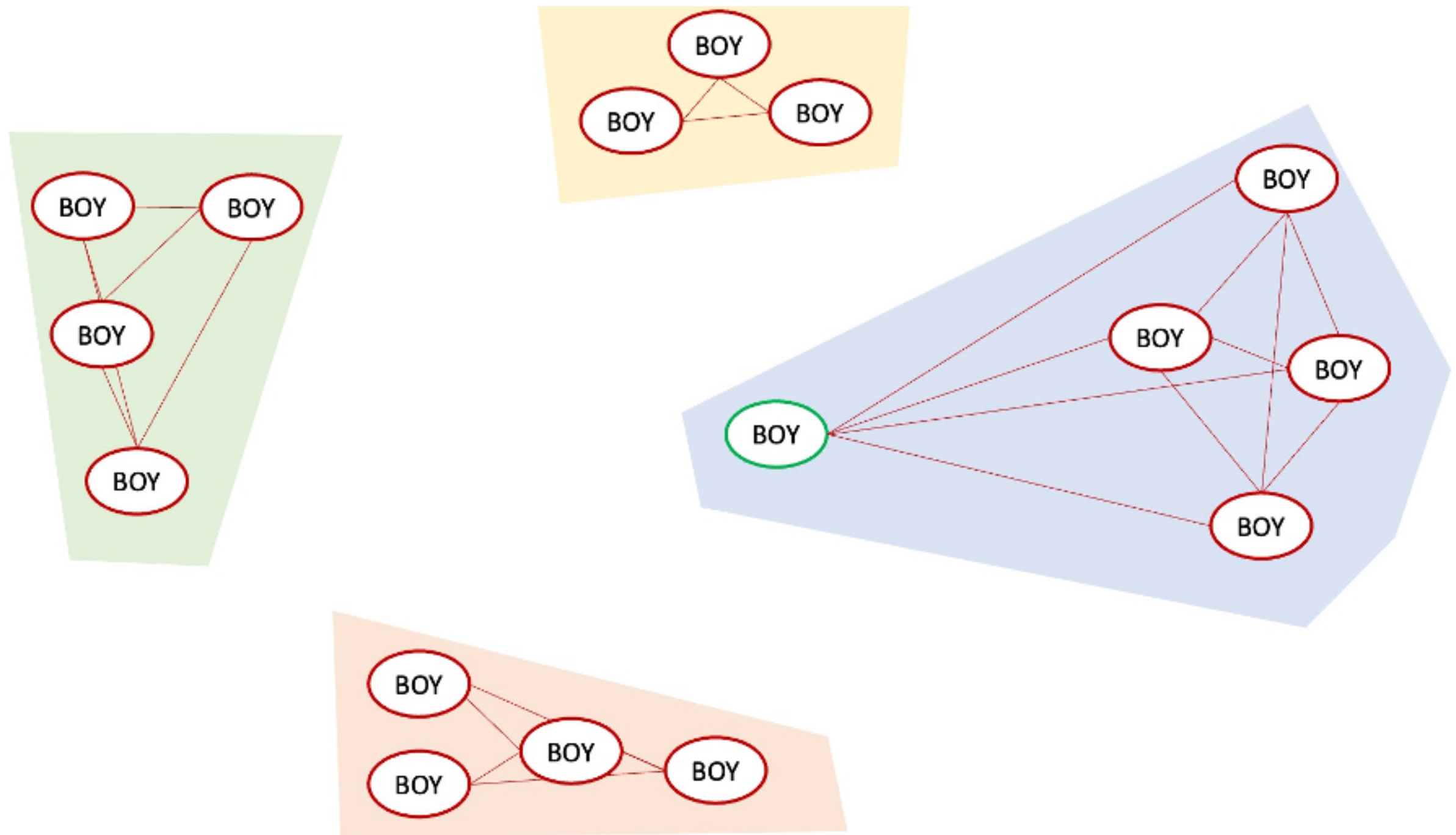
By Ciaran Thapar

28 April 2019



# TEEN GIRLS AS GUARDIANS

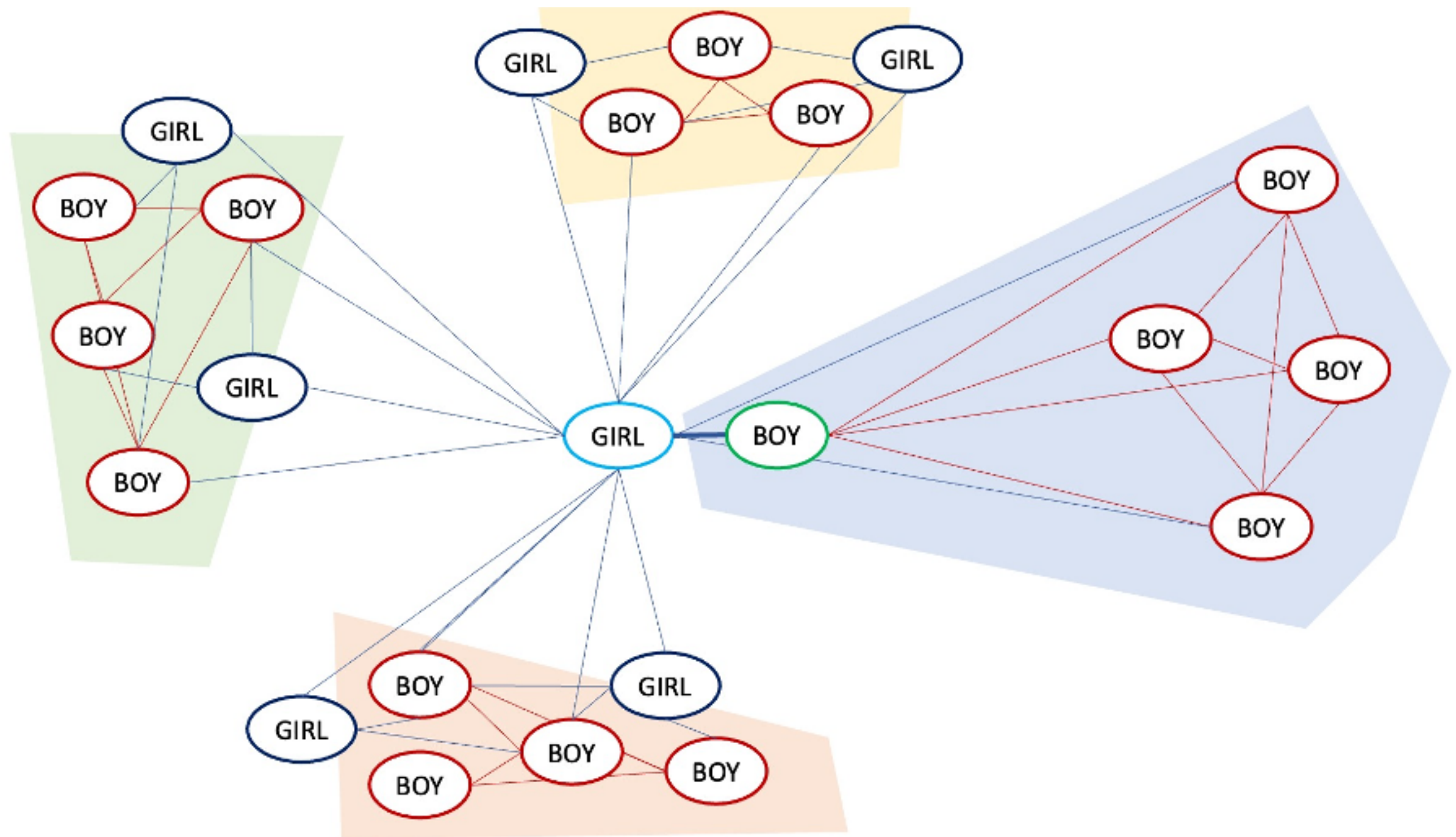
*The role of young women is expanding due to social media*





# TEEN GIRLS AS GUARDIANS

*The role of young women is expanding due to social media*



# DANIELLE SAFEGUARDS DJ

*Network access and visibility allows her to keep her brother away from harm*

- Danielle constantly monitors the geographic locations of the Corner Boys' rivals
  - Can prevent DJ from accidentally crossing paths with rivals
- Danielle constantly monitors the girls in rivals' networks
  - Can reduce likelihood of "baiting" and ambushes
- Danielle constantly monitors DJ and his friends' social media posts to gauge their emotional states and trauma
  - Can provide additional emotional support when it's needed most—before it turns to violence



# PUTTING COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE TO WORK

## How can we formalize and “scale up” safety strategies?

PUBLISHABOUTBROWSE

SEARCHadvanced search

PLOS ONE

OPEN ACCESSPEER-REVIEWED

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A human-machine partnered approach for identifying social media signals of elevated traumatic grief in Chicago gang territories

Forrest Stuart✉, Alicia Riley, Hossein Pourreza

Published: July 30, 2020 • <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0236625>

59 Save

10 Citation

3,625 View

71 Share

Download PDF

Print

Share

Check for updates

ArticleAuthorsMetricsCommentsMedia Coverage

Abstract

Introduction

Theoretical background and justification:  
Traumatic grief, gang violence, and digital social media

Qualitative fieldwork:  
Understanding traumatic grief on Twitter

Computational analyses:  
Using Twitter to identify moments of collective elevated traumatic grief

Matching elevated traumatic grief on Twitter to offline events

Conclusion and discussion

Supporting information

Acknowledgments

References

Abstract

There is a critical need to improve trauma-informed services in structurally marginalized communities impacted by violence and its associated traumatic grief. For community residents, particularly gang-associated youth, repeated exposure to traumatic grief causes serious adverse effects that may include negative health outcomes, delinquency, and future violent offenses. The recent proliferation of digital social media platforms, such as Twitter, provide a novel and largely underutilized resource for responding to these issues, particularly among these difficult-to-reach communities. In this paper, we explore the potential for using a human-machine partnered approach, wherein qualitative fieldwork and domain expertise is combined with a computational linguistic analysis of Twitter content among 18 gang territories/neighborhoods on Chicago's South Side. We first employ in-depth interviews and observations to identify common patterns by which residents in gang territories/neighborhoods express traumatic grief on social media. We leverage these qualitative findings, supplemented by domain expertise and computational techniques, to gather both traumatic grief- and gang-related tweets from Twitter. We next utilize supervised machine learning to construct a binary classification algorithm to eliminate irrelevant tweets that may have been gathered by our automated query and extraction techniques. Last, we confirm the validity, or ground truth, of our computational findings by enlisting additional domain expertise and further qualitative analyses of the specific traumatic events discussed in our sample of Twitter content. Using this approach, we find that social media provides useful signals for identifying moments of increased collective traumatic grief among residents in gang territories/neighborhoods. This is the first study to leverage Twitter to systematically ground the collective online articulations of traumatic grief in traumatic offline events occurring in violence-impacted communities. The results of this study will be useful for developing more effective tools—including trauma-informed intervention applications—for community organizations, violence prevention initiatives, and other public health efforts.

ADVERTISEMENT

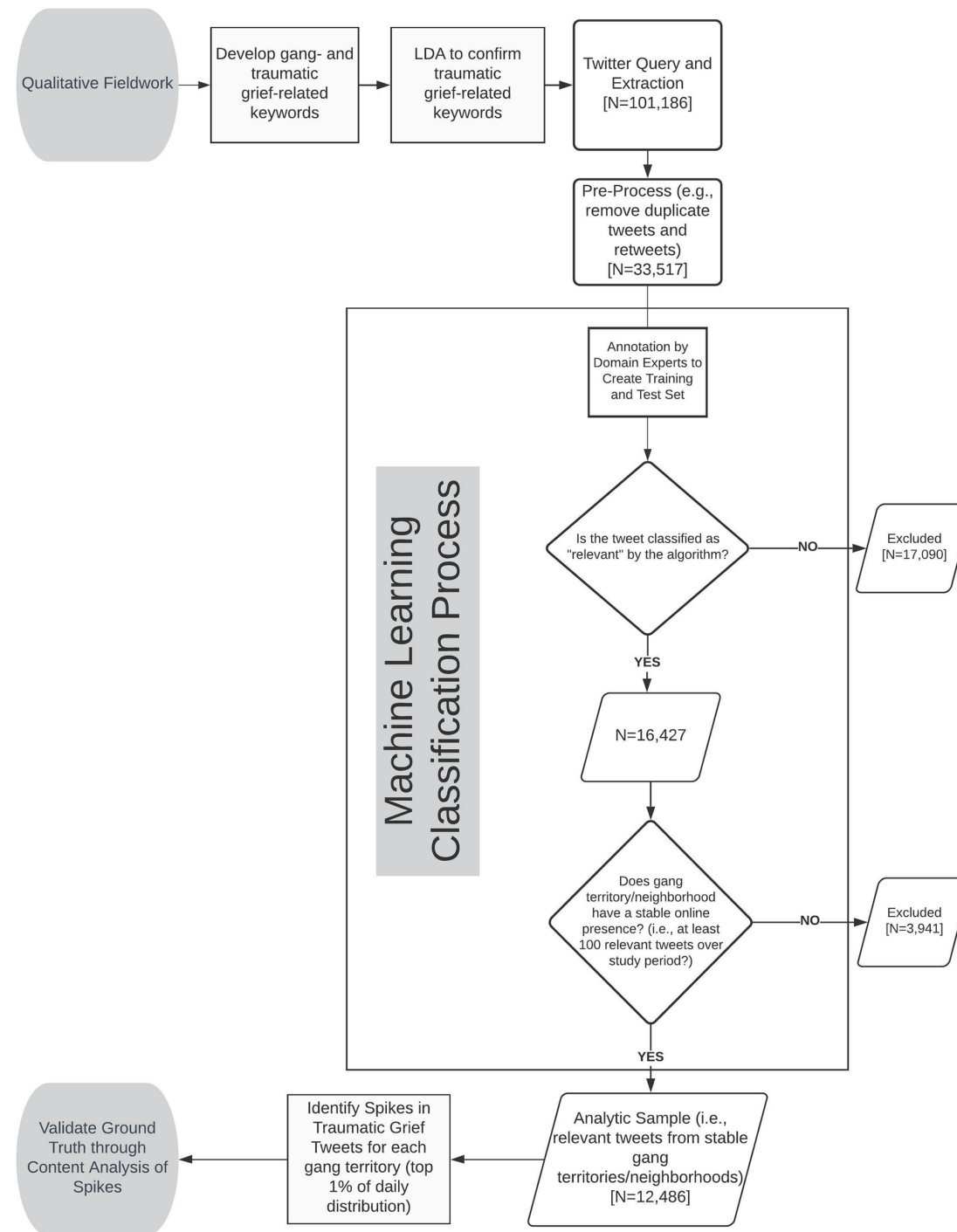
PLOS

We're driving change in research integrity and publication



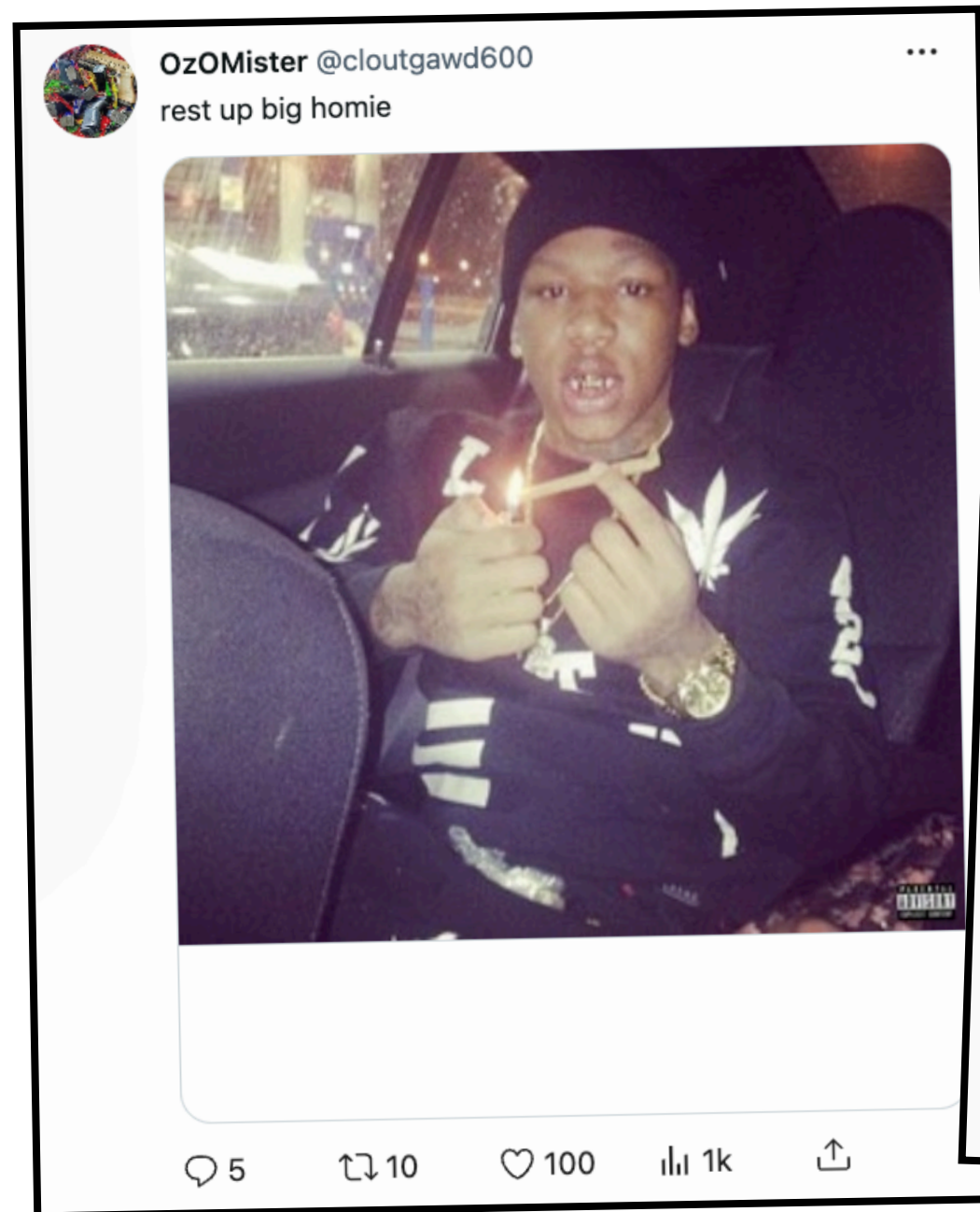
# PUTTING COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE TO WORK

*How can we formalize and “scale up” safety strategies?*



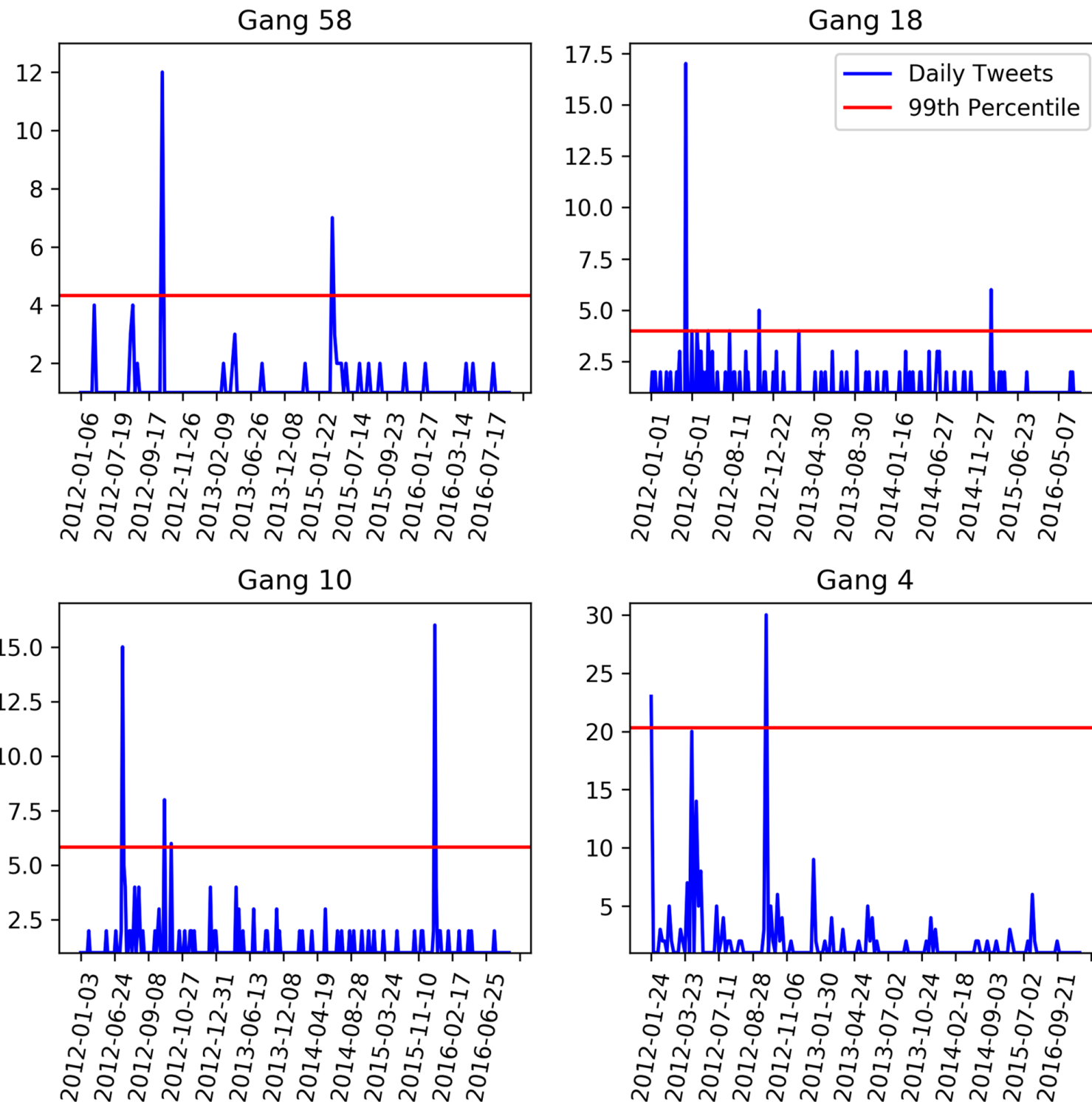
# PUTTING COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE TO WORK

*How can we formalize and “scale up” safety strategies?*



# PUTTING COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE TO WORK

*How can we formalize and “scale up” safety strategies?*





# GETTING “SMARTER” ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA

## *Key lessons and pathways forward*

- Resist the myth of a direct causal relationship between online taunts/challenges and retaliatory offline violence
  - Online content is more likely the expression of offline events and dynamics
  - Pay more attention to the context and conditions of online content (e.g., which particular content brings parties into shared physical space?)
- Become more familiar with community strategies for using social media to promote safety
  - Build on community knowledge to create formal interventions