



Published in final edited form as:

*Am Sociol Rev.* 2009 June 1; 74(3): 445–464.

## Violence, Older Peers, and the Socialization of Adolescent Boys in Disadvantaged Neighborhoods

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### Abstract

Most theoretical perspectives on neighborhood effects on youth assume that neighborhood context serves as a source of socialization, but the exact sources and processes underlying adolescent socialization in disadvantaged neighborhoods are largely unspecified and unelaborated. This paper proposes that cross-cohort socialization by older neighborhood peers is one source of socialization for adolescent boys in such neighborhoods. Data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey suggest that adolescents in disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely to spend time with older individuals. Qualitative interview data from 60 adolescent boys in three neighborhoods in Boston are analyzed to understand the causes and consequences of these interactions and relationships. I find that some of the strategies these adolescents employ to cope with violence in disadvantaged neighborhoods promote interaction with older peers, particularly those who are most disadvantaged, and that such interactions can expose adolescents to local, “unconventional,” or “alternative” cultural models.

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Most theoretical perspectives on neighborhood effects on youth assume that the neighborhood context serves as a source of socialization, particularly for adolescents. Through differential exposure to behavioral models or cultural ideas, disadvantaged neighborhoods are thought to influence how young people make decisions in domains such as schooling and romantic relationships. For example, Wilson’s (1996) social isolation theory argues that residents of poor neighborhoods are isolated from middle class or mainstream social groups, organizations, and institutions as a result of joblessness. Social isolation creates cultural isolation, which - when combined with diminished educational and labor market opportunities - leads to the development of cultural repertoires that differ from those of working or middle class communities. Neighborhood interactions expose young people to “ghetto-specific” cultural models.

The exact sources and processes underlying such adolescent socialization are, however, largely unspecified and unelaborated. Wilson (1996) argues that in high joblessness neighborhoods, life is not organized around work, and the experience of observing adults going to work or discussing their jobs is absent. Yet critics counter that even in high joblessness neighborhoods, many people are working or going to school and that neighbors can just as easily serve as models of what *not* to do (Newman 1999). Although many African-American middle class families left ghetto neighborhoods, many also remained (Patillo-McCoy 1999). Moreover, both survey and ethnographic research show strong support for mainstream ideals regarding work, education, marriage, and childbearing among the poor (Newman 1999, Edin and Kefalas 2005, Young 2004, Solarzano 1992, Goldenberg et al. 2001). What then are the sources of “alternative” or “ghetto-specific” cultural models in poor neighborhoods? More specifically,

who exposes adolescents to these ideas, and why do adolescents take these individuals seriously, often against the wishes of parents, ministers, teachers, and other community adults?

This paper proposes that at least part of the answer lies in *cross-cohort socialization*, the socialization of adolescent boys by older neighborhood peers, particularly those most likely to be available in the neighborhood: older males who are unemployed, not in school, and involved in the underground economy. Drawing on representative survey data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS), I show that adolescents in disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely to spend time with older peers than their counterparts in more advantaged neighborhoods. The majority of this paper attempts to understand the sources and implications of this pattern. Based on in-depth, unstructured interviews with 60 adolescent boys and their parents in three Boston communities, I describe the role older peers play in the socialization of adolescent boys in two poor areas. Violence in these two areas reinforces neighborhood as a form of social identity, restricts adolescent males' pool of potential friends, structures their use of geographic space, and leads younger adolescent boys to greater interaction with older adolescents and young adults on the street, all unintended consequences of boys' strategies for navigating dangerous streets. Older males, particularly those who are unemployed and out of school, thereby become an important potential source of neighborhood socialization for these boys and have the power to influence their decision making in domains beyond safety. In contrast, adolescent boys in a third Boston community with a low poverty rate and less violence have few older friends and acquaintances and experience less exposure to such socialization.

## Neighborhood Effects and Adolescent Socialization

Social isolation theory argues that lack of participation in the mainstream labor market isolates residents of inner-city communities from middle class social groups, organizations, and institutions (Wilson 1996). According to this theory, children in high joblessness neighborhoods also do not experience life organized around work, and illicit income reduces attachment to the labor market. Social interaction in isolated neighborhoods leads to the development of cultural repertoires that differ from the mainstream. Socially and culturally isolated from wider society and without resources or opportunities for social mobility, residents' social problems build upon themselves in a vicious cycle.

Social isolation theory assumes that neighborhood interactions expose young people to neighborhood-specific cultural models that differ from those common among the middle class.<sup>1</sup> Yet there is strong support for conventional ideals about education, work, welfare, and marriage among the poor (Young 2004, Newman 1999, Edin and Kefalas 2005, Solarzano 1992, Goldenberg et al. 2001). It is unclear then, how and by whom "ghetto-specific" or "unconventional" cultural models are transmitted to young people in poor neighborhoods and how these models are passed from generation to generation. A purely structural account, in which each succeeding generation faces similar structural barriers and develops similar cultural adaptations, does not suffice. Because adolescents respond differently to structural limitations, as evidenced by considerable variation within neighborhoods in outcomes, response to blocked opportunities cannot be the whole story. Even in the poorest neighborhoods, high school dropout, joblessness, and teenage pregnancy are far from universal.

One potential mechanism for these cultural transmission processes that has not been fully investigated is peers. As youth enter adolescence, the focus of their social world shifts from

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<sup>1</sup>Quinn and Holland (1987: 4) define "cultural models" as "Presupposed, taken-for-granted models of the world that are widely shared (although not necessarily to the exclusion of other, alternative models) by the members of a society and that play an enormous role in their understanding of that world and their behavior in it."

family to peers. Duncan, Boisjoly, and Harris (2001) find relatively large correlations among friends on developmental outcomes, in some cases almost as large as correlations among siblings. Peer effects are frequently invoked to understand delinquency and drug use (Sutherland 1947, Akers et al. 1979, Warr and Stafford 1991, Haynie 2001), but little recent work has addressed the role of peers in neighborhood effects, particularly with regard to outcomes in other domains. One exception is Anderson (1990, 1999), who argues that peer “street” cultures in disadvantaged neighborhoods promote teenage pregnancy.

The broader literature on socialization emphasizes that socialization is an active process (Simon, Eder and Evans, 1992, Corsaro and Eder 1995, Adler and Adler 1998, Eder and Nenga 2003), in which youth have considerable agency to develop “new patterns of thinking and acting” (Corsaro and Eder 1995: 433) by incorporating elements of both the wider adult culture and local peer cultures (Adler and Adler 1998). This “interpretive approach” (Corsaro and Eder 1995) views the youth as a “discoverer of meaning” (rather than an empty vessel to be filled by adults) who engages in “creative appropriation” through social interaction.

Yet socialization researchers typically study middle class youth (Youniss and Smollar 1985, Simon et al. 1992, Adler and Adler 1998, Gilligan, Lyons and Hanmer 1990, Eder 1995), and so they focus either on the family or age-structured settings such as schools or organized sports (e.g. Fine 1979) where youth tend to develop ties with same-age peers. Socialization of youth in urban neighborhoods, which ethnographers describe as more age and class heterogeneous (Anderson 1990, 1999, Horowitz 1983, Sullivan 1989), is understudied. Perhaps because their subjects tend to be pre-adolescents embedded in age-structured, middle-class contexts, socialization researchers implicitly make a binary distinction between adults and children, which may be inappropriate for adolescents, and assume that such contexts are the primary settings for formation of friendships and peer groups. Indeed, Eder and Nenga (2003) note the need for research on adolescent socialization outside family and school settings.

The ethnographic and urban poverty literature on cultural transmission processes describes the dynamics of multiple competing sources of socialization among adolescents in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Classic accounts of criminal socialization emphasize the role of older peers in introducing adolescents to criminal opportunities and skills (Thrasher 1927, Cloward and Ohlin 1960, Sullivan 1989, Whyte 1943). Anderson’s (1990, 1999) ethnographic description of the competition between conventional (“decent”) and oppositional (“street”) orientations in poor neighborhoods provides the framework for much contemporary research. “Decent” families compete with peer groups and others with “street” orientations for the attention of adolescents making key decisions about school, crime, and sexual behavior. Parents work to separate their children from neighborhood influences (Furstenburg et al. 1999), and schools fail to engage students when teachers interpret their “street” behavior as resistance (Mateu-Gelabert and June 2007). Anderson has been criticized for utilizing his subjects’ cultural categories as analytical categories (Wacquant 2002), but his ethnographic description of competing cultural codes in poor neighborhoods is widely accepted.

Though implicit in many ethnographic descriptions of life in poor neighborhoods (Anderson 1999, Horowitz 1983, Suttles 1968, Whyte 1943), the causes of cross-age interactions and their implications for adolescent socialization have been under-explored. Anderson (1990, 1999) laments the decline of the cultural authority of the “old head” - an older man who imparts “decent” values to neighborhood boys. Such figures face competition from drug dealers and hustlers presenting alternative models of success (cf. Young 2007). While Anderson describes in detail the nature and content of old heads’ interactions with adolescents, he provides little information about their replacements, the young men held in high regard in the neighborhood because of their resources from the underground economy and their successful navigation of dangerous streets. How they interact with and transmit cultural models to adolescent boys is

not specified, nor are the reasons that adolescent boys take their messages seriously, other than their social status in the neighborhood. In order to understand how neighborhood cultural transmission processes operate, we need to know how different neighborhoods influence adolescent social networks and how interaction with different peers shapes adolescent cultural frameworks.

Underlying my analysis of boys' perspectives and experiences is a cognitive view of culture. Rather than examining values or attitudes and explaining individual behavior via involvement in a particular subculture in which certain behavior is normative, this perspective views culture as fragmented and composed of "disparate bits of information and ... schematic structures that organize that information" (DiMaggio 1997: 293). Following Harding (2007), I view poor neighborhoods as culturally heterogeneous, presenting adolescents with a wide array of competing and conflicting cultural models. From this perspective, there are multiple cultural models from which to choose (Swidler 1986, Quinn and Holland 1987, Fuller et al. 1996). Key concepts employed to understand socialization are scripts or strategies of action (Swidler 1986), repertoires or toolkits (Hannerz 1969, Swidler 1986), and frames (Goffman 1974, Benford and Snow 2000, Small 2002). An advantage of this approach is that socialization can occur not just via involvement in a cohesive subculture but also via the introduction of alternative ways of conceptualizing problems (frames) and their solutions (scripts, strategies of action). For example, older peers may structure the frames regarding gender distrust that adolescent boys bring to romantic relationships (Harding, forthcoming).

## Social Organization of Violence

While social isolation theory posits cultural consequences of neighborhood disadvantage, social organization theory emphasizes community capacity for social control, arguing that neighborhood disadvantage leads to difficulties maintaining order (Park and Burgess 1925, Shaw and McKay 1942, Sampson et al. 1997). Social organization models have been used primarily to explain neighborhood differences in crime, violence, and delinquency (exceptions include Browning, Leventhal, and Brooks-Gunn [2005]). Social organization predicts not just a neighborhood's level of violence, but also how its residents respond to it. Sharkey (2006) shows that adolescents in neighborhoods with higher levels of collective efficacy have greater "street efficacy," a perceived ability to avoid violence and victimization in their neighborhoods. Neighborhoods with low social organization may also have difficulty regulating other adolescent behaviors, but whether social organization theory can explain neighborhood effects on other outcomes remains unclear. This paper suggests one avenue through which social organization can have consequences in domains other than violence, such as education and sexual behavior. When a community possesses inadequate capacity to control violence, the social networks of adolescents are affected, and therefore their socialization can be as well.

Elaborating these neighborhood processes requires understanding the organization of violence in poor neighborhoods, studies of which have focused on status contestation in gangs or the interpersonal dynamics of reputation. According to Thrasher (1927), conflict with other gangs is a central element in gang life, and "gang warfare" erupts over status as well as over economic assets, territory, and the safety of members. Short and Strodtbeck (1965) argue that gang conflict is also part of status management within the gang, as members use violence within the gang and between rival gangs to establish and maintain leadership roles.

Anderson (1999) describes the social and cultural dynamics of street violence, beyond the role of gangs. Young men "campaign for respect" on the streets according to a "street code" of informal rules governing masculinity, violence and public behavior (cf. Mateo-Gelabert and Lune 2007). Where victimization is common, young people view a reputation for toughness - created and maintained by posturing and fighting - as a form of protection. As in the gang

literature, violence is a means by which status is achieved and maintained. While this form of status contestation through violence is often interpersonal, Anderson notes (without development) that it can also be group or neighborhood based.

Below I build upon these theoretical concepts- status contestation, defended territory, and respect, reputation, and masculinity through violence - to understand the consequences of violence for the peer networks of adolescent boys in poor neighborhoods. Before doing so, however, I examine whether the relationship between neighborhood disadvantage and interaction with older peers observed in the fieldwork is evident in nationally representative data.

## Neighborhood Disadvantage and Interaction with Older Peers

For older peers to play a role in the differential socialization of adolescents in poor neighborhoods, such adolescents must experience greater interaction with them. I investigate whether this is the case using nationally representative data from NELS. In the first follow-up, conducted two years after respondents were sampled while in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, adolescents were asked about the ages of the “people with whom you spend most of your time.” I use responses to this question in conjunction with the respondent’s age to construct an indicator for whether the respondent spends most of his time with individuals who are older than him but under age 26. This age cutoff most closely corresponds to the age range of older peers described by the adolescent boys in the disadvantaged areas in the fieldwork presented below.

Table 1 shows the percent of urban adolescents who report spending most of his time with individuals who are older but under age 26, stratified by type of zip code, a proxy for neighborhood. Zip codes are divided into quintiles of a disadvantage scale constructed from the following census variables (measured at the zip code level): family poverty rate, male unemployment rate, percent of families headed by a single mother, median household income, percent of workers in managerial or professional occupations, and percent of individuals over age 25 who have a college degree. Results are presented for all urban adolescents and for males and females separately. Further information about data and methodology is presented in the Online Supplement.

Three limitations of these data make it difficult to detect differences across neighborhoods in the type of interactions with older peers on which I focus in the qualitative data below (older, non-kin males in the immediate neighborhood). First, zip codes provide very broad definitions of neighborhoods. Averaging over larger, more diverse geographic areas will attenuate any neighborhood differences based on neighborhood socioeconomic composition. Second, a key characteristic of disadvantaged neighborhoods in the qualitative analysis below is neighborhood violence, but NELS data do not provide information on neighborhood violence. To the degree that some low-violence disadvantaged neighborhoods are included in the data, they will also attenuate the neighborhood differences in interaction with older peers. Third, while the qualitative analysis focuses on non-kin older peers, the wording of the NELS survey question does not allow me to exclude family members from the older peers captured in the NELS data or to focus on same-sex older peers. This may be exacerbated by the “most of your time” wording in the NELS question, which suggests a greater level of interaction than that described in the qualitative interviews. To the degree that kin or opposite sex individuals are included in the NELS responses, neighborhood differences will again be attenuated. For these reasons, the neighborhood differences observed in the NELS data are smaller than those observed in the qualitative data presented below, where the measures can be more precisely defined.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Note that there is also a difference between the time period of the NELS survey (1990) and the fieldwork (2003–2004).

Despite these limitations, this descriptive analysis provides evidence that both male and female adolescents in more disadvantaged neighborhoods are significantly more likely to interact regularly with older peers. Although base levels of older peer interaction are higher for females than for males, cross-neighborhood differences are similar for boys and girls. Greater interaction with older peers among females is likely due to girls dating older boys, a consistent finding in the literature on adolescent romantic relationships (Elo, King, and Furstenberg 1999, Ford, Sohn, and Lepkowski 2001). A logistic regression presented in the Supplement controls for a large number of individual and school covariates and also finds neighborhood differences in interaction with older individuals.

This analysis simply shows that, although the magnitudes of neighborhood differences are different, the neighborhood differences in cross-age interaction observed among adolescent boys in the fieldwork data also exist in a nationally representative sample of adolescents. It serves merely to demonstrate an association between neighborhood disadvantage and the probability of cross-age interaction, for which qualitative data are ill-suited. The remainder of this paper seeks to understand the nature, sources, and consequences of interaction with older peers by focusing on a qualitative sample of male adolescents in three Boston neighborhoods.

## Fieldwork Methodology

I conducted unstructured interviews with 60 adolescent boys age 13–18 living in three predominantly African-American areas of Boston, with 20 boys per area. For 80 percent, a parent or primary caretaker was also interviewed. I focus on boys because of their greater involvement in and exposure to street violence and to allow a gender match between subject and interviewer. The Online Supplement provides a detailed description of the fieldwork and analysis, including subject and neighborhood characteristics, subject recruitment, interview content, data interpretation and cross-checking, analysis procedures, and challenges in conducting fieldwork with this population, including issues of race and social distance.

The study areas were selected to allow for explicit comparisons between similar youth in neighborhoods with different poverty rates. Two of the areas (“Roxbury Crossing” and “Franklin”) have high rates of family poverty (35–40 percent). The third area (“Lower Mills”) has a low poverty rate (below ten percent). Each area consists of two contiguous census tracts. Additional neighborhood characteristics from the 2000 census are provided in the Online Supplement. As I have defined them, Roxbury Crossing, Franklin, and Lower Mills are areas of the city rather than social neighborhoods. Each area encompasses multiple locales that more closely approximate neighborhoods recognizable to residents, but the neighborhoods within each area share parallel histories and demographic and structural characteristics.

In order to understand the boys’ neighborhoods, the interviews investigated how the subjects conceptualize their neighborhoods as geographic and social spaces and how they overlap with their social networks, daily travel, and institutions. Though a full discussion is beyond the scope of this paper, when the boys and parents describe their neighborhoods, they are referring to much smaller spaces, often a few blocks in any direction.<sup>3</sup> The boundaries of these more limited spaces are to some degree reinforced by the violence described below. The terms Roxbury Crossing, Franklin, and Lower Mills delineate the three study areas and provide anonymity for the research subjects by broadening the geographic scope of reference.

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<sup>3</sup>Though Furstenberg et al. (1999) note that definitions of neighborhood boundaries vary considerably across individuals, I am aware of no prior research that explicitly investigates adolescents’ perceptions of neighborhood size. However, evidence presented in Cobbina, Miller, and Brunson (2008) for a different city also suggests that adolescents conceive of their neighborhoods as particularly small. Also consistent with the small neighborhoods identified here, Hunter (1974) finds that younger individuals and the poor tend to have smaller definitions of their neighborhoods. Harding (forthcoming) investigates the social construction of neighborhood boundaries in more detail.

Hereafter, “neighborhood” will refer to the geographic and social spaces defined by the subjects, and “area” will distinguish the three larger study areas.

Space limitations preclude a more detailed description of the three areas, but a key difference between the two high poverty areas and the low-poverty area is the level and social organization of violence. Violence is highly spatially patterned in urban areas (Morenoff, Sampson, and Raudenbush 2001, Sampson and Morenoff 2004). Young people from high poverty neighborhoods are exposed to high rates of crime and violence (CDC 1997, American Academy of Pediatrics 2000), and the adolescent boys from Roxbury Crossing and Franklin are no exception. In contrast to their counterparts in Lower Mills, the boys in these neighborhoods must contend with an ever present threat of conflict and victimization.

Table 2 shows violent crime rates and counts for the three study areas and for Boston as a whole during the fieldwork period. Because they are rare events, homicides provide indications of the most severe violence. By this measure, Franklin is the most violent of the three study areas. Rates of robbery and aggravated assault, much more frequent events, illustrate the key distinction between Lower Mills, the low poverty area, and the two high poverty areas, Roxbury Crossing and Franklin. By both measures, Roxbury Crossing and Franklin have much higher rates of violence than Lower Mills or Boston as a whole. This “street” violence is rarely random or indiscriminate, but rather organized by both interpersonal and neighborhood-based “beefs,” ongoing conflicts that wax and wane and are largely based on individual and neighborhood status contestation. Neighborhood rivalries structure much of the more serious violence that occurs in Boston’s disadvantaged neighborhoods, including Roxbury Crossing and Franklin.

The ability to make comparisons across neighborhoods is a key aspect of this study’s design. Few qualitative studies allow systematic comparison of experiences in poor and non-poor neighborhoods. By asking similar questions and discussing the same topics with individuals in different neighborhoods, key differences in the daily lives of adolescent boys across neighborhoods are revealed. It was only through these explicit comparisons that neighborhood differences were discovered in experiences of violence and threat of victimization and the role of older males in social networks. Across areas, it is important to compare adolescents from similar family backgrounds, so I selected subjects to achieve economic diversity in each area.

## Age Structure of Peer Networks

Compared to their counterparts in Lower Mills, the boys in Franklin and Roxbury Crossing interact more often with older adolescents and young adults, particularly those from their own neighborhoods. As suggested by the NELS data, the peer networks of adolescent boys in these two disadvantaged areas include individuals who are considerably older. Seventy-five percent of boys interviewed in Franklin and Roxbury Crossing reported older males from outside their families as part of their peer networks. These older males were at least two years older and sometimes as old as their mid twenties. In contrast, only 15 percent of Lower Mills subjects reported interacting with older adolescents and young adults outside their families. In this section, I describe how the social organization of violence in and among Boston’s most disadvantaged neighborhoods structures the age composition of the peer networks of the adolescent boys who live in Roxbury Crossing and Franklin. In highlighting the role of same-sex older peers, I am not arguing that these actors are the only source of socialization for the Franklin and Roxbury Crossing subjects. Parents, siblings, same-age peers, girlfriends, and extended families play important roles as well. I focus on older peers because their role has not been previously explored, because comparisons across neighborhoods revealed this stark difference, and because of their potential role in non-family cross-cohort socialization.

Two mutually reinforcing processes explain why the adolescent males of Franklin and Roxbury Crossing tend to associate more with older peers. First, neighborhood-based violence increases

the salience of neighborhood identity, leading boys to choose friends from those available locally. Because Boston boys conceive of their neighborhoods as small geographic areas and because venturing outside the neighborhood or interacting with male youth from other neighborhoods increases one's risk of victimization, fewer same-age friends are available and use of geographic space is constrained. Second, as the younger adolescent boys of Roxbury Crossing and Franklin struggle to cope with the ever-present threat of violence, relationships with older peers are one strategy for securing at least a measure of protection. Older peers can be called upon in times of danger to intervene, and relationships with older peers provide status-based and reputational advantages that can help preclude conflict. In contrast, adolescent males in Lower Mills face a much lower threat of victimization. Their social lives are not structured by strong neighborhood identities that restrict social networks or the use of geographic space, and strategies for reducing the threat of victimization are less necessary.

### Neighborhood Violence and Social Identity

Among the adolescent boys of Franklin and Roxbury Crossing, neighborhood based violence is simultaneously structured by neighborhood identities and a primary way in which these identities are experienced and reinforced in daily life. Neighborhoods are categories that nearly all of the subjects in these two poor, violent areas use to distinguish insiders from outsiders. They strongly influence, though do not rigidly determine, which male peers they socialize with and would consider as potential friends. In Franklin and Roxbury Crossing, 32 of 40 boys (80%) reported that more than half of their friends lived in their immediate neighborhoods, and 22 of the boys (55%) in these areas had no friends from outside their neighborhoods. Only three of 40 boys reported no neighborhood friends. In Lower Mills, 13 of 20 boys (65%) reported that more than half of their friends lived in their neighborhoods, and seven of the boys (35%) had no friends outside the neighborhood. Four of 20 Lower Mills boys reported no neighborhood friends.

The power of neighborhood distinctions is illustrated by Marcus, 16 and from Roxbury Crossing. Another boy from Marcus's development owed him four dollars. Marcus wanted the money, but did not want to fight his neighbor for it. Instead, he told him that if he did not repay, Marcus would rob his friend from another neighborhood:

A kid owed me \$4... He lives in this development, so I didn't want to do nothing to him, because I knew it would cause problems. I said, "I see you coming around here with a kid that you hang out with, and I really don't care for the kid, 'cause the kid's not from around here. It's either I get my money, or we're going to have problems," because that \$4 means something to me, 'cause my family does not have that much. I told him, "I'll rob your friend the next time I see him around here." ... I had my \$4 in my hand the next day... We just shook hands, and we left it at that.

This story reveals the salience of neighborhood distinctions for Marcus, but also indicates that this distinction is not universally important, as the other boy did have a friend from another neighborhood. From Marcus' perspective, conflicts among neighborhood insiders are different from those between youth from different neighborhoods. Conflicts among neighbors are resolved quickly, though sometimes with a physical fight. Third parties from the neighborhood take on a mediating role to resolve the dispute before it escalates into an ongoing beef. There is often social pressure to resolve the dispute and "leave it at that." When conflicts between youth from different neighborhoods emerge, however, each youth becomes a representative of his neighborhood, and its reputation is at stake. Others may become involved, either to seek retribution and redemption for the neighborhood or to protect its reputation.<sup>4</sup>



Consider an incident recounted by Chris, a 14-year-old Franklin resident. Soon after arriving at a nearby roller rink, Chris and “his boys” encountered a group of youth from a rival street who insulted a girl from his neighborhood.

We almost got into a fight. Some Lucerne [Street] kids was there... They were just making mad noise. Cause in the Vous [the roller rink] they're like “Lucerne, Lucerne.”... There was all kinds of kids there though. The Point was there, and the Head was there. D Block was there... They had a dance contest and the girl that was from [our neighborhood], she was dancing. And they was talking mad trash, so we almost got in a fight with them. They was scared. They left... We was there like 20 deep.

Neighborhood is a central organizing category in Chris' account. It structures not only what happened, but the way he tells the story. In mentioning “the Point,” “the Head,” and “D Block,” Chris describes other youth using local slang for their neighborhoods. Chris and the boys from his neighborhood are not being chivalrous in defending the girl. Rather, they are defending their own neighborhood from insult with a masculine display of physical force. An outside observer might expect an older brother or boyfriend to challenge the insult, but here the conflict quickly became a contest between neighborhoods rather than individuals.

With these dynamics, neighborhoods in Roxbury Crossing and Franklin become what Suttles (1972) terms “defended communities.” Neutral spaces such as schools, public transportation, or commercial areas are also sites of contestation and conflict. Confrontation between youth from different neighborhoods is always a possibility, and often youth will ask each other what neighborhood they are from as a challenge or physical threat. In Roxbury Crossing and Franklin, violence, neighborhood identity, and community membership are closely linked. Tyree, 17 and from Roxbury Crossing, describes how he experienced the obligations of community membership with regard to violence:

If you're not willing to help in the neighborhood, then you really can't be here. Like, if you wasn't in that circle, you was outside that circle ... There's people in the neighborhood that live on the same street and could see you getting jumped that wouldn't care. “Oh it's not my problem.” But if you was really tight, grew up together, been through ups and downs and really been cool, know family members, then there's always a chance of help. I always got to help the people in my neighborhood because you never know when it's going to come back to you. I could be outside the neighborhood getting ready to get jumped, and he could walk by and help.

Those who do not support their neighbors in fights or who do not defend the neighborhood cannot rely on neighbors for other forms of assistance. Though not all boys see things this way, for adolescents like Tyree, participating in this system of obligations defines membership in the community, including access to mutual protection.

In contrast, the adolescent boys of Lower Mills do not link identity and community membership to mutual obligations of protection. Lower Mills boys tend to look to sources of membership other than the neighborhood to situate their identities. Small friendship groups, interests such as sports or music, and involvements in religious or ethnicity groups are more important. For example, Isaac, 13, is the quarterback of the Pop Warner football team. He can also frequently be found playing football either at the park near his house or at the after school program he attends. He has one or two friends from the neighborhood, but most of his friends are from his team or program. He describes himself as someone who doesn't “have any enemies,” by which

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<sup>4</sup>The roles of third parties in within vs. cross-neighborhood violence is consistent with Black's (1993) argument that vengeance increases with social distance (Phillips 2003) and the finding that mediating third parties within groups can reduce violence (Phillips and Cooney 2005).

he means, unlike some of the others at his public middle school, neither he nor his neighborhood have beef with anyone.

The absence of neighborhood-based identities and rivalries in Lower Mills is confirmed by Jason, 18 and from Lower Mills. He dismissed the notion of gangs in his neighborhood as if gangs were a passing phase among younger adolescents.

Gangs are kind of like 8th grade. That's kind of dry now. Nobody is in a gang any more. You do what you gotta do. I know people that is like freshman year in school, don't see them wearing their bandannas any more... Like you won't hear anyone like, "Oh yeah, a whole bunch of Crips jumped some old lady" or something. It wouldn't be like a gang, it would just be a group of kids. It's not really a gang any more cause when it comes down to it, people are mostly for theirself.

For Jason, group-based conflicts and the social symbols that go with them (colored bandanas) were a middle school fad, lifted from popular culture. Some remnants remain, but Jason does not see such conflicts as affecting his daily life, as violence does not touch Lower Mills youth like Isaac and Jason very often. When it does occur, it is both less serious and more likely to be based upon interpersonal disputes than ongoing neighborhood conflicts. If a boy from Lower Mills ventures outside his neighborhood, he must avoid encroaching on others' turf, but he need not fear encountering someone with whom his neighborhood has beef. Lower Mills neighborhoods are outside the system of neighborhood beefs.

Parents also take seriously the connections between safety, neighborhood identity, and conflict. For example, two parents cited neighborhood identities as affecting decisions about school choice. When Terrell from Franklin, now 16, and his mother decided which high schools he preferred, she insisted that he not include two schools on his preference list because many youth from a rival housing development attended them, and he would be at risk of assault at school. When Manuel, now 15, and his mother made the same decision, she favored a particular high school because other youth from their Franklin housing development attended that school. He would have neighborhood friends to keep him safe at school and while traveling there and back.

In contrast, instead of violence, Lower Mills parents worry about other challenges that adolescent boys face, like staying focused on school and avoiding early fatherhood. Darnell's mother focuses instead on her fear that her 13-year-old son will get "sidetracked" from school.

Violence? This neighborhood, not too much. Most of the kids, they basically play at the park and my son is not the fighting type. That is not one of my concerns, at least not right now... I don't want him to get sidetracked. Girls, no. Girls and falling into the wrong crowd. I just think if he sees people doing things that they think is fun but is stupid, that he might want to try to try it too, just cause everybody else is having fun... I mean because he is very independent. He spends a lot of time by himself just by choice. Like sometimes I have to tell him, go outside and play, but he is in his room writing and reading... I think he's getting into girls. Once he really gets into girls, I try and steer him away from that, sex and getting girls pregnant, diseases and just all the little things that can go on between teenagers.

While Franklin and Roxbury Crossing parents worry constantly about their sons becoming enveloped in the neighborhood's dangers, Darnell's mother makes it a point to encourage him to interact with his neighborhood friends and can focus her parenting energy on other concerns.

The link between neighborhood identity and violence affects not only those actively involved in violence but also the boys who remain on the sidelines. Only a small proportion of Franklin and Roxbury Crossing youth defend territory from intrusion by others, confront youth from

other neighborhoods in neutral territories, or carry out the retribution and revenge that keep beefs going, and some boys “opt out” of neighborhood social life altogether (see also Furstenburg et al. 1999). Nonetheless, any boy who ventures outside his own neighborhood to go to school, a store, or downtown risks confrontation with youth from other neighborhoods. Most youth travel in groups to avoid being harassed when leaving their neighborhood. Even those Franklin and Roxbury Crossing youth who *never* start fights with youth from other neighborhoods are enveloped in the system of place-based antagonisms. Terrell was threatened with a gun when he visited a friend who lived near a rival housing development. The two developments had beef at the time, but Terrell was never involved until then.

Just from us living around here, sometimes it’s a safety issue... Because these people [from our development] get a lot of people riled up against them. So they want revenge in any way. And they don’t care if you hang with them or you don’t hang with them, as long as you live around here, you’re a target to certain people.

I was actually with one of my friends, and we were going to [a grocery store] in Jamaica Plain. We were walking up and some people asked me where I was from, so I told them. And then, they pulled out a hand gun on us... It had to be like three o’clock in the afternoon.

And it’s more than just trying to ignore it, you gotta watch your back too. You can’t just say, “Well yeah, I’m from around here, but I don’t mess with those guys [who are involved in neighborhood beefs].” They’re gonna say, “So what!”

Contrast Terrell’s experience with that of Delbert, 15 and from Lower Mills. Like his Franklin and Roxbury Crossing counterparts, Delbert tries to travel with a group when he leaves his neighborhood, even to take the train to go downtown, but because his Lower Mills neighborhood is outside the system of neighborhood beefs, his chances of victimization are far lower than Terrell’s:

I was on the T [the Boston subway] one day. I was coming from downtown, the movies... And I was sitting there and these three kids who were like 17 came over to me and was like, “Where are you going, where are you from, do you know the big gangs that are around there,” and questions like that and I answered no to all of them.

Int: And then they left you alone?

Yeah, cause I said no.

The youth who confronted Delbert were looking for people from certain neighborhoods and approached him because they suspected he was from one of them. As a resident of Lower Mills, he has no connection to the neighborhood conflicts that the youth on the train are trying to draw out, and so he was left alone. Neighborhood identity does not structure Delbert’s safety as it does for Terrell.

### Neighborhood Identities and Cross-Age Interactions

The consequences of neighborhood identities and defended territory for an adolescent boy’s freedom of movement are amplified by the small size of the neighborhood territories. Boston’s relatively small public housing developments, usually not more than several hundred families and covering only a few blocks, are natural organizing units. Other natural geographic areas are large private or co-op housing developments. However, many of the geographic areas are single streets one to three blocks long, and sometimes parallel streets have longstanding beefs.

Terrell’s experience illustrates how simply being associated with a particular neighborhood enmeshed in ongoing beefs can limit one’s freedom of movement. Many adolescents in Franklin and Roxbury Crossing adopt the survival strategy of remaining in their home

neighborhood as much as possible, geographically constricted as it may be, and avoiding interaction with males from other neighborhoods.<sup>5</sup> Simon, a 16-year-old Franklin resident who has experienced many altercations with adolescents from other neighborhoods, now rarely leaves his neighborhood. He explains how leaving can easily lead to a violent confrontation if he is not with a group of friends:

I don't feel safe at all. Well, probably a little bit, like in my neighborhood, it's all right. But other places? Noooo, I don't really go out of my area that much because I know people, just from looks, get murdered... Because you're like an alien, you're not known over there. So the first thing you do when you walk through there, all eyes is on you... "Where you from?"... If they got problems with that area... They just see you over there, and knowing you're not from over there, and they just set it off with you right there... It happens to me a lot of times... The best thing to do, if you're not with people you know, you have to be at the [local community center], because that's the most safest thing. That's about it if you're not with a lump sum [large group] of people.

This strategy leaves only those who live in one's neighborhood as potential friends. Since the social space in question is quite small, same age peers are often not abundant, and older peers often fill the gap. Marcus, age 16, described how lack of same-age peers in his development led him to socialize with the "older guys" who are a fixture of the streets. These older guys dispense advice to Marcus and his friends.

[My two friends and I] are the three younger individuals that live around here, so we're forced to be around nothing but older guys... We're put around older guys that done been through it, that tell you what to do, and what not to do, and how to do it, and when to do it, and when it's appropriate to confront somebody, or that you've got a problem with...

We just hang out, talk about things that done happened -- laugh, joke with each other. One person might be fixing on their car; one person might be fixing on their bike, listening to music, and we all just go gather around there, and just talk... Maybe the older guys might be sitting down, and drinking beer and playing cards, and everybody just gather around.

The scene Marcus describes is frequently visible to any observer who spends time in the neighborhoods of Franklin and Roxbury Crossing. Hanging out in a mixed age group (with older individuals at the center), usually on the basketball court, a stoop, or the corner, older adolescents and young adults recount their experiences and dispense general advice.

Previous ethnographic work has described the extensive use of public space in poor neighborhoods, owing to overcrowded apartments and lack of air conditioning in the summer and leading to "street interaction and informal meetings" (Horowitz 1983: 39). Similarly, for adolescent males in Franklin and Roxbury Crossing, parks and corners are a venue for cross-age interaction. Joseph, age 15 and from Franklin, spends most of his non-school time at the neighborhood basketball court and nearby athletic fields, where he encounters individuals of every age, some older and some younger.

I know little kids and older, like adults, like in their 20s or so. Teenagers my age. I know most everyone on that court. And we all just play with them. And now we play with our own age and stuff like that. So it carries on through the ages, like a legacy.

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<sup>5</sup>Cobbina et al. (2008) also note that adolescents in high violence areas view their immediate neighborhood as safe and stay close to home as a safety strategy.

For Joseph, the neighborhood's public spaces are where the "legacy" is passed down to him from the older generations, and where he will pass it on to the younger boys he encounters as well. Limited from venturing outside their local area by violence, boys like Joseph come into frequent contact with older males in these settings, and these males become part of their social networks, not necessarily as friends but as acquaintances.

The streets and parks of Lower Mills neighborhoods present a stark contrast. Compared to Franklin and Roxbury Crossing, the regular observer of Lower Mills will witness far less activity in the neighborhood's public spaces. Greater family economic resources mean more youth participate in formal programs after school and on the weekends or have the pocket money to venture outside the neighborhood to the movies or the arcade. For those without such resources, there are simply fewer others of any age hanging around the neighborhood. When the youth of Lower Mills do associate with older peers, their interactions are more often family-based and take on a different character. When age inappropriate discussions or activities arise - for example, those about romantic relationships, sex, or drug or alcohol use - younger adolescents are pushed away. Delbert explains his experiences with older neighborhood peers:

Int: You said the older youths would be your brother and his friends?

Yeah. His friends about like a range of seventeen, eighteen, and nineteen. Some of them are twenty... They don't let us hang out with them. And then if we try hangin' out with them, they'll say get out of here.

Int: Why?

Because they don't want us to do bad things. They want us to live our own lives and not copy what they do and to be ourselves.

Int: What kind of bad things might you be doing?

Smoking [marijuana] probably.

Int: And why would you want to hang out with them?

Cause they're older and they're more experienced and some of them... [pause], but most of them look like they're going in the right direction.

Just as importantly, the working and lower-middle class neighborhoods of Lower Mills have fewer idle young men and older adolescents of working age with whom younger adolescents might pass the time.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, Tyree, now age 17, described the characteristics and behaviors of the older peers in the Roxbury Crossing neighborhood where he grew up:

I'd say they were like 16 to like 22. They was basically not going to school, selling drugs, shooting guns, and really basically doing all the negatives. Like they would rather sell drugs than go job hunting... They rather stand outside on the corner all day than make sure their little brothers and sisters is getting off to the school bus.

It seems like the older you get the worsen it gets. Like if you're living in the neighborhood, if you started off young, the older you get, the harder it is to leave the neighborhood because you feel that's where you're from and that's what you got to, you got to hold the neighborhood down.

As a younger teen, Tyree did not see those older peers who were working or in school, since they were not hanging around in the streets. As a result, the older males who were actually present seemed more and more disadvantaged as they got older. He began to see himself

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<sup>6</sup>See the Online Supplement.

becoming more like them as he spent time with them and became involved in neighborhood rivalries, what he calls “holding down” the neighborhood.

While it is clear why younger adolescent boys would gravitate toward the available older adolescents and young adults for both status and - as discussed below - for protection, why do older adolescent males and young adults in Franklin and Roxbury Crossing attend to younger teens? They see it as their duty to look out for the younger adolescents and children in the neighborhoods with which they so strongly identify, similar to the “fictive kin” relationships Stack (1974) describes. They have learned this behavior from adults and from those youth who have come before. They also see this guardian and friendship behavior as a way to keep the neighborhood safer, to keep the peace and prevent the “drama” that conflicts can create. David, a 17-year-old from Franklin, describes how he watches over younger adolescents as part of his role as a community member. Others who came before looked out for him, and the youth he looks out for will grow up to do the same.

If I look after somebody, then, they can probably grow up and look after somebody else - *that's basically what makes it a community* - everybody looking after somebody. So, if something happens in your neighborhood you can like stop it before it gets worsen. Like somebody selling drugs, shooting. Before those folks moved in, there was none of that stuff going down, we could pinpoint it right now - like take that out of here. And, basically, just watch out for your kids.

Note that David refers to this as watching out for “your kids,” indicating his identification with the neighborhood as a locus of cross-age ties. Yet caring for younger children and adolescents extends beyond simply keeping the peace. Older adolescents recount with pride how they help the younger ones by giving them a dollar when the ice cream truck arrives or they want a snack from the corner store. As Stack (1974) and Newman (1999) have described, those who have money or other resources are obliged to share it with others in the community, reciprocity norms that extend to adolescents as well. For Marcus, relationships with younger adolescents have a particularly kin-like motivation: the lack of fathers among neighborhood youth.

Some kids don't know who their father is... I never had a big brother, so I never had an older brother to look up to, to throw a football around with, because me and my father never really did that... So, when a younger guy comes and asks me to play ball, I'll be happy to play with him, because I want him to feel like he has an older person to hang out with.

Int: So what are some of the things that you try to impart on the younger kids?

Just like the older guys tell me. I tell the little dudes that are maybe 13, 12, “Don't hang out in one spot for too long, because that's going to make it look bad on you, and then it's going to make it look bad on us, because now they [the police] think that we have you out here doin' stuff, so now they're goin' to think that we're trying to start up something.”

As Marcus's account suggests, an older adolescent's interactions with younger adolescents are about more than a simple altruistic notion of community and collective responsibility. By taking responsibility for their juniors, older peers are gaining the status that comes with such roles. Whether it is providing a dollar for the ice cream truck, offering instruction on how to shoot a basketball, giving a lesson on avoiding police harassment, or sharing knowledge about romantic relationships, Marcus gains the respect of the neighborhood kids and that of others his age who play the same role. Though the focus of this paper is on the potential negative - and often unintended - consequences of cross-cohort socialization, these accounts illustrate that cross-age interactions are often altruistically motivated and serve constructive functions as well.

### Older Peers as a Protection Strategy

Despite the power of neighborhood identities and conflicts to limit the mobility and social networks of adolescent males in Roxbury Crossing and Franklin, boys must leave the neighborhood sometimes, at least for school. In addition, though cross-neighborhood beefs are a key part of youth violence in Boston, there is still conflict among youth from the same neighborhood. For both these reasons, adolescent males in Franklin and Roxbury Crossing must develop protection strategies. As discussed above and in prior research, these strategies include traveling in groups, staying close to home, avoiding particular people, locations and activities that might increase one's risk of victimization, and developing a reputation as a tough fighter, and many youth employ multiple strategies (Cobbina et al. 2008, Jones 2004, Anderson 1999). Still other youth decide to withdraw from neighborhood social life entirely (Furstenburg et al. 1999), as several of the Roxbury Crossing and Franklin subjects did.

Another strategy, one that has not been previously discussed, involves relationships with older peers who can provide security both through direct intervention and through reputational status. An example of older peers providing a measure of protection comes from Chris, 14, whose Franklin housing development has on ongoing beef with a nearby rival development. As Chris explains, "the drama" began again at a party.

Me and my boys bagged these Franklin Field girls [got their phone numbers], and the guys from Franklin Field got mad. So they brought it [the fight] to us. We beat them up a little bit. Then the older mens came, then we got our older mens, so that it looked like a go. But then the girls called us like, "We don't want drama." So I was like, forget it.

However, as Chris made his way home, he was jumped by Franklin Field youth riding in a car driven by one of the "older mens." They were looking to win back some pride for their neighborhood. As his mother confirmed, Chris was beaten fairly badly but suffered no serious injuries. As the cross-neighborhood conflict escalated, Chris and his friends secured the help of some older adolescents and young adults (the "older mens") from his development. This show of force seemed to halt the conflict.

Then they [the youth from Franklin Field] started riding through here [Franklin Hill]. So me and my little niggas told our older niggas, and then they got involved. Once they got involved, they [Franklin Field] didn't want it. Our OG's [original gangstas], they didn't even get involved. There was just me and the older niggas. It was just a couple of niggas from up here [Franklin Hill], and they [Franklin Field] couldn't handle it... Because if the whole [Franklin Hill] team came together, it would have been a problem.

Three sets of actors of different age and experience populate Chris' account. "Little mens" (or "little niggas") are neighborhood teenagers Chris' age (about 13 to 16). "Older mens" are in their late teens or twenties and, as veterans of previous "beefs," have honed their reputations based on past deeds. Currently, they may be hustling or dealing drugs or working, but they are usually a common presence on the streets. "OG's," or "original gangsters," are in their 30's and 40's, survivors of the worst days of violence in Boston. OG's grew up in the neighborhood and were leaders in their day. Their places at the top of the social hierarchy are cemented by their sometimes legendary reputations, but their daily connections to the neighborhood are often weak, as many have moved away from "the street life." Chris' account again illustrates the complexity of social interactions with older peers. While the older peers play a role in cross-neighborhood conflict, in this case they also helped to contain it.

James (14 and from Roxbury Crossing) provides another example of relationships with older youth providing protection in a violent neighborhood.

I know mostly everyone cause I've grown up with everyone. So kids who are 11 and I was 7 and 8, I was probably outside playing basketball with, or they seen me. So now they're probably about 16, 17... The kids who was doing bad things, I know most of them. So I wouldn't feel bad walking down the street cause they probably wouldn't mess with me... I know most of them with a good relationship; I could talk to them and hold a conversation, but that's about it... If somebody was like trying to jump me or do something stupid, they'd probably come in and stop it.

In addition to direct intervention, an association with older friends can also provide status and respect, and the respect that older friends provide translates into protection. When others know that a boy has older friends, that alone is often enough to make them think twice about "messing with" him (see Jones 2004:55 for a similar example among adolescent girls). Miguel, 16 and from Roxbury Crossing, describes his relationships with older youth and their benefits:

Most of my friends are a lot older than me. Probably like, maybe 20.

Int: How did you get to know them?

Hanging out, like in the summer time we go out, we just sit down on the steps and chill, we talk and stuff like that. People playing baseball, they just tend to come over and they start playing and you just get to know them.

Int: So why would someone who's younger want to be friends with people who are older?

A lot more people will respect the younger person. They wouldn't mess with him because he has a lot of older friends.

Miguel's interactions with older youth, which started when he moved to the housing development at age 13 and began hanging out with them on the stoop and on the ball field, earn him respect from others. In Miguel's view, the respect that these relationships provide can serve to protect him. When retaliation from older youth may be forthcoming, adolescents may be less likely to start a fight.

I have emphasized the importance of neighborhood violence in understanding the greater cross-age social interaction in Roxbury Crossing and Franklin compared to Lower Mills. However, one might imagine that family connections are an alternative explanation. Lareau (2003) has argued that among lower class families there is considerable interaction with extended family members. While the data from this study are consistent with this description of such families, when adolescents in Roxbury Crossing and Franklin described their interactions with older peers, they were not typically facilitated by family connections. Nor was there a difference between adolescents with large extended families and those without such families.

## Implications for Socialization

I have argued that both the level and organization of violence in Franklin and Roxbury Crossing increase adolescent boys' interactions and relationships with older adolescents and young adults. I now discuss the potential implications of these interactions for socialization. The strategies that the boys of Roxbury Crossing and Franklin use to deal with violence and victimization can have unintended consequences. While relationships with older peers provide some protection, they also expose these boys to local "alternative" or "ghetto specific" (Wilson 1996) cultural models that influence their behavior and decision-making in other domains, such as romantic relationships or schooling. By contrast, Lower Mills boys tend to have more age homogenous friendship groups. Their peer networks are more similar to those of middle class children in the bureaucratized and age-graded social settings described by Lareau (2003). As a result, older peers play a smaller role in the socialization of Lower Mills boys.



The potential consequences of interactions with older peers depend on their characteristics. Not every older adolescent or every young adult male in the neighborhood sells drugs, impregnates multiple partners, or drops out of school. But those who might serve as more positive role models are not as visible because they spend more time outside the neighborhood, either working or in school. The older peers who are available and visible in Roxbury Crossing and Franklin and who can provide some measure of protection are seldom positive role models, though not for lack of good intentions. Marcus, who tries to be an older brother figure to the boys in his neighborhood, is an occasional drug dealer, frequently skips school, and at 16 already has two young women who claim they are pregnant by him.

Eduardo, now 17, recalled how at age 12 older friends in the neighborhood introduced him to drinking, marijuana, and stealing cars. At about the same time, he became considerably less interested in school.

I turned 13 in fall of '99. That summer of 2000, that's when everything went downhill. By the time eighth grade came around, I went to school for maybe about a week.

Int: Why do you think you weren't interested in school?

The peers around me. Smoking [marijuana], drinking. We were always around girls. Those type of things. Stealing cars. Selling car parts... The so-called friends around me, they knew how to steal cars. I just got into it. At first, I just started breaking car windows, then I learned how to steal a car...

I considered them my age. Now, that I look back at it, though, they weren't my age, but when I thought about it [at the time], they were my age... 'Cause my whole life I grew up around people a lot older than me, and that affected me a lot... The other guys that were 14 or 15 were still acting younger. At 12, I was into girls. I was into partying... I was around older guys... I just ended up acting mature. The other 12-year-olds, they were thinking about, mommy, buy me some sneakers. At 12-years-old, I was thinking how to get 'em myself.

Eduardo imitated the behavior of older friends with whom he was spending time, but older friends and acquaintances can also have more subtle influences on younger adolescents through their cultural power to frame and contextualize daily life in the neighborhood and beyond. Through both their words and their deeds, they expose younger adolescents to and reinforce cultural models that often differ from those privileged in middle class culture. The older adolescent males and young adults who are respected in Roxbury Crossing and Franklin because of their mastery of the streets regularly dispense advice about girls, school, and staying out of trouble. The guidance comes in the form of general statements that can be interpreted and applied to future situations or from recounting experiences and interpretations of daily life.

Such general statements have little impact when they come from teachers or parents. But older males, especially those with status that has been earned on the streets, command the attention of their younger counterparts because they have "been through" experiences similar to those their younger counterparts will soon face (see Young [2007] on the similar appeal of "redeemed" old heads). By virtue of their reputations for toughness, their exploits in previous conflicts, and often their resources from the underground economy, these young adults sit atop a status system that defines masculinity and confers great cultural power, particularly in the eyes of adolescent boys (Anderson 1999).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>One possible unintended consequence of interactions with older peers is that they may actually increase a boy's risk of victimization, as spending unstructured time with delinquent peers has the potential to expose boys to violent situations (Osgood et al. 1996), though the boys in this study did not seem to recognize this risk. In addition, the level of interaction with older peers described here may not rise to the level required to increase this risk, as most of the interactions occur with the relatively safe confines of the neighborhood.

A full account of the types of messages that the boys of Roxbury Crossing and Franklin receive from their older male peers is beyond the scope of this paper, but here I briefly summarize an example of how interactions with older peers structure boys' thinking in one seemingly unrelated domain, romantic relationships. For adolescent boys beginning to explore sexual and romantic relationships, the stories and views of older peers play a role in structuring frames and expectations regarding girls and girlfriends by defining the categories boys use to understand girls. These include "good girls" who are interested in real relationships and focus on school, "stunts" who are just after sex and may transmit an infection, and "golddiggers" who are just after a man's money and may trick a boy into fathering a child. As a result, Roxbury Crossing and Franklin boys tend to approach potential girlfriends with hesitation, expecting them to try to take advantage of the relationship in some way. In contrast, these distinctions are far less salient for Lower Mills boys, and they approach relationships with more positive expectations, expecting most girls to be "good girls." The gender distrust that is created and legitimized in part by interactions with older peers in Roxbury Crossing and Franklin has the potential to affect relationship behavior and contraceptive practices among the boys from these areas (Harding, forthcoming).

## Conclusion

Theoretical perspectives on neighborhood effects such as social isolation theory assume that the neighborhood context serves as a source of socialization for youth. Through differential exposure to behavioral models or cultural ideas, disadvantaged neighborhoods are thought to influence how young people make decisions in domains such as schooling and romantic relationships. Yet the empirical literature has largely failed to identify and describe the sources and processes underlying such cultural transmission, especially given recent research showing strong support for conventional cultural ideals among poor parents, community leaders, and other residents of poor neighborhoods. Understanding cultural transmission processes in poor neighborhoods requires understanding with whom adolescents in such neighborhoods are interacting (compared to those in more advantaged neighborhoods), why those interactions occur, and their socialization consequences. Based on fieldwork with adolescent boys in three areas of Boston, this paper has proposed that disadvantaged older males are an important source of socialization for boys in poor neighborhoods, thereby identifying one potential pathway for neighborhood socialization.

The NELS data indicate that adolescents in disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely to spend time with older individuals. A similar association is evident in the qualitative data, and the remainder of the analysis draws on these data to understand its causes and consequences. Greater interaction with older peers among boys in Roxbury Crossing and Franklin is in large part a product of the level and organization of violence in these neighborhoods. When victimization is based on neighborhood identity, the salience of such identities is magnified. Venturing outside one's neighborhood carries risk of challenge, and youth from other neighborhoods are potential enemies rather than potential friends. The neighborhood is one of the only spaces where a young man feels safe from challenge from youth from rival neighborhoods, regardless of whether he is actively involved in neighborhood beefs. The result is a restricted set of possible friends, and older peers become a more attractive choice. Spending more time in the immediate neighborhood also increases boys' exposure to interactions with older neighborhood peers. Older peers become a source of protection, both through reputation and their capacity to intervene. In contrast, for the boys of Lower Mills, victimization is much less of a threat, and these coping strategies are largely unnecessary.

These strategies may have unintended consequences in other domains. Attachments to and interactions with older peers, however beneficial for safety and status, have the potential to expose younger adolescent males to - and reinforce the legitimacy of - local frameworks

regarding not only violence but also other domains, such as romantic relationships. Because those older peers who are available in Franklin and Roxbury Crossing often present models at odds with mainstream society, these interactions can influence the frames and strategies that boys bring to their decision-making regarding in other domains. The messages offered by the older peers are complex and at times consistent with mainstream notions of responsibility, safe sex, or the importance of schooling. Nevertheless, the cross-cohort socialization processes described here explain how adolescent boys encounter - and take seriously - local cultural models that can be at odds with mainstream models held by adults in their communities or presented in the media or at school. In terms of cultural repertoires (Swidler 1986), this suggests that the repertoire elements selected for activation depend on social networks and patterns of association.

The fieldwork on which this analysis is based is limited to adolescent boys, so it is not clear whether girls experience neighborhood violence similarly. Boys have higher rates of participation in violence, so they may be more affected by cross-neighborhood conflicts. Furthermore, conceptions of masculinity drive responses to both individual and neighborhood-based challenges (Anderson 1999), and boys with absent fathers may be more susceptible to the influences of older male peers. Though gender differences in violence seem to be declining, as recent ethnographic research has documented violent behavior among girls in inner city neighborhoods, there is disagreement over the existence of gender differences in strategies for dealing with violence (Ness 2004, Jones 2004, Cobbina et al. 2008). Moreover, some evidence suggests that violence among girls takes place more frequently in and around schools (Jones 2004, Cobbina et al. 2008).

In addition, the fieldwork and analysis focus on the experiences of urban African-American and Latino boys in primarily African-American neighborhoods in Boston, so it is not clear whether the cultural transmission processes described here operate in other neighborhoods or among youth from other racial/ethnic groups. Since the research design prioritizes cross-neighborhood comparisons, differences within neighborhoods by race/ethnicity are also outside the scope of this study.

Moreover, it is possible that two features of Boston neighborhoods give rise to the structure of neighborhood based conflicts and the small sizes of neighborhoods described here: the relatively small size of Boston's public housing developments compared to those in mid-western cities such as Chicago and the city-wide attendance areas for Boston high schools. In addition, compared to cities like Chicago or Los Angeles, Boston has relatively little history of race-based gang conflict or prominent "corporate gangs" that control territory across large geographic areas. Only through further research can potential differences and similarities by gender, race, urbanicity, and neighborhood be investigated and the generalizability of the findings assessed. Finally, while this study has focused on one particular strategy boys use to cope with violence and described its consequences, other strategies are also available and many boys employ multiple strategies. Future research should investigate how boys choose strategies and what explains this variation within neighborhoods.

This study elaborates some of the processes by which social isolation and social organization may account for neighborhood effects on adolescents. Social isolation theory must specify how local cultural models regarding education, work, and relationships are transmitted within the neighborhood. This paper proposes one cultural conduit: cross-age interactions between younger adolescents and older peers on the street. With respect to social organization theory, this paper shows how the failure of a community to control violence can have spillover effects in other domains through the impact of violence on the age-structure of peer networks.

Another possible implication of these arguments is that older peers may play a role in other cross-generational processes, independent of the family-based intergenerational transmission processes that have been the focus of much stratification research. Suttles (1968) and Horowitz (1983) highlight the age segmentation of street corner groups in inner city neighborhoods. The argument here, while recognizing some degree of age segmentation, emphasizes that disadvantaged neighborhoods, *in comparison to more advantaged ones*, have more cross-age social interaction. Such cross-age interactions may account for the transmission of other social phenomenon, such as norms about violence or frames regarding schooling.

More generally, these arguments suggest that violence is a critical characteristic of poor neighborhoods, structuring the daily lives and social networks of adolescents. Considerable research has examined the relationship between neighborhood disadvantage and crime and disorder (e.g. Sampson et al. 1997, Sampson and Raudenbush 1999, Sampson and Groves 1989), and psychologists have focused on the cognitive and developmental effects of exposure to violence (Moglin and Gordis 2000, Aneshensel and Sucoff 1996). However, few prior studies have examined the social effects of neighborhood violence. This paper links violence, older peers, and socialization, suggesting that neighborhood violence plays a role in the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage.

## Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

## Acknowledgments

Funding for this research was provided by the National Science Foundation (SES-0326727), The William T. Grant Foundation, the American Educational Research Association/Institute of Education Sciences, the MacArthur Foundation Network on Inequality and Economic Performance, and by the Harvard Multidisciplinary Program on Inequality and Social Policy, which is funded by an NSF Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship grant. An NICHD Post-Doctoral Fellowship at the Population Studies Center at the University of Michigan provided additional support. Katherine Newman, Christopher Winship, Robert Sampson, Christopher Jencks, Jeff Morenoff, Al Young, Jr., Renee Anspach, Andrew Clarkwest, Brian Goesling, the ASR editors and reviewers, and audiences at the CUNY Graduate Center, Temple University, Harvard University, UCLA, UC-Berkeley, University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin, Cornell University, New York University, and the University of Chicago provided helpful comments on previous versions of this paper. Shutsu Chai, Johnathan Smith, and Stephen Rose provided excellent research assistance during the fieldwork, and Shutsu Chai, Stephen Rose, Kai Jenkins, Lauren Galarza, Aghogho Edevbie, and Meaghan Cotter worked tirelessly to code the data. I thank Anthony Braga of Harvard University and Carl Walter of the Boston Police Department's Boston Regional Intelligence Center for providing the incident data presented in Table 2.

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**Table 1**

Percent of NELS Respondents From Urban Areas Reporting That They Spend Most of Their Time With People Who Are Older (but under age 26) at First Follow-up (10<sup>th</sup> grade)

<i>Zip Code Disadvantage Quintile</i>	<i>All Adolescents (n = 9,291)</i>	<i>Male Adolescents (n = 4,514)</i>	<i>Female Adolescents (n = 4,757)</i>
1st (least)	48.5%	42.8%	55.0%
2 <sup>nd</sup>	53.1%	44.6%	60.8%
3 <sup>rd</sup>	57.0%	52.6%	60.6%
4 <sup>th</sup>	58.4%	50.8%	65.5%
5 <sup>th</sup> (most)	64.5%	55.6%	71.5%
All	55.9%	48.5%	62.5%

Source: NELS:88 Base Year (1988) and First Follow-up (1990)

Estimates adjust for the NELS sampling design & weights

Zip Code differences statistically significant at 0.01 level in each column

Violent Crime Counts and Rates per 1,000 residents by Study Area and for City of Boston as a whole

**Table 2**

	Franklin		Roxbury Crossing		Lower Mills		City of Boston	
	2003	2004	2003	2004	2003	2004	2003	2004
Homicide	4 0.34	8 0.67	1 0.16	0	0	3 0.31	39 0.07	61 0.10
Robbery	76 6.39	68 5.71	48 7.78	46 7.46	26 2.72	23 2.40	2759 4.68	2433 4.13
Aggravated Assault	171 14.37	157 13.19	83 13.46	90 14.60	58 6.06	44 4.60	4113 6.98	4151 7.05

Source: Author's calculations from incident data provided by Boston Police Department  
Denominator for rates is 2000 Census total population