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## Violence Prevention and Targeting the Elusive Gang Member

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Who do violence preventers target to achieve violence prevention? This fundamental question of selection is typically associated with law enforcement, yet gang labeling is critical in another context: nonprofit violence prevention. Eighteen months of fieldwork in a gang outreach organization find that (a) workers operationalize gang violence prevention as social service provision, but (b) services are only offered to those deemed “ready” for life changes. Readiness is an unwritten eligibility criteria leveraged as a rhetorical tool to focus recruitment on clients who demonstrate complicity. It is reaffirmed through external pressures to document program effectiveness; organizational-level concerns for efficient resource allocation; the subpopulation of clients who actually want services; and workers’ own fears of “getting played”—losing face from free-riding clients interested in street worker perks, but not formal services. While core gang members may be most at-risk, their very centrality may deter, rather than justify, providing them services.

Who do violence preventers target to achieve violence prevention? This unyieldingly practical question is one of selection—targeting individuals most likely to start or participate in violence in the first place. Targeting gang members is typically associated with the law enforcement domain, where defining gang membership has significant legal consequences in states like California where gang ties earn enhanced penalties (Klein 1996). The traditional police approach to gang violence often centers on suppression: gang sweeps, hotspot policing, saturation patrols, and exclusionary zones (Tita and Papachristos 2010: 31). Rather than low-level members, law enforcement often views leaders, key players, or those most active in high-profile activities like drug dealing or shootings as key to dismantling the organization (Vargas 2014).

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But identifying gang membership is also critical in another context: within the sphere of social service organizations. Defining gang membership in this realm does not elicit enhanced penalties, but rather enhanced services. These social services can range from boxing lessons to more formal programs like drug treatment. Given increased privatization of government services to third parties and the devolution of policy decisions down to states and municipalities, community-based organizations are increasingly the primary deliverers of basic social services (Marwell 2004). Thus the decision-making practices of employees working in nonprofits are critical, especially when the stakes involve community violence.

Whether referred to as street outreach workers (SOW), detached workers, or curbstone counselors, gang outreach organizations beginning in the 1930s with the Chicago Area Project promote changing social norms around violence by promising services rather than threatening punishment (Klein 1971; Kobrin 1959; Short and Strodbeck 1965; Spergel 2007).

The history of gang outreach is both long and mixed (see Tita and Papachristos 2010 for a review), but it has resurfaced as an alternative or supplement to heavy-handed law enforcement strategies following SOWs' contributions to the Boston Gun Project (Braga et al. 2001; Kennedy et al. 1997) and even more so, Chicago's Cure Violence model<sup>1</sup> (Skogan et al. 2008). Cure Violence practices a public-health approach to violence reduction where credible messengers, especially former gang members, treat the transmission of violence by targeting the attitudes and behaviors of high-risk offenders (Butts et al. 2015). Cure Violence stresses prevention by identifying those most at-risk for violence.<sup>2</sup> In 2009, Attorney General Eric Holder revealed a lesson learned from Chicago Cure Violence's evaluation: "We learned that targeting a small, high-risk population can have significant, broader benefits" (Holder 2009; see also Melde et al. 2011: 279). The Department of Justice has made gang intervention a primary focus, and with local municipalities across the United States, endorses the street outreach worker model as one key to a

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<sup>1</sup> After starting in Chicago in 2000, Cure Violence spread to more than 50 domestic cities and 13 international sites (Cure Violence, "Community Partners," <http://cureviolence.org/partners/> [accessed 24 December 2015]). Funders range from the Illinois Department of Corrections to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (Cure Violence, "Funding Partners," <http://cureviolence.org/partners/supporters/> [accessed 24 December 2015]).

<sup>2</sup> Cure Violence defines "high-risk of violence" as individuals who meet four of the following seven criteria: (a) gang-involved, (b) major player in a drug or street organization, (c) violent criminal history, (d) recent incarceration, (e) reputation of carrying a gun, (f) recent victim of a shooting, and (g) being between 16 and 25 years of age (Butts et al. 2015: 14.2–14.3).

comprehensive violence reduction strategy (U.S. Conference of Mayors 2006; U.S. Department of Justice 2010).

Yet, the intuitive appeal and political popularity of Cure Violence and programs like it are incongruent with our understanding of how outreach workers actually do their jobs. First, quantitative program evaluations, which are often better suited to measuring outcomes rather than implementation processes, have yielded mixed results at best (e.g., Chicago, Baltimore, and Brooklyn) and negative at worst with increased shootings and forms of violence (e.g., Phoenix and Pittsburgh) (see Butts et al. 2015 for a review). Second, beyond Cure Violence and in virtually all gang violence prevention programs, including the one studied here, the model explicitly targets shooters, leaders, or the most active members. This has been the precise goal of the Ladin Hills Project (Klein 1971: 259), Little Village Project (Spergel 2007: 48), and interventions pairing social network analysis and law enforcement (Kennedy et al. 1997). Yet when operationalized, who is considered “most active” is ultimately a negotiated, boundary-making process that implicitly or explicitly weighs organizational realities and pressures for programmatic success.

Outreach workers provide social services to prevent violence, but not every gang member is offered them. Drawing on 1.5 years of ethnographic fieldwork triangulating 1,260 street worker daily reports, 68 roll call meetings, and interviews with each staff member, this case study of Bridgeport, Connecticut examines how one group of SOWs comply with organizational aims of reducing violence by defining, selecting, and targeting only specific gang members: those deemed ready to change their lives. Beyond typical qualifications such as age and residence, this binary classification scheme of readiness is effectively an additional prerequisite for services. It is rhetorically rationalized as a tool to winnow the large pool of potential clients by focusing on those who demonstrate complicity to SOWs and program protocol. Readiness is reaffirmed not simply by scarce resources, but by looming affirmative demands placed on SOWs by external funders, program supervisors, resistant clients, and SOWs’ own fears of “getting played”—or losing face from free-riding youth interested in the perks of SOW relationships (e.g., free meals or gym membership), but who never intend to commit to program protocols. In doing so, SOWs selectively overlook core group members—those most embedded within the gang network and its activities—to target “wannabes,” or fringe members most likely ready and compliant. Core gang members may be most at-risk of violence and in need of services, yet their very centrality may be why they have yet to receive them. These findings reveal that nonprofits often gate keep, rather than universally provide, social

services. While alternatives to law enforcement promise a more community-oriented strategy that can relieve overburdened police departments, even these progressive approaches require investigation into whose violence prevention is prioritized and how.

## **Decisionmaking Among Social Control Actors**

### **Defining Organizational Compliance and Commanding Compliance from Clients**

One-way frontline workers determine whether their actions comply with workplace expectations is by apprehending what is considered failure. Social control actors often make work-related decisions to avoid mistakes, challenges to their authority, and other trouble (Emerson and Messinger 1977). Medical examiners, for instance, underreport suicides in part because false negatives do not challenge their authority as false positives do (Timmermans 2005). Immigration inspectors similarly err on the side of admitting travelers into the country rather than flagging them for secondary review (Gilboy 1991). Inspectors' judgments would be called into question more by flagging a string of admissible cases than by admitting an unacceptable passenger since most are nonthreatening anyways. Beyond a mere question of allocating scarce resources, workers practice a "tactical balancing" of heterogeneous demands, incentives, and pressures from multiple organizational levels (Kapiszewski 2011).

Thus in both the public and private sectors, workplace opportunities for decisionmaking are extensive and discretion is subsequently pervasive (Lipsky 1980). Workers categorize, simplify, and make sense of assigned tasks as they operationalize abstract policies into concrete actions. Such strategies have been broadly referred to as "law in action" (Pound 1910); "coping mechanisms" (Lipsky 1980: 19), the "applicant-oriented" approach (Zimmerman 1969: 238), "citizen-agent narrative" (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003: 9), and the "endogenous" definition of compliance to rules (Edelman 1992; Edelman, Uggen, and Erlanger 1999). Human resource managers, for instance, proactively "invented" equal opportunity and diversity programs in response to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Dobbin 2009).

Simultaneously, how employees define the content of their compliance to vague organizational policies both forms, and is informed by, the expectations and interactions with clients. Several have argued that workers' typification of clients persists because prior knowledge shapes decisionmaking (Emerson 1983; Zimmerman 1969). Based on accumulated knowledge of other

cases either firsthand (Gilboy 1991) or through integration into office culture (Heumann 1978), workers approach cases not as discrete units, but with reference to larger organizational needs.

### **Gang Member as Client**

When clients are gang members, unique challenges underlie interactions. First, the target population of gang members is not easily circumscribed or defined. Whereas health care enrollment is a binary status (see Vargas 2016), gang membership is more fluid and classification is negotiated (Spergel 2007: 49). In past violence prevention programs, especially in large cities with more established gang cultures like Los Angeles (Klein 1971) and Chicago (Spergel 2007), the unit of intervention was often the gang itself—workers were assigned particular gangs on which to focus. Yet after Klein (1971) found that group-level assignments could ironically preserve the group’s cohesion, programs sought to avoid group-centered activities. Chicago’s Little Village project initially focused on individual youths, but soon had to intervene at the group level “in recognition of the strength of the gang culture in Little Village” (Spergel 2007: 49). In Bridgeport, gangs are less stable, organized, and cohesive which has prompted a focus on “groups” or “cliques” defined more broadly, and intervention at the individual-level. In fact, gangs in most cities are like those in Bridgeport—not Chicago or Los Angeles which Klein (2011: 1039–1040) described as “simply not typical of the several thousand jurisdictions with gang problems gangs in most cities.” Thus, while the Little Village intervention focused exclusively on the Latin Kings and Two Six (Spergel 2007), the organization here focused on recruiting any violent-prone individuals and their friends.

Second, gang membership must not only be conceptually pinned down, but members who fit those criteria must be physically located. Unlike medical care providers in neonatal intensive care units (Heimer and Staffen 1995), high school teachers (Bowditch 1993), and most other service deliverers, SOWs must proactively find and recruit their clients. These gang-involved youths are not automatically referred, but instead hard-to-reach. Many programs have partnered with law enforcement to help pinpoint on whom specifically should workers focus. These partnerships boast a more comprehensive approach to gang violence reduction, and benefit from regular meetings with police officers, access to police data, and even social network analysis (Kennedy et al. 1997; Spergel 2007). Yet the outreach workers studied here maintained a calculated distance from official law enforcement collaboration given concerns that (a) they would lose credibility

from the community which harbors distrust toward law enforcement, and (b) police will expect a mutual or two-way sharing of information, which workers gathered through cultivated trusting relations with clients and if shared, may land their client in prison.<sup>3</sup>

A third challenge of having gang members as clients is that even once located, many are resistant, especially initially, to formal services. Unlike homeless people who engage in “client work” to persuade decision makers that they deserve services (Spencer 1994) or former prisoners who can leverage graduation of employment reentry programs to signal competency to potential employers (Bushway and Apel 2012), gang members are neither initiating contact nor lining up for assistance.<sup>4</sup> Yet fourth, SOWs cannot meet their clients’ resistance with formal, legal authority. SOWs’ lack of coercive power differs from criminal justice actors who, for instance, can exert social control over participants by threatening a permanent criminal record to mandate performances like court appearance (Feeley 1979; Kohler-Hausmann 2013). Whereas even drug rehabilitation counselors retain leverage over clients through a “coerced voluntarism” (Peyrot 1985), SOWs lack legal power backing efforts to provide services.

Together, the hard-to-reach, fluid, and resistant target population of gang members over whom SOWs lack a background enforcement mechanism coercing compliance shifts the focus of interactions toward relationship building and generating voluntary compliance. To build relationships, SOWs must engage in face-to-face exchanges with clients to achieve legitimacy (Huisig 2014; Vargas 2016). Moreover, how workers define the content of their compliance can have a dispositive effect on who ultimately becomes a client and consequently, the services rendered. These dynamics are exacerbated in the context of nonprofits where private or governmental grants are tied to external standards of effectiveness (Marwell 2004; see Meyer and Rowan 1977). These external standards often become “surrogate performance measures,” only crudely capturing the organization’s effectiveness in

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<sup>3</sup> However, Wilson and Chermak (2011: 1020) suggest that like in the Boston Gun Project, stronger law enforcement collaboration in Pittsburg’s gang outreach program may have improved program efficacy since police can deliver credible messages deterring gang violence.

<sup>4</sup> While Klein (1971) found that some gang members in Los Angeles ironically *sought* outreach worker assignments as a status symbol demonstrating the group’s toughness, this issue does not appear to affect the organization studied here for two reasons. First, again, the outreach workers studied here are not “assigned” to groups and mostly focus on individual clients. Second, for the reasons described below, workers strictly enforce program protocols to which clients must abide to continue receiving services.

achieving its mission (Lipsky 1980: 53). Thus rather than possessing intrinsic meaning, violence prevention can only be understood in the social context surrounding SOWs' dynamic interactions with the organization and clients, and the meanings, symbols, and logics that emerge therefrom (see Blumer 1969; Snow 2001). Violence prevention is a decision-making process whose content and implementation must be gleaned contextually, not generally. This paper begins to unpack what violence prevention means by asking: Who do violence preventers target to achieve violence prevention?

### **Empirical Strategy**

Ethnography is best suited to studying relational interactions and meaning-making processes. With few exceptions (Whitehill et al. 2013, 2014), most studies on Cure Violence-like programs quantitatively assess efficacy. Quantitative program evaluations, however, often treat program success as a trichotomous variable (yes, no, or mixed), and are less suited to examining how both program implementation and success are contemplated, negotiated, and contextually contingent. Thus rather than a quantitative evaluation, this ethnographic study seeks to understand a key process: how workers define compliance and select clients.

It does so by focusing on a gang outreach organization located in Bridgeport, Connecticut pseudonymously called Bullet-Free Bridgeport (BFB). BFB was launched in September 2013 following a year of particularly high gun violence where the medium-sized city saw 22 murders (15 per 100,000), 606 robberies (415 per 100,000), and 744 assaults (510 per 100,000). BFB's parent organization is Fairfield County Youth Project (FCYP), which has offered youth-centered services such as afterschool programs and leadership training since 1985. BFB is a subcontractor of the city and is funded by state-level youth violence prevention legislation. Conversation in the BFB field site is heavily dominated by the use of *in vivo* acronyms referring to the different positions that people occupy. Table 1 defines the "role-set" (Merton 1957) encountered in this scene.

BFB is not an official Cure Violence replication site, and thus its model contains both similarities and differences. Like Cure Violence, BFB stops the transmission of violence by: (a) directly interrupting retaliations by resolving street conflicts; (b) identifying and recruiting those most likely to shoot or be shot; and (c) changing community norms around the acceptability of violence (see Butts et al. 2015: 14.2). These key pillars form both Cure

**TABLE 1.** In Vivo Acronyms Used to Identify Role-Set

Acronym	Full Phrase	Role
FCYP	Fairfield County Youth Project	Umbrella or parent organization of several youth-oriented, nonprofits within Fairfield County, including Bullet-Free Bridgeport
BFB	Bullet-Free Bridgeport	Street outreach worker organization established in 2013 to reduce gang violence in Bridgeport, Connecticut.
SOW	Street Outreach Worker	BFB's frontline workers whose task is to recruit targeted youth, build relationships, and connect them to prosocial services and institutions.
PRI	Proven Risk Individual	Official BFB clients who meet eligibility criteria and have completed an intake with the Case Manager.
Pre-PRI	Preproven Risk Individual	Youth eligible and interested in BFB services, but have <i>not</i> completed an intake with the Case Manager.
MIA	Missing in Action	SOWs' terminology for pre-PRIs or PRIs who are no longer compliant with BFB procedures and/or with whom they have lost contact.

Violence and BFB's organizational ideology. Cure Violence employs two messengers: Violence Interrupters and Outreach Workers. While Violence Interrupters monitor and de-escalate immediate violence, Outreach Workers connect clients to employment, educational, and other social service opportunities. Given less funding, the novelty of a gang outreach program in Bridgeport, and less gang-related violence than in Chicago, BFB merged the responsibilities of Violence Interrupters and Outreach Workers into one position called SOW. However, SOWs are no less credible messengers. They are street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky 1980) who leverage their street savvy and social work training to connect with local gang-involved youth, build relationships, stop retaliatory exchanges of violence, and direct clients into prosocial services. SOWs are former offenders and either native to Bridgeport or long-time residents. By mentoring at-risk youth and becoming community leaders, SOWs can further cement their own reformation (see Flores 2013). In fact, many SOWs previously mentored youth informally through their mosque or in partnership with local schools.

While BFB coordinates some services "in-house," such as movie discussion nights or anger management workshops, most "proven-risk individuals" ("PRIs," or BFB's term for official clients) are referred to partnering organizations providing job training, drug counseling, and other services. BFB's administrators—particularly the SOW Supervisor and Case Manager—are charged with forming community-wide partnerships with local clergy, other social service agencies, and parents. This community coalition not only informs residents of BFB's mission and opens

client referral streams, but such conversations help “de-normalize” violence (Butts et al. 2015: 14.12).

Over the course of 18 months, I gained access into the organization in exchange for providing descriptive statistics of data SOWs recorded in Daily Reports (N = 1,260). Daily Reports summarized each client interaction including time and place of the meeting, type of activity, and a free-response description of the exchange. I was honest about my research intentions and status as a student. Because I started fieldwork in the first month of BFB’s operation, trust among workers developed organically as I was there from the beginning.

I also regularly attended roll calls (N = 68)—daily staff meetings where SOWs introduced and developed ideas; workers provided client updates and defended recruitment strategies; supervisors gave instructions; and staff reached consensus as often as disagreements. Given that “individual action cannot be understood apart from the social environment that gives meaning to that action” (Edelman 2004: 186), roll calls represent the primary social environment where workers made sense of what actions they should take. These meetings revealed the organization’s closed-door decision-making processes. While the supervisor at first wanted to keep roll calls to “team members only” to maximize SOW honesty, I earned open access to all roll calls after attending regularly. While SOWs were older and of different ethnic/racial background than me, they respected my academic goals as many already returned to, or wanted to return to, school. Informal conversations before roll call, helping SOWs fix cell-phones, and even participating in a summer weight loss challenge with the SOWs helped build rapport. And as a nonparticipating observer, I recorded direct quotes on my laptop.

Besides roll calls, each staff member also participated in semi-structured and informal interviews (N = 8, comprising four SOWs, one SOW Supervisor, and three administrators—Case Manager, Program Director, and FCYP Director). The first set of interviews covered life histories and personal backgrounds. The second set prompted SOWs to walk me through each step of the recruitment process with specific PRIs. My pre-existing relationship with SOWs facilitated honesty about their challenges and criticisms. As my relationship with SOWs strengthened, they volunteered driving me to the train station for my commute. I used this opportunity to candidly talk to individual SOWs about roll call reactions, the day’s plans, and specific client updates. I also accompanied SOWs to community events, client court dates, and other daily activities. Triangulation of these varied data sources facilitated systematic understanding of the multilevel social

environment and mechanisms facilitating SOW decision-making practices that translated policies into actions.

The remaining sections leverage this ethnographic data to first discuss how SOWs operationalize violence prevention as providing social services; second explain how SOWs activate this compliance strategy only for clients deemed ready; third how this particular compliance strategy focusing on client readiness is reinforced; and finally how this strategy translates into an affirmative selection mechanism targeting gang members at the group's fringe, rather than core.

### **Violence Prevention Compliance as Social Service Provision**

BFB is an organization created to prevent violence. SOWs operationalize this mission by recruiting, building relations with, and coordinating social services for gang members—a compliance strategy illustrated in Figure 1 (see subsequent section for a discussion on “MIA” status). SOWs structure their time around these three steps.<sup>5</sup>

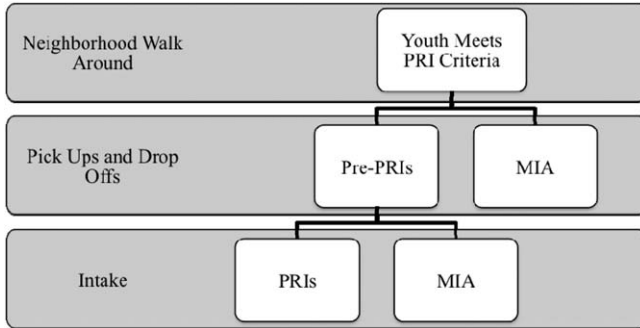
#### **Neighborhood Walk-Around: From Youth to Pre-PRI**

SOWs conduct daily “walk-arounds” in different Bridgeport neighborhoods to establish their presence and search for individuals who meet PRI criteria. To be eligible, a youth must be (1) between ages 14 and 24, (2) an official Bridgeport resident, (3) at-risk of getting shot or shooting, and (4) gang or group-involved. Wearing BFB-logoed gear, SOWs walk blocks, apartment complexes, and projects. They have multiple names for walk-arounds: patrol, tour, making rounds, hitting up areas, and showing ourselves. SOWs also approach mothers and business owners to expand community relations. They have passed out sandwiches, played basketball, and negotiated deals for free PRI haircuts. Through their persistence, SOWs believe that residents initially skeptical will eventually open up. One SOW wrote in his Daily Report: “A group of youths we always see around here are even beginning to speak now which is progress because at first they use to walk away when they would see us coming” (SOW Daily Report, 2013 November 07).

Some walk-arounds are planned to achieve specific tasks, such as to “cool” areas that have been “hot” with recent shootings (SOW Daily Report, 2014 May 07). When a shooting occurs, BFB

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<sup>5</sup> BFB is a relatively new program and therefore, has yet to develop stable referral streams from other agencies. Thus, the majority of BFB's clients are recruited through the steps described below.



**Figure 1. Operationalizing Violence Prevention as Social Service Provision.**

has a coordinated response in place with the police department and nearby hospitals. The police chief has agreed to inform the SOW Supervisor of gang-involved shooting incidents, and SOWs attend the scene to perform “crowd control” (Field Notes, 12 May 2014). SOWs speak to friends, family members, and onlookers to stay informed about what happened, if the incident was motivated by retaliation, and whether the victims will seek vengeance. BFB administrators have also met with hospitals about obtaining information about gang-involved shootings and speaking to victims and visitors, subject to standard medical privacy regulations.

### **Pick-Ups and Drop-Offs: Relationship Building with Pre-PRIs**

After meeting individuals interested in BFB, SOWs must deliver the promised programs and services to these pre-PRIs. While some are already interested in specific activities such as basketball or modeling, SOWs also begin conversations about obtaining a G.E.D., signing up for Job Corps, and long-term life planning. On a basic level, SOWs pick-up and drop-off pre-PRIs because most lack means of transportation. Parents are working, do not have access to a car, or are incarcerated. While some youths proactively want to box or rap, many pre-PRIs are resistant to formal services such drug counseling, and cannot be relied on to voluntarily take public transportation. Picks-ups and drop-offs guarantee that pre-PRIs arrive on time—especially at home before probation-enforced curfews. SOWs use activities to occupy pre-PRIs’ schedules, minimizing time spent on the street exposed to negative situations.

On a more meaningful level, SOWs use pick-ups and drop-offs to learn about pre-PRIs’ backgrounds. It was during a car ride, for instance, when SOW Phil learned why his PRI asked to

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change schools. Following a stint in juvenile detention for a home invasion, this PRI active in the Yung Gunz gang<sup>6</sup> was released to his grandmother's custody on the other side of town—space that the rival Broad Street Boys claimed. Broad Street members “pulled up [to] his grandmother's home three days ago and threatened to get him and his friends when they catch them, so he just stays in the house right now” (SOW Daily Report, 2014 April 07). This information, released in the safety of the SOW's automobile, was important to understanding the PRI's social situation, why he was missing school, and what can be arranged to avert further conflict. When SOWs subjectively believe their relationships with pre-PRIs are firm, they prompt the potential client to meet BFB's Case Manager for an intake.

### **Intake: Becoming a PRI**

The final step to client status is an intake with the Case Manager. The Case Manager sits with the potential client—and a parent if underage—and clinically assesses the youth's strengths, weaknesses, needs, and priorities. He obtains background information including government names (as opposed to nicknames) and relevant criminal histories. After the intake, a more formal and structured intervention strategy is implemented. Whereas before a pre-PRI may have only wanted to record music, now the Case Manager places the official PRI in formal programs such as G.E.D. classes or drug treatment. Rather than viewing success as dichotomous, BFB sees it as an ongoing process. BFB expects clients to continue meeting with the Case Manager, participating in programs, and engaging in socially productive activities. Thus SOWs have operationalized their violence prevention mission by providing social services, and in particular, structuring their time around these three steps—walk arounds; pick-ups and drop-offs; and intake. The remaining sections discuss when SOWs activate the three steps just described; how this situational activation is reaffirmed; and the implications of such a compliance strategy on who ultimately receives services.

### **Defining the Rhetoric of Readiness**

SOWs operationalize BFB's organizational mission to prevent violence by building relationships with gang members and providing social services, yet this compliance strategy is activated only under certain circumstances. During roll call one day, the Case

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<sup>6</sup> All names of any individual, organization, or gang—except for the city of Bridgeport—are pseudonyms.

Manager updated SOWs about a PRI who called earlier asking for a letter of good standing to show the court in exchange for leniency. The Case Manager lamented how PRIs only contact him when they need something—especially after getting into trouble with police, school principals, or peers on the street. The Case Manager used this opportunity to speak about a larger trend he noticed:

I'm not in the business of chasing ghosts. Here's a perfect example, your boy Justin didn't show up today [speaking to an SOW]. All these missed appointments, I sit back and watch. Okay, you say you're ready and want services, but your actions haven't shown that. I have a stack of bus passes, but I only give them to those who show they're ready. I don't give passes to those who come see me for intake and then I don't see them again until they need something...I have no problem counseling these guys, but all I can do is set the appointment...How much do you really want it? (Field Notes, 2014 August 13).

The Case Manager's question of "how much do you really want it" epitomizes the rhetoric of readiness. While the organizational mission is to target at-risk youth who qualify for services under basic criteria such as age and residence, the pool from which to select clients is large enough that workers still must decide with whom to start. SOWs overcome this selection question, while still complying with their violence prevention mission, by introducing a concept of readiness as a de facto additional criterion.

Readiness is not written in any manual, brochure, or memo. Instead, it is best understood relationally to how SOWs understand failed interventions with nonready clients. At any point, a pre-PRI or PRI can demonstrate nonreadiness by becoming what SOWs informally refer to as going "MIA"—the SOW cannot establish contact, cannot locate the client, or the client failed to attend a meeting with the SOW, Case Manager, or other program to which (s)he was assigned. MIA status is a circular, post hoc understanding of failed intervention: as long as the client is ready, (s)he will not go MIA. But once a client does go MIA, SOWs conclude that the client was not ready after all. Like readiness, the MIA label does *not* appear on any BFB form. It was only through access to roll call conversations that I noticed SOWs using this status designation. Moreover, SOWs rarely discuss who is affirmatively ready, as it is typically reserved to describe those who are not. Rather than a permanent marker, clients can go in and out of MIA status (and designations of readiness) as they follow and diverge from program rules, and break and re-establish contact. Those sentenced to time in juvenile detention, jail, or

prison are automatically MIA while incarcerated. The threat of the client going MIA is always looming, and SOWs do not always know the reasons why a client goes MIA. Clients have gone missing a week before a mandated court appearance or even after the SOW secured a new job for the client. Ultimately, going MIA is a term that SOWs created to conveniently refer to clients who have gone “off the map” (Interview Transcript, 2014 June 19).

Whereas MIA status represents fragmented contact, readiness is about SOWs having a sense of control over a compliant client: the client is contactable, attends assigned programs, and avoids trouble with law enforcement, school officials and others on the streets. For instance, SOW Phil described in a Daily Report how he “called [a] PRI a couple of times in the morning to confirm meeting. John did not respond via text so I then phoned and found out his phone was off” (SOW Daily Report, 2014 March 25). The next day in roll call, SOW Phil declared the youth MIA: “John is MIA, I will visit [John’s] known [hang-out] locations on Friday. His phone is off. The last I heard from him he was going to go to the boxing center and was going to call me to pick him up at 8:30 but he never did. I’m a little concerned” (SOW Daily Report, 2014 March 26). One month later, the SOW Supervisor asked Phil where will he do his walk-around, and Phil responded: “Go to the east side probably. Hope I see John today. Can’t believe he just went MIA” (Field Notes, 2014 April 29). SOW Rahim interprets MIA status as “when they [clients] stop believing in you, the process, and what you’re proposing to them. It’s when they say, ‘Let me leave this alone, this is the same shit’. You sound like my P.O. You sound like my school teacher. You sound like my uncle—same old bullshit” (Interview Transcript, 2014 June 19).

Yet recurring experiences with MIA clients only strengthens the grip of the rhetoric of readiness, which simultaneously recognizes clients’ agency yet shifts responsibility for a successful intervention onto the client’s shoulders. An integral part of criminal desistance and the redemption script involves re-asserting agency and taking self-control of one’s own narrative (Maruna 2001: 147). As redeemers, SOWs recognize the importance of agency and routinely recall how they were just like their target population. Before one roll call, I sat with two SOWs in the building’s kitchen when one said: “And these kids today, they have no one to blame but themselves. They’ve had all the opportunities, warnings, but they just didn’t heed them. But I can’t blame them, I was like that too” (Field Notes, 2014 May 16). As interveners, the rhetoric reasons, BFB can only do so much. It is ultimately up to the client to change his or her life. In fact, a client’s service needs are not even considered a program qualification. As the Program

Director reminded SOWs in one roll call: “It’s not for us to say when people are ready” (Field Notes, 2014 March 21). Only those who “want it” will be receptive, and only when the client is ready for change, can the intervention succeed (Field Notes, 2014 August 13). Those lacking readiness cannot be helped yet, and readiness is a status diagnosed rather than induced. As the Case Manager articulated, all he can do is set the appointment. It is up to the client to show up.

### **Mechanisms Reinforcing the Rhetoric of Readiness**

SOWs’ compliance strategy, which defines violence prevention as providing social services to those deemed ready, emerges and coheres at each level of the organization—from funders, supervisors, SOWs, and clients.

#### **Funding BFB: “They’re gonna move on to the next group”**

Following a visit from BFB’s funders, the Program Director explained at roll call: “These funders were responsible for bringing BFB and this model to Bridgeport. So if we impress them, then they’re gonna be right behind us. If not, then they’re gonna move on to the next group” (Field Notes, 2014 June 10). In addition to funding from the city, BFB depends on grants from a specific place-based, community foundation devoted to funding nonprofits in the county. Administrators have repeated the phrase “if it’s not recorded, it didn’t happen” so often, that it has become a clichéd mantra within the organization. Program effectiveness is rooted in demonstrating SOWs’ efforts and thus, a record of each client interaction is as important as the interaction itself.

The Case Manager then explained how the funders “asked how many people we have, how many people we’re working with,” and how “that question is going to come up again and again” (Field Notes, 2014 June 6). The Case Manager continued: “We want numbers. That’s what people want, that’s the harsh truth in this industry” (Field Notes, 2014 June 6). “Numbers” refer to the total number of PRIs served, interpreted as the number of gang members whose violence has been prevented. The Case Manager reasoned: “You don’t want the case where you invest, invest, invest and then all of a sudden, it’s too late. You don’t want to be chasing your own tail when you can touch three other peoples’ lives” (Field Notes, 2014 March 21). This tradeoff between assisting one nonready client at the expense of three ready clients rationalizes the focus on total number of intakes. While BFB collects, and funders consider, other statistics—such as minutes spent with clients and community groups, activities

with clients, and places of contact—BFB believes that funders seek a particular success, one verified by high intakes.

Documenting program effectiveness according to external standards of success animates a co-dependent relationship between BFB and its clients. Not only do gang members rely on BFB for services, but BFB relies on gang members for numbers. While driving me to the train station, SOW Fred explained his attempted connections with a certain pre-PRI: “Every time we roll by and see Kendrick, he takes our business cards and whatever, says hi, but he never call us. And that’s fine. I respect someone like that more, because he’s communicating that he ain’t ready. And that’s better than someone who’s gonna string us along...Some people, they just want to take and take. They have to be willing to give too” (Field Notes, 2014 May 21). Clients can “give” by agreeing to a Case Manager intake, becoming an official PRI, and making the prosocial choices on which BFB can stake their claims of effectiveness. As in religious movements that implement strict codes of conduct in part to screen out free-riders (Stark 1996), BFB prioritizes avoiding clients unwilling to follow program protocols, help BFB document its effectiveness, and contribute to sustaining the collective enterprise. Program administrators justify focusing on youth deemed ready by envisioning the end of BFB otherwise. In an interview, the Program Director explained how nonprofits “live and die by the grant” (Interview Transcript, 2014 July 02) and accordingly, youth come to rely on daily SOW support to “get them through life. And if the funding goes away and the program falls, it impacts people at their core humanity. And that brings you to a whole new level of consciousness and worry about what will happen if we’re not here” (Interview Transcript, 2014 July 02).

### **From Supervisors to SOWs: “If they don’t want it, we move on to the next one”**

BFB administrators warn SOWs about spending time with nonready clients. Unless SOWs “move on” from a nonready client, funders will “move on” from BFB. The SOW Supervisor explained to SOWs during roll call how “we gotta find those kids who get it.” There exists a select population, he argues, of group-involved youth who “wanna back door out of the gang life and try some program stuff if the right influence steps to them” (Field Notes 2014, June 02). This subpopulation is believed to be less likely to go MIA since their interests align with those of SOWs: increase engagement in prosocial activities with mainstream institutions. Rather than directing attention towards those most deeply involved in gang activities and structures, the supervisor

explicitly instructs his workers to locate those on whom they can make an actual impact. Whereas other organizations confront troubling clients with meetings, reassessments, and complaints (Emerson 1981; Miller 1983), BFB avoids troubling clients altogether by deeming early signs of noncompliant behavior as signs of nonreadiness. Ideally, these nonready individuals never become clients in the first place.

In fact, BFB has placed a premium on SOWs' ability to determine, as quickly as possible, whether a particular client is ready. At first, the Case Manager advised SOWs to "use your own intuitions" and that "by the time of the second or third week, you guys know if this guy is for real or not" (Field Notes, 2014 March 21). But BFB soon decided to systematize readiness determinations by training SOWs in Motivational Interviewing (MI) techniques. MI comes out of experimental social psychology, and seeks to "help people work through ambivalence and commit to change" (Hettema et al. 2005: 92). By hearing themselves talk about their desire for change, clients are more likely to be motivated and commit. The interviewer facilitates this process as a reflective listener. The Case Manager excitedly explained in roll call: "Motivational Interviewing is used all over the place, it's used when a population is in denial and in resistance. But now you're gonna be able to roll with the resistance, it's a very smooth, suave way so they don't feel confronted" (Field Notes, 2014 May 16). For weeks leading up to the training, it was consistently the major talking point on all roll call agendas. No matter the initial topic, each conversation seemed to end with the upcoming, five-session MI workshop. Besides orientation training almost a year ago, MI was the only formal training SOWs received.

While MI is a tool to help clients realize their own abilities for change, BFB has repurposed these techniques as a readiness assessment tool. The Case Manager explained in one roll call: "What that [MI] training is gonna teach you guys in a more clinical way, I'll put it pretty simply, we're just going to learn how to ask in a more clinical way: 'Are you ready?'" (Field Notes, 2014, June 06). The Case Manager promised: "Remember how I always say you gotta know when someone's ready, this [MI] is gonna be an asset to you guys so you're not running around chasing your tail" (Field Notes, 2014 May 16). Upon receiving MI training, SOWs were now equipped to make more accurate and faster determinations of readiness. The Case Manager continued: "The MI training is gonna be good in asking them [clients], 'You want it or not?' If they don't want it, we move on to the next one" (Field Notes, 2014, June 06). Rather than purely rhetorical, the rhetoric of readiness was being systematized.

### Internalizing the Rhetoric and the Fear of Getting Played: “they flip it on you”

In the first training session that BFB’s then newly-hired SOWs underwent, an experienced SOW supervisor from another city led the training and warned: “You don’t want the people in the hood to take advantage of you. You don’t want to be wanting to help them so much, that they play you. You know how the niggas in the hood be, they start asking, ‘So what can you do for me?’ You see? They flip it on you” (Field Notes, 2013 September 25). Since BFB’s inception, a looming fear preoccupies SOWs and supervisors alike: “getting played” by nonready clients. By providing services, SOWs can build stable relations with clients that engender long-term commitments. Yet the fear of getting played casts a shadow of insecurity doubting the gang member’s devotion and fearing that the client will approach the tie as disposable, burn it, and then burn the SOW and BFB’s resources (see Desmond 2012). From the perspective of SOWs, these free-riding clients are not genuinely interested in life changes, but rather pay lip service to receive material benefits—such as meals or gym membership.

The fear of getting played is also form of losing face for SOWs. This fear of discrediting took on the status of a rational myth that was transmitted directly from another SOW organization to BFB (Edelman, Uggen, and Erlanger 1999; Meyer and Rowan 1977). However, it was also socially reaffirmed and fully endorsed as rational after a “horror story” of a SOW getting played (Bosk 2003). SOW Joy spent 2,300 dollars of personal money to purchase recording studio time for a group of youth interested in rapping. Yet after over a year of relationship building, those youths have yet to complete an intake and thus, are still not PRIs. The SOW Supervisor recounted the lesson learned: “You can’t buy them out, can’t suck them in by just buying them things. And unfortunately, SOW Joy found out the hard way after spending hundreds of dollars. They’re just gonna play you” (Field Notes, 2014 June 20). If the client is not ready, SOWs must move on to the client who is ready—lest get played.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The concept of readiness governs rhetorically, and neither formally nor with accompanying sanctions. Even though SOWs voluntarily comply given the fear of getting played, failure to comply does not automatically lead to disciplinary actions. BFB’s Executive Director recognizes what Lopez-Aguado (2013) calls SOWs’ “liminality” as they transition from their criminal past to reformed leaders: “[T]his is a learning experience, you can screw up a few times before there’s a consequence for it. I mean if you see a real pattern over time then we can talk about it, but people [SOWs] are gonna get a chance just like we’re giving people out there on the streets a chance. I’m also gonna give my staff a chance because we’re here as much for them as they are for the young people they’re serving” (Interview Transcript, 2014 June 30). BFB recognizes that SOWs’ involvement as outreach workers is integral to their own reformation process as well, and responds to “screw up[s]” not with discipline, but as a learning experience. Over the course of field work, no official sanctions were delivered.

Learning from prior interactions with clients who lacked readiness, BFB staff utilizes the rhetoric to preemptively funnel who receives services in the first place. Rather than a service provider BFB is a service gatekeeper. After SOW Joy got played for 2,300 dollars with no resulting PRIs, she decided to “slow my roll” (Field Notes, 2014 June 20). Whereas she used to approach individuals and offer, “I can get you into the studio,” she now reserves her “spiel” until they demonstrate signs of readiness, such as completing the parental consent form (Field Notes, 2014 June 20).

In a roll call two months later, SOW Joy demonstrated how previously getting played—and the fear of getting played in the future—became an affirmative selection mechanism determining who becomes a client and receives services in the first place. She had been working with pre-PRI Alphonso for about 11 months already, but he unexpectedly called her the previous day saying “he wanna go to the gym” (Field Notes, 2014 August 15). SOW Joy responded: “Now it’s time to step your game up a little bit. No gym. How about an intake?” (Field Notes, 2014 August 15). SOW Joy attributed Alphonso’s sudden interest to him just being “bored” after his best friend went into juvenile detention (Field Notes, 2014 August 15). While the pre-PRI showed initiative and strong interest in BFB, the inclination was viewed as insincere and temporary. SOW Joy stated plainly: “We’re here if you need us, but all that activity stuff? No. Come in” (Field Notes, 2014 August 15). Rather than risk getting played again, SOW Joy refused to bring Alphonso to the gym unless he agreed to a Case Manager intake. Thus, Alphonso was still viewed as nonready and not worth investments of time and resources.

### **From SOW to Clients: Communicating Expectations of Being “Serious”**

During roll call one day, SOW Rahim’s phone suddenly interrupted the conversation with its jarring ring. “Oh you outside? Come to the front door, I’m coming right out.” SOW Rahim rushed to meet who we soon learned was his “star” PRI. Jay was an 18-year-old African American with short dreadlocks. He was wearing all black except for the splash of yellow, blue, red, and orange in the middle of his Nike shirt—a color scheme matching his Nike Foamposite sneakers. SOW Rahim pulled him into the room by the middle of his forearm and announced proudly: “He’s the one. He’s the one. This is my guy, my PRI: Jay. He does everything I say. Everything. He showed up to his court date, he’s going to Job Corp in Massachusetts, he’s working at McDonald’s right now, his drug counselor called me yesterday

giving praise. This one is my guy” (Field Notes, 2014 May 08). Jay was clearly deemed ready. The more he followed SOW Rahim’s instructions over time, the more credit he built in his tolerance bank for future noncompliant acts or mistakes. SOWs make their subjective determinations of readiness early in the relationship, and the label persists through time by molding the lens through which SOWs weigh future signs of (non-)readiness. Thus when Jay later “caught a case” in the proximate town, SOW Rahim continued to believe in his readiness.

SOWs communicate expectations of readiness by praising clients’ complicity. Like in Child Protective Services cases where parents seeking to unite with their children must demonstrate behavioral deference to the state (Reich 2005), readiness is about complicity, or perhaps more accurately, performing complicity. SOW Fred described how “if we have an appointment for 1:00 p.m., and I come to your house and you’re not there, that’s a first sign. Call me, let me know. But then let’s say I gotta go look for you every time I want to catch up. Then I know you’re not serious” (Interview Transcript, 2014 September 11). SOW Fred then cited specific signs of nonreadiness, including submitting “dirty urines to his P.O. [Probation Officer], still staying out past curfew, hanging out where they shouldn’t be” (Interview Transcript, 2014 September 11).

SOWs further communicate expectations of readiness by spending the most time with those most complicit. In a Daily Report, SOW Fred justified bringing a particular youth to a sneaker convention: “I have been spending more time with him because he has shown the most progress, and he is/was a legitimate gang-banger. He is working part time and attending a drug program and has signed up for job corps” (SOW Daily Report, 2014 May 03). Only those who follow SOWs’ advice are viewed as worth SOWs’ attention. As PRIs continue to comply with SOWs instructions and the programs coordinated for them, SOWs focus even more attention on them since their pro-social development is more within reach. Those showing initiative by calling SOWs to check-in, searching for jobs themselves, and actively engaging in programs are viewed as deserving more of SOWs’ limited time within the day.

While SOWs and administrators agree on the importance of focusing on ready clients, they differ on what constitutes readiness. This heterogeneity turned into tension when it began to directly affect which clients received services. On one Friday afternoon, SOW Rahim scheduled an intake with the Case Manager for noon. But the pre-PRI and his family arrived over two hours late at 2:15 p.m. While the Case Manager views the unpunctuality as an instance of negative performance that should

be penalized, SOW Rahim explained: “Don’t tell me you have to have scheduled appointments. I just want to walk in because I only get one shot at bringing them in here, you gotta be flexible enough to serve them” (Interview Transcript, 2014 June 30). By rescheduling the intake, SOW Rahim feared he would “lose the family,” which would become dispirited from replanning the trip and disinterested in pursuing services with BFB. While the intake was ultimately rescheduled, this exchange captures how the existence of the readiness framework and disagreements over expectations of readiness can impact who receives services.

## **Implications of the Rhetoric of Readiness**

### **“Wannabes” Versus “For Real” Gang Members**

While the rhetoric of readiness is a strategy to narrow the pool of potential targets and explain failed interventions, it simultaneously translates into an affirmative selection mechanism choosing only certain clients. When populations are hard-to-reach, the quantity of recruits becomes as important as, or in this case more important than, finding individuals hardest to reach. With no added benefit for the risks taken with those non-ready, BFB is incentivized to focus solely on clients deemed ready.

Yet, SOWs have questioned what this strategy—searching for ready clients—actually means for the organization’s objective of reducing gang violence in Bridgeport. SOWs, like many other criminal desisters (Flores 2013; Maruna 2001), have turned to mentoring at-risk youth to cement their own reformation, give back to the community they had damaged, and become community leaders. While SOWs understand the importance of appeasing funders, they question the approach. During a car ride with SOW Phil, he doubted administrators’ insistence that SOWs can straightforwardly determine who is “for real”: “And I don’t care what they say, two weeks or whatever, it gonna take at least, I say two months for a PRI to really be like, okay let me go in and see what this is all about” (Field Notes, 2014 June 02). SOW Phil then explained that to truly reduce Bridgeport’s gang violence, SOWs should not focus on those willing to do an intake after only two weeks of relationship building anyways:

[E]ven if we get three pre-PRIs to come in, I’d say most of them are just wannabes anyways, they not the ones really out there. They probably just come out and kick with their friends. They definitely gang involved, but they go home at night. We gonna be getting those guys coming in. So at some point, if they wanna tighten the numbers, each individual

outreach worker is gonna have to make the decision of whether to go for the phony PRIs or save lives. (Field Notes, 2014 June 02).

SOW Phil's rough dichotomy between "wannabes" and "for real" gang members points to the notion of gang embeddedness (Pyrooz et al. 2013). For SOW Phil, when answering both the descriptive question of who *is* being recruited and the normative question of who *should* be recruited, it is crucial to consider the individual's level of immersion within the gang network.

In a roll call next week, SOW Phil reinforced his concerns that SOWs are just "trimming the edges" (Field Notes, 2014 June 16) by focusing on easier targets. His argument aligns closely to Lipsky's (1980: 107) idea of "creaming": "Confronted with more clients than can readily be accommodated street-level bureaucrats often choose (or skim off the top) those who seem most likely to succeed in terms of bureaucratic success criteria." Yet creaming occurs not only when clients exceed resources, but also (or perhaps more so) when there is a deficiency of willing clients yet program survival depends on documentation of effectiveness.

Rather than recruiting core members—those most embedded within gang activities—the emphasis on the number of intakes, fear of getting played, and ultimately the rhetoric of readiness push SOWs to target "wannabes." Wannabes epitomize ready clients. They are the least central within gang networks, yet not coincidentally, the most likely to comply with SOWs offering an exit out of gang activity. But targeting wannabes deviates from the Cure Violence model, and accordingly, represents a "surrogate performance measure" that yields uncertain implications for reducing gang violence (Lipsky 1980: 53). SOW Phil is certain, however, that a violence prevention strategy centered on wannabes reduces violence among those already least violent. Thus while concentrating on wannabes is beneficial for organizational survival, it complicates program effectiveness at best and renders SOWs superfluous at worst.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In response to growing criminal justice efforts toward targeted interventions, Melde et al. (2011) asked if we can successfully identify those gang members most at-risk? Answering this question cannot be divorced from the organizational context in which violence prevention workers operationalize and decide how to define, select, and target specific gang members in the first place. This study makes four main points. First, gang outreach workers comply with their violence prevention mission by

providing social services. SOWs operationalize social service provision in three steps: neighborhood walk-arounds to identify targets; pick-ups and drop-offs to build relationships with prospective clients; and client intake to formally assess social service needs. Second, this study finds that this compliance strategy is not activated for all gang members, but for only those deemed ready, which is demonstrated by performing complicity to SOW demands. Readiness transfers the responsibility for successful intervention onto the clients themselves, but is rationalized as a tool that concentrates resources on those who will benefit most.

Third, this compliance strategy is communicated and cohered at multiple organizational levels. Rather than simply scarce resources, the rhetoric of readiness is reaffirmed through SOWs' "tactical balancing" (Kapiszewski 2011) of heterogeneous demands from funders who measure effectiveness by total number of intakes; supervisors trading off trouble cases of nonready clients for organizational survival; and SOWs who fear getting played. In a Los Angeles gang outreach program, Lopez-Aguado (2013: 203) hinted at how the way funders evaluate program efficacy and "count" clients shapes the outreach carried out. This relationship between evaluation measures and work execution, which Skolnick (1966) also found among detectives who pressured robbers to "cop out" to boost clearance rates, reinforces the importance of finding ready clients whom SOWs can recruit and stake claims of program effectiveness.

And fourth, in doing so, the rhetoric of readiness acts as an affirmative selection mechanism that risks choosing "wannabe" gang members, or those less embedded within gang activities, over more central members who likely lack readiness. Thus, the most violent member's very embeddedness in gang structures may be a hurdle, rather than a reason, for providing him services. The tension between servicing "for real" gang members versus ready yet "wannabes" tracks similar tensions among other violence preventers. In carrying out their order maintenance functions, for instance, written examinations and fixed assignments may encourage police to avoid "the most conflict-laden, pleasant parts of their task" and instead, encourage "following the safe routine, memorizing the penal code and departmental rule book, and 'pushing paper'" (Wilson 1968: 413). Like Holstein's (1984) finding that judges decide to institutionalize mental patients not based on health status but rather the patient's ability to demonstrate viable living arrangements, SOWs decide which gang members to extend services not based on clients' gang centrality, but rather performed readiness.

BFB's targeting of ready clients may protect program existence, but it implicates a socially counterproductive use of

resources if targeting wannabes does not reduce violence. Epp, Maynard-Moody, and Haider-Markel (2014) explained how investigatory police stops, as opposed to traffic stops, are typically race-based and therefore, trade off short-term utility at the expense of long-term trust from African American communities. Similarly, even though prison programs encourage violent inmates to reorient their narratives around self-change, they overly scrutinize the authenticity of changes since program completers get early parole (Fox 2001). SOWs' skepticism of insincere clients can limit program effectiveness by incentivizing only targeting certain gang members—those already interested in changing their lives and thus contributing least to gang violence. While this approach may sustain organizational survival, it may come at the expense of actually preventing gang violence.

SOWs' compliance strategy raises immediate policy implications. On the one hand, if social services are in fact better incentivized, designed, and equipped to target ready clients, then there should be a clearer division of labor with law enforcement. Police sweeps and other gang tactics that arrest individuals who outreach workers are uniquely positioned to service risks focusing on the same individuals without any coordinated message. If, however, gang outreach can in fact target those most embedded within gang activities, then the immediate challenge is not to search for alternative approaches, but rather to improve model fidelity, or the fit between reality and research. In fact, a theme across Butts et al.'s (2015) meta-analysis of the Cure Violence model's program evaluations is the problem of implementation (see also Wilson and Chermak 2011: 1019). Rather than fundamental flaws, the model itself cannot be properly assessed because most programs veer too far from theory when operationalized. While Cure Violence may have intuitive appeal and gained political favor (see Papachristos 2011), key challenges in organizational design and execution call for greater reconciliation between workers' actual incentives and realities, and with Cure Violence's conception of them.

One possibility is to further specify the geographic focus of interventions involving hard-to-reach, resistant populations. Rather than an entire city, an organization can focus on servicing a neighborhood or even smaller geographical unit. By restricting the pool of possible clients from which to choose, programs would be encouraged to focus on each and every potential client. This would eliminate incentives that bias client selection. Another line of policy should focus on ways organizations can be differentially rewarded for recruiting and servicing harder-to-reach individuals. One way of documenting who is difficult-to-reach—and

therefore merits greater praise if recruited—is to compare people’s centrality within social networks. Law enforcement efforts against gang violence in Boston and elsewhere have already begun to implement such strategies with success (Kennedy et al. 1997). However, as referenced above, given high levels of distrust towards law enforcement among the target population in particular, such partnerships must carefully balance the advantages of access to police data with the dangerous inferences drawn by distrusting communities if officers and outreach workers are seen collaborating. Thus, ongoing efforts to introduce social network analysis to law enforcement should be independently extended to outreach worker programs as well.

This paper is not without limits. While this study focused on SOWs’ viewpoint—that is, the “demand-side perspective”—subsequent studies should focus on its interaction with the “supply-side perspective” of gang members. Comparing participating PRIs with those MIA will generate important insights into whether the fear of getting played is valid, and how gang youths contemplate complying with street worker demands. Additional research should compare BFB to other SOW organizations, tracking whether the rhetoric of readiness has become an institutionalized myth (Meyer and Rowan 1977), and investigating how SOW strategies are disseminated into other organizational environments. Future studies should also consider the general intervention landscape in which a given program is situated—analyzing, for instance, communication with law enforcement agencies and other social service programs.

Nonetheless, this study highlights the need for program evaluations to account for the ground-level, decision-making processes selecting which clients receive services. As nonprofits and community-based organizations increasingly pose as gatekeepers to basic social services, a parallel effort must scrutinize how services are delivered, when, and to whom. Whether targeting gang members, homeless populations, or drug users, social service providers engage in a boundary-making process much like law enforcement. And consequently, access to resources is not guaranteed, but rather negotiated through demonstrated complicity. While social service programs often implicate narratives of scarce resources, the findings above more immediately underline the consequences of program design, worker incentives, and organizational structure in determining service delivery. Only by examining the social processes contemplating who is offered services in the first place can we more precisely explore not only the inequalities in access to, but also the differential offering of, society’s most fundamental resources.

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