Electronic aggression and gang violence on Twitter: A case study of a Southside Gang Member
Aggression defined

• Physical Aggression: “Any behavior that is intended to harm another person who does not want to be harmed” (e.g., Baron & Richardson, 1994).

• Electronic Aggression: “any kind of harassment or bullying that occurs through email, chat rooms, instant messaging, websites, blogs, or text messaging.”
Gakirah Barnes, 17, fatally shot in Woodlawn

The life and death of the real 'Lil Snoop': Teenage queen of Chicago's gangland who 'became a killer at 14 to avenge her brother's murder' and was gunned down on the streets she ruled just three years later

STL EBT’s Gakirah Barnes, aka K.I., Gunned Down, Talked Death Days Before Murder

Gakirah Barnes of Chicago's Fly Boy Gang is teen queen of gangland
Internet 2.0

• Internet is increasingly integrated into everyday life (Tyler, 2002)

• Internet use helps to facilitate social connectedness, capital, and integration (Pasek, More, and Romer 2008; Wellman, Haase, Witte, and Hampton 2001)
New Trends in Technology and social media

• Digital Divide Shrinking
• 90% of individuals 18-29 use the internet
  – 73% of African Americans use the internet/
    79% of Latino’s(a) use the internet
• Youth comfortable with posting and discussing personal details
“Gang members routinely utilize the Internet to communicate with one another, recruit, promote their gang, intimidate rivals and police, conduct gang business, showcase illegal exploits, and facilitate criminal activity such as drug trafficking, extortion, identity theft, money laundering, and prostitution . . . computer hacking, and phishing schemes”

“Social networking, microblogging, and video sharing websites—such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter—are now more accessible, versatile, and allow tens of thousands of gang members to easily communicate, recruit, and form new gang alliances nationwide and worldwide.”

• Is there assessment true???
Theoretical considerations

• Aggression Theory

• Context Collapse

• Code of the “digital street”

• Internet Banging
Amiracle Williams, 3
Research Question

How might gang-involved youth communicate aggression on Twitter?
Methods

Computational Data Collection

- Radian6 was used to capture ~ 4,266 tweets, mentions, replies and retweets of @TyquanAssassin from March 29, 2014 to July 15, 2014.

- Qualitative Content Analysis/ “Thick Data” vs Big Data
  - Grounded theory
  - Codebook
  - Two coders developed codebook representing main content areas and used the codebook to identify and code 408 tweets that pertain to aggressive communication
  - Interrater reliability: .71 or 71%

- Analysis focused on two critical time points: Gakirah and her peers’ reactions to the death of “Lil B”, and reactions after Gakirah’s death.

- Identified 408 tweets, mentions, and replies from “Lil B’s” death on 3/29 up until 4/17, a week after Gakirah’s death
How do you know someone is really in a gang?

• Never 100% sure.
• Here is what we looked for:
  • Images and videos of Gakirah and users in her Twitter network that may include a tattoo, gang name, hand signal or gang initial in the image.
**Codebook**

- **Insulting [INSULT]**: Posts that describe one user making fun of another user. Examples may include a direct insult (using “@” or naming an individual), or indirect insult (embedded within a Twitter handle or tweet).
- **Bragging [BRAG]**: Posts in which a Twitter user is boasting about oneself or a group and its abilities, particularly regarding violence, crime, and distribution and use of illicit substances.
- **Substance Use [AOD]**: Posts, pictures, or videos showing substance use, distribution, or general conversations about substances.
- **Grieving [GRIEF]**: Descriptions of posts about the loss (death or incarceration) of a friend of kin.
- **Threatening [THREAT]**: Descriptions of indirect or direct communications towards an individual or group about the possibility or intent to commit a violent act. This includes both retrospective and future threats.
- **Hypervigilance/ “Staying on point” [AWARE]**: Descriptions of posts that describe an individual being keenly aware of their surroundings, particularly the need for safety in a violent environment.
Codebook (cont.)

• Aggression [AGGRESS]: Descriptions of posts that include four types of aggression:
  • Indirect aggression – overt threat or insult directly broadly towards an individual or group.
  • Direct aggression – uses @ symbol or other methods to directly insult or threaten a rival gang member.
  • Proactive aggression – unprovoked aggressive post that is offensive and seemingly abrupt.
  • Reactive aggression – person is mainly responsive or retaliatory to aggressive posts directed at them.

• Physical Violence [FIGHT]: Descriptions of posts with users discussing physically assaulting someone.

• Transformation [TRANS]: A change in point of view or behavior as a result of an event such as a friend’s death.

• Challenges with Authority [AUTHORITY]: Descriptions of posts that express anger, hostility, or resentment towards law enforcement (e.g. #CPDK). This may include communications about law enforcement checking Twitter accounts, or being active in specific areas of the community.
PRELIMINARY FINDINGS
Why might Aggression occur on social media?

- Community violence and trauma exposure
- Chronic loss and grief
- Gang affiliation
- Presence of weapons
- Substance use
NO SURRENDER LIL B
@TyquanAssassin

Trust no one 🙄😊😊

9:52 PM - 28 Mar 2014

NO SURRENDER LIL B
@TyquanAssassin

Reminiscing on da guyz like damn I memba dem dayz 😭😈💯

11:47 PM - 2 Apr 2014

NO SURRENDER LIL B
@TyquanAssassin

My pain ain't never been told 🙄😊😊

11:41 PM - 2 Apr 2014

NO SURRENDER LIL B
@TyquanAssassin

Da pain unbearable 😞

I Dne lost a couple partners wen I thought 🙅😊

7:26 AM - 5 Apr 2014

D&RD @Dessy_Baybee - Apr 2
@TyquanAssassin keep yo head up ❤️
Mechanisms of gang violence on Social Media?

- Interpersonal Conflict
- Reciprocity/Vengeance
- Status Seeking

NO SURRENDER LIL B
@TyquanAssassin

I Guess u niggaz won't get da picture until 1 of y'all ass get put in da frame 🙌💪lain

RETWEETS  FAVORITES
66        21

5:53 AM - 6 Apr 2014

NO SURRENDER LIL B
@TyquanAssassin

O'block been Dead like Keta 😒🤔💀💀💀

RETWEETS  FAVORITES
56        18

1:30 PM - 6 Apr 2014
Reciprocity

NO SURRENDER LIL B
@TyquanAssassin

Ion kno wat u do fo yo nigga'z but ima die fo mine 100

7:22 PM - 1 Apr 2014

NO SURRENDER LIL B
@TyquanAssassin

I Dnt care if mf ain't neva turnt up b4 nigga'z betta turn up fo Lil b Frm ebt 100

10:31 PM - 29 Mar 2014
Proactive/Reactive Aggression

Proactive:
If We see a opp Fuck it We Gne smoke em

Reactive:
They killed my nigga @TyquanAssassin........
On GD Its a Drill! Imma kill you! @Shurvell300
#BDK
Vengeance/ Retaliation

"@TyquanAssassin: How do we take dis 🙄 do we drop a cop like he a opp c'mon y'all pay attention Lil b I'd do it for us 😞 😈 100"

LilBubba Think You Know How We Coming On These Fuck Niggas This Summer 🚗😈🔫 💰 #RipTyquan @TyquanAssassin

I Might Be Next To Go Cause It's Fuck Them Opp Niggas I'm T'D 🔴 For @TyquanAssassin Won't Let A Nigga Or Bitch Pull My Card 👊
Status seeking

NO SURRENDER LIL B @TyquanAssassin

u Nobody until Somebody kill u dats jst real Shyt 😎

RETWEETS 418 FAVORITES 109

7:27 PM - 10 Apr 2014

NO SURRENDER LIL B @TyquanAssassin

Got Gunz like da military catch a body n beat it n pulmonary

RETWEETS 17 FAVORITES 5

9:46 PM - 28 Mar 2014

B Los @500_BELMONT - Aug 11

*@TyquanAssassin: 30 wit a beam really show u wat a nigga mean 😶

RETWEETS 24 FAVORITES 5

8:09 AM - 7 Apr 2014
Emerging Themes
In some cases, urban gang members tweet their location and reference gang territory, increasing the likelihood of victimization.
Tweeting Location

Gakirah Barnes, 17, fatally shot in Woodlawn

NO SURRENDER LIL B @TyquanAssassin · Apr 11
6347 TMB

9:36 AM · 11 Apr 2014 · Details
If u ion Want Dat Foreign Cum Ride Dwn St.Lawrence

800 must of changed dey location but if i catch em out dere im sending @Arrogant_Bubba thru to relocate em

Fuck Oblock Dats A Hoe Block Turn Dat Mf into a No Block talm Bout Yall making Noise nigga we ain’t Heard No Shots 100 100

Fuck Da Whole Cottage Grove 67th-60th 💜 100
Threatening Group Tweets

@3hunnaorgetkill @FBG_DUCK
@DutchieDntSHOOT @Stl_trell
@TV_TaTADDIC @TyquanAssassin
@WwDc_Deja kill yoself

@3hunnaorgetkill @younggodumb
@DutchieDntSHOOT @FBG_DUCK @Stl_trell
@TV_TaTADDIC @TyquanAssassin
@WwDc_Deja @Drose600Rose goofy ass opp
Predicting death?

I'ma Die a Real nigga we all got dat day coming 🙏💯

I Do wat I Do Cuz I Kno God Got a day 4 me
Discussion

1. We find examples of gang behavior on Twitter that resemble gang behavior in urban communities.

2. Twitter can provide a space to respond to and cope with chronic exposure to violence and trauma.

3. Bidirectional relationship between what happens in the neighborhood (e.g. violence) and what is communicated online.

4. Context is needed to understand aggressive communication on social media (e.g. prior trauma).
Conclusions

• One person’s coping can be a threat to another.
• Social media can be a space for coping and expressing raw emotion. How do we tap into this to promote positive socio-emotional development? Online interventions?
• Can social workers work with social media companies to create safer platforms?
Next steps

• Does exposure to violent social media communications influence aggressive behavior?
  • Crawl all of Gakirah’s network
  • Compare gang-involved youth to youth in different contexts
  • Engage with big data
Special Thanks!

• Members of the SAFELab!

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