Lecture 8: Social Structural Theories

A. Racism, Neighborhoods, and Gangs
B. Social Disorganization

• Start as we did in defining "juvenile delinquency."
  – What are we talking about?
  – What is the police perspective?
    The sociologist's perspective? The gang member's perspective?
• Your definitions vs. "classic" definitions

produce a gang definition

• Include diverse distinctive gang behavior (but exclude the U of M football team)
• Start with a list of characteristics that you think all gangs share
  – Behaviors and activities
  – Attitudes and beliefs
  – Leadership
  – Patterns of social interaction
  – Legal and/or illegal activities
  – Demographics: age, sex, urban residence, income, etc.
• Then formalize your definition, write it on a sheet of paper, and hand it in with the names of all group members
classic definitions - thrasher

- F. Thrasher (1927): A gang is an interstitial group, originally formed spontaneously, and then integrated through conflict. It is characterized by the following types of behavior: meeting face to face, milling, movement through space as a unit, conflict, and planning. The result of this collective behavior is the development of tradition, unreflective internal structure, esprit de corps, solidarity, morale, group awareness, and attachment to local territory.
- Elements
  - form in "cracks" of social fabric
  - face-to-face interaction
  - conflict gives common enemies: "men are closest to their brothers when they join in stoning others"
- Critique: too inclusive, fits football teams

classic definitions - miller

- W. Miller (1982): A youth gang is a self-formed association of peers, bound together by mutual interests, with identifiable leadership, well-developed lines of authority, and other organizational features, who act in concert to achieve a specific purpose which generally includes the conduct of illegal activity and control over a particular territory, facility, or type of enterprise.
- Elements
  - some level of organization
  - identifiable leaders
  - territory
  - recurrent associations
  - specific purpose
  - illegal activity

Esbensen/NYGS definition

- Finn Esbensen – Youth Gang has:
  - 3 or more members
  - Shared identity (name, colors, symbols)
  - Limited age range (12-24)
  - Some permanence and degree of organization
  - Illegal activity
  - [association with geographic area]
scale?

- 2015 National Gang Intelligence Ctr (USDOJ)
  - Estimates ~30,000 US gangs (2012 report)
  - ~850,000 active gang members (precision?)
    - Pyrooz & Sweeten estimated 1.1 million using self-report NLSY97 data
    - 88% are in nbhd-based street gangs, 9.5% prison gangs, 2.5% outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMG)
    - Tie to extremist groups, military and government
  - Most are active on Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, & Twitter

- Thornberry et al: gang members responsible for large proportion (2/3 in some studies) of serious violent juvenile offenses
  - Most in gangs for relatively short time (< 2 years)
  - Blumstein: gangs/guns/crack and youth homicide


Age: Younger in self-report

- NYGS (Official)
  - Aging in urban gangs? (% adult)
- NLSY97 (Self-report) Pyrooz & Sweeten 2015
  - Peak at 5% at 14
Sex: at least 92% male

- NYGS (Official)
  - ~8% of gang members female
- NLSY97 (Self-report) Pyrooz & Sweeten 2015
  - “Have you ever belonged to a gang?” from age 5-17
  - 29% of self-reported gang members were female

Race/ethnicity

- NYGS (official):
  - 46% Hispanic/Latino
  - 35% Black
  - 12% White
  - 8% other
- NLSY (self-report): Pyrooz & Sweeten 2015
  - Gang members
    - 58% White
    - 24% Black
    - 2.5% Asian
    - 9.4% Other
  - Ethnicity
    - 20% Hispanic/Latino

Agencies reporting gang problems (drop in late '90s; stable since '05)
8B. Social Structural Theories

- Contrast with individual or social-psychological theories
  - Social Disorganization
  - Anomie and Opportunity
  - Conflict
  - Gender-based
- “Root” social and cultural causes
- Then, Delinquent Careers in the Juvenile Justice System

WEB Du Bois (1899)
Social Account of “Negro Criminal”

- Founder of US “scientific sociology”
- P. 24: peculiarities of 1. slavery and emancipation, 2. immigration & 3. social environment;
- Hard to retain “self-respect” in this environment
- P. 27-8: role of “color prejudice” (work)
- Law traced from 1693: “carried to gaule” to be “publicly whipt”
- P. 22: “visit the corridors” of courts
- Statistics
- Racial overrepresentation (Table 1); non-violent property (Table 2); “Discrimination greater then”
- Policy: P. 30: encourages “criminal, lazy & shiftless,” not “educated and industrious”

Social Disorganization Theory

- Background
  - Race, ethnicity, and “Born Criminals”
  - Clifford Shaw & Henry McKay (1942): a sharp rebuke to racist stereotypes
- Assumptions
  - Delinquency due to breakdown of community institutional controls
  - Normative consensus
  - Disorganization is caused by rapid social change (industrialization, urbanization, immigration)
  - Social disorganization leads to self-perpetuating criminal values and traditions
Social Disorganization

• Conceptual Tools
  – Social disorganization #9, p. 387
  – Ethnic succession, #12-13, p. 388
  – Cultural transmission of delinquent traditions (p. 387 – “traditional behavior”)

• Methods
  – Maps! Descriptive statistics
  – Life histories

• Critique
  – Ecological stability
  – Ethnic groups do not intermingle
  – Measurement: “disorganization” = crime

• SIMPLIFIED SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION DIAGRAM

  Social Change
  • Industrialization
  • Urbanization
  • Immigration
    [tie to poverty, mobility, heterogeneity]

  Weak institutional & informal social controls

  Development of spontaneous play groups and gangs

  Cultural Transmission of delinquent traditions

  High delinquency rates
policy and extensions

• Policy Implications: Chicago Area Projects
  – Recreation, neighborhood health and sanitation, indigenous gang workers
  – Little evaluation data (Boston Midcity - no effect)
  – But, “moving to opportunity” experiment shows promise in reducing violent crime – at least for girls

• Extensions: Robert Sampson (CWB) and “Neighborhood Collective Efficacy”
  – Combines social cohesion with shared expectations for social control (p. 152)
  – Survey measures of reaction to kids hanging out, firehouse closing; plus trust/cohesion of neighbors (correlated -.3 with crime rates in meta-analysis)
  – Videotaping physical and social disorder

Robert Sampson (Immigration as Protective against Violence)

• Neighborhoods that can realize their own values have lower crime rates
• But! Immigration story is different today
  – Not “suicidal maniacs” p. 29, but lower crime
  – “Latino Paradox”
  – higher perceptions of disorder, but lower disorder
  – Raise denominator/not numerator
  – Vibrant low-crime cities

• Intact families as mechanism (e.g., Kubrin)

Rios & Panopticon - Ch. 3-4

• Inverting Foucault’s panopticon (89)
  – boy at center, surrounded by social control
  – no discipline; informal social or self-control
  – Tyrell: Violence as collection agent
    – Electronic monitoring (p. 65)
  – Jose: Gang-based attack on Puppet (p. 67)
    – 2 wks detention -> 6m group home -> Camp Sweeney for gun & culture of street justice
    – PO advice (p. 69) and police advice (p. 72)
• Schools, police, POs reinforced code
  – Probation “magnifying glass” (p. 87)
Rios 4: “zookeepers”

- Well-intentioned adults participated in criminalization of the boys
  - Victims: Spider stabbed at 15, erroneously registered as a gang member (p. 77-8)
- Teachers & “continuation school”
  - Criminalize via threats; drugs (exaggerated); narcs
- Parents & “courtesy stigma”
  - Parenting lessons from institutions
- Probation, CJ in community centers
  - Parents, teachers, POs, police
  - High expectations; little support p. 84;
  - magnifying glass effect -> minor arrests
  - Anger management; life skills courses taught by P.O.s (snitching); no funding for youth workers

Next: Anomie

- Week 9 – 10/30 & 11/1: Anomie and Individual-Level Strain
  - A. Social Structural Theories: Anomie
  - B. General Strain Theory