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English

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Gangs as a subculture

One of the most fundamental elements of human existence is that we organize in societies. Societal organizations are hinged on certain absolute moral duties and values that define and predict behavior. Once a member of the society, one is obliged to be subservient to the societal moral demands. The general attitude within a society is that of compliance to the moral standards and ethical conduct. Within the moral frameworks and standards there are conventionally defined goals and means of achieving those goals. The deviation from these goals and means of achieving them are labeled deviant. In criminal justice, behaviors that set apart from the conventional behaviors are considered criminal and are indictable under the penal code. However, since it is not possible to label all indictable behaviors as criminal, they are referred to as, in sociological terms, deviant. Gang subculture is a consequence of these deviant behaviors. In gang research, there has not been an conventionally agreed upon definition of what gangs are and what characterization distinguished them from other deviant organizations in the society(Lerman 63). In the main, this paper explores gangs as a subculture to determine what goes on in those in gang groups and why people join them. Gang subculture forms as a result of the breakdown in social order that is advanced by marginalization and structural inequalities.

Gang theory was developed by Albert K Cohen, in his seminal publication *Delinquent Boys*. Cohen's theory was founded on his conception that juvenile delinquents belonged to a certain subculture which was opposed to the moral concepts of the society. Society in its collective form has defined social and economic goals, and the means of achieving these goals. However, because there is lack of equality of opportunities and manifest structural inequality, people are forced to form attitudes that depart from the conventional social moral conceptions. The strains in life force youths to adjust to their status through rebelling against the social goals, or through changing both the social goals and the conventional means of achieving these goals. "For example, a boy from the lower classes always strives to adapt to higher social strata, but is confronted with expectations and goals that he cannot fulfil due to his social background or cannot achieve due to rigid social structures. In direct comparison with middle-class boys, he has to recognise his own low status, poor prestige and little chance of success in business and society. The resulting problems of self-respect ultimately lead to the merging of several such boys into alternative subgroups, which are defined by their demarcation from the unattainable middle class"(Wickert).

Gang subcultures emerge as a result of delinquent juveniles coming together. The rate of spread in gang subculture is palpable and has been made more prevalent with the ubiquity of telecommunication technology. Today, high-speed internet and digital communication has made it easy for delinquent juveniles to organize their disparate activities and reconfigure in real-time. Unlike the traditional organization of gangs around economic status philosophy, the increased intensity of global issues, including immigration and transnational crimes have made gang membership more versatile.

According to most American sociologists, the rise of gang subculture is a consequence of the manifestation of masculine youthful misconduct (Lerman 63). The conceptualization of gangs as a manifestation of youthful misconduct explains their looseness and fluid affiliations. Cohen posits that gang subcultures are not highly structured and lack consistent leadership. The fact that gangs gain foothold in societies with weak social control supports Cohen's argument about their disorganization. Since, gangs' organization is founded on diversion from conventional moral conception, they are disintegrated from the economic goals of the society, and gang activities are not based on any model of economic rationality. Since low class youths fail to place well according to middle class norms and are enraged by the feeling of alienation produced by lack of opportunities to achieve the socially-constructed goals (Bordua 119), their activities are often malicious and aiming at upsetting or causing injury to those they see different from them. Gang subcultures are rebellious social groupings motivated by the desire to upset the social order that has failed to respond to their plights. Their negativism can cause them to commit crime, not because they desire to achieve any rational end, but because those acts have been prohibited.

Gang membership can be explained by the subculture theory and the social disorganization theory. Subculture theory advances the notion of social inequality as a significant factor in gang membership. According to the social disorganization theory, gang subcultures are a result of loose parental control in marginalized neighborhoods. Socially disorganized societies culturally transmit deviant and criminal behaviors to youths; "[...]families in poor inner city areas have low levels of functional authority over children, who, once exposed to delinquent traditions, succumb to delinquent behavior" (Alleyne 9). Because of lack of legitimate conventions, socially disorganized youths find satisfaction through engaging in rebellious

activities. With views of the hierarchy of needs, social acceptance and affection is a foundational block of self-actualization. Where the social institution do not offer social support, youths take it upon themselves to form gangs to fill the gap. In American inner cities the risk of violent victimization are high. Youths that perceive victimization are more likely to join gangs for the return benefit of safety and protection against other gangs and the violent activities in the inner cities (Taylor 340). Delinquency and offending are overriding identity marks of gang subculture and so one of the reasons youths join gangs is to have an opportunity at committing crime.

Gang joining can also be as a result of policy implications. Status degradation and labeling of inner city youths as predisposed to violent and crime leads many youth to assert those expectation through joining groups. Administrative-level policies within the law enforcement have been a major contributor to gang membership. According to Hesketh, “Since 2008 and the onset of austerity, many disenfranchised young people have felt the effect of cutbacks to youth services, which have in turn affected where and how they spend their time. The emergence of street gang culture in many marginalised areas has also seen an increased police presence, which further constrains young people’s liberty – whether they are involved in gangs or not”(Hesketh).

Pushed to the wall by the law enforcement response youths are often left with limited opportunities to advance conventional activities and so resort to joining gangs. The banality of routine existence couples with restraints by social inequalities youths in inner cities find gang membership a satisfying endeavor. Just like recreational engagement in drug abuse, gang membership is often a result of lack of emotional connectivity with the real world.

In conclusion, gang subculture forms as a result of the breakdown in social order that is advanced by marginalization and structural inequalities. Gangs are durable street groups whose mark of identity is violence and criminal activities. Sociological theories try to explain the reason

behind gang joining. Social disorganization and structural inequalities are the significant causes of gang subculture. Delinquent youths who are strained by economic inequality form gangs for satisfaction. The subcultures focus on fun and leisure to solve their failed academic and employment areas by placing the blame on the class system. Gangs are basically the distinct ethnic and racial groups in their localities that focus only on their own survival. . The consequences that arise from gang involvement have different varying intensities from short to long term negative outcomes to the society. Understanding subculture is significant to the solving of gang menace.

Works Cited

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