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Sociology 240b

The Urban Street Gang

Spring 2015

Thursdays 3:30pm to 5:20pm

Location: Hall of Graduate Studies 117 (320 York Street)

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Tuesday 2pm to 3pm

“The gang, in short, is *life*, often rough and untamed, yet rich in elemental social processes significant to the student of society and human nature.”

–Fredric M. Thrasher,

The Gang (1927)

INTRODUCTION

Street gangs are intimately linked to urban neighborhoods. On the one hand, gangs are the product of neighborhood conditions and processes, often arising in communities where other institutions breakdown. On the other hand, gangs are embedded into the social fabric of neighborhoods in multiple and complex ways some of which provide order and social organization for residents of these neighborhoods. This course examines the character, composition, and consequences of modern street gangs. Particular attention will be given to the institutionalization of gangs in disadvantaged neighborhoods. This course stresses a sociological understanding of gangs, although other social scientific theories will also be reviewed. Throughout the course we will focus on theoretical perspectives on gang formation, persistence, and behavior, as well as methodological issues in gang research. From a solid theoretical base, we will

then discuss recent changes in modern street gangs and its implications on urban social structure. Policy responses ranging law enforcement to community-based strategies will also be discussed.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are unacceptable and be handled according to university guidelines. I will strictly adhere to university regulations concerning academic integrity, and I shall report all suspected violations of the policy (including suspicion of plagiarism and/or cheating). Familiarize yourself with the university's policy on academic integrity which can be found at: <http://yalecollege.yale.edu/content/cheating-plagiarism-and-documentation>. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or academic dishonesty, I am more than happy to discuss such matters with you.

READINGS

In addition to selected academic articles, newspaper reports, and other readings (outlined below), the course will rely on the following primary texts:

- Maxson, et al. (2005). *The Modern Gang Reader* (4th edition). New York: Oxford University Press.
 - Sanchez, Reymundo. (2000). *My Bloody Life: The Making of a Latin King*. Chicago: Review Press.
 - Hagedorn, John M. (2008). *A Word of Gangs: Armed Young Men and Gangsta Culture*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
 - Warr, Mark. (2002). *Companions in Crime: The Social Aspects of Criminal Conduct*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
 - * (Only select Chapters) Whyte, William F. (1943). *Street Corner Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
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REQUIREMENTS

In addition to completing the weekly readings and participating in class discussion, course requirements consists of a series of short writing assignments, a mid-term, and a “term-paper.” Short writing assignments (the gang definition essay and the textual/reaction essay) will be stand-alone essays in response to questions handed out by the instructor. These will be submitted via **classes*v2** on the specified dates. The Mid-term exam will consist of a series of **take-home** short-answer essay questions and will submitted via **classes*v2** on the specified date. The remaining assignments (the Research Topic Abstract, the Annotated Bibliography, Term Paper, and Presentation) are cumulative in nature. Each student will be asked to pick a unique gang-related topic to pursue throughout these assignments; topics must be approved by instructor (Research Topic Abstract) prior to completion of other assignments. Specific instructions and information for each of the assignment will be discussed thoroughly during class. Strong communication with instructor and teaching fellow are strongly encouraged to ensure the best progress on this project.

Course evaluation will be based on the following schema:

Assignment	Point Value	Due Date
Gang Definition Essay (250 - 350 words)	10	1/29/2015
Textual Analysis/Reaction Essay to <i>My Bloody Life</i> (approximately 500 words)	25	TBA
Mid-Term Exam (take home)	50	2/26/2015
Research Topic Abstract (250 - 350 words)	10	3/26/2015
Annotated Bibliography (10 sources)	25	4/9/2015
Class Presentation (5 to 7 minutes)	30	Last Day of Class
Final Report (7 to 10 pages)	50	Last Day of Class
Total Points	200	

COURSE OUTLINE *note: syllabus subject to change

Week 1. Introduction

Overview & Objectives: In addition to providing an overview of course objectives and requirements, this week will provide a broad overview of the prevalence of street gangs in the U.S. as well as some of the dominant cultural memes about gangs that appear in modern pop-culture.

Readings: (* indicates optional or suggested reading)

- *Modern Gang Research* (hereafter, MGR). Chapter 5: Gang Problem Prevalence Trends in the U.S.
- MGR Chapter 28: “Gang Homicides in Five U.S. Cities.”

Week 2. What is a Gang?

Overview & Objectives: What is a “gang”? Who is a gang “member”? The course begins by asking—and hopefully *answering*—these two questions. Various gang typologies are discussed. This week will also discuss how such definitions relate to issues of crime, violence, and other delinquent behavior.

Readings:

- MGR. Chapter 1: A Brief Review of the Definitional Problem
- Hagedorn. Chapter 3.
- *MGR Chapter 2: Street Gang Theory and Research
- MGR. Chapter 3: Studying Youth Gangs: Alternative

Week 3. Group Processes and Gang Delinquency

Overview & Objectives: At its core, the gang is a group. But it's not just an "ordinary" delinquent group. This week explores how group processes in the gang give it its unique character.

Readings:

- Warr. *Companions in Crime*. Chapters 1, 3, 4, and 5
- * Papachristos. (2009). "Murder by Structure" *American Journal of Sociology*
- * Decker, S.H., Collective and Normative Features of Gang Violence. *Justice Quarterly*, 1996. 13(2): p. 243-264.
- * MGR Chapter 30: "Gang Membership and Offending Patterns"

Week 4. Gang Structure and Organization

Overview & Objectives: Gangs take many types of organizational form—some have formal rules and regulations, others are quite informal and based on single individuals. This week explores some of the variation in gang structures and organizational type.

Readings:

- MGR. Chapter 7: "Who are Gangsters? An Examination of the Age, Race/Ethnicity, Sex, and Immigration Status of Self-Reported Gang Members in a Seven City Study of American Youth."
- MGR. Chapter 11: "Gang Structures"
- MGR: Chapter 13: "Understanding the Black Box of Gang Organization"
- * "The Fremont Hustlers" - Mark Fleisher (provided by Prof. P).
- * Levitt, Steven and Sudhir Venkatesh. (2000). "An Economic Analysis of a Drug Selling Gang's Finances," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, August.

Week 5. The Neighborhood Context I: Social Disorganization and Social Control

Overview & Objectives: Most theories link the origin and development of gangs to the conditions of urban neighborhoods. This week will review the dominant theories of how the urban environment gives rise to street gangs paying particular attention to the role of formal and informal social control. Although many theories view gangs as the product of "broken" neighborhoods, gangs are also important neighborhood social actors, often times providing social order where there might otherwise be none. This week explores the numerous and complex ways that gangs are interwoven into the social fabric of urban neighborhoods.

Readings:

- Excerpt from Shaw and McKay (provided by Prof. P).
- Hagedorn Chapter 1: "Ghetto, Favela, and Township: The Worlds Gangs Live In."
- **Bursik, Robert and Harold Grasmick. Excerpt from "The Neighborhood Context of Gang Behavior" pgs 128-134. (Provided by Prof. P).**
- Garot, R., "Where you From?" Gang Identity as Performance. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 2007. 36(1): p. 50-84.

- * MGR Chapter 26: “Neighborhood Variation in Gang Member Concentrations.”

Week 6. The Neighborhood Context II: Social Re-Organization Theory

Overview & Objectives: Gangs provide a voice for disenfranchised and they can help structure what might otherwise seem “disorganized” from the outside.. At times, this voice has taken the form of social movements, community activism, and political action. This week we review a few moments when gangs have become (or tried to become) political or otherwise mobilized themselves and their communities.

Readings:

- *Street Corner Society* Chapters 1 and 2
- Hagedorn Chapters 6
- * Venkatesh, Sudhir. (1997). “The Social Organization of Street Gang Activity in an Urban Ghetto” *American Journal of Sociology*.
- * Pattillo, Mary. (1998). “Sweet Mothers and Gangbangers: Managing Crime in a Black Middle-Class Neighborhood,” *Social Forces*, v76 n3.

Week 7. The Neighborhood Context III: Gang Culture, Honor, and the “code of the streets.”

Overview & Objectives: Gangs have a unique culture that shape their members behaviors, cognitive frameworks, and identities. Some of aspects of this culture diverge or come into direct conflict with mainstream society, while others are merely micro-representations of it. This week explores the ins-and-outs of gang culture, focusing on how the ideas of honor and respect shape (1) the ways gang members walk, talk, and act, and (2) the ways groups persist over time. Also discussed will be how gang culture intersects with popular culture.

Readings:

- Hagedorn Chapters 5, 7, and 8.
- **Bursik, Robert and Harold Grasmick. Exerpt from “The Neighborhood Context of Gang Behavior” pgs 134-end. (Provided by Prof. P).**
- “Ways of the Badass” - Jack Katz (provided by Prof. P).
- Excerpt from *Codes of the Streets* - Elijah Anderson (provided by Prof. P).
- * MGR. Chapter 16. “The Impact of Multiple Marginality on Gang Membership and Delinquent Behavior for Hispanic, African American, and White Male Adolescents”
- * MGR. Chapter 17: Racialized Identities and the Formation of Black Gangs in Los Angeles

Week 8. Gangs Across the Life Course: Joining and Leaving the Gang

Overview & Objectives: Perhaps some of the most important processes to understand in the gang are joining and leaving the gang. In contrast to most “blood-in, blood-out” images of gang initiation seen in the media, joining a gang is often an amorphous and unseen process. Leaving the gang is often similarly normal, although, like initiation, can have rather dramatic manifestations. This

week considers the gang in a *life course perspective*—how the gang takes on meanings and different points in people’s lives, and how participating in gang membership varies over the life course.

Readings:

- Sanchez. *My Bloody Life*. Selected Chapters.
- * MGR. Chapter 8. Getting Into Gangs.
- * MGR. Chapter 9. “Longitudinal Perspectives on Gangs”
- * MGR. Chapter 10. “Motives and Methods for Leaving the Gang: Understanding the Process of Gang Resistance.”

Week 9. Girls in the Gang

Overview & Objectives: Although the modern street gang is largely a male phenomenon, girls are joining gangs at an increasing rate. More than that, however, the role girls play in gang life is quite unique. Some girls form their own gangs, others join male gangs, while others still hang out with a gang but never actually join. This week explores the different ways in which girls are involved in gang life and discuss the implications for the theories discussed thusfar.

Readings:

- MGR. Chapter 20: “Girlfriends, Gun-Holders, and Ghetto Rats?”
- MGR. Chapter 21: “Gender and Victimization among young Women in Gangs.”
- Selections from Jodi Miller’s *One of the Guys: Girls, Gangs, and Gender*
- “Girl on the Wire” (on classes*v2)
- “Chicago’s Gun-Toting Gang Girl: ‘Lil’ Snoop”
(<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/04/29/chicago-s-teen-girl-ganglord-real-life-lil-snoop.html>)

Week 10. Gangs in the International Context

Overview & Objectives: Although most scholarly research on gangs is based on the research from the U.S., gangs are a global phenomenon with groups of “armed young men” inhabiting the slums, ghettos, barrios, shantytowns, and favelas around the world. This week will review the growing body of scholarship that looks at gangs and other delinquent groups around the world, paying attention to how theories discussed in this do or do not apply in the non-U.S. cities.

Readings:

- Hagedorn. Chapters Introduction and 4
- MGR. Chapter 31: “Deviant Youth Groups in 30 Countries.”

WEEK 11. Responding to Gangs

Overview & Objectives: This week we shift from understanding gangs and gang behaviors to trying to figure out what to do about gangs. We start with the U.S.'s historical approach to any crime problem: policing. Unique approaches to policing gangs will be discussed, especially the formation of specialized gang units within police departments.

Readings

- MGR: Chapters 33-37

Week 12. Final thoughts

Overview & Objectives: In our last week of class we will discuss the future of gangs in the U.S.—what will gangs look like in 20 years? Will they stay the same? Will they change? Students will also present the results of their course projects to their peers.