PRELIMINARY TEST OF THEORY OF GROUNDED CULTURE AND GANG DELINQUENCY

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INTRODUCTION

The idea of *subculture* as an explanation of delinquency has taken two different forks. One fork is reflected in the work of Albert Cohen (1955), Cloward and Ohlin (1960), and Walter Miller (1958). In this view, a delinquent subculture is a world view that essentially incorporates values in opposition to conventional (middle class) ones generating delinquent patterns of behavior. It is the *oppositional nature* of the values that leads to *oppositional behavior* in the form of, often non-utilitarian, delinquent behavior. The other fork is that of the control theorists, most particularly, David Matza. For Matza (1964), *a subculture of delinquency* is not characterized by oppositional values but rather by conventional ones. The conventional values, though, have a particular twist due to *subterranean convergence*. The deviant traditions in the subculture provide a surplus of *negations of the offense* (in a neo-classical sense) that allow the subculture delinquent to maintain conventional values while at the same time behaving in a way that breaks the conventions in the form of delinquency.

This paper's sociological perspective involves studying the interaction structure of the situation in the tradition of Erving Goffman (1959, 1961, 1963a, 1963b, 1967, 1969). However, at the same time, it recognizes the importance of the phenomenological tradition, especially that of Harold Garfinkel (1967) and the ethnomethodologists. On the one hand, Goffman treats situations as "little institutions" in a fairly positivistic manner. On the other hand, ethnomethodology takes contextual embeddedness (indexicality) as a condition of social behavior, and contends that all meaning relies on context for its exact and specific sense. Furthermore, there is a reflexive (mutually elaborating) relationship between interpretation and the phenomenon in the world. The interpretation of the phenomenon characterizes the phenomenon in a certain way that gives it a specific sense while simultaneously justifying that very interpretation in terms of the phenomenon being interpreted (Garfinkel 1967).

Reflecting this background, the key concept used in this paper to account for the nature of gang violence and patterned behavior of gangs is *grounded culture*. Rather than separating culture and structure, with culture hovering over social structure like a cloud, culture's *specific sense* is viewed as grounded in the social structure. (By *specific sense*, I mean how talk is used and understood in a given context.) As typically used in sociology, culture is a "gloss" to explain behavior relating to a set of shared values, norms, and world view. Culture is somewhat vague even though the content of culture is explained in terms of key values. However, the key values tend to be further glosses that only become sensible when pointing to specific instances of behavior. In an attempt to cull the specific sense of culture as related to behavior, rather than simply naming and defining a value for one and all in a given society, it is necessary to show how a certain value term is used in a specific situation. For example, a cultural concept such as *loyalty* must be located in a specific instance for it to have a social reality. The concept *loyalty* is woven into the day-to-day experiences of those who live in the structure. *Loyalty* gets its exact meaning from life in the structure and not simply as a verbal tradition handed down independent of the structure. Hence, while in middle-class society loyalty may be viewed in terms of patriotism to back military actions taken by the government, it can be viewed in gang areas in terms of standing up for your gang. While some experiences and senses of culture are held in common, others, grounded in different structures, are very different. Thus, in talking about grounded culture, we are talking about how a certain cultural value is used in the context of a group, organization, or subculture.

By examining the social situations of violence, we can see not only the patterns of violence, we can examine what sense is made of these situations. *The meaning of the actions in the situations constitutes the culture.* That is, culture is embedded in the situated meaning of events and actions. The violence elaborates the culture, and at the same time is explained by the culture. That is, gang violence tells us something about the culture (or subculture) while we use the culture to explain the violence. It is a reflexive relationship.

In order to test such ideas, it helps to codify and specify them in the form of a set of theoretical propositions. The following propositions reflect the key ideas in a way that I hope can be empirically tested, criticized, revised, and generally used as a tool for further understanding of patterns of gang behavior. Some of the propositions are fundamental and others are supplemental to the main ideas. Those near the beginning are more fundamental, and those toward the middle and end, supplemental.

Theory of Grounded Culture and Gang Delinquency

1. All values, whether dominate culture or subculture, can only be understood in the context of their use.

2. Identically expressed values (i.e., the words used to talk about values) may have widely different meanings in different contexts.

3. Delinquent gangs constitute a salient context for creating the specific sense of values for gang members.

4. Actions by gang members are guided by commonsense reasoning based on the values grounded in gang activity and interpretive schemes commonly used by gang members to understand and explain such activities.

5. Gang subculture is generated in and sustained by gang members who teach other youths in the community the interpretive schemes for understanding expressed values grounding them in shared experiences, actions, situations and life position.

6. The expression of a value in a given context must be grounded in a contextual matter that can be seen as an event or action. Otherwise it lacks meaning and essential sense.

7. Different religions, ideologies, ethnic group beliefs, and histories (group and individual) are further contexts in the community for interpretive schemes.

Question and Problem

Besides any purely logical or internal consistency problems, the theory must stand the test of empirical validation or rejection. At the outset, it is necessary to test a fundamental assumption of a subculture based on different values. Asked in its most simple form, "C gang members express similar or differe values than nongang members?" We mu have some test of the assumption that we ca differentiate gang members from nongan members in terms of values.

METHODOLOGY

The most straight-forward way of doin this is to ask a gang group and nongang grou about their values. If the same instrument given to the two groups and there is a diffe ence in expressed values, then we can se what values they are and the strength of th relationship, if any.

Generating a set of values that refle the conventional values was done using youn people pursuing conventional goals. It wa reasoned that while any group could be use to generate a set of values to be compared wit gang members, a more conventional grou would serve as a more valid test for compar son since deviance has its defining point i conventional norms and values. To this en college students served as a group whose ve being in college suggested conventionality. group of students, mostly Mexican-America reflecting the ethnicity of the region and gan members in the region were asked to list te values that they believed to be of key impo tance. Listed values were then compared see which ones came up the most frequentl Then using values identified with non-conve tional lifestyles (e.g., coolness, courage) fro Miller (1958) and Goffman (1967), the follow ing 17 values were derived using this metho

Coolness
Courage
Dependability
Education
Family
Hard Work
Honesty
Independence
Integrity
Intelligence
Kindness
Loyalty
Open Mindedness
Religious Values
Respect Others
Self Respect
Trust

The questionnaire constructed was

Table I

Coolness

Very Important   ___   Important   ___   Neutral   ___   Not very important   ___   Not important at all   ___

simple one using Likert categories with the following heading:

> Below are listed several values that may or may not be important to you personally. Please place a check mark next to the description that best describes how important the value is to you personally. If you're not sure what a value means, use what it means to you. (The listing is alphabetical.)

Following the heading, each value question was posed as in Table 1. In addition, there were test variables for sex, age, ethnicity, religion, education level, and gang affiliation. Gang affiliation was tested by a request to draw a gang "placa" (a gang logo that is stylized for a particular gang). If the gang placa was not present or if it was one that was either of a tagger crew or inauthentic, based on previous research in the area (Sanders, Rodriguez 1995), it was not included in the gang sample.

The sample was drawn from four sources. The college students were sampled from large, introductory, general-requirement courses at a state university. This assured a general cross-section of college students from different disciplines. The gang members were drawn from an alternative school for youths who had been suspended from the general high school population for behavioral problems, incarcerated youths in a local rehabilitation center, and from youths on probation in the community.

Of the 302 questionnaires completed, 159 were college students, 111 were self-identified and verified gang members and 32 were non-college students either from the probation or alternative school sample. The analysis for this paper was based on only the college students and gang members.

Since the basic question concerned differentiating two groups on the basis of responses to values, it lends itself to many forms of statistical analysis. Logistic regression analysis was chosen because it is especially good for S-curve regressions found in a dichotomous (instead of continuous) nominal variable such as gang affiliation measured against an ordinal variable on a Likert scale. In order to see if gang-affiliation could be predicted by the 17 variables set up as value expressions,

gang membership was held as the dependent variable and the 17 values as the model for the independent variables. The first model produced the following results, using the SPSS format for logistic regression output (see Table 2).

As can be seen, the model accounted for 75 percent of the variance. That it, it was able to differentiate gangs from nongangs in about three-fourths of the cases. In order to see if a more accurate model could be generated, the four variables with levels of significance nearest .05 were selected and recomputed. As can be seen in the results, slightly less variance was accounted for, but that was with only four independent variables (education, trust, integrity, and honesty) instead of 17. This provides us with a much better model, but still there is not a clear rejection of conventional values by a significant proportion of gang members when we examine those variables that can best distinguish gang from nongang values.

Overall, though, while the nongang sample appeared to have clearly different value array with 86 percent falling into the nongang category in the first model, and 90 percent in the second, those identifying with gangs were almost evenly split in the gang and nongang value array (see Table 3).

DISCUSSION

This first exploratory effort at differentiating gangs from nongangs on the basis of a simple questionnaire resulted in a surprising outcome. It was not expected to differentiate gang from nongang members to the extent that it did. Indeed, when we looked at both models, we find that gang members are about as likely to express nongang values as they are gang values. That was not too surprising given that the theory posits that the *expressed values* can be conventional or not. What counts is what those values mean in the context of their application. Apparently, though, there is some difference between the college students and the gang members in their expressed value arrays.

The expressed values by the gang members on probation and those in incarceration may tend to reflect more the nongang values since it is expected that they were trying to

Table 2

-2 Log Likelihood	257.539
Goodness of Fit	244.726

	Chi-Squar	df	Significance
Model Chi-Square	83.117	17	.0000
Improvement	83.117	17	.0000

Classification Table for GANG

		Predicted		Percent Correct
		Non-Gang	Gang	
Observed		N	G	
Non-Gang	N	134	22	86%
Gang	G	43	56	57%
			Overall	75%

Variables in the Equation

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig	R	Exp(B)
COOLNESS	.2402	.1492	2.5927	1	.1074	.0417	1.2715
COURAGE	.0218	.2204	.0098	1	.9212	.0000	1.0220
DEPEND	-.0644	.1665	.1493	1	.6992	.0000	.9377
EDUCATIO	-.6352	.3255	3.8075	1	.0510	-.0728	.5299
FAMILY	.5727	.2987	3.6763	1	.0552	.0701	1.7730
HARDWORK	-.3564	.2605	1.8716	1	.1713	.0000	.7002
HONESTY	-.7043	.2819	6.2402	1	.0125	-.1116	.4945
INDEPEN	.2170	.2259	.9224	1	.3368	.0000	1.2423
INTEGRIT	-.6210	.2625	5.5976	1	.0180	-.1028	.5374
INTELLIG	.1905	.2351	.6567	1	.4177	.0000	1.2099
KINDNESS	-.3986	.2194	3.2994	1	.0693	-.0618	.6713
LOYALTY	.3657	.3009	1.4772	1	.2242	.0000	1.4416
OPENMIND	-.2557	.2195	1.3575	1	.2440	.0000	.7744
REL.VALU	.0241	.1488	.0262	1	.8713	.0000	1.0244
RESPECT	-.1598	.2507	.4063	1	.5239	.0000	.8523
SELFRESP	.1544	.3136	.2425	1	.6224	.0000	1.1670
TRUST	-.5067	.2589	3.8299	1	.0503	-.0733	.6025
Constant	8.0161	1.9157	17.5093	1	.0000		

some extent play for the audience of a probation officer. Unfortunately, in the coding of the data, we did not differentiate the groupings in the sub-samples. There may have been a greater difference in the value arrays if we had gang members in the streets as the primary sample group.

In further research on the problem of values and context-related elements of values, two different strategies suggest themselves. First, a questionnaire that asks questions about actions in various situation related to values can determine whether the same values are held constantly across situations or, as the theory implies, what may be a value for some in some situations are not appropriate in other situations. (e.g., Is coolness in a drive-by shooting considered in the same way that coolness in an examination is? Secondly, using participant observation techniques combined with informal interviews when an action is accounted for in terms o different values.

CONCLUSION

This theory has been derived from larger corpus of work (Sanders 1994) an represents inductive logic from observation research. However, the amount of researc leading up to the development of the theory i irrelevant to the quality of the theory. Muc work still needs to be done on refining th

Table 3

-2 Log Likelihood	281.848		
Goodness of Fit	253.436		

	Chi-Square	df	Significance
Model Chi-Square	69.299	4	.0000
Improvement	69.299	4	.0000

Classification Table for GANG

		Predicted		
		Non-Gang	Gang	Percent Correct
Observed		N	G	
Non-Gang	N	143	16	90
Gang	G	53	50	49
			Overall	74

Variables in the Equation

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig	R	Exp(B)
EDUCATIO	-.6862	.2392	8.2294	1	.0041	-.1332	.5035
HONESTY	-.7141	.2404	8.8241	1	.0030	-.1394	.4896
INTEGRIT	-.4560	.2151	4.4934	1	.0340	-.0843	.6338
TRUST	-.3915	.2043	3.6717	1	.0553	-.0690	.6760
Constant	9.5557	1.5451	38.2480	1	.0000		

propositions both as a scientific-logical issue and also as propositions to be rigorously tested. This paper is a request for criticism, revision, insight, and empirical testing.

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