Why do young people join gangs and other subcultures? How does a criminal sub culture develop?

Intro Criminal Justice

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Introduction

In this is essay I will be discussing why young people join g angs and sub cultures. I have used books and Internet sites to help me with this. The first part of the essay wil l be about young people joining gangs and sub cultures. I have also discussed about what gangs are and what sub cultures are. In the second part of the essay I have written about how does a criminal sub culture develops? I have broken the essay down is int o short sections which will help me put my argument forward.

What are gangs?

The label gang has been applied to various groups including outlaws of the nineteenth century American West, prison inmates, Mafia and other organized criminals, motorcyclists, a nd groups of inner city youths. Despite its diverse application, the term gang almost always is involved in disreputable or illegal activities. **Families (2006)**

A gang is a group of individuals who share a common identity and, in current usage, engage in i llegal activities. Historically the term referred to both criminal groups and or dinary groups of friends. Some anthropologists believe that the gang structure is one of the most ancient forms of human organizations. **Families (2006)**

Some commentators use " gang" to refer to small, informal, and disorganized "street gangs", while "syndicate" or "organized crime" are used to refer to larger, more powerful organizations, such as the Italian-American Mafia, which may control entire legitimate businesses as "fron ts" for their illegal operations.

Gang researchers have suggested several definitions of gangs. **Thrasher, F. M. (1927)** defined a gang as an "interstitial group originally formed spontaneously and then integrated through conflict". It is characterized by t he following types of behaviour :

- Meeting face to face.
- Movement through space as a unit.
- Conflict and planning.

The result of this collective behaviour is the development of tradition, unreflective internal structure, solidarity, morale, group awareness, and attachment to a local territory.

According to (**Thrasher, 1927**), all childhood playgroups are potential gangs. The transformation from playgroup to gang occurs when youths encounter others who oppose or display disapproval for their group. This disapproval may or may not stem from delinquent activities, and Thrasher was careful not to include delinquency in his definition of gangs. Instead, Thrasher argued that gangs facilitate delinquency. In contrast, other scholars like Cohen distinguish gangs as delinquent groups.

Malcolm Klein (1995) defines a gang as a group that recognizes itself as a gang, is recognized by the community as a gang, and is committed to a criminal orientation. Gangs have all of the following features:

- Contains more than two members who fall within a specific range of age (commonly, older than eleven and younger than twenty-five)
- members have some common identity (often accomplished through gang names, symbols, colours, hand signs, and graffiti)
- The group exhibits stability over time (a year or more)
- The group members are involved in criminal activity. Esbensen suggests that the requirement of illegal activity is necessary to distinguish gangs from groups such as school and church clubs. **Families (2006)**

Why do young people join gangs and other sub cultures?

Hackerman pointed out four overarching reasons why young people join gangs: **American Counselling Association (2002)**

Family issues
These issues can range from the absence of a male role model to inadequate supervision or an unhealthy level of permissiveness in the home. In some cases, a child's parents may be incarcerated, and he or she looks for a gang to take the place of the family unit. Physical, sexual or emotional abuse within the family also drives many young people to join gangs. "Some kids think it's safer to be out on the streets than in the home,"

Personal issues
These can include having low self-esteem or not knowing how to deal with emotional problems in a positive manner. Drug use and financial need are other personal issues that can make gangs appear more attractive to young people.

Education issues
Bad grades and low expectations, both on the part of the student and his or her teachers, can make school seem intolerable while simultaneously increasing the ap peal of gangs. Oftentimes, these students have learning disabilities that haven't been diagnosed or they haven't received the proper assistance.

Community issues
Young people who grow up in neighbourhoods where violence is pervasive or where gang associa tion is already prevalent may feel extra pressure to join a gang in hopes of being protected. Communities without many job opportunities or after -school activities are often plagued with high levels of gang activity. Areas going through an ethnic transitio n may also see increased levels of gang membership as gangs fight to hold onto old turf or gain new turf.

Joining a gang generally involves associating with gang members, gaining the acceptance of important members within the gang, and eventually being ad mitted (**Spergel 1995**). In many cases, youths will hang out with gang members for up to a year before making a commitment to join. Initiation rites, which range from being beaten by a row of gang members, to committing a crime or harming a member of an oppo sing gang are sometimes required to join a gang, but are often inconsistently applied (**Fleisher 1998; Spergel 1995; Miller 2001**). Many gangs also actively recruit new members, especially when gang membership is low offered three ways of gang recruitment:

- Fraternity the gang advertises itself as, cool, hip, and the social thing to be in.
- Obligation the gang appeals to a person's sense of community.
- Coercion the gang uses physical and psychological intimidation.

The youths who join gangs do so for a varie ty of reasons. Common motives include :
- Camaraderie.
- A sense of belonging.
- Status.
- New and exciting experiences.
- Access to drugs and alcohol.
- Monetary opportunities through illegal markets.

In most cases, youths believe that the gang will provide them wit h things they could not otherwise obtain. Many gang members report that they joined gangs because of the protection they offered. Youths who live in areas with gangs may be harassed, assaulted, or even killed if they do not belong to a gang, and friends wh o are tough and have knowledge of the streets may protect them. However, they may also be harmed if they belong to the wrong gang.

What is a Subculture?
As understood in sociology, anthropology and cultural studies, a subculture is a set of people with a distinct set of behaviour and beliefs that differentiate them from a larger culture of which they are a part. **Wikipedia (2006)**

The subculture may be distinctive because of the age of its members, or by their race, ethnicity, class and/or gender, and the q ualities that determine a subculture as distinct may be aesthetic, religious, political, sexual or a combination of these factors. Subcultures are often defined via their opposition to the values of the larger culture to which they belong, although this de finition is not universally agreed on by theorists. **Wikipedia (2006)**

Members of a subculture will often signal their membership through a distinctive and symbolic use of style. Therefore, the study of subculture often consists of the study of the symbolis m attached to clothing, music and other visible affectations by members of the subculture, and also the ways in which these same symbols are interpreted by members of the dominant culture. If the subculture is characterized by a systematic opposition to th e dominant culture, then it may be described as a counterculture. **SUB-CULTURAL THEORY (2005).**

More simply, subcultures are groups of individuals who, through a variety of methods, present themselves in opposition to the mainstream trends of their culture.

It may also be difficult to identify subcultures because their style may often be adopted by mass culture for commercial purposes, as businesses will often seek to capitalise on the subversive allure of the subculture in search of cool, which remains v aluable in selling any product. This process of cultural appropriation may often result in the death or evolution of the subculture, as its members adopt new

styles, which are alien to the mainstream. A common example is the punk subculture of the United K ingdom, whose distinctive style of clothing was swiftly adopted by mass -market fashion companies once the subculture became a media interest. In this sense, many subcultures can be seen to be constantly evolving, as their members attempt to remain one step ahead of the dominant culture. In turn, this process provides a constant stream of styles, which may be commercially adopted.

The different Concepts of Criminal/ Deviant subcultures

Cloward & Ohlin's Differential Opportunity Theory
In 1959, Richard Clo ward noted that Merton's anomie theory specified only one structure of opportunity. He, however, argued for two and not one. He thus proposed that there are also illegitimate avenues of structure, in addition to legitimate ones. In 1960 he and Lloyd Ohlin worked together and proposed a theory of delinquent gangs known as Differential Opportunity Theory. **Cloward, Richard A. and Ohlin Lloyd E. (1960)**

They argue that the types of criminal subcultures that flourish depend on the area in which they develop. The y propose three types of delinquent gangs.

- The first, the criminal gang, emerge in areas where conventional as well as non conventional values of behaviour are integrated by a close connection of illegitimate and legitimate businesses. This type of gang is stable than the ones to follow. Older criminals serve as role models and they teach necessary criminal skills to the youngsters. Cloward, **Richard A. and Ohlin Lloyd E. (1960)**

- The second type, the conflict or violent gang, is non -stable and non-integrated, where there is an absence of criminal organisation resulting in instability. This gang aims to find a reputation for toughness and destructive violence. Cloward, **Cloward, Richard A. and Ohlin Lloyd E. (1960)**

- The third and final type, the retreatist ga ng, is equally unsuccessful in legitimate as well as illegitimate means. They are known as double failures, thus retreating into a world of sex, drugs, and alcohol. Cloward and Ohlin further state that

the varying form of delinquent subcultures depended up on the degree of integration that was present in the community.
Cloward, Richard A. and Ohlin Lloyd E. (1960)

Cohen

Cohen wrote in the mid 1950s. He was interested by the fact that many of the crimes that the delinquents, that he was studying, committed were non-utilitarian crimes. That is the perpetrators of the crime received no financial reward.

Cohen argued that these crimes were a direct response to status depravation, and that this response was logical and rational. He argued that, "most delinquents are motivated by status depravation, wherein they feel they are looked down upon by the rest of society and denied any status. They therefore develop a distinct set of values or a subculture which provides them with alternative ways of gaining status, and possibly leads them into delinquency." "Investigating Deviance." **Cohen, Albert K. (1955)**

Miller

Miller argues that there are six focal concerns of working class culture and that these can lead the working class male into crime. The six focal concerns are...

- Trouble. They accept that life involves violence and they will not run away from fights.
- Toughness. Males ought to demonstrate the qualities of manliness, being able to drink, play sport, etc.
- Smartness. This involves looking good and being smart.
- Excitement. They are always on the look out for some fun and enjoyment.
- Fate. They believe that there is little that they can do about their lives, what will be, will be
- Autonomy. Although they can do very little about the general conditions of their lives, they do not want any one to push them around.

Criminal Sub-culture Structure
  ▪ **Stable, cohesive, working class community:**
In this respect, the potential criminal will be able to develop
contacts within both the mainstream working class culture and th e
criminal sub-culture (for example, stolen goods can be easily
distributed through a wider mainstream culture that doesn't ask too
many questions...). **Sociology (2006).**

  ▪ **Successful role models:**
In this sense, there needs to be people of standing in the co mmunity
who have "done well" out of crime. The young criminal can begin to
model themselves upon such people - they represent tangible evidence
of the fact that crime does pay and that crime is a potential route
out of poverty, deprivation, low social stat us and so forth.
Sociology (2006).

  ▪ **A career structure for aspiring criminals:**
The importance of a stable community within which criminal
enterprises can develop and flourish is significant here, since if a
criminal sub-culture is to develop as a form of " illegitimate
opportunity structure" it has to be organised in some way. In effect,
it has to provide people with the opportun ity for advancement
(promotion) as an alternative to the legitimate job market, for
example. **Sociology (2006).**

How does a criminal sub culture develop?
Criminal behaviour is, more often than not, sub cultural behaviour.
Criminologists have long acknowledged that actions and identities
labelled "criminal" are typically generated within the boundaries of
deviant and criminal subcultur es. In this sense, much of what we take
to be crime is essentially collective behaviour whether carried out
by one person or many, particular criminal acts are often organized
within and instigated by sub cultural groups. Though the boundaries
may remain ill defined, and the membership may shift in gross numbers
and level of commitment, these subcultures constitute definitive
human associations for those who participate in them. Biker, hustler,
Blood, pimp and prostitute all name sub cultural networks as mu ch as
individual identities.

(**Sutherland & Cressey, 1970**) knew and as innumerable case studies have
since confirmed, criminal subcultures incorporate far more than
simple proximities of personal association. To speak of a criminal
subculture is to recogn ize not only an association of people, but a

network of symbols, meaning, and knowledge. Members of a criminal subculture learn and negotiate "motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes;" develop elaborate conventions of language, appearance, and pre sentation of self; and in so doing participate, to greater or lesser degrees, in a *sub*culture*,* a collective way of life. **Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture (1995)**

Much of this sub cultural meaning, action, identity, and status is organized ar ound style that is, around the shared aesthetic of the subculture's members. As earlier researchers have found, subtleties of collective style define the meaning of crime and deviance for sub cultural participants, agents of legal control, consumers of med iated crime images, and others. If we are to understand both the terror and the appeal of skinheads, Bloods and Crips, graffiti "writers," rude boys, drug users, and others, we must be able to make sense not only of their criminal acts, but of their collec tive aesthetics as well.

 (**Katz, J.1988**) research has linked criminal acts and aesthetics by examining the styles and symbolic meanings, which emerge inside the everyday dynamics of criminal events and criminal subcultures. By paying attention to dark sun glasses and white undershirts, to precise styles of walking, talking, and otherwise presenting one's criminal identity, (**Katz, J.1988**) has sketched the "alternative deviant culture," the "coherent deviant aesthetic" in which, punks, youth gang members, and others participate. In these cases, as in other forms of crime on and off the street, the meaning of criminality is anchored in the style of its collective practice.

The biker's ritually reconstructed motorcycle, the gang member's sports clothing and ta ttoos, the graffiti writer's mysterious street images, and the skinhead's violently provocative music constitute the essential cultural and sub cultural materials out of which criminal projects and criminal identities are constructed and displayed. Once again, participation in a criminal subculture, or in the culture of crime, means participation in the symbolism and style, the collective aesthetic environment, of criminality. **Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture (1995)**

Research has shown that symbolism and style not only shape criminal subcultures, but also intertwine with the broader social and legal relations in which these subcultures are caught. Criminal subcultures and their styles both grow out of class, age, gender, ethnic, and legal inequalities, and by turns reproduce and resist these social fault lines.

This interplay of sub cultural style, inequality, and authority in turn reminds that we must examine not only criminal subcultures, but the legal and political authorities who co nstruct these subcultures as criminal. When we do, we find these authorities both reacting to sub cultural styles, and themselves employing symbolic and stylistic strategies of their own against them. The criminalization efforts of legal and political camp aigners display aga in the power of cultural forces, in criminalizing cultural and sub cultural activities, and campaigning for public support, moral entrepreneurs and legal authorities manipulate legal and political structures, but perhaps more so structur es of mass symbolism and perception. **Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture (1995)**

Conclusion

Young people join gangs and subculture because of the following reasons:

- **Family issues**
- **Personal issues**
- **Education issues**
- **Community issues**

Common motive s include camaraderie, a sense of belonging, status, new and exciting experiences, access to drugs and alcohol, and monetary opportunities through illegal markets.

A Criminal Subculture is an environment in which the young are exposed to crime committed b y the adult subculture. This subculture is mainly concer ned with the utilitarian crime . Crime, which results in are financial reward/gain. This subculture usually forms in areas where there is an established organisation of adult crime that provides an illegitimate opportunity structure for youths to learn the. Criminal subcultures and their styles both grow out of class, age, gender, ethnic, and legal inequalities, and by turns reproduce and resist these social fault lines.

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