

Gang Violence

Gang violence only takes place in big, urbanized, poverty stricken, low class neighbourhoods and does not have any effect on middle or upper class areas; or does it? The Mall of America shooting exemplifies how gang violence can erupt anywhere and that no part of society is immune to this problem. As the mall employee in the article states, "you just can't be safe anywhere. Every time you turn around someone is being shot, or beat up, or killed." Why are events such as the mall shooting so common? Why do these tragedies even take place? What is the motivation for people to engage in such immoral and delinquent behaviour? Do people who commit crimes such as murder fit an exact stereotype? All of these questions must be examined to properly understand what caused this horrible catastrophe at the Mall of America that took the lives of two innocent bystanders who were waiting to see a movie at the mall cinema. The violent occurrence that took place at the Mall of America in Minnesota erupted late while mall workers were closing up shop and customers and patrons of the mall movie theatre remained inside. Police believe this incident to be a gang related dispute that was sparked by a verbal confrontation between the groups who were hanging out at the mall. This confrontation led to twelve gunshots being fired and the killing of twelve-year-old Enrique Suarez and twenty-one-year-old Mario Cardenas. When conveyed to the public, shocking atrocities such as the mall shooting can have a negative and lasting effect on society. Could an incident such as this create a moral panic? What characterizes a moral panic? According to Goode & Ben-Yehuda, a moral panic is defined by five key elements. First, there must be a heightened sense of public concern caused by the event. As with the mall shooting, this is clearly evident. The statement issued in a press release by the head of the Minneapolis police department, James Martin, is a prime example of how these moral panics originate. He is quoted as saying, "it used to be that violence was confined to big cities and bad neighbourhoods. Now, every time you walk outside your door you think 'am I going to survive the day.'" Such a statement will inevitably instill fear among society members. The mall, which is generally considered a peaceful and safe place for people to go, may become a place that is considered dangerous. Second, there must be an increased level of hostility towards the category of people involved. Gang members are usually considered detriments to society and are generally the objects of hostility among people of the world. Let's face it; gang members are people we "love to hate." Third, there must be a certain level of agreement, a consensus, that there is a real, definite problem. In this article, the problem of gang violence is seen as a substantial issue that must be addressed and there is a collective hostility aimed at people involved in gangs. As detective Martin states, gang violence has begun to take over the city, leaving no place violence-free. Fourth, moral panics are associated with some level of disproportionality. The amount of concern related to this incident may be much greater than the problem really is. In this case, gang related murders at the mall may not take place on a frequent basis, but the media will no doubt blow this incident out of proportion. And Finally, moral panics are volatile, that is they develop suddenly and almost as sudden they disappear, although they may last for long periods of time. Only time will tell how long this panic among the residents of Bloomington, Minnesota will exist. When examining the question of why depressing events such as murder ever even take place, one must look at the people involved and how they came to become criminal. Sutherland's theory of differential association may help provide an explanation to the above question. Sutherland states that criminal behaviour is not inherited rather it is learned through social

interactions. Is it merely a coincidence that mentioned suspects in the article are best friends and both repeatedly engage in criminal behaviour. The offenders in this article are described as being best friends who have a long, repeated history of law violation, beginning at age 11. In applying differential association theories to this article, it is not a coincidence that both suspects engage in the same deviant activities. Judging by their association with an intimate peer group such as a gang, they have put themselves in an environment where it is easy to learn to become criminal. The fact that members of gangs engage in the same activities is a main factor in explaining why these mall shootings took place. Theories defining routine activities provide a good explanation of such instances. The main premise behind the routine activity theory is that your daily activities can make you more prone to be an offender or victim or both. The members of rival gangs are motivated by their dislike for each other, which lead to a verbal confrontation and escalated into a shootout. These criminal acts generally occur while groups are "hanging out." which is one of the most dangerous activities. Facts from this article are no exception to this theory. For example, it is stated in the article that the two groups involved in the dispute were hanging out at the mall, which provides for more of an opportunity to commit a deviant act. The fact that the offenders involved in the shootings spend most of their time hanging out together and engaging in the same activities played a crucial role in determining how and why this particular event occurred. The labelling theory can be useful in examining the question of whether or not people who commit such crimes fit a certain stereotype or label. As stated by Becker in "The Outsiders," labelling consists of a primary act of deviance, social reaction towards deviant act, secondary act of deviance and negotiation. In applying this theory to the article, the offender's primary act of deviance was age eleven when he first committed a deviant act. He could have stopped here but he then went on to commit multiple acts of deviance such as assault, spousal abuse, and battery. By this point he is already stereotyped a deviant by society and he obviously accepts this label. It is then no surprise to society that the people involved in the double homicide at the Mall of America are career criminals with a long criminal record for committing violent acts of deviance. Gender and masculinity are two concepts that help explain why some crimes are committed. Gender relates to crime in that males account for over 90% of all violent crimes. labelling theory can be Once the label of "criminal" was obtained at the age of eleven, the primary act of defiance, it can be difficult to reject.