

General sociology – code of the streets

Sociology



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In the article “ The Code of the Street” by Elijah Anderson, he allows a glimpse of everyday life through the eyes of two completely different worlds wrapped up within one universe. He compares street families to what he refers to as “ decent families”. Although the meaning can take on different perceptions to the eye of the beholder, the author described it as a code of civility at one end of conduct regulated by the threat of violence.

Within these most economically drugged, crime-related, and depressing neighborhoods, the rules of civil action have been severely weakened, and their stead of survival known as this “ code of the street” often holds many their key to survival. The book Essentials of sociology gives four different theories on why crime exists, they are the functionalist theory, the internationalist theory, conflict theory, and control theory. The theory I believe best relates to Andersons article is the internationalist theory.

The author presented only two groups of people which categorized their existence within the social contest among individuals and families of the neighborhood, the “ decent” and the “ street. ” I thought that they were kind of broad terms and that maybe they shouldn’t necessarily be “ categorized” but they should be more of a description of people. Because there can be many “ decent” people and they can still know the street. The internationalist theory basically implies that crime is learned from the things you observe in life and your interactions with people around you.

The first place Anderson says people in impoverished areas learn crime is at a young age from the family. Children are always influence by their parents and Anderson says “ those street oriented adults with whom children come in contact with including mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, boyfriends,

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cousins, neighbors, and friends-help them in forming this understanding by verbalizing the messages they are getting through experience: “ watch your back. ” “ Protect yourself. ” “ Don’t punk out. ” “ If someone messes with you got to pay them back. ”

“ If someone dishes you got to straighten them out.” many parents actually impose sanctions if a child is not sufficiently aggressive. ” This shows that children can even be punished for not being aggressive enough, so they will have a tendency to be more violent and commit more crime Street families are overwhelmed with the demands of parenting which means kids to have to be able to take care of themselves more which leads to a dependence on the code of the streets and Anderson says” families, who are more fully invested in the code of the streets than the decent people are, may aggressively socialize their children into it.”

This means children are taught to be aggressive from a young age so they can better take care of themselves and survive in their environment. Another example Anderson gives of children growing up around violence in poorer areas is many parents have financial problems caused by drug use which causes more violence and exposes the child to more crime. Another place Anderson says children are exposed to crime is in the streets. He says, “ Realities of inner city life are largely absorbed on the streets.”

One reason Anderson says children gravitate towards being in the streets is a lack of supervision at home or a home environment not fit for children. He notes that the children who hang out in the street are allowed to “ rip and run up and down the street” which shows that from a young age these children are being taught they can do anything they want, and in poorer

areas it only takes a matter of time before they start getting involved in crime.

Also many kids may not be looking to commit any crimes but because they hang-out in the street they are perceived as criminals, and the eventually except the label and actually start committing crime. This concept is known as the labeling theory. It shows that it is not the act of being in the street that causes crime it is the way people react to people being in the streets that cause them to commit crimes. Another aspect of life children in poorer areas observe and emulate is disrespect and reputation.

When you don't have many physical possessions reputation is seen as all that one has. Anderson talks about how from a young age that a child "to maintain his honor he must show he is not someone to be "messed with" or "diced" the article also talks about how in urban societies "it is a basic requirement to show a certain disposition to violence" meaning in order to keep up with your reputation you must show that you can be violent and commit crime, and if this is the way the majority of people living in these areas think there is no wonder there is so much crime.

The last reason Anderson gives that I believe gives children the impression they must commit crimes if they live in poor areas is the areas they live in themselves. They are poorer areas so living is already a struggle, and kids see that crime is an easy way to get a lot for a little; they can rob someone in two seconds and have money to eat with. An example Anderson gives of this state of mind is "a boy wearing a fashionable, expensive jacket, for example is vulnerable to attack by another who covets the jacket, and either

can't afford to buy one or wants the added satisfaction of depriving someone else."

Anderson also mentions how sometimes in these neighborhoods police won't even show up and when kids see that their neighborhood is too dangerous for police it is easier to say I will become a part of it instead of becoming a victim. In conclusion I believe that the interactionist theory best describes Anderson's article "The Code of the Streets" and like it says in the book deviance is learned through interaction with others. Crime in particular is learned through experiences growing up at home, hanging out in the streets, trying to gain reputation, and experiences and interaction with where you live and the community you live in.