

Example of gangs in garden city - review critical thinking

[Sociology](#), [Immigration](#)



SUMMARY/REFLECTION

In Sarah Garland's book *Gangs in Garden City*, the author examines the deterioration of the normally-quaint suburb of Hempstead, Long Island, as a result of social and economic policy introduced in recent years. The book itself touches on themes of immigration, crime, urban decay and suburban sprawl, among other. According to Sarah Garland's research and thesis, the deterioration of the suburbs and the increase in crime is a result of underfunded schools, immigration raids, and excessive incarceration policies. By limiting the opportunities for growth that these suburbs have, as well as the chances for advancement available to its citizens, economic and infrastructure suffer, and juveniles turn to gang life in order to make ends meet. The cause of juvenile delinquency, therefore, is attributable to a lack of education and economic opportunities.

In order to perform this study, Garland focuses her work primarily on three different Mara Salvatrucha gang members who live in Long Island and its suburbs. The research subjects are Julio, Jessica and Francisco, all of whom have their own unique stories to tell about the influence of gang activity on these suburbs. Julio is a veteran of the Salvadoran civil war, moving to Los Angeles in order to escape the violence. He later moves to Long Island so that he can turn his life around. However, he starts to face deportation issues after he is arrested.

Jessica was born into the Mara Salvatrucha gang in Long Island; however, she starts to ally with a rival gang, a consequence of abuse she suffered

during childhood. She then sees the difficulties inherent in shifting loyalties between gangs, as well as the dangers. Finally, Francisco is an immigrant who moves to Long Island to be with his mother; finding a close friend in one of his classmates, he starts to turn his life around. However, they are recruited by rival gangs, which strains their friendship in unexpected ways.

One interesting conclusion Garland comes to is the fact that, despite the furor over gang violence increasing, there had been a decreasing prevalence of violent crime, gang crime in particular. By 2006, the crime rate dropped from 758 for every 100,000 people to 474 for the same number (Garland, p. 26).

Garland also determines that media overexposure of gang violence elevated the reputations of gangs like 18th Street and Mara Salvatrucha well beyond their capabilities. "The more attention paid to them - and the more gang members swept up and sent back to Central America or to jail under the new federal initiatives - the more the gangs seemed to spread" (Garland, p. 25). As the media painted suburbs like Hempstead as gang hubs, the gangs themselves were fighting with bats and mostly recruiting from within, a departure from the media's depiction of them as highly organized, spreading institutions.

In her research, Garland noticed a dramatic underappreciation or lack of attention paid to the epidemic of minority students dropping out of school. Hispanics were beginning to enter segregated schools; in 2005, nearly a third of Hispanic children being educated in the US did so in a school

consisting of more than 90% Hispanics (Garland, p. 229). It was found that 90% of the immigrants in New York were clustered into schools that had Caucasians in less than 5% of the population.

In conclusion, there are three unique conclusions that Garland makes about juvenile delinquency and its causes - economic depression, inadequately funded schools, and national panic. In the early 2000s, the economic pattern made it so that many immigrants moved out to the suburbs to meet " a growing demand for labor" (Garland, p. 36). America became more and more of a service-based economy, and so many immigrants found it more feasible to simply move here to meet the demand. However, given the recent economic crisis, there suddenly became no way to finance these jobs, and so money dried up. This left many immigrants to join gangs, particularly juveniles.

Schools in these areas were also criminally underfunded, leaving many sorely-needed programs out of the curriculum. This made it possible for gang infiltration to become a much more pervasive, prevalent phenomenon in the schools. In-school prevention programs did exist, but not in the capacity they had before 2002 - " Federal funding for programs to prevent gangs and juvenile delinquency was cut by 67 percent between 2002 and 2005 (Garland, p. 23).

National panic is one of the most pervasive and destructive aspects of Garland's findings - the presence of a gang brought a community into an exaggerated level of anxiety and fear. Normal citizens would lose faith in

their community because of this gang presence, thereby putting less into it as a result. " Often, their anxiety had little to do with actual crime levels. Instead, it stemmed from perceptions that a community was changing from the way it used to be and usually - the fearful populace believed, for the worse" (Garland, p. 27). It was shown that there was little to be concerned about by those who feared the most - the greatest level of anxiety came from women, the elderly, and those with the least gang affiliation. The people " most afraid of it were not the ones most likely to be victimized" (Garland, p. 27).

THEORETICAL INTEGRATION

In order to explain the juvenile delinquency present in Hampstead, Long Island, differential association could be used as a potential explanation. Differential association, coined by Edwin Sutherland, states that people pick up attitudes and values from those they interact with. This also extends to criminal behavior; the motives for doing so are also associated with the people that they interact with. By hanging around people who are criminals, they acquire the skills and the motives for participating in criminal behavior. According to this theory, people are defined largely by the environment they live in, being reshaped whenever they move to a new place or interact with other people.

According to differential association, the existence of gangs and the peer pressure to join them can act as the primary factors in actually participating in delinquent activity. In this case, young Hispanics grow up around gang life, and have many people they know in gangs. As a result, they know more

about being in a gang than anything else; as young men often hang around in groups, they often pick up these attributes from each other. This is evident in the decrease in gang violence and criminal activity after men get married, as that often diminishes the influence of their peers. In the book, the patterns of juvenile delinquency often are shaped by the movements of groups of men, especially in and around school; there is certainly an element of peer pressure and competition there. In the case of Fernando, he and his friend join rival gangs, at least partly as a sense of competition between them.

According to differential association, most criminal behavior is learned within intimate personal groups - this is expressed in many of the research subject's stories. In the case of Jessica, her exposure to Mara Salvatrucha through her family is a significant factor in her joining the gang; she knows more about gang life than someone who is not exposed to that level of gang activity. As a result, she is very intimately acquainted with the motives and behaviors of Hispanic gangs; this makes it easier and more justified for her to join the gang.

The motives of criminal behavior are often equated to those of non-criminal behavior in differential association; the legal code is often defined as unfavorable in the eyes of gang members and juvenile delinquents, as it does not get them what they want. When someone interacts with a criminal long enough, they learn the reasons for engaging in these activities (to get what they want from a system that will not give it to them legally), and therefore are more inclined to engage in them. This can be equated to many

of the stories in Garland's book - many of these Hispanic families are poor, and they do not get what they want or need from the government, the schools, or the workplace. As a result, they must turn to crime.

Comparing these two theories, it can be said that Garland's theory provides a more compelling explanation of juvenile delinquency. Garland's unique perspective states that social factors and media depiction of minorities creates these self-fulfilling prophecies leading to economic depression and the turning to gangs for support. The multifaceted nature of this theory explains a confluence of factors, leading to the development of a subtle, natural decline for a community into gang violence and destitution.

Differential association, on the other hand, simply proposes criminal activity by osmosis - the development of peer pressure is sought after as the only explanation for the criminal behavior. While peer pressure is a significantly higher factor in influencing decisions among juveniles, it does not explain the circumstances that led them to choose their peer groups. Garland's explanation, on the other hand, provides that explanation; immigrants came to America for work, the work dried up, and left them stranded in America with no prospects. This, in addition to latent racism in white communities leading to Hispanic segregation, led to them developing gangs in order to survive and protect themselves. Given these two theories, this well-researched perspective is likely the most complex, accurate explanation.

Works Cited

Garland, Sarah. *Gangs in Garden City: how immigration, segregation, and youth violence are changing America's suburbs*. New York: Nation Books, 2009. Print.