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JLC 206.001

November 3rd, 2021

Boyz N the Hood: Deviance Explained

Throughout the film *Boyz N the Hood* we can see that the main characters Tre, Ricky, and Doughboy all come from the same inner city, high crime environment. Each boy comes from the same high poverty and crime environment where problems are solved with violence and aggression. The police are not held accountable for their neglectful and abusive behavior, and the future predictions of jail, death, or addiction are pushed on the boys by mainstream society. However, their family dynamic and relationships within their subculture resulted in the boys having different paths in life. Additionally the film uses social bond and labeling theory as the constructs that affect the boys participation in deviance. Within the film Ricky and Tre are examples of how social bond theory can turn people who are at risk of deviance into successful citizens. While on the other hand, the audience can use Doughboy and Ricky as an example of how labeling theory can lead to a life for and against deviance.

The environment portrayed within *Boyz N the Hood* depicts the opposite from mainstream society. The main characters do not get to live in the American Dream society that is filled with moral values, economic and police protection, good jobs, and access to the best education. Instead they live in a subcultural environment that is filled with poverty, a lack of police protection and equal education, high crime rates, aggression, and drugs. This can be seen throughout the film where women who are addicted to drugs, teens who are involved in gangs,

Code of the Streets, Anderson
Boyz N the Hood, Singleton

and men who are constantly put in and out of prison are being displayed. Majority of the community are filled with citizens like this who come from street families, which are described as “priding themselves on living the thug life and using violence to earn respect” (Anderson, 304). Oppositely, the “decent family is concerned with hope for the future and building a good life” (Anderson, 304). From the film we can see that Doughboy is a prime example of someone from a street family, because he demands respect through verbal and physical violence, and also participates in a gang to survive. Tre and his father can be depicted as a decent family, because they pride themselves on being a good role model for their future children and try to stay away from criminal behavior so they don’t get caught in the system built against them.

The element within social bond theory that is heavily portrayed in the film is attachment and commitment. These specific elements are a part of the reason why Tre and Ricky were leading away from deviance, while Doughboy led a life of deviance. The attachment within social bond theory can be related to Tre’s healthy and strong bond with his dad. Tre’s dad taught him the three rules of “always look a person in the eyes, don’t be afraid to ask your father for anything, and don’t respect a person who doesn’t respect you” (Singleton). These rules helped Tre in his adulthood to earn respect without violence, not commit crimes in order to survive, and to think about the consequences in his life. Most importantly his father made him want to be a role model, so he can be an example of a good man for his own children one day. Learning these valuable lessons since a child and having a healthy relationship with his dad, made Tre unlikely to participate in deviance. He knew that participating in deviance could cause his father to be disappointed in him or lose respect for him, which is even worse.

In Ricky’s cas he has always been committed to being a star football player, so instead of focusing on gang culture, he continues to focus on football. This keeps him out of trouble and

tied to the thought of a success, which gives him the incentive to not jeopardize his future by participating in deviance. Ricky also has a strong bond with his mother, since she is the source of his love for football. Therefore just like Tre, he would not want to run the risk of disappointing his mother. However, Doughboy has no true attachment or commitment to anything but gang culture. This causes him to deepen his ties with the Crips throughout the movie and continuously commit crimes.

Labeling theory is excessively utilized on Doughboy and Ricky by their mother, and plays a major role on their different paths in life. When it comes to Doughboy their mother told him numerously “You ain’t shit, you will never amount to nothing” (Singleton). She constantly labels her mother insignificant and worthless as a child, which leads to Doughboy being a stereotypical “dangerous African American male” or thug. On the other hand, Brenda bestows all the positive labels upon Ricky instead of Doughboy. Ricky often gets encouragement from Brenda as she labels him a good man and a success. In result, Ricky becomes a successful football player, who overcame the gang culture within his environment. Brenda’s different parenting styles and labels between the boys really projects the power that labeling theory possesses because she was responsible for the types of men her sons chose to be.

I believe that the movie does portray what I have learned during class in a realistic manner. It can demonstrate the four theories clearly because the movie is based in a high poverty and crime area. Also, the film highlights the limitations of some criminological theories because the audience is exposed to characters who would be perceived as a “deviant in the making” but turn out to make a good life for themselves. I especially like how this film doesn’t strictly rely on stereotypes, but shows the truth behind some stereotypes and gives citizens who live in high poverty and crime areas a voice to explain themselves. This can be seen throughout the film as

Singleton shows the different perspectives and circumstances between the street and decent family as shown in *Code of the Streets*. Just like Anderson hinted to his readers, the film also gives off a sense of hope, because even some people who are raised in the hood can make it out.