Takeaway thoughts on:


**Historical ethnographic context**

You want to recognize that ethnographies have been an integral part of criminology and urban studies for a century; if you want to include the observational delinquency work of Mayhew (1851) then we go back even further than that.

There was of course a spate of these in the first third of the 20th century, many of these associated with the Chicago school of sociology (Bulmer, 1983; Shaw, 1966; Zorbaugh, 1929).

Midcentury, by which I mean from the 1940s through the 1960s, saw another round addressing concerns about delinquent gangs (William Foote Whyte, 1943a; W. F. Whyte, 1943b), unemployment prospects faced by inner-city blacks amidst white flight and urban riots (Liebow, 1967), the implications of complex multiethnic and racially shifting urban neighborhood composition for preserving order (Suttles, 1968), and of course social control dynamics in emerging suburbs (Gans, 1967).

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw another spate of ethnographies many of these documenting transformations in neighborhoods and among juveniles caught in the tsunami of crack cocaine (Bourgois, 1996; Simon & Burns, 1997; Williams, 1989, 1991) or confronting the difficulties of finding a job in urban economies ravaged by de-manufacturing (Sullivan, 1989).

Now we have a new batch of ethnographies, one of which you have read, which take a different turn. Both of the books listed for this week address the interface between the juvenile justice or criminal justice system, and the lives of young male African-Americans who have official adult or juvenile records in the system.

**Fader: failed by juvenile justice, barriers to jobs, justice entanglements**

Fader seems to concentrate on how juvenile justice programming has failed these youth. They are placed far away from home, supervised by a clueless and potentially bigoted staff, adhering to a scientifically questionable program, encouraged to concentrate on getting a job and controlling their anger when they get home. They return to find a heavily stratified labor market (R. Crutchfield & Pitchford, 1997; R. D. Crutchfield, 1989; Robert D. Crutchfield, 2014) which puts up seemingly insurmountable digital barriers to even the most menial work.

Although Fader does not detail as extensively as does Goffman these young men's entanglement in the criminal justice system, it's clear that sometimes their job training or program enrollment goals get sidetracked because of outstanding criminal justice records, and that they are extremely leery of further trouble with the police. Thus they try to sell drugs smarter. This of course fits into a much broader
scholarship on ex-felon disenfranchisement and biases against ex-felons as employees more broadly (Manza & Uggen, 2006).

It's always dangerous to organize a stream of scholarship into overly tidy categories or clusters.

Nevertheless, if you were to compare views about criminal justice from the most key (IMHO) ethnographies of the 1990s – Williams, Bourgois, Simon – with Fader and Goffman, you would find a dramatic shift in the ways that agents of the criminal justice system intrude in the lives of these urban African-American juveniles and young men. Compare Simon and Burns’ discussion of police routinely stopping, frisking, and maybe strip searching young African-American males, and their discussion of “stupid policing,” with the data driven systematic challenges made by police to those described by Goffman. Whether this is due to shifts in technology – databases and CRTs and police cars – or actual shifts in levels of policing – some would say over policing – in some communities is not clear. There's an interesting paper in here somewhere that has a title that goes something like this "The evolution of intrusive policing from "The Corner" to "On the Run": databases and CRTs, or hyper segregation, or something else?"

I think that there is a second interesting comparison as well. Contrast the job difficulties of African-American men in DC in the mid 1960s recounted by the late Elliot Liebow, and the job difficulties confronted here, especially the digital barriers described by Fader.

In other words, again we are cycling back to some of the same problems, but the texture of those problems have shifted in important ways.

**Goffman: CJS involvement as a way of life and cultural adaptations**

Part of the reason Goffman's book has had such an impact – we will get to the controversies in a minute – is because she portrays how the criminal justice system has woven its way into all aspects of the lives of the people she reports about. It makes it dangerous to have routine activities that will be predictable, to have others know where you will be when. It makes it dangerous to go the hospital. It puts extraordinary strains on couples and families when those close to someone sought by the system is pressured by agents of that same system to give him or her up. And of course being incarcerated far away wreaks further havoc. To make it even worse there are several ironies including disputing parties employing the criminal justice system to settle personal scores, using bail as a bank, and so on.

Goffman clearly thinks that the actions of the agents of the criminal justice system are excessive. She recounts police officers giving suspects meeting. She recounts rough handling of suspects. She recounts agents busting in the homes perhaps unnecessarily. She recounts how various locations within the criminal justice system become main social arenas for keeping up with friends and neighbors. The lives of these people are dominated by their legal concerns in the actions of criminal justice agents.

What's harder to say is how typical or atypical any of this is. That concern has prompted some criticisms of her work.

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1 Betts, D. (2014). The Stoop isn’t the jungle. Slate.com [ONLINE:...
There’s also the question of how much of this over policing is “deserved” and what might or might not be “justified.”

Nevertheless, as blogger Danah Boyd put it, with this book we get an “Understanding [of] the cultural logic underpinning poor black men’s relationship with the law [that] is essential for all who care about equality in this country.”

**The Link to Garland**

Well known criminal justice scholar Tim Newburn put it this way:

> In essence, this is a study of the extraordinary reach of the penal system – a reach that goes far beyond the simple impact of the formal systems of prison, probation, parole and even policing, to become something that influences and infects almost every aspect of a neighbourhood’s life.

That is the main question I would like you to ponder as you think about integrating either of these books with Garland. If this is what the crime control complex looks like “on the ground,” what are the implications? For theory? For policy? For practice?

LET’S DISCUSS!

**Ethical question**

At least one reviewer has taken Goffman to task for driving an acquaintance around looking for someone to kill. Yes, this is an important ethical question. But don’t get sidetracked by this question from a careful consideration of the scholarship.

**References**


[http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/jurisprudence/2014/07/alice_goffman_s_on_the_run_she_is_wrong_about_black_urban_life.html; accessed 1/12/2014]
