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The Roles of Churches in Reducing the Crime Rate: An Analysis of Pilsen, Chicago

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Abstract: The relationship between religiosity and crime between Whites and Latinas/os has remained in the sociological discourse and has played an integral role in crime rates. This suggests a hypothesis that individual religiosity is salient in creating community and unity among Latinas/os and the perceptions of the role of the church among Whites is strictly to aid in the path of salvation. To test this hypothesis, data is drawn from 10 interviews conducted with five Latinas/os and five Whites. Results from these interviews indicate that Latinas/os are more likely to perceive the church as an outlet for creating community, and that its main purpose is to provide services for everyone. The results also show that Whites are more likely to perceive the role of the church as a place to worship God and hold individualistic views of including outsiders inside their church. Furthermore, the heterogeneity of Pilsen, Chicago provides an interesting dynamic as to how both Whites and Latinas/os perceive each other's churches and the crime that is associated to them. This study is in need of more participant interviews in order to have more inclusive results of Whites' and Latinas/os' perceptions of crime.

Introduction

The sociological discourse of the relationship between religiosity and criminality has remained salient to understanding every aspect of religion from what is believed to how individuals act while in worship and while living out their stated convictions. Historically, the study of religion was essential to the discipline of sociology. In the early stages of the discipline of sociology, institutions like religion were understood as a core factor in providing community, which is demonstrated in Emile Durkheim's and Max Weber's works on the role and function of religion in human society. The fundamentals of religion provided by Durkheim and Weber are beneficial in examining the relationship of religiosity and criminality between Latinas/os and Whites in urban and rural areas. Typically, in urban areas there are more churches that are clustered closer together than in rural areas, which makes it more accessible for people to attend services provided by the church (Shihadeh and Winters 2010). On the other hand, churches in rural areas tend to not be in close proximity of each other and are more discrete with their membership (Shihadeh and Winters 2010). Latinas/os who attend church have shown to be more

welcoming to non-members and participate in more community service activities (Ellis 1987). However, Whites who attend church have shown to be more reserved in their faith (Ellis 1987). Latino Paradox is a perspective that can be applied to understanding the commonalities of Latinas/os compared to Whites. The Latino Paradox demonstrates how Latinas/os are inclined to do better in specific outcomes and adversities, including violent crime, than other groups living in similarly disadvantaged urban neighborhoods (Martinez 2002). In this study, I hypothesized that Latinas/os are more focused on creating community through the influence of the church and Whites are less likely to be involved with the community. This research offers a potential test of the Latino Paradox by examining the role of the church, and its effects on sense of community and crime rates in urban neighborhoods.

Literature Review

In my research, I argue that Latinas/os are mainly dedicated in forming a community through the guidance of the church and that Whites are chiefly focused on preserving their path of salvation. This research provides an interesting dynamic of analyzing two Catholic churches that are in the same urban neighborhood. Moreover, this research is salient in illuminating the perceptions of crime between Whites and Latinas/os. This research is also crucial in understanding how the Latino Paradox can be applied to the role of religion and its effects.

Social disorganization theory is proficient in clarifying and predicting crime in an urban setting by familiarizing and implementing its key components. One of the key figures of the Chicago School, William I. Thomas, defined social disorganization as the process by which the authority and influence of an earlier culture and system of social control is undermined and eventually destroyed. Traditionally, social disorganization theory suggests that crime is indicative to environmental conditions such as ethnic heterogeneity, residential instability, and poverty. Furthermore, social disorganization theory has been intertwined in various forms of

informal and formal social control applicable to crime. Sociologists have implemented social disorganization to explain the breakdown in three levels of social control: private, parochial, and public.

The Chicago School of urban sociology has a long tradition in the study of communities and crime. The Chicago School conceptualized Shaw and McKay's (1942) theory of social disorganization. In the groundbreaking study by Shaw and McKay (1942) of juvenile delinquency, they found concentrated delinquency rates across certain areas. They proposed that ethnic heterogeneity, social mobility, and low economic status led to social disorganization, which in turn led to higher delinquency and crime rates. In addition, they found that regardless of the inhabitants of certain areas, crime and delinquency rates remained constant (Shaw and McKay 1942). The Chicago School conceptualized many of these elements by actually observing and studying the processes behind urbanization, industrialization, and immigration (Braude 1970). While their findings and contributions have provided much of the framework for studying communities and crime today, contemporary research in the city where the approach was developed lacks a crucial demographic analysis that examines the factors of criminological patterns of Latinas/os and Whites in the city of Chicago.

Low economic status, ethnic heterogeneity, and residential mobility are relevant to explaining neighborhoods and crime because they are imbedded within social ties and informal social control, which explain culture. The barriers that might exist to integrate these approaches are distinguished between cultural and social disorganization, which is seen as a complex system relying heavily on friendship and kinship networks. Conceptualization is a barrier as well because the traditional views of social disorganization theory are focused more on racial homogeneity and less on cultural heterogeneity. Shaw and McKay provide a basic template for

social disorganization, which is helpful in examining neighborhoods, yet it does not specify how social ties operate. Specifying how social ties work is crucial in understanding the cultural strength of the neighborhood.

Ethnic enclaves are defined as “immigrant groups which concentrate in a distinct spatial location and organize a variety of enterprises serving their own ethnic market and/or the general population” (Portes 1981). Furthermore, an ethnic enclave provides a spatially bounded labor market including language, cultural knowledge, and social network ties. In recent years, Pilsen has become more diverse because of the proximity of the University of Illinois in Chicago campus.

Since the latter part of the previous decade, the issue of immigration has become of increasing relevance in contemporary society. There is currently large opposition to immigration reform and immigration itself. This is mainly because of the negative and often antagonizing views of immigrants. Indeed, a central component of Shaw and McKay’s (1942) model of social disorganization was ethnic heterogeneity in neighborhoods. This is also largely because immigration has historically been associated with crime (Sampson 2008; Hagan Palloni 1999).

However, the societal association between immigrants and crime is not entirely unwarranted. This is largely because of the often inflated rates of Latino incarceration that are found in many prison statistics, taken at face value and not fully evaluated (Hagan and Palloni 1999). Using U.S. prison statistics Hagan and Palloni (1999) critically evaluated this overrepresentation. First, they found that regardless of citizenship status, a large number of Latino immigrants are young males who are at a greater risk of criminal involvement. The study explains much of the Latino Paradox through initial speculations on immigrants, mainly Mexican immigrant communities that have strong extended family networks and Catholic religiosity. The

authors provide a well-presented argument to criminologists, who they argue have neglected integration and unification in the research of law making, law breaking, and reaction in relation to immigration and crime. The implications of the study suggest that the social and cultural capital that is brought by Latino immigrants can enhance many aspects of living in the United States.

Contrary to many of the criminal associations and overrepresentations found throughout society, most empirical evidence has found immigration to be a protective factor against crime. Sampson, Morenoff, and Raudenbush (2005) explain many of the racial disparities in violence through family structure, family socioeconomic status, neighborhood context, and individual differences. Using data collected as part of the Project of Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods and through a series of logistic regression models, they found a number of factors that contributed to the racial disparities in crime. Specifically, they found that Mexican-Americans and Whites were more likely to live with both biological parents versus blacks living in single headed households. Specifically, first and second generation immigrants were less likely to be involved in crime. The most significant finding of the study overall was that neighborhood context was important in understanding crime rates (Sampson, et al. 2005). The study provided an important clarification of the association between crime and race; however, it did not thoroughly examine the protective factors of immigration status and the consideration of the Latino paradox.

The concept of the Latino Paradox was first documented in relation to public health. Often described as the Hispanic or epidemiological Paradox, the concept refers to the relatively good health and longer life span of foreign born Latinas/os when expectations or assumptions, based on socioeconomic status, would indicate otherwise (Browning, Cagney and Wallace

2007). However, this paradox also applies to a number of social indicators such as the propensity to violence (Sampson 2007). Sampson (2007) studied the violent acts committed by 3,000 males and females in over 180 neighborhoods in the city of Chicago, using police records, census data, and neighborhood surveys. The study selected whites, blacks, and Latinas/os (Sampson 2007). Among the findings, Sampson (2007) found a significantly lower rate of violence among Mexican-Americans compared to blacks and whites. The study also found generational differences among the immigrants in terms of individual tendency toward violence. According to Sampson (2007) first-generation immigrants (foreign-born) were 45 percent less likely to commit violence than third-generation immigrants. Likewise, second generation immigrants were 22 percent less likely to commit violence than the third generation (Sampson 2007).

Residential mobility has a variation of implications in regards to neighborhood change. Certainly, the relationship between residential mobility and neighborhood change reveals an interdependency and causal link. When mobility is high, social norms at the level of informal social control cannot be established because of relative unrecognizability with ephemeral populations. Within the social disorganization and systemic model framework, neighborhood change is conducive of constant population migration. Recent works on residential mobility and neighborhood crime suggests that residential mobility and its effects on neighborhood changes are linked to neighborhoods with population loss, gentrification, and public housing, demolition/relocation, and increased crime.

Wirth (1938) laid out an understanding of urban environments and implied that mobility or areas of transition are the lead cause of weakening social bonds and lack of informal social control. According to Wirth (1938),

The distinctive features of the urban mode of life have often been described sociologically as consisting of substitution of secondary for primary contacts, the

weakening of bonds of kinship, the declining social significance of the family, the disappearance of the neighborhood, and the undermining of the traditional basis of social solidarity (4).

Wirth's work considered that social bonds and informal social control has negative consequences on individuals. Although Wirth hold a pessimistic view of the urban life, he delineates how people within the neighborhood establish relationships for certain purposes. However, Wirth highlighted the fluidity of residents' migration as a phenomena that can be viewed through detached indices, and ultimately result in crime.

Additionally, Raleigh and Galster (year) hinted at the apparent competitive market conditions. Once there is a development of markets and convenience stores that buy products for people specifically within that particular neighborhood, then the neighborhood develops around the access of resources that are indicative of that neighborhood. When more residents move out of a neighborhood, the neighborhood that they left begins to change because of the introduction of other resources favored by residents. This shift between residents of different socioeconomic tiers isolates certain racial groups. Raleigh and Galster (year) emphasize that the disinvestment in certain neighborhoods increases the crime rate. High residential mobility is a contributing factor to high crime rates in these areas, which results into gentrification.

Gentrification is described as the process of displacing lower-income households by increasing property values and the economic value in a certain neighborhood. Gentrification is vital in understanding residential mobility and its effects on neighborhood change. Papachristos, Smith, Scherer, and Fugiero (2011) provide an example of the effects of gentrification:

We operationalize the spatial distribution of this indicator of gentrification through the annual increase in corporate and noncorporate coffee shops. Measuring the number of coffee shops in a neighborhood has the distinct advantage over the more commonly employed census and survey indicators in that coffee shops provide an on-the-ground and visible manifestation of a particular form of gentrification—the increased presence of an amenity often associated with gentrifiers' lifestyles. Furthermore, this measure also

captures the role of corporate and private actors (i.e., coffee shop properties) in the gentrification processes (216).

Gentrification has been used to further isolate particular racial groups. Gentrification proves to have its monetary aims and divides neighborhoods that predominantly consist of minority low-income communities. Also, the distinct distribution offers an insight into the isolation of certain racial groups, which creates problems between residents in the neighborhood.

Assertions about the relationship or the lack of relationship between religiosity and criminality have been examined in over 50 research studies (Ellis 1985). Analysis of these studies reveals three religiosity-criminality relationships, the most documented relationship is between church attendance and crime rates (Ellis 1985). Among church members, the evidence consistently indicates that frequent church attenders have lower crime rates than infrequent attenders, especially regarding victimless offenses (Ellis 1987). Among the main Western religions, membership in the Jewish religion is associated with lower crime rates, compared to Christian religious membership as a whole; and among Christians, Protestants as a whole have lower crime rates than Catholics (Ellis 1987). Historically in Chicago, there has been a high concentration of churches in Latino communities. According to surveys distributed to Latino neighborhoods throughout Chicago, including Pilsen, a 6:10 ratio of Latino families responded that they regularly attended church sermons (Shihadeh and Winters 2010). On the other hand, according to surveys distributed to White neighborhoods throughout Chicago, including Pilsen, a 8:10 ratio of White families responded that they regularly attended church sermons (Shihadeh and Winters 2010). Nevertheless, these studies have not linked the ways that Latinas/os and Whites perceive crime in their neighborhoods.

Research in churches in urban areas such as the inner cities of Chicago, Detroit, and New York have shown to have a resounding impact on the types of crimes that are not as prevalent as

in rural areas. Churches in urban areas have shown to have younger congregation members and positively impact the lives of the youth (Johnson, Larson, Li and Jang 2000). According Simpson and Hagan (1981), youth in urban disadvantaged neighborhoods who frequently attend church are more likely to not commit a drug related crime. A study done by Johnson, Larson, Li, and Jang (2000), found that the youths who sold drugs and attended church were more likely to decrease drug dealing within the community. Their study reveals the types of crimes present in churches in urban areas and demonstrates the importance of how extracurricular activities churches provide may positively impact youth that attend church. Church attendance has a significant impact on various measures of deviance among disadvantaged youths living in poverty tracts (Triplett, White and Gainey 2013).

Methods/Data

This research was conducted in Pilsen, Chicago with two Catholic churches that are in close proximity of each other. There were ten interviews that were conducted, five members in each church for 30 minutes. There were five interviews conducted in each church: St. George and St. Mark. St. George consisted of Latinas/os in the west side of Pilsen. It had demographics of two females and three males who were between the ages of 20 to 50. St. Mark consisted of Whites in the east side of Pilsen. It had demographics of two females and three males who were between the ages of 45 to 70.

From the interviews conducted in St. George I found the following codes: members emphasize their responsibility to the community surrounding the church, members show a sense of pride of their ethnic roots, members take ownership of their church by using the phrase “we”, belief that the main purpose of the church is to create community, members mention that the

police presence is concentrated around the community surrounding the church, and the church provides extracurricular activities for children. Second, I coded the five interviews from St. Mark and found the following codes: members empathize that the church is a symbol of worship, members take self-ownership of their participation in church by using the word “I”, members demonstrate their legitimacy of being a person of God, belief that the main purpose of the church is to allow people to get closer to God, members perceive the role of the church not contributing to controlling crime, and the church does not provide extracurricular activities for children. I derived the two themes role of the church and individuality versus community from the codes that I found in the ten interviews by concluding that all the codes correlated with the purpose of the church and the emphasis on individual interests versus community interests. The two themes role of the church and individuality versus community are relevant in their application to the Latino Paradox and crime by furthering the understanding of why Latinas/os are conditioned to helping others, especially other Latinas/os stay out of trouble. On the hand, the two themes role of the church and individuality versus community are pertinent in explaining why Whites are adamant in self-induced actions being justified through the secular realm of the church. I chose quotations for each theme. These quotations are indicative of the correlation of Latinas/os perceiving the church as an outlet for creating community and that its main purpose is to provide services for everyone unlike Whites who are more likely to perceive the role of the church as a place to worshipping God and hold individualistic views of including outsiders inside the their church.

The Role of the Church:

According to a 62 year old White man’s answer to the question of how he perceives the role of the church in controlling crime,

“ . . . I believe that the church is a symbol of love not destruction.”

This quotation demonstrates his varying views regarding the White church and the Latino church. He viewed the White church as a symbol of love, a place for people who worship God, and the Latino church as a place of destruction, a place for criminals. It can be inferred that he was comparing his church in positive manner and shedding light on how he views the other church as being innately geared to people who are destructors of the church.

According to a 65 year old White man's answer to the question of how he perceives to be the sole role of the church,

“The role of the church as is to only provide its members with the path to salvation.”

This quotation shows how the predominant perception of Whites in relation to the role of the church is to aid in their individual spiritual benchmarks. Also, the age of the interviewee reveals his solidification of traditional views on the church's function as an outlet for practicing their faith.

According to a 24 year old Latina social justice activist's answer when she was asked about the church's role in reducing crime,

“The church influences me to be confident and proud of who I am. Being a young Mexican woman, I want to have some guidance and the church provides that. The church offers hope.”

This quotation illustrates how the church should be referred to as a place that is an icon of hope and provide guidance in people's lives. Also, she eludes into how her identity as a young Mexican woman is being directly influenced by the church and her ethnicity.

According to a 40 year old Latino answer when he was asked about the role of the church and his opinion of if the community approves of extracurricular activities for children in the church,

“Some of the children are first generation are better off with the tutoring here[the church] than at their school because we provide a better support system.”

This quotation demonstrates how the church should be a support system and that the church serves as a secular and learning establishment. In essence, the church in the Latino community is

considered to being a place of unconditional support and is concerned about the successes of the people.

According to a 54 year old White woman's answer about the role of the church,

"The church needs to only aid people in their spiritual lives."

This quotation shows how the church is not multi-faced in the realm of providing extracurricular activities to the community. Additionally, this quotations reveals how Whites will concentrate their involvement with the church to be restricted to the secular realm.

According to a 61 year old White male's answer about the role of the church as it pertains to the perceptions of the community,

"The church can only offer so much. Besides the church needs to worry about people that actually come to services."

This quotation reveals that the church should be restricted in the services they offer to only focus on people's spiritual well-being. Additionally, the White male refers to how people that continuously go to church should be praised and that the church should concentrate its efforts on those who always attend.

According to a 65 year old White man's answer to the church's role in controlling crime,

"The church has certain obligations to uphold. People know that the church is the house of God and those who enter must abide by the commandments."

This quotation illustrates how the church has certain *standards* for membership and implies that people who attend church could not have committed crimes.

Individuality vs. Community:

According to a 37 year old Latino answer when asked about how comfortable he feels with other congregation members,

"I believe that our church creates unity in our community because I see people starting to wear there rosaries around their necks and that when I see new members they say that they see people

from the church so passionate to be forgiving and helpful. If the church was not here, there would be no sense of unity.”

This quotation reveals the importance of identity of Latinas/os through rosaries which are symbols provided by the church and that Latinas/os are more willing to create community with influence of the church. Likewise, Latinas/os perceive the church as an outlet for being more connected with the people.

According to 65 year old White man’s answer about if he believes the community views the church as a secular place,

“The church gives me the power to be morally correct and follow the right path. I do not commit crimes. I am a man of God and I follow his teachings dutifully.”

This quotation shows how the White man was geared toward focusing on his self-performance in advancing in his own path of salvation.

According to 35 year old Latina’s answer to her opinion on the effectiveness on the church on the community,

“Most of the church members are willing to participate, especially when it has to do with bettering the community. The members love to work closely with the youth.”

This quotation illustrates how the majority of Latinas/os are active participants in uniting the community with the church. Moreover, there is an emphasis on more members focusing on the youth within the Latino community than any other age group.

According to a 24 year old Latina’s answer on her opinion on the church being a safe space,

“I had one woman come to me saying that the church gives her hope and security. I think that people like her see our church as a place to feel safe and a place to not feel ashamed of who they are.”

This quotation reveals a direct positive relationship with the resources provided by the church and the sense of community that has been created by the church. Additionally, when she refers to Latinas/os not being ashamed of who they are implies that the church has an influence of the identity of Latinas/os.

According to a 54 year old White woman's answer about the way the community perceives the church,

"I think our church is for the ones that are committed to being close to God"

This quotation shows how she is more concerned on how to categorize people and their legitimacy to God. Furthermore, she implies that she is already committed to God and is interested in her commitment to God.

According to a 37 year old Latino's answer about his opinion of the church,

"I believe that the church is here to give us a path of hope and success in our lives. I want to find my true identity with others. I need the help of others to concretely know who I am."

This quotation reveals how the church is seen as an establishment that allows Latinas/os to understand their culture. Also, he relates the church to being a salient factor of being successful in life and he uses the word us to include the rest of the Latino community.

According to a 27 year old Latino's answer to his opinion about the church congregation members,

"We need to take care of our people."

This quotation shows how he is adamant in preserving and tending to the Latino community's needs through the church and is passionate in putting the community first before himself.

Discussion of Findings

As we can see in the interviews conducted in St. George, Latinas/os emphasized the saliency of creating community and aiding the Latino community through the resources provided by the church. The religious standpoints that were prevalent in the interviews of Latinas/os were liberal-communal because they all referenced an obligation for social justice. On the other hand, the interviews conducted in St. Mark, White highlighted the importance of the church being an outlet for practicing their faith and not an establishment for serving the community in any other way. The religious standpoints that were evident in the interviews of Whites were conservative-

individualistic because all of them referred to themselves more frequently than Latinas/os. Additionally, Latinas/os used their faith as a focal point for their identities, while the Whites used their faith to be prideful of their commitment to God. The findings show that this research did outline the relevance of the Latino Paradox by examining the role of the church, and its effects on sense of community and crime rates in urban neighborhoods.

Implications/Conclusion for Urban Crime and the Latino Paradox

According to U.S. Census Bureau, as of July 1, 2013, there are an estimated 54 million Latinas/os living in the United States, representing approximately 17% of the U.S. total population, making the group the nation's largest ethnic or race minority. Out of the 2,718,782 inhabitants living in the city of Chicago, 29.8% of them were of Latino origin. While one may expect to find proportional crime rates, this may not be the case. As many studies have shown in other cities with significant Latino populations, a Latino paradox may be mitigating many of the effects of crime. Thus, a further analysis of the city of Chicago is needed in order to prove or disprove the existence of a paradox of crime and to further address the paradox that serves as a protective factor in relation to crime and the Latino population. The implications that can be derived for this study are the different socioeconomic barriers and struggles the Latino community endure other than Whites and the amount of amount of Latina/as in relation to Whites of the amount of Catholics globally. Recently, the Pew Research Center's 2013 National Survey of Latinos and Religion found that a majority (55%) of the nation's estimated 35.4 million Latino adults – or about 19.6 million Latinos – identify as Catholic today. The amount of Latinos in comparison to Whites identifying as Catholic has intrigued several sociologists to examine the effects of the prevailing Latino culture imbedded in Catholicism.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. What is your gender?
4. What is your race?
5. What racial group is the majority of the congregation members?
6. How did you become a member of the congregation? Why didn't you go anywhere else?
7. What is your position in the church?
8. How many people go to church?
9. How comfortable do you feel with other congregation members? Why?
10. Are most of your friends members of the church?
11. Do you think that your church does a lot of service events for the community? How?
12. What types of extracurricular activities that the church offers?
13. Do you believe that these extracurricular activities are beneficial? Why?
14. Do you believe that the community approves of these extracurricular activities? Why?
15. Is there church functions that rely on community participation?
16. What are your views on crime?
17. What types of crimes are prevalent in your neighborhood?
18. Do you believe that your neighborhood is safe? Why?
19. Do you notice a lot of police in your neighborhood? Give example.
20. Do you believe that the community views the church as a secure place?
21. How do you perceive the role of the church in controlling crime? Why?
22. Does your church do any activities related to addressing/combatting crime? Do you think these activities work? Why?
23. How far does the influence of the church go in your daily life? Explain.
24. Do you believe that your church creates unity in your community? Why?