This dissertation uses the case of youth gangs in the Mormon Cultural Region to present a synthetic, dialectical theory of social problems, bridging the perspectives of social constructionism and objectivism. The primary assertion of this dissertation is that communities use social problems as tools to establish and maintain social boundaries and to protect the core values and beliefs of the established communal order.

The case of youth gangs in Utah, core of the Mormon Cultural Region, demonstrates that both social problems and the organizations involved with social problems follow a natural-history cycle similar to that reported in social movement literature. Anti-gang organizations, youth gangs, and the gang movement all seem to change forms as they progress through this cycle. Further, the relationship between the claims-making and the ontological increase in social problems is dialectical.

(178 pages)
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Ramona Higley
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Sociologists have studied social problems since the discipline was founded. In fact, it is the study of social problems that first gave sociology a place in scientific realms. Since sociology emerged as a discipline, a debate has raged among social problems researchers over the nature of social problems. On one hand those supporters of an “objective” (Best, 1989) or “realist” (Miller & Holstein, 1993) orientation have “insisted that there is an objective reality to social problems that should be the topic of sociology” (Miller & Holstein, p. 3). These traditional theorists argue that social problems are, in effect, conditions that are opposed to the dominant norms of society. Although theorists disagree as to the contributing causes of these social problems, there is a consistent assumption that social problems are empirically real with an element of tangibility to them. For traditional social problem theorists, social problems can be identified, examined, measured, and solved.

Social constructionists, on the other hand, analyze social problems as social processes, looking at the rhetorical activities of interest groups in the transformation of ordinary events into social problems. “Construed in this fashion, social problems are not objective conditions to be studied and corrected; rather, they are the interpretive processes that constitute what come to be seen as oppressive, intolerable, or unjust conditions like crime, poverty, and homelessness” (Miller & Holstein, 1993, p. 4).

Social construction theorists have rejected the idea that social problems are tangible conditions and instead have concerned themselves with the methods used by individuals and groups to change ordinary situations into events that are seen as
problematic to the public. They have concentrated on the processes by which social problems are constructed. They reason that it is through the behaviors of interest groups that the public identifies and reacts to perceived events or conditions and begins viewing these designated events as social problems. Rather than aiming to discover solutions for social problems, constructionists seek to explain the activities of interest groups. Little attention is given to the actual social conditions in and of themselves. In fact some social constructionists have argued that there need be no change in social conditions at all in order for a social problem to emerge. Some even argue that conditions are irrelevant, that social problems are all about rhetoric and claims making.

An ongoing debate concerning the balancing of these approaches continues (Best, 1993; Fine, 1977; Hammersley, 2001; Miller & Holstein, 1993; Pollner, 1974, 1993; Rains, 1975), and resolution of social constructionism and objectivism approaches to social problems seems to have failed. Consolidating the views of theorists purporting social problems as social conditions and those insisting that social problems are social processes has come to an impasse. Researchers from each group continue to largely ignore the contributions of the other while extolling the benefits of their own views. However, it is possible and desirable to synthesize these two approaches. The explanation of any given social problem is not complete when either of the two methods is singularly employed. Instead, a bridge between the social construction approach and the objective approach to the explanation of social problems can and should be developed.

This dissertation proposes a social problems theory that synthesizes these two broad approaches to the study and explanation of social problems. More specifically, this
dissertation demonstrates that, through the processes used by interest groups to construct social problems, negative social conditions within the community increase. There is, in fact, a dialectical relationship between the activities of interest groups and the social problems they combat. Both social construction theories and objective theories of social problems have alluded to but not clarified this tie. This work synthesizes these two general approaches.

A study of gangs in the Mormon Cultural Region between 1990 and 2000 is used to illustrate this connection. Evidence of a dialectical relationship between the activities of interest groups opposed to gangs and gang activity is presented by examining newspaper references to gangs, investigating crime reports, and interviewing members of prominent interest groups about gang activity. This study suggests a strong tie between social problem conditions and the activities of interest groups. Although it is not clear which began first (gang activity or the anti-gang movement), the link between the two is compelling, suggesting that any type of change in either element of the social problem will likely produce a reciprocal change in the other. The likelihood of a social situation in becoming a social problem largely depends on both the conditions surrounding the situation and the activities of special interest groups. Without both elements, the situation will not be treated as a social problem.

Further, it is suggested here, that communities use social problems as tools for adapting to the community’s changing social environment. In this particular study, rapid population growth and racial restructuring are studied as possible leads to the construction and display of a gang problem. Likewise, the decreasing gang problem was preceded by Salt Lake City winning the bid to host the 2002 Winter Olympics, coupled
with the change in the popular youth culture and the rise of non-youth gang-related shootings in schools. These elements combined to shift the government and public focus away from the gang problem. The result was an empirical decline in gang activity.

The Gang Problem

One of the United States’ most prevalent national social problems of the 1990s was the gang problem. “Gang members became the stereotypical criminals of the decade, being blamed for random violent crimes against innocent citizens” (Lane & Meeker, 2000, p. 497), even to the point that President Bill Clinton declared “war on gangs” in 1997 (Clinton, 1997). Few metropolitan areas were considered gang free and reports of gangs infiltrating the suburbs and rural areas were increasing. “Throughout the 1980s and well into the 1990s, the media, with the generous help of law enforcement, created many myths about gangs and gang crime, which understandably created much fear among the public” (Shelden, Tracy, & Brown, 2001, p. 5). However, one enduring attitude toward gangs continues to exist. Gangs are thought to be a pressing problem of the inner-city minority communities caused in part by thwarted ambitions of people living in those communities (Anderson, 1994).

Youth culture, during this time period, was intertwined with hip-hop culture. “A hip-hop culture rose out of the gang-dominated street culture, and aspects of the gangs are still defining features of hip-hop particularly territorialism and the tradition of battling” (Fricke & Ahern, 2002). Hip-hop includes rapping and graffiti art as two of the four main elements of the culture and is closely aligned with the gang movement. The language of music, the style of dress, and other aspects of the hip-hop movement are
primarily about youth exerting power and gaining respect (through violence if necessary) from a society that has created “an emerging underclass of marginalized minority youth” (Shelden et al., 2001, p. 8). During the 1980s and 90s, hip-hop gradually became mainstream. By 1992 it was a part of the dominant culture in most of the U.S. Youth from all socio-economic classes, creeds, and racial and ethnic groups followed the hip-hop movement adopting the hip-hop dress styles of baggy pants and bandanas (most often associated with gangs). Rap music was played on the contemporary radio stations and graffiti art was commonly practiced by youth called “taggers” (Stallworth, 1995, p. 39).

Also, during the 1990s law enforcement agencies were moving towards a new method of dealing with crime called “community policing.” Although there is some ambiguity as to a clear definition of community policing, “this movement has generally emphasized two important issues: getting closer to the community, and solving discrete community crime, disorder and fear of problems” (Greene, 2003, p. 3). Agencies employing this method seek community member’s help and advice in identifying and solving crimes. Community members are seen as partners to policing agents rather than adversaries. One of the side effects of community policing is that community fear, rather than crime, often directs policing efforts.

With the popular youth culture’s acceptance of hip-hop, the media’s focus on gangs and the movement of law enforcement to community policing, “it did not take long for citizens to become alarmed about the threat of gangs” (Shelden et al., 2001, p. 5). In 1995, the National Youth Gang Center (NYGC) conducted the first annual national youth gang survey, showing that responding law enforcement agencies estimated “that there
were more than 660,000 youth gang members and more than 23,000 gangs active in their jurisdictions during 1995" (Bilchik, 1997, p. iii). According to this survey, Utah ranked tenth in the nation for the number of gangs reported. However, the demographic composition of Utah and the core values of the Mormon Cultural Region would seem adverse to stereotypical gang activity.

Stereotypically, there was no reason for Utah to have a gang problem. The stereotypical approach to gangs is that it is a minority problem; it is Black and Hispanic males. They are preying on the White community. . . . They come from poor family backgrounds, a single-parent environment. Usually, mom is the one in the household. The father has long since flown the coop and they are on welfare. That is the stereotypical approach to what constitutes gangs. (Stallworth, 1995, p. 34)

"The minority communities in Utah are relatively small and comprise a small percentage of the population" (Jacobson, 1996, p. 69). Although Utah children living in mother-only households are likely to suffer economic hardships, “fewer Utah children [lived] in mother-only families [10 % vs. 17 %]” compared to the nation as a whole in 1990 (Hirschl, 1996, p. 234). Additionally, Utah is dominated by the members of the Mormon religion (Young, 1996), who put a high emphasis on Christian ideals and this life style seems contradictory to the cultural adoption of gangs.

Yet, during the early 1990s, Utah citizens showed an increasing fear of gangs. For example, a 1993 poll of Salt Lake City residents indicated that the majority of residents were anxious enough about the expanding gang problem to support a tax increase to combat the problem (Shelden et al., 2001; Shelley, 1993). State legislators passed numerous laws and appropriated money to combat the gang problem. Gangs were a daily topic of the media. Numerous agencies were formed with the main purpose to combat gangs. Indeed it appeared that Utah had a gang problem.
Claims concerning gangs began in 1990 and peaked in 1993. At that time there was a drastic decrease in the newspaper articles referencing gangs. By the year 2000, references to gangs in Utah were sparse. The amount of reported gang activity by policing agents also peaked in 1993. Since that time, the number of gang members and reported gang activities has steadily declined. It seems that increasing (or decreasing) claims about gangs was accompanied by a reciprocal increase (or decrease) in gang activity.

This research explores both the process of defining youth gangs as a problem for Utah and the conditions surrounding this problem. It demonstrates a dialectic relationship between the claims making process and the ontological presentation of gangs in Utah, suggesting that a similar relationship may exist between the claims making process associated with other social problems and those problems ontological occurrence.

Dissertation Outline

In order to establish a link between social constructionism and objective theories of social problems, a review of both perspectives is presented in Chapter 2. The major theoretical contributions and the weaknesses of each perspective as they pertain to this synthesis are discussed. Finally, a connection between the two will be drawn in what will be called “a dialectical synthetic” social problem theory.

Following the establishment of the synthetic theory, Chapter 3 presents background information on the Mormon Culture Region and illustrates cultural paradoxes associated with the communities of this region. These cultural paradoxes are cultural peculiarities that have developed over time and cause uncertainty and sometimes fear in
the community because conflicting values and norms have developed. All communities develop paradoxes. Discovering the paradoxes within the culture aids in the understanding of social problems because this cultural point of uncertainty is where social problems nearly always develop.

Chapter 4 presents an account of the structural changes that took place in Utah during the early 1990s that provided the proper atmosphere for social problems to occur. Utah experienced economic prosperity and an associated increase in migration. The rapid in-migration changed the racial distribution of residents within the state. Every county in Utah experienced growth in minority population. Additionally, Utah has a high portion of youthful residents. The combination of a proportionately high youth group, increasing numbers of minorities, and the national attention on the gang problem combined to prepare Utah for the social problem of gangs.

A brief discussion of the national trends towards fear of youth gangs is presented in Chapter 5. Evidence suggests that fear of crime and fear of gangs specifically have as much to do with a community’s belief in a crime wave as does the ontological increase in gang activity. The media plays a vital role in establishing this fear.

Chapter 6 presents the methods used to gather data concerning this research. Three sources of data are used for this test of theory. First, newspaper articles that referenced gangs from 1990 to 2000 were read and evaluated. Patterns associated with these articles help demonstrate the claims making process and the objective increase of gang activity in the Utah, the core of the Mormon Cultural Region. Second, FBI Uniform Crime Reports and the statistics generated by a gang-policing agency in Salt Lake area are used to demonstrate the ontological increase in crime, juvenile arrests and gang
activity in Utah. Finally, a series of interviews with lead personnel of six anti-gang organizations were conducted. These interviews clarified the claims made by interest groups and showed the changes in the organizations making those claims from 1990-2000.

Chapter 7 applies this new theory to an established social problem. More specifically, this research demonstrates a dialectical relationship between gang activity in the Mormon Cultural region and the anti-gang movement. Information collected from newspaper articles, official statistics, and interviews with anti-gang personnel, demonstrates that social problems are the creation of communities and that evidence suggests that either a change in claims making or a change in objective conditions will result in a reflective change in the social problem.

Chapter 8 evaluates how well this new theory "fits" with the data about the gang problem in the Mormon Cultural Region. Results of the data analysis are used to test the theory developed in this dissertation. Recommendations for further research are suggested and the implications of this research are clarified.
CHAPTER 2
THEORY PRESENTATION

“In recent years theories of social problems have been polarized between two broad schools of thought: the objective view and the constructionist view. The objective view is the traditional approach (Thio, 1998) to the study of social problems and deviant behavior. This positivist perspective treats social problems as objective social conditions inherently detrimental to society. Researchers who adhere to this perspective seek to identify and analyze negative or harmful events present in society. They study conditions and people involved in troublesome behavior or situations. The assumption is that some events or people are themselves problematic. Researchers seek to gain a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding the problem situation. By so doing, they hope to identify the causal conditions that lead to the emergence of social problems and solve them.

“While they fit our common-sense notion of what social problems are, objectivist definitions have two key flaws. First, they minimize or even ignore the subjective nature of social problems” (Best, 1989, p. xv). Second, conditions defined as social problems might vary from one community to another and share little in common with conditions in others places or times that are called social problems. The study of objective conditions as social problems becomes little more than an exploration of current events because social problems that exist from one place to another and one time to another may or may not have common characteristics (Fuller & Meyers, 1941a).
For example, hitting children was not seen as a social problem prior to the child-saver crusades of middle-class feminists of the mid-1900s. There was no definition of child abuse prior to that time (Nelson, 1979). The treatment of children was left to the discretion of the parents. Today, however, every state in the U.S. has laws regulating the treatment of children. What, at one time, was considered disciplinary action is now considered child abuse and those participating in such activities (such as hitting children) are now considered deviant. Indeed, what changed were not the actions of the parents but the definitions of the act (Johnson, 1989). It is difficult to obtain accurate statistics of child abuse, or any other social problem over time, because the definitions of problems change from time to time and from place to place.

In reaction to the perceived limitations of the objectivist perspective, a new approach to the study of social problems emerged. Social constructionists focus “on the processes by which people designate some social conditions as social problems” (Best, 1989, p. xviii). They define social problems as “activities of individuals of groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative condition” (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987, p. 75). In so doing, constructionists down play the empirical existence of negative conditions. The important part of social problem research from the constructivist perspective is to understand the processes by which a set of conditions becomes the center of public concern. Constructionists seek to understand the methods used to generate public consensus (Mauss, 1975) about real or imagined social events. They study claims makers (Best, 1989), boundary maintenance (Erikson, 1966) and the natural history of social problems (Mauss; Spector & Kitsuse). In short, social constructionists seek to understand how the public constructs social problems.
Strict social constructionists, such as Kitsuse and Ibarra, “argue that the objective status of these [social problem] conditions is irrelevant. It does not matter whether or not the conditions exist” (Best, 1989, p. xviii). “Social problems,” according to strict constructionist theory, “are possible strictly as assemblages of the member’s perspective [of putative conditions]” (Ibarra & Kitsuse, 1993, p. 22). They are “accomplishments” (Gubrium, 1993, p. 3). They are “bound to the rhetorical claims making activities of those who clarify, redefine, or counter the status of putatively objectionable conditions in society” (Gubrium, p. 3). In other words, “social problems are what people view as social problems” (Best, 1989, p. xvi) and nothing more. Social conditions have little, if any thing to do with social problems.

Contextual constructionists (Best, 1989, 1993), although also most interested in the process involved in development of a situation into a social problem, “study claims making within its context of culture and social structure” (Best, 1993). This allows the researcher to evaluate the quality of the claims made in context with the ontological reality. “These works assume that we will understand the empirical world better if we pay attention to the manner in which social problems emerge and, at a more basic level, they also assume that understanding the empirical world is desirable” (Best, 1993, p. 119). In other words, contextual constructionists recognize that conditions are part of social problems and deviance and may be “a feature of a particular action, rather than a simply a product of societal reaction” (Hammersley, 2001, p. 94). However, for contextual constructionists, the more interesting question is “how do community members come to view some situations as social problems and not others.”
Both strict and contextual constructionists have been criticized for minimizing the importance of social conditions in their analysis of social problems. Critics argue that the constructionist point of view ignores the fact that some conditions and behaviors are inherently bad. Instead, constructionists argue that no situation can cause a social problem to emerge in and of itself. Whether a situation or condition is thought to be good or bad is primarily a matter of definition. Even situations that are ontologically harmful to human existence are not always considered bad. Wars and the soldiers that fight in them, for example, are ontologically detrimental to life. But, whether the wars or soldiers are considered “bad” depends on the perspective of the observer and on the claims made concerning the situation. What is said about the conditions determines how an event or person is viewed.

The idea that social problems are largely a result of rhetoric activities is commonly rejected by persons closest to the social problems, (e.g., victims, police officers, social workers, and politicians). Their experiences often suggest that negative and harmful conditions do exist regardless of the public’s attitude toward these conditions. For instance, although research suggests that the incidents of children being abducted by strangers is extremely low in the U.S., families experiencing this type of abduction appeal to others fears that all children are equally vulnerable of such abductions in order to solicit public help in the return of their children. These appeals, coupled with inflated statistics, transform individual tragedies into structural issues (Best, 1989). Similarly, elderly persons who feel neglected or abused by their care-giving children are unlikely to see how the creation of institutes to study aging is largely responsible for the construction of elder abuse as a social problem (Baumann, 1989).
Although the process of typifying (Best, 1989) social problems described by constructionists is important, objectivist theories also increase our understanding of social problems. For instance, those objectivist theorists adhering to different approaches such as structural functionalism have some merit in arguing that individuals and organizations that fail to act within the normative expectations of society do produce problems for individuals and the system. Similarly, objectivist conflict theorists are correct in arguing that individuals and groups working to exert power and control over other individuals and groups are likely to produce troublesome, problematic conditions for those that they exert power over. Even labeling theorists are correct in asserting that the meaning people have of situations will direct their activities and that the objective conditions will be altered based on these meanings. Therefore applying negative labels to a group or to individuals may very well lead to secondary deviance or worsening of social conditions.

The solution to this dilemma would be to find a way to synthesize the theories so that both the process of constructing social problems and the objective conditions of social problems can be studied and understood simultaneously. However, attempts to rectify these two approaches have failed.

Some sociologists who remain more-or-less committed to the objectivist approach...argue that objectivism and constructionism are merely “two sides of the same coin,” and that the two theoretical perspectives can be easily reconciled. . . . Because the two perspectives define social problems differently and focus on different issues, it is no small matter to reconcile objectivism and constructionism in a single integrated theory. (Best, 1989, p. 244)

The difficulty in reconciling these two perspectives is due to the relative perspectives of their proponents of each towards social problems. Objectivists define social problems as problematic conditions or situations. In essence, objectivists view
social problems from the “bottom-up.” They begin with empirical factors that are independent of what people think. Social Problems from this perspective can be compared to tornadoes or earthquakes. Regardless of what people say or think about such events, they are still real (ontologically) and potentially harmful to those in their paths.

Social constructionists, on the other hand, define social problems as the outcome of claims making activities that result in public consensus of reality. They view social problems from the “top-down.” They begin by evaluating the desired characteristics of a community (from the community perspective) and examine the process the community uses to obtain or maintain those characteristics. Constructionists suggest that people manufacture social problems. Social problems are the artifacts, or better, social facts, of a community. They reflect the desires, morals, customs, norms and values of the community. Events, even such things as earthquakes and tornadoes, happen, but they only become problematic for a community if the community members define them as problematic.

The two approaches are looking at two different aspects of the same phenomenon. Both are models of social problems. However, useful models are simpler than the thing they represent. Models highlight important aspects of their prototype while ignoring other aspects. For instance, a terrain may be mapped to show the rivers of the area, or it may be mapped to show the highways. The fact that one cannot find the best roads in the area when looking at the river map does not make the river map “wrong.” The same is true when discussing the theoretical models of social problems presented by constructionists and objectivists. The fact that objectivists cannot explain social
processes involved in social problem construction does not make them “wrong.” The same is true of constructionists. The fact that constructionists focus on processes does not make the conditions non-existent. Conditions are just not the focus of the constructionist “map.”

The trick is to find a way to illustrate both perspectives without minimizing either. Previous attempts to reconcile these perspectives began with the traditional (objectivist) view and attempted to trace the history of social problem construction as an afterthought. The argument goes something like this: “Here is a negative, objective condition. Let’s see what occurred among the public to amplify this condition into a public concern.” A consolidation of the two approaches that begins with the objective reality being taken for granted merely examines the conditions surrounding the negative situation. Only lip service is given to the constructionists’ point of view.

However, if researching social problems began from the constructionists’ analysis, the objective realization of the claims made could also be explained. A synthesis of these two approaches requires that we first understand the community culture where the social problem occurred. If we understand the values, beliefs and structure of the community, we can begin to see the processes used to construct social problems. And, if we understand these processes we can also learn more about the objective conditions associated with the social problem.

Social problems have two aspects: The subjective element and the objective element. All social problems require both. Claims are made by claims makers about something, about some condition. Whether there is ontological evidence of that condition or not, social problems are about conditions. However, there are a lot of
conditions that are not seen as social problems by some people at certain times and are seen as social problems by others at other times. Therefore, the presence of any condition is not enough to cause a social problem. Social problems are the processes by which some alleged situations are made to appear problematic.

It is the purpose of this dissertation to build and test a synthetic, dialectical theory of social problems that explains both the process of constructing social problems and the objectification of those conditions. To begin the synthesis of these two approaches, it is necessary to succinctly summarize some of the most important conceptual contributions of each perspective.

The Objectivist Perspective

The concept of social problems in America surfaced with the urban-industrial order of the nineteenth century (Bernard, 1957; Green, 1975; Rubington & Weinberg, 1995). Emerging conditions in urban areas were perceived as problematic by middle class reformers.

As cities swelled, a number of troublesome conditions became more and more noticeable. Near the end of the Civil War, the notion arose that these conditions of suffering, pain, social disorder, institutional malfunctioning, and the like could be remedied. With the corrective attitude the concept of social problems was born. (Rubington & Weinberg, 1995, p. 15)

Prior to this time, the general public’s perception suggested that although negative social conditions existed, there was no collective belief that there was any remedy for these conditions. In order for a social condition to be considered a social problem there needs be a collective belief that something can be done to solve the problem or to
improve the condition. Without such a belief, the condition is not viewed as a social problem (a problem that belongs to the public realm).

From this climate of social unrest emerged the concept of social problems. Following the lead of members of the newly formed American Sociological Association (ASA), early explanations of social problems mirrored the popular beliefs of the late nineteenth century concerning human behavior. “Much contemporary theorizing owes an unacknowledged debt to [Herbert] Spencer” (Turner, 1991, p. 37) who developed a recessive form of the organic analogy that was adopted by structural functionalist theorists. Spencer compared societies with organisms, concluding that: (a) as a society increases in size and structure, it becomes more complex and differentiated; (b) differentiation of structures within a society leads to specialization of the parts (individuals and groups) of the society; (c) specialization leads to mutual dependence of the parts on the system; (d) each differentiated structure (individual or group) is a systematic whole by itself; (e) the structures (individuals and groups) can “live on” for a while after the destruction of the systematic whole (Turner). In other words, human behavior was thought to be the combination of “natural law, progress, social reform, and individualism” (Rubington & Weinberg, 1995, p. 16).

Because sociology was a new field, lacking rhetoric of its own, many terms used to describe human behavior were borrowed from other disciplines. So, for instance, when talking about social problems many theorists saw society functioning like an organism, and as a result medical terms were used to describe the process. Social problems were thought to be pathologies or signs of an illness within society (Rubington & Weinberg, 1995).
Social Pathology

From this general objectivist view, the social pathology perspective was developed and (Henderson, 1909; Smith, 1911) "dominated the field for at least a generation" (Rubington & Weinberg, 1995, p. 17) during the early 1900s and continues to influence the public attitude towards social problems today. In essence, from the social pathologist's view "desirable social conditions and arrangements are seen as healthy, while persons or situations that diverge from moral expectations of a community are regarded as 'sick,' therefore bad. . . . Social problems are violations of moral expectation" (Rubington & Weinberg, 1995, p. 19).

Social problems from this perspective were thought to be caused by a failure of socialization and were perpetuated within groups that contained the problems. As with many types of illness, social problems could be transferred from one person or group to another through contact and association with infected groups or people. The solutions to social problems for social pathologists took several forms: re-socialization of the deviant, restructuring of institutions, and/or various degrees of isolation of "sick" populations from healthy populations (Rubington & Weinberg, 1995).

The strength of the social pathology perspective relative to the synthetic theory being developed here is in its application of the organic analogy (Smith, 1911). The organic analogy indicates that there is a link between individual and community behavior. Also inherent in this theory is the recognition that community morals and values are thought to be healthy while anything that runs counter to those values are thought to be sick. This is an important point in the formation of a synthesized theory of social problems. Although social pathologists took for granted the objective behavior of
deviants and sought only to explain that behavior, they set the stage for social construction explanations of social process.

The primary weakness of the social pathology perspective is the inability of its proponents to define “pathology.” The concepts of normality and pathology on which the theory rests are vague and subjective. Although social pathology emerged in the light of positivism, it is so laden with moral judgment that testing the concept of pathology through scientific means is nearly impossible.

Social Disorganization

Following World War I, the processes of migration, urbanization, and industrialization began to occur at an unprecedented rate in the U.S. (Rubington & Weinberg, 1995, p. 53). In this changing environment, social problems flourished and it became increasingly more difficult to explain deviant behavior using the pathological analogy. As a result, stricter uses of scientific tools were applied to the study of social problems and the social disorganization perspective emerged. With this new emphasis on positivism, social problem research flourished. Researchers developed theoretical concepts that helped explain conditions surrounding social problems. For instance,

A very early but still influential writer, (Charles H.) Cooley made some important conceptual contributions to the social disorganization perspective. First, he formulated the distinction between primary and secondary group relations.... Second, Cooley conceptualized social disorganization as the disintegration of traditions. (Rubington & Weinberg, 1995, p. 56)

Meanwhile, William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki (1927) expounded the ideas of the disintegration of tradition with a study of Polish immigrant families. They explained disorganization within families as a result of either having too many rules or
too few rules placed on the individuals by the change in culture. Thomas and Znaniecki argued that deviance resulted as individuals shifted their attitudes from a “we” attitude to an “I” attitude in an effort to adjust to the rule conflicts.

About the same time, William Ogburn (1922) developed the idea of cultural lag. “The different parts of a culture are interdependent, Ogburn said, and when different parts change at different rates, one part can get out of phase with another and produce disorder” (Rubington & Weinberg, 1995, p. 57).

In summary, “social disorganization is conceived of a failure of [societal] rules” (Rubington & Weinberg, 1995, p. 57) to produce order. Rapid social change is thought to create stress in the individual and restructuring, dysfunction or breakdown in the social system. Social disorganization theorists studied the failure of community norms to fulfill the societal contract. For instance, Robert E. Park (1967) defined delinquency as a “failure of our community organizations to function” in light of the rapid changes of modern life. The failure, for Park and others like him, is in the community’s ability to socialize individuals. The emphasis of this theory is still on viewing the objective condition surrounding social problems and on understanding deviant behavior.

The strengths of this theory are threefold. First, social disorganization theory advances the organic analogy and recognizes that there is indeed a tie between social problems and the community. Many social disorganization theorists used the human ecology model to study communities (Faris & Dunham, 1965). Second a connection is made between social problems and rapid social change. Social change was thought to contribute to the formation of social problems. And finally, social disorganization
theorists recognized that social problems were most likely to occur in periphery areas of the community (Faris & Dunham).

A great deal of research has been accomplished using this theory. Sociologists from the University of Chicago largely employed this social disorganization perspective. Most of Chicago-based research sought to explain why some parts of the city were laden with social problems and others were virtually free of them. The recognition that social problems are systematically determined and not random is important to this dissertation's synthetic theory.

However, the social disorganization perspective also has several weaknesses that were recognized by sociologists such as Marshall B. Clinard. Below is a summary of Clinard's critique.

There are a number of objections to this frame of reference. (1) Disorganization is too subjective and vague a concept for analyzing a general society. . . . (2) Social disorganization implies the disruption of a previously existing condition or organization, a situation which generally cannot be established. . . . (3) Social Disorganization is usually thought of as something "bad", and what is bad is often the judgment of the observer and the members of the social class of other social group. . . . (4) The existence of forms of deviant behavior does not necessarily constitute a major threat to the central values of society. . . . (5) What seems like disorganization actually may be highly organized systems of competing norms. . . . (6) Finally, as several sociologists have suggested, it is possible that a variety of subcultures may contribute, through their diversity, to the unity or integration of a society rather than weaken it by constituting a situation of social disorganization. (Clinard, 1995, p. 41-42).

The weaknesses of the social disorganization perspective have pushed many modern day sociologists to look for other explanations of social problems.
Value Conflict

Recognizing these problems when applying the social disorganization perspective to the study and teaching of social problems, Richard C. Fuller and Richard D. Meyers (1941a, 1941b) formulated the value conflict approach. Value conflict draws heavily from the ideas of early European theorists Karl Marx and George Simmel and addressed the need to use a sociological perspective to study social problems rather than presenting “a mass of data pertaining to crime, divorce, immigration, insanity, and the like... in unsystematic and undigested form” (Fuller & Meyers, 1941a, p. 24).

Fuller and Meyers (1941a) argued that at the core of every social problem was a conflict of values between groups.

These conflicts are mirrored in the failure of people to agree that a given condition is a social problem, or assuming agreement, failure to reach an accord as to what should be done about it. It is exactly this disagreement in value judgments that is the root cause of all social problems, both in the original definition of the condition as a problem and in subsequent efforts to solve it. (Fuller & Meyer, p. 25)

Fuller and Meyers (1941a) identified three types of social problems. The first, physical problems, involved problems that were caused by natural events such as earthquakes, storms, volcano eruptions but that required social cooperation to solve. Disagreements between groups as to solutions to physical problems make the problem a social problem. The second level of problems was identified as ameliorative problems. “Problems of this type represent conditions which people generally agree are undesirable in an instance, but they are unable to agree on programs for the amelioration of the conditions” (Fuller & Meyer, p. 28). And finally, at the third level Fuller and Meyers identified the moral problem. “The moral problem represents a condition on which there
is no unanimity of opinion throughout the society that the condition is undesirable in
every instance” (p. 30).

In an effort to systematically evaluate social problems, Fuller and Meyers (1941b)
argued that social problems follow a natural evolutionary process that they termed a
natural history. Although they continued to view social problems as negative conditions,
they insisted that the “objective condition is necessary but not in itself sufficient to
constitute a social problem” (Fuller and Meyers, p. 320). Instead a basic agreement that a
condition is a “threat to fundamental values” of one group has to exist. In addition, there
has to be a conflict of values between groups. Under these conditions of conflict, social
problems emerge through a three-step process: (1) awareness, (2) policy determination,
and (3) reform. Therefore, value conflict theorists argue that

the genesis of every social problem lies in the awakening of people in a given
locality to a realization that certain cherished values are threatened by conditions
which have become acute . . . . Very soon after the emergence of awareness,
comes debate over policies involved in alternative solutions . . . . The final stage in
the natural history of a social problem is that of reform. Here we find
administrative units engaged in putting formulated policy into action. (Fuller &
Meyer, pp. 320-328)

It is thought by value conflict theorists that every social problem naturally progresses
through this three-stage process.

The primary strength of the value conflict perspective is in the recognition that
social problems have a subjective element that is based on competing values of groups
that interact with each other. Fuller and Meyer’s natural history model became the
predecessor to the natural history model proposed by Spector and Kitsuse as the process
by which social problems are constructed. Herein lays an obvious link between
rectifying the objective and the constructionist approach to the explanation of social problems.

The primary weakness of the value conflict approach is Fuller and Meyers’ insistence that objective negative conditions are the cause of the subjective reaction to social problems. In addition, Fuller and Meyers fell under criticism when attempts to duplicate that natural history model failed (Lemert, 1951). Empirical evidence did not confirm that social problems progressed through the stages of awareness, policy formation and reform. However, the contributions of the value conflict perspective led to the formation of the constructionist approach. Still, other theorists rejected what appeared to be a value-laden explanation of social problems and returned to the structural functionalist theory to explain social problems.

**Deviant Behavior Perspective**

Theorists who were more inclined toward the general structural functionalist frame of reference revisited the disorganization perspective from an individualist approach. Robert Merton (1938), following the theoretical traditions of Harvard sociology, borrowed the term “anomie” from Emile Durkheim (1951) and formulated a typology of modes of individual adaptation to societal stress. He argued that anomie could be the normal state of affairs for persons in society if their legitimate opportunities to achieve cultural goals are routinely blocked by structural restraints (Merton). According to Merton, deviant acts are the normal result of individuals being frustrated by structural-caused inability to achieve success as defined by society. When society changes too fast or society’s rules are consistently unfair for individuals or groups of
people, the result is an individual rejecting either the goals of society or the legitimate means of achieving those goals or rejecting both. When groups of people experience anomie as routine, those groups are likely to also experience a relatively large number of social problems as a result of individual adaptation to that anomie.

For example, gangs can be explained using Merton’s theory as the logical result of lower- and working-class youth being restrained from achieving middle- and upper-class success. Restrictions in education and employment opportunities result in the inability of lower-class youth to accomplish the standard of living presented to them by the media. As a result, groups of youth reject either the standard means of achieving the middle-class success (e.g., go to school, work hard) and replace them with other means (e.g., stealing, selling drugs), or they reject the goals (e.g., achieve middle-class life style) and substitute other goals (e.g., become biggest, toughest gang member). Either way, the result is an increase in deviant behavior.

A contemporary of Merton, Edwin Sutherland (1939), approached an explanation of deviance from the research tradition of the University of Chicago. Giving greater attention to the process by which individuals become deviant than to the conditions of deviance, Sutherland maintained that people learn deviant behavior in primary groups. The frequency, duration, priority and intensity of interaction with groups with deviant orientation determine the likelihood that an individual will become deviant. It follows from Sutherland’s analogy of deviants as a process of socialization that groups with deviant orientations are the same groups that experience high levels of social problems. Based on this theory, Sutherland would have argued that individuals learn to be gang
members by associating with gang members. What is “normal” for the gang, stealing for instance, is likely to be considered problematic for the rest of society.

Albert Cohen (1955) synthesized the ideas of Merton and Sutherland. He explained that structural restrictions of opportunities to gain status in the “respectable society” (p. 121) as described by Merton, were likely to lead individuals into delinquent subcultures, which had been suggested by Sutherland as contributing to the learning of deviant ways. “The delinquent subculture deals with these problems [of status attainment] by providing criteria of status these children can meet” (Cohen, p. 121). The structure of society encouraged the emergence of deviant subcultures that in turn taught delinquent behavior. “The hallmark of the delinquent subculture is the explicit and wholesale repudiation of middle-class standards and the adoption of their antithesis” (Cohen, p. 129). In this manner, working class boys formed gangs that “transmitted a set of norms that required the violation of legitimate codes, if only to achieve and maintain status in the gang” (Rubington & Weinberg, 1995, p. 132).

Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin (1960) presented another synthesis of Merton’s anomie theory and Sutherland’s differential association theory. While Merton identified a single structure of opportunity in his study of middle class culture, Cloward and Ohlin identified two competing opportunity structures. They titled these the legitimate and the illegitimate structures within the community and argued that the illegitimate structure is nearly as diverse as the legitimate structure and is flourishing in lower-class subcultures. Not every one has equal access to learn deviant behavior in the way that Sutherland suggested. Therefore, not all persons have equal opportunities for becoming deviant. Individual participation in delinquent groups, such as gangs, occurs for a variety of
reasons. Restrictions from participating in these same groups may also be structurally determined. Perhaps the youth does not live in the right area, doesn’t know the right people, or is a member of the wrong race or ethnic group and is not allowed membership in the deviant subgroup. Competition in the illegitimate subculture can be used to explain a variety of deviant behaviors and the related social problems.

Cloward and Ohlin (1960) argued that at least three types of gangs are likely to emerge in a community that experiences sudden change and/or does not allow financial success for lower-class youth within legitimate opportunity structure. The *criminal gang* is a relatively stable subculture that emerges in areas of the community where conventional and non-conventional values are integrated. These gangs are basically business organizations of the illegitimate social structure. In most instances they are organized with leadership, norms, values, and sanctions which act as regulators of the members of the gang. The primary purpose of the gang is to make money. Older gang members teach younger gang members the criminal skills needed to succeed.

A second type of gang identified by Cloward and Ohlin (1960) emerges in urban areas of the community that show evidence of a great deal of social disorganization. They referred to these gangs as *conflict* or *violent gangs*. “For lower--class youth who are blocked from the legitimate-opportunity structure and who, in addition, do not have access to criminal means, the possibilities for achieving success goals are significantly narrowed,” (Suchar, 1978, p. 98). Probably due to the lack of criminal organization, these gangs are unstable. Members of violent gangs generally act unpredictably due to the lack of social control by both the legitimate and the illegitimate structures. Members of violent gangs achieve status by gaining a reputation for toughness and destructive
violence. The behavior of the "conflict" or "violent" gang members is many times anti-theoretical to those of the legitimate structure.

A recent study of inner city neighborhoods supports Cloward and Ohlin's characterization of violent gangs. Elijah Anderson (1994) stated that the violent behavior of inner city Black youth is characterized by a code of the street.

At the heart of the code is the issue of respect—loosely defined as being treated "right," or granted the deference one deserves. However, in the troublesome public environment of the inner city, as people increasingly feel buffeted by forces beyond their control, what one deserves in the way of respect becomes more and more problematic and uncertain. This in turn further opens the issue of respect to sometimes intense interpersonal negotiation. In the street culture, especially among young people, respect is viewed as almost an external entity that is hard-won but easily lost, and so must constantly be guarded. The rules of the code in fact provide a framework for negotiating respect. The person whose very appearance—including his clothing, demeanor, and the way of moving—deters transgressions feels that he possesses, and may be considered by others to possess, a measure of respect. With the right amount of respect, for instance, he can avoid being bothered in public. If he is bothered, not only may he be in physical danger but also he has been disgraced or "dissed" (disrespected). Many of the forms that dissing can take might seem petty to middle-class people (maintaining eye contact for too long, for example), but to those invested in the street code, these actions become serious indications of the other person's intentions. Consequently, such people become very sensitive to advances and slights, which could well serve as warnings of imminent physical confrontation.

A hard reality can be traced to the profound sense of alienation from mainstream society and its institutions felt by many poor inner-city black people, particularly the young. The code of the streets is actually a cultural adaptation to a profound lack of faith in the police and the judicial system. (Anderson, 1994, p. 81).

The retreatist gang, compared to violent or conflict gangs, is composed of individuals who have proven to be equally unsuccessful in the legitimate as well as the illegitimate worlds. These were labeled double failures by Cloward and Ohlin (1960). They retreat into a world of sex, drugs, and alcohol and form bonds with others in order to solve the common problems of their particular deviant activities. Cloward and Ohlin
also suggested that a variety of other deviant subcultures could emerge relative to the degree to which individuals are integrated into the community.

In summary, the deviant behavior perspective presents social problems as the routinization of deviance. Individuals derive most of their values, beliefs, and behaviors from the groups in which they associate. Structural factors, such as social class status, race ethnicity, family income, and the geographic location of the individual’s home, influence (and even determine) the sub-groups that individuals join. Individuals strive to achieve social and financial status. However, access to the societal prescribed means for obtaining status is often limited especially for the lower-class minority youth. As a result, illegitimate subcultures develop and offer status to individuals unable to obtain that status in the legitimate ways prescribed by the community. However, stratification develops among the illegitimate groups, and those groups specialize in particular kinds of deviance. The levels of social integration experienced by a gang determine the type of deviant behavior of the members of the gang. This provides a relatively uniform response to negative, structural stratification. This uniform response to shared experiences explains why some areas of the community have higher incidents of social problems than other parts of the community (Clinard, 1995).

The deviant behavior approach enhances the study of social problems by recognizing that there is nothing inherently abnormal about deviant behavior or about social problems. Values of different groups are passed to individuals through the socialization process. Deviant behavior is only an objective reality for a group or community when the behaviors of a subgroup are evaluated using the values of a different group or community that is opposed to the subgroup behaviors. Social
stratification is the "cause" of deviant behavior. Therefore, deviant behavior perspective opens the door for the study of the process by which stratification occurs and social problems emerge.

The primary weakness of the deviant behavior perspective is the suggestion that deviant behavior is an objective condition. Researchers adhering to this perspective also experience frustration when trying to identify the impetus of anomie and differential association. This frustration is due to the focus on individual behavior. It is difficult to explain why two individuals experiencing similar structural restraints react differently. One individual may become deviant and the other may not. As a result, explaining social problems from this perspective is easier than explaining individual deviance.

Summary of the Objective Perspective

Although objectivist theorists disagree as to the conditions that surround social problems, they share a common belief that social problems are ontologically real. As such, the study of social problems measures the degree that negative social conditions exist. The researcher then identifies factors contributing to those conditions. Social pathologists blame social problems on the individual's inability or unwillingness to learn and follow the norms established by society. Social disorganization theorists blame societal change for creating situations where the established societal rules fail, leaving opportunities open for all sorts of problems to emerge. Value conflict theorists blame conflicting values of competing groups for social problems. Deviant behavior theorists blame the social structure for pushing individuals into deviant sub-groups. However, all objective theorists look outside the normal social institutions for the explanation of
problems that exist in the community. It is this irony of blaming outsiders for community problems that led to the constructionist perspective.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionists seek to explain social problems by the behaviors within the social organization rather than blaming exterior groups and events. The idea that social problems are normal to society is found in the writings of Emil Durkheim (1895, 1958).

One of the most important themes of Durkheim’s work was that sociologists should formulate a new set of criteria for distinguishing between “normal” and “pathological” elements in the life of a society. Behavior which looks abnormal to the psychiatrist or the judge, he suggested, does not always look abnormal when viewed through the special lens of the sociologist; and thus students of the new science should be careful to understand that even the most aberrant forms of individual behavior may still be considered normal from a broader point of view. To illustrate his argument, Durkheim made the surprising observation that crime was really a natural kind of activity, “an integral part of all healthy societies” . . . . Crimes may actually perform a needed service to society by drawing people together in a common posture of anger and indignation . . . . They develop a tighter bond of solidarity . . . . Many separate persons are fused together into a common sense of morality . . . . The deviant act, then creates a sense of mutuality among the people of a community by supplying a focus for group feelings . . . . Unless the rhythm of group life is punctuated by occasional moments for deviant behavior, presumably, social organization would be impossible. (Erikson, 1966, p. 3-4)

If crime and social problems are normal, integral parts of a healthy society, it follows that healthy societies would have built-in processes for ensuring the occurrence of crime, deviance and social problems at various structural levels of society. Social constructionists seek to identify and to explain these social processes.
Boundary Maintenance

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, in a direct attempt to translate Durkheim’s ideas about the normality of crime into a “useful research hypothesis,” Kai Erikson (1966, p. 5) formulated the theory of boundary maintenance. Erikson saw that most of the behaviors of any particular deviant person were in fact in accord with the values and expectations of society. Only a small proportion of all individual actions are outside the norms of a community. “When a community nominates someone to the deviant class, then, it is sifting a few important details out of the stream of behavior he has emitted and is in effect declaring that these details reflect the kind of person he “really is,” (Erikson, 1966, p. 7).

Erikson also realized that deviance is a subjective concept. The definition of what is deviant depends upon the observer of the act, not the deviant act itself. For example, being a gang member might be considered normal to the gang member’s family or to the people living on the same block as the members of a gang. However, becoming a gang member is likely to be looked upon as deviant by most members of the middle-class. Therefore, behaviors in and of themselves cannot be considered deviant. Instead, something has to happen within a social organization to designate a person or group as deviant. The social organization has to develop a process to designate deviance. The process, according to Erikson, is boundary maintenance.

The people of a community spend most of their lives in close contact with one another, sharing a common sphere of experience which makes them feel that they belong to a special “kind” and live in a special “place.” In the formal language of sociology, this means that communities are boundary maintaining: each has a specific territory in the world as a whole, not only in the sense that it occupies a defined region of geographical space but also in the sense that it takes
over a particular niche in what might be called cultural space and develops its own "ethos" or "way" within that compass. Both of these dimensions of group space, the geographical and cultural, set the community apart as a special place and provide an important point of reference for its members. . . . A human community can be said to maintain boundaries, then in the sense that its members tend to confine themselves to a particular radius of activity and to regard any conduct which drifts outside that radius as somehow inappropriate or immoral. . . Human behavior draws a symbolic set of parentheses around a certain segment of that range and limits its own activities within that narrower zone. These parentheses, so to speak, are the community's boundaries. (Erikson, 1966, p. 9-10).

The concept of boundary maintenance builds on the work of Symbolic Interactionism presented by George H. Mead (1934). The individual's identity and sense of self are intimately connected with his or her sense of belonging within a greater social scheme. "The individual experiences himself as such, not directly, but indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same group, or from the generalized standpoint of the social group to which he belongs" (Mead, p. 136).

Identifying with a group is primary in the development of individual identity. Therefore, it is a fundamental process of human activity to develop unique social groupings and to designate group membership.

Now people who live together in communities cannot relate to one another in any coherent way or even acquire a sense of their own stature as group members unless they learn something about the boundaries of the territory they occupy in social space, if only because they need to sense what lies beyond the margins of the group before they can appreciate the special quality of the experience which takes place within it. (Erikson, 1966, p. 10)

Because individual identity relies on identification with a group, and because identification with a group relies on an understanding of the boundaries of the group, a primary function of communities is boundary maintenance.
The problem is in identifying the community boundaries. "The only material found in society for marking boundaries is the behavior of its members" (Erikson, 1966, p. 10). Unlike the objectivist theorists, Erikson saw social interaction, not deviant behavior as the behavior that signified group membership. "And the interactions which do the most effective job of locating and publicizing the group's outer edges would seem to be those which take place between deviant persons on the one side and official agents of the community on the other" (Erikson, p. 11).

Through the ritualistic process of designating an individual's behavior as deviant the community clarifies who is a part of the group and who is not. A general sense of group membership and a specific designation of community boundaries are created when formal and informal ceremonies are used to confront those whose behaviors do not fit with the expectations of the community.

Because communities are dynamic entities, the cultural boundaries cannot be stagnant. "Boundaries are never a fixed property of any community. They are always shifting as the people of the group find new ways to define the outer limits of the universe, new ways to position themselves on the larger cultural map" (Erikson, 1966, 12). Therefore, each confrontation between the deviant and a social control agent is part of an on-going process of defining community boundaries.

Boundaries remain a meaningful point of reference only so long as they are repeatedly tested by persons on the fringes of the group and repeatedly defended by persons chosen to represent the group's inner morality. Each time the community moves to censure some act of deviation, then, and convenes a formal ceremony to deal with the responsible offender, it sharpens the authority of the violated norm and restates where the boundaries of the group are located. (Erikson, p. 13)
Erikson pulls together, in this theory of boundary maintenance, some important concepts from earlier theorists. Social problems, to Erikson, involve the process of boundary maintenance. This process gives individual members of the community a sense of self and community meaning. This sense of meaning is clearly explained by symbolic interactionists beginning with Mead. On the macro-level, however, Erikson explains that the main function of communities is to provide for boundary maintenance of the community. Studying the functionality of communities closely follows the tradition of Durkheim, which gave rise to several modern objective theories of social problems and deviant behavior including the social pathology, social disorganization, and deviant behavior perspectives. Therefore, the boundary maintenance perspective ties together not only Durkheim and Mead but also the objective and the constructionist points of view. Herein lays the main support for this work's bridge between the constructionist and the objective views of social problems. The bridge is the community and the boundary maintenance activities used to define the values and beliefs of that social entity.

But how do communities link both the objective and subjective aspects of social problems? Social problems occur because communities are unique social entities. (The concept of community will be discussed later in this chapter). Members of communities develop a sense of personal identity based on their experiences within the group. Therefore, it is an integral community process to designate those behaviors and people that are a part of the community and those that are not. This is done by defining, formally and informally, some behaviors as deviant. In this way community boundaries are designated and maintained. Deviance and social problems are the result of social processes that clarify social boundaries.
From this basic understanding of boundary maintenance, Erikson (1966) identified three themes around which social problem research should revolve. All of these themes are relevant to the synthetic theory of social problems being developed here. The first theme suggests that because every community is unique, every community will have its own definition of deviant behavior and that those definitions of deviant behavior will reflect the value concerns of the community.

It is not surprising that deviant behavior should seem to appear in a community at exactly those points where it is most feared. . . . And if it is not always easy to know whether fear creates the deviance or deviance the fear, the affinity of the two has been a continuing course of wonder in human affairs. (Erikson, p. 22)

Seeing the tie between “fear” and social problems is difficult for people who are a part of the community. It is like trying to see the edge of a forest while standing in the middle of the trees. In order to clearly see the connection it is somewhat necessary to be removed from the community. For this reason, Erikson suggested using historical accounts of deviant behavior in order to understand social problems. He studied the histories of several communities that have successfully identified the boundary maintenance process that led to “crime waves” in each. These studies have revealed the core values of the community, the power structure of the community, and the techniques used to transfer ordinary citizens to deviant members of society. Howard S. Becker (1963) discussed these same concepts in his study of deviant behavior. He suggested:

Social rules are the creation of specific groups. Modern societies are not simple organization in which everyone agrees on what the rules are and how they are to be applied in specific situations. They are highly differentiated along social class lines, ethnic lines, occupational lines, and cultural lines. These groups need not and, in fact, often do not share the same rules. . . . Insofar as the rules of various groups conflict and contradict one another, there will be disagreement about the kind of behavior that is proper in any given situation. . . .
Differences in the ability to make rules and apply them to other people are essentially power differentials (either legal or extralegal). Those groups whose social position gives them weapons and power are best able to enforce their rules. Distinctions of age, sex, ethnicity, and class are all related to differences in power, which accounts for differences in the degree to which groups so distinguished can make rules for others. (pp. 15-18)

In other words, every community has its own set of unique core values that develop over time. Those values reflect the belief system of powerful groups within the community. Those powerful groups use boundary maintenance activities to shape the community in the form that they desire. People in power use their influence to designate the margins of the community and to establish and maintain their social positions.

The second theme presented by Erikson “has to do with the volume of deviant behavior found in social life” (Erikson, 1966, p. 23). Erikson asserts that the amount of deviance that a community can tolerate remains fairly constant over time and is in part a function of the control apparatus of the community. “Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders” (Becker, 1963, p. 9). “It is a simple logistic fact that the number of deviancies which come to a community’s attention are limited by the kinds of equipment it uses to detect and handle them” (Erikson, p. 24).

Communities act with alarm when deviance threatens to grow beyond some level that members have learned to consider “normal.”

A society completely intent on suppressing crime would punish every offender with all the severity it could manage—for the present system, with its careful attention to the formula that punishment should vary with the circumstances of the crime, only seems to suggest that society can afford certain kinds of crime more readily than others. ... the power [to control crime] is ordinarily used in such a way as to stabilize rather than eliminate the amount of crime in the social order. (Erikson, 1966, pp. 24-25)
Additionally, because deviance is used to mark the boundaries of a community, there will always be deviants.

Imagining a society of saints, a perfect cloister of exemplary individuals. Crimes properly called, will there be unknown; but faults which appear venial to the layman will create there the same scandal that the ordinary offense does in ordinary consciousness. If, then, this society has the power to judge and punish, it will define these acts as criminal and will treat them as such. (Durkheim, 1958, pp. 68-69)

Although what is considered deviant changes from time to time and from place to place, deviance and social problems are necessary elements of every community. So necessary, in fact, that community building is, in essence, accomplished by the creation of these problems.

Members of a community inform one another about the placement of their boundaries by participating in the confrontations when persons who venture out to the edges of the group are met by policing agents whose special business it is to guard the cultural integrity of the community. (Erikson, 1966, p. 11)

The community defines marginal individuals and groups as deviant. Therefore, there will always be deviance within the community and the level of deviance will remain fairly constant. Communities will shift their focus from one problem to another rather than endure “too much” deviance at any one time. For instance, in recent years United States presidents have “declared war” on various social problems. Beginning with the Nixon administration, attention was drawn to the “drug problem.” Following the end of the “cold war” with the former Soviet Union, the administrations of Reagan, Clinton, and Bush, have increased the efforts to prosecute drug users. The Clinton administration redirected the crime wave to focus on the gang problem. However, since the terrorist bombings of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, the focus of attention of the media, political officials and policing agents has been on terrorism.
Nothing "changed," per se, in the amount of ontological use of drugs, however, because the society only has the ability to concentrate on a limited amount of deviance at one time, the fear and hysteria associated with the drug war has been somewhat replaced with the war on terrorism.

The measure of what is "too much" deviance is also based on the community as well. In part, this measure is a function of the values of the community. It is also a result of the availability of resources. A community can only afford to deal with a certain number of social problems and deviants prior to losing their unique identity. Otherwise they become so diverse that they are no longer special. The core values become diluted until no one is sure what the community means.

It is expensive and time consuming to maintain boundaries. As a result, communities have to choose which battles to fight, which behaviors to call deviant and which to ignore. Therefore, it is the job of the social problem researcher to identify and understand the process the community uses of choosing the behaviors that are considered to be deviant.

Erikson used historical analysis to describe the boundary maintenance activities of communities. However, the study of the community’s core values can indicate areas where social problems are likely to emerge. Because social problems reflect the values of society, studying the social problems evident in the community would reveal the values of the community. And, indeed, studying the values (at least of those powerful enough to exert claims) of the community would likely reveal areas where social problems may occur in the future. Thus, this theory of boundary maintenance could also be used as a predictive tool.
Finally, the third theme presented by Erikson deals with "the way society handles its deviant members" (Erikson, 1966, p. 27). In essence, for Erikson, social problem research is the study of community process of transferring community members from the inner circle of communities to the outer periphery. As stated before, the behaviors of the individuals called deviants are a reflection of the defining values of the community. Communities have unique formal and informal methods to transfer members from a community into deviant status. These methods are primary in the process of boundary maintenance and, according to Erikson, should be the object of study for social problem researchers.

In summary, boundary maintenance theory explains how and why social problems occur. It suggests that every community is unique and has its own set of behaviors that are considered deviant and its own way of dealing with deviant behaviors. Because the ability of the community to manage borders is limited, the rate of deviance within a community is likely to remain fairly constant. However, because communities are dynamic entities, there is a continued need to redefine and maintain boundaries in order to preserve the community's identity. Erikson used the boundary maintenance model as a historical method of analysis. However, it is likely to prove to be a valuable tool to study current social problems and to predict the types of social problems that are likely to occur in the future.

The weakness in this theory is in its lack of theoretical structure. Erikson waffled back and forth in his discussion of social problems from talking about the process of constructing social problems to talking about objective social conditions. He never makes clear that these are, in fact, separate phenomena. However, he emphasizes the
social problems belong to communities and this is a strength. A modification of
Erikson's boundary maintenance perspective is the core of the synthetic theory presented
in this dissertation.

Social Movement Approach

In 1975 Armand Mauss published a textbook titled Social Problems As Social
Movements. He claimed that with its publication he had presented

the first book, as far as we know, to (1) pose a comprehensive theoretical
framework explaining social problems totally from an interactionist/collective
behavior perspective (whether they involve deviance or not); to (2) apply the
framework consistently to that analysis of a long series of social problems,
historically and contemporary, and to (3) carry the theoretical framework to its
logical conclusion by identifying social problems with social movements, i.e., to
treat social problems simply as a sub-type of social movement. (Mauss, p. ix)

Mauss (1975) began his account of social problems with reference to Durkheim's
explanation of crime, argued that "social problems originate in public opinion rather than
in objective reality" (Mauss, p. xv). He further asserted, "No social condition, however
deplorable or intolerable it may seem to social scientists or social critics, is inherently
problematic" (Mauss, p. xvi). Instead he argues that social conditions become problems
through the collective behavior activities of a social movement.

Mauss (1975) recognized that in order for a social problem to exist a group of
people had to agree that there was a social problem. His perspective focuses on the
process of developing public consensus about a situation, real or imagined. He asserted
that individuals and interest groups present to the public a version of reality for which
they hope to get support.
Social problems have to be sold to the public. Campaigns are designed to convince the public that problems exist. According to Mauss (1975), social problems are not merely objective conditions. Instead they are presented purposely to the public for acceptance. Groups have specified interest in their involvement of social problems. Champions of social problems are involved with the issue for a reason and these reasons that persons become involved with social problem social movements are varied. Mauss identified six types of interest groups and publics (six different reasons) that are involved with the construction of social problems: economic, political, occupational, moral, psychological and scientific. These interests are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the most successful social problem campaigns are those that have advocates from several different interest groups. In other words, if multiple groups with multiple reasons for involvement present “facts” about a social situation, the likelihood of gaining public consensus that a problem exists will increase.

Mauss (1975) described the structure of a social movement as three concentric circles. The outermost circle contains the interested public that provides support for the movement through financial donations and the use of votes. The sheer number of those involved provides political strength to a movement. More active supporters of a movement compose the other two rings.

Within this ring comprising the sympathetic public, there is a much smaller one containing the active membership. This consists of individuals and organizations that have definite interests in the success of the movement, but their interests are not necessarily exclusively focused on the movement. . . . They are often influential people whose public support for a movement will help to give it legitimacy and acceptance. . . .

The innermost ring of a social movement is its heart or core. It contains the principal leaders and the organizations having their goals exclusively in the success of the movement. The most zealous and committed members are also
found in this core. If there is a central coordinating organization, committee, or other steering body for the movement, it is also located here, but there might be two or three separate major organizations committed to the movement who share the center space with a greater or lesser degree of cooperation and harmony. The attitudes of people at the core of the movement are likely to be rather uncompromising, sometimes a little paranoid, and in many ways rather like those of religious enthusiasts in a new sect. (Mauss, 1975, p. 47-48)

These three rings of the social movement represent all of those working to convince the public that a social problem exists.

However, social problems have to be continually restated or the public will be drawn to other interests and no longer provide support for a problem. All types of social movements cycle, waxing and waning in public interest and policy, and social problems are no exception. Mauss (1975) described this cycle as the *natural history of social movement*. Previously Herbert Blumer (1951) described a five-stage process through which social movements typically pass. Mauss asserted that Blumer's social movement process and the process used to construct social problems are exactly the same. Therefore, he claims, it is redundant to create a new natural history explanation of social problems.

The stages of a social movement according to Mauss (1975) are as follows: incipiency, coalescence, institutionalization, fragmentation and demise. The inception of a movement or social problem occurs when some people begin “to feel a mild threat to the preservation or realization of certain vital interests” (Mauss, p. 61). The response is an uncoordinated effort to bring attention to the situation they find problematic. Usual efforts include the use of the media (i.e., reading articles, writing letters to the editor), members of Congress, *ad hoc* meetings, and informal discussions in which there is agreement that something ought to be done about a situation. Governmental officials
play an important role in the formation of any social movement. Movements are often ended before they are established when policing agents, politicians, or state and local officials take care of the complaints of individuals. However, unresolved complaints lead to the next stage in the social movement. The coalescence stage of the movement is marked by a gradual formation of the two inner rings of the movement. Formal and informal organizations begin to develop out of segments of the sympathetic public that have become the most aroused by perceived threats to the preservation or realization of their interests. (Mauss, p. 62)

These organizations emerge primarily when people feel that governmental officials are not heeding their concerns and interests. Alliances are formed at this stage to drive the movement forward. “The movement cannot usually be stopped at this point without massive repression, or else massive co-optation approaching capitulation on the part of the society” will ensue (Mauss, p. 63). Efforts to gain public support continue until “the government and other traditional institutions take official notice of the problem or movement and work out a series of standard coping mechanisms to manage it” (Mauss, p. 63). At that point the movement is institutionalized.

During this third stage, the movement is at its peak. Legislation is passed to deal with the issue. The movement receives support from the public. Societal norms adapt and change to align with the claims of the social movement advocates and the general public considers the social issue to be a social problem.

Following institutionalization movements begin to fragment. People in the two outer rings of the movement see improvements in the conditions based on institutionalization and lose interest in the movement. Also, those in the movement’s inner circle often “fall to fighting among themselves over strategy and tactics for the
future” (Mauss, 1975, p. 64). Additionally, in order for the social movement to be effective, the charismatic leadership that drove the movement to this point has to give way to more stable, rational leadership.

The final stage of the movement is its demise. Often the movement just disappears. This may be due to the movement achieving success, experiencing a setback, or changing forms. Sometimes interest groups and publics are drawn to other movements. Lacking many of the leaders and most of the effective members, outside support for the movement dissipates. “This leaves only small bands of ‘true believers’ who appear increasingly ridiculous” (Mauss, 1975, p. 65).

The following is Mauss’ (1975) description of the “shape” of the ideal type historical model described by these stages:

A growth curve representing this five-stage life-cycle would have a shape approximating the normal curve, with the third stage at the apex. For some movements, however, the hypothetical curve would be sharper or flatter than normal. The chief impetus or force which projects a movement through these stages is the interaction between the movement and the society, with particular reference to the changing mix of co-option and repression applied by the society and the movement’s responses to that “mix.” (Mauss, p. 61).

Mauss emphasized that “social problems and other movements have a life-cycle involving a rise, a thriving, and a decline” (p. 66). Nonetheless, not all social problems will complete the natural history cycle. Three alternative patterns may occur: (1) the abortive pattern, (2) the revival pattern and (3) the overlapping pattern.

The abortive pattern (occurs when) a society, (usually through government agencies) . . . brings to bear overpowering repression in either of the first two stages of growth, thereby unbalancing the risk/reward ratio too much for it to be in anyone’s interest to continue the movement. . . . A second variation of our model, one which permits the movement to go almost to complete demise, is the revival pattern. In this case, a movement retains a flicker of life even after severe decline and flares up again later, sometimes a generation or two later, in response
to new definitions by the appropriate interest groups. . . . Still a third variation of our model . . . the overlapping pattern (is) a sequel to an earlier movement (and gets going before the latter has completely died out. (Mauss, p. 67)

Regardless of the pattern that a social problem follows, residues of the movement can be found at three different levels of society following its demise. The first level, the popular culture may experience “changes in argot, jokes, leisure-time activities, styles, and the like” (Mauss, 1975, p. 69). At the normative level of society, social movements may change normative boundaries even if the movement is not successful in meeting its goals. At the level of laws and law enforcement new laws may be enacted. However, laws often reflect the interests of the lawmakers more than those of the interest groups and may, in fact, create new social problem social movements.

Although the propositions presented by Mauss (1975) are sound, the social movement approach to the study of social problems failed to gain widespread support among sociologists. Mauss’ textbook was large and cumbersome and became outdated quickly because it included specific examples of social problems. Additionally, other explanations of the social process involved in constructing social problems emerged and were more speedily incorporated into the research models. Therefore, the social movement explanation drifted into relative obscurity.

Natural History Model

Malcolm Spector and John I. Kitsuse (1973, 1987) proposed one of the more popular explanations of the social process used by communities to construct social problems. Following the pattern of their precursors, Spector and Kitsuse argued that social problems are a result of social processes and that objective conditions are
insufficient to constitute social problems. The work of Spector and Kitsuse (1973) has become the foundational literature for the social construction perspective. Their purpose was “to provide a definition and to prepare the ground for the empirical study of social problems” (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987, p. 1). In so doing, they revisited the natural history model of social problems outlined by Fuller and Meyers (1941a, 1941b), presented earlier in this dissertation, and sought to modify that model. They called this modification the natural history model.

Stage one of the Spector and Kitsuse’s (1973) natural history model is the claims making stage. This claims making stage corresponds somewhat with the second stage described by Mauss (1975). Collective attempts are made by interest groups to “press claims, gain publicity, and arouse controversy,” (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987, p. 143). Spector and Kitsuse see claims making as an integral part of everyday social life, which is carried on at all organizational levels. Groups with the most status, power, and money are likely to have their claims heard by the public. Claims range from vague expressions of displeasure to pointed grievances. “Social problems arise from the statement by groups that certain conditions are intolerable and must be changed” (Spector & Kitsuse, p. 148).

Spector and Kitsuse (1973, 1987) developed the first stage of the model more than the other three stages. They provided in-depth discussions of the claims making process, the power of claims making groups, the nature and variety of claims, the mechanisms for pressing claims, documentation of claims, and the relationship between the assertions of claims and social controversy.
Spector and Kitsuse’s (1987) second stage of the natural history mode is the recognition/transformation stage. “When governmental agencies or other official and influential institutions to which claims might be put respond to the complaints of some group, the social problems activity undergoes a considerable transformation” (Spector and Kitsuse, p. 148). The response gives legitimacy to the claims. Stage three is reached when “activities culminate in the creation and establishment of procedures to deal with claims” (Spector & Kitsuse, p. 151). Stage four occurs when claims makers cease to look for solutions from the governing system and instead seek to create and develop “alternative solutions for their perceived social problems” (Spector and Kitsuse, p. 153).

In his discussion of social problems, Mauss (1975) noted that Spector and Kitsuse’s stages two, three and four of the natural history model are encompassed by the Mauss’ institutional stage (Mauss, p. 63).

Many researchers have adapted Spector and Kitsuse’s model, particularly the claims making ideas. However, the stages of the Spector and Kitsuse model are vague and under-defined. Additionally, Spector and Kitsuse offered little help for understanding the demise of social problems or alternative patterns to social problems cycles. A bigger criticism of this perspective is Spector and Kitsuse’s insistence that conditions surrounding social problems are irrelevant to the study of social problems (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987; Ibarra & Kitsuse, 1993). Completely ignoring social conditions limits the practical understanding of the construction of social problems. While social problem construction is not dependent on social conditions, there is evidence that conditions viewed as negative by some members of society and social construction activities, like claims making, are positively correlated. Even some of the
major proponents of the natural history model of social problems research reject the
notion that conditions play no part in the construction of social problems (Best, 1993).

Claims Making and the Typifications
of Social Problems

Joel Best (1989) adapted the Spector and Kitsuse model to a number of research
projects. He expounded the concept of claims making, insisting that claims makers do
not simply draw attention to a specific social condition, but instead “shape our sense of
just what the problem is” (Best, xix). This shaping of the problem Best called
typification.

Naming is just one way claims makers typify social problems. Typification
occurs when claims makers characterize a problem’s nature. Typification can
take many forms. One of the most common forms is to give orientation toward a
problem, arguing that a problem is best understood from a particular perspective. Thus, claims makers assert that X is really _________ (moral, medical,
criminal, political, etc.) problem. Each orientation emphasizes a different aspect
of X. (Best, p. xx)

Best focused almost exclusively on the activities of claims making. He explored the
nature of claims, claims makers, and cycles in the typification process.

Ironically, although he is closely aligned with Spector and Kitsuse, Best’s
theoretical outline seems closer to that presented by Mauss. Best (1989) recognized the
need of claims makers to convince the general public that a problem exists. He also
recognized that the goal of claims makers was to persuade “policymakers to do
something about the condition” (Best, p. 1). Additionally, he established that claims
makers “tend to be interested parties—individuals who stand to gain something if their
claims are successful—but not all claims makers have similar interests” (Best, p. 75). He
makes reference to different layers of persons working toward the claims making process.
Oddly, like Mauss (1975) he even recognizes that social problems cycle and "the notion of claims making cycles suggests that the natural histories of social problems do not always lead to the problems resolution" (Best, p. 139). Best's application of Spector and Kitsuse's model seems to have resulted in a working model that is almost identical to Mauss'.

*Consolidation of the Constructionist Perspective*

Although there is considerable overlap in the theoretical models of Mauss, Spector and Kitsuse, and Best, it seems evident that the natural history model of social movements is the most complete model developed by constructionists for the study of social problems. Therefore, a combination of the Mauss model and Erikson's theory of boundary maintenance will be used in this synthetic theory developed here.

*Towards A Synthetic Theory Of Social Problems*

Although the controversy between objectivist and constructionist perspectives has not been resolved to date (even though both perspectives make valid points) a synthesis of these two frames of reference would increase understanding of social problems. The goal of this dissertation is to synthesize these perspectives, at last, by developing a theory of social problems that would clarify both perspectives without minimizing either. To date, synthesis of these approaches have begun with the assumption that social problems are objective realities. This dissertation assumes, instead, a constructionist point of view. Social problems are the result of social process but social process and objective reality are dialectical in nature.
Table 1 identifies the social problem theories discussed here and lists the major weaknesses and strengths of each perspective. A synthetic theory of social problems will be proposed highlighting the strengths of the included theories while minimizing the weaknesses. In the end, the synthetic model will contain elements of each of the theories discussed in order to integrate these two seemingly contradictory approaches.

The Concept of Community

In order to combine these seemingly opposite approaches to the study of social problems, it is necessary to revisit the concept of community. Due to difficulties in defining the concept, many researchers have ceased to the study of communities and have instead studied society (Bell & Newby, 1978; Gusfield, 1975; Mayo, 2000). This is an unfortunate development. Communities are different than societies. Therefore, by studying society rather than communities, we get a different view of social problems. In order to understand social problems we must focus on the study of communities.

Assertion 1:

*It is the first assertion of this synthetic theory that community structure serves to both construct social problems and to encourage the objective appearance of social problems.* To understand this assertion it is necessary to define the term community as it is used here. There are several elements of social structure that work to define communities. First, communities generate “an all inclusive, public interest as contrasted to special or partial interest” (Gusfield, 1975, p. xiii). In other words, what happens in the community “matters” to the individuals living in that community. This concept parallels the notion of “consensual reality” described by Mauss (1975). Community
### Table 1
*Perspective Summary*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical perspective</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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</table>
| **Objective Theories:** | Social problems are objective realities that are displayed ontologically | (1) Empirically tested  
(2) Scientific in nature  
(3) "Believable" for those most closely associated with said problem. | (1) Ignores the subjective elements of social problems (reductionistic)  
(2) Blames outside conditions for the problems of a group  
(3) Becomes a study of current events |
| **Social Pathology** | Social problems are the result of the failure of socialization | (1) Organic Analogy provides a link between individual behavior and community process  
(2) Recognizes social problems are based on public consensus (moral of community) | (1) Inability to define "pathology"—too vague and subject to interpretation  
(2) Laden with moral judgment—pretends to be scientific  
(3) Unstable |
| **Social Disorganization** | Social problems occur when sudden changes cause rules to fail | (1) Advances the organic analogy—Human Ecology employed  
(2) Draws a connection with social change and social problems  
(3) Recognizes that social problems occur most often in periphery areas of the community | (1) Too subjective and vague  
(2) Implies previous "organization"  
(3) Value laden  
(4) Wrongly assumes that deviant behavior is always a threat to the values of society  
(5) Defines all social problems as "disorganized" (some may be highly organized)  
(6) Assumes that diversity is damaging |
| **Conflict** | Social problems are conditions of a subgroup that are defined as problematic by other sub-groups or the greater community | (1) Recognizes that social problems have a subjective element that is tied in with power structures of society  
(2) Proposed a natural history model of social problems | (1) Reduces social problems to objective conditions that cause subjective reactions  
(2) Duplication of natural history model was unsuccessful |
| **Deviant Behavior** | Social problems are learned in subgroups as a reaction to frustration to limiting social structures | (1) Deviant behavior is not inherently abnormal  
(2) Social structures cause deviance  
(3) Deviance leads to social problems  
(4) Process based explanation | (1) Deviance is objective  
(2) Individual orientation fails to explain macro-level phenomena (social problems) |
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constructionist Theories:</strong></td>
<td>Social problems are the results of social processes</td>
<td>(1) recognizes that no objective conditions in-and-of-themselves are social problems (2) consolidates exploration of many different social problems into a single analytical framework (3) Identifies the processes within a group that lead to the development of social problems.</td>
<td>(1) ignores or under-plays objective conditions (2) lacks a strong research tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kai Erikson Boundary Maintenance</td>
<td>Social problems are tools used by a community to maintain boundaries</td>
<td>(1) social problems are the work of communities (2) Social problems are used to designate and maintain community boundaries (3) Social problems occur most often in the periphery (moral or geographical) areas of the community (4) Bridges social constructionism and objectivism. (5) Identifies the use of social problems by communities.</td>
<td>(1) loosely defined theory (2) Does not clarify the difference between social process and objective reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armand Mauss Social Movements Approach</td>
<td>Social problems created by interest groups in the same manner as social movements</td>
<td>(1) equates social problems with social movements (2) describes interest groups and their activities (3) clearly defines natural history stages of social problems (4) provides for alternative cycles (5) Is backed empirically with social movement research.</td>
<td>(1) unable to suggest “why” a social movement begins (2) minimizes the objective nature of social problems (3) drifted into relative obscurity and has little empirical support with social problems per se</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spector and Kitsuse Natural History Model</td>
<td>Social problems are the constructions of claims-makers and they follow a natural history cycle.</td>
<td>(1) provides a natural history explanation of social problems (2) recognizes the subjective element of social problems (3) supported with empirical research</td>
<td>(1) stages of cycle are vague and under-defined (2) focuses too much on claims-making (3) offers little to our understanding of social problem demise (4) Ignores the objective element of social problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joel Best Claims-making Typification</td>
<td>Social problems are typified through the actions of claims-makers</td>
<td>(1) empirically based (2) Working model parallels Mauss’ (3) Allows room for conditions to be considered</td>
<td>(1) Focus is only on claims-making. (2) Does not examine the motivation for claims.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
relationships result in shared views of reality. Common ideology develops. From shared values of the community, individual belief systems and identities are built (Mayo, 2000). In essence, communities are the source of culture.

Second, the term community suggests a “special closeness or bond which unites some persons and differentiates them from others” (Gusfield, 1975, p. xiii). A key element in constructing social problems is designating who is a part of the accepted group and who is not. This, in fact, is boundary maintenance as Erikson described it. In order for communities to restrict membership there needs to be criteria by which group members must live. Social problems are used as indicators of behaviors that are not thought to be appropriate for community membership. It is not an accident that the social problems that receive the most attention, time, and money from the community members are those that are in opposition to the values of the community. In fact, all social problems serve as social markers for indicating values that are expected of community membership. For this reason, in order to understand the process of social problem construction, it is necessary to understand the core values of the community.

On the other hand, when individuals and groups are separated from the community and used as examples of “what not to be like,” it is necessary for those individuals to adapt to the new status that they are given. Robert Merton’s (1938) typology of individual adaptation to blocked opportunities for achievement of cultural goals is relevant here (Clinard, 1964). One response to being denied a respectable community status is to rebel against the community. Groups and individuals accomplish this by developing new and different cultural goals, many of which run counter to the prescribed goals and values of the greater community, and by committing deviant acts.
In response, force is met with force. Resistance is met with resistance. In this manner, social problems are objectified. Therefore, the process of designating community membership generates social problems both as a function of social processes and as objective conditions. Elijah Anderson (1994) describes this process in his study of inner-city black neighborhoods and the violence associated with them (sited earlier in this chapter).

Ironically, this process can also be reversed. Social conditions, which later become known as social problems, can exist in a community without drawing public attention for extended periods of time. However, when these conditions are brought to the attention of the general public by interest groups making claims concerning the conditions, they accentuate the values of the community and identify cultural boundaries. Interest groups bring claims to the public to rally support for their own interests. For example, individuals who have had a negative experience with handguns may seek to rally support of the community members for handgun regulations by making claims concerning the potential danger of the weapons. The public interest generated by such claims transforms the existence of handguns in the community (something that was there all along) into a social problem (something that needs to be handled by united community action) only after interest groups (those affected by the situation) successfully appeal to the public (usually with the help of the media) for help with what they say is a problem.

Therefore, communities can either generate social problems asserting that an existing condition is problematic or the existence of a social problem can be used to designate community values and membership. In this way, communities are double-
edged swords; they are both the impetus and the outcome of social problems
construction.

Third, the term community seems to point to a "particular kind of human
relationship rather than a kind of group" (Gusfield, 1975, p. xvi). Community ties are
ties of kinship and loyalty (Bell & Newby, 1978; Kemmis, 1990). This usage of the term
is a magnification of ideas previously presented. Communities not only designate which
people or behaviors belong within the in-group of the community and which do not, but
community membership also comes with obligations to other community members.
Community membership is a status. A measure of protection is dealt to community
members. At the same time, community members are expected to participate in specific
behaviors that are approved by the greater community. The obligations and privileges of
community membership result in feelings of closeness and loyalty to one another
(Gusfield, 1975).

Because of these behavioral requirements and the resulting loyalties, community
membership is limited. Individuals have to do something to achieve and maintain their
membership. This is not true of society. Society, by definition, is all encompassing.

There is a place for everyone in society. However, since community membership is an
achieved status, it is necessary to have boundaries, both social and physical, that
designate who is a part of the community and who is not. It is the primary assertion of
this theory that social problems are boundary designators. They indicate the social and
physical borders of the community.

The fourth and final usage of the term is, ironically, the most controversial. The
word community implies place. Communities are geographic entities. Although
community status is achieved through application of the first three explanations of the term community; community membership begins with residence. The word community is derived from combining two words: common and unity. Therefore, physical proximity is a necessary element in community; the social bonds that develop are secondary developments.

Communities are the place of culture. “No real culture—whether we speak of food or of politics or of anything else—can exist in abstraction from place” (Kemmis, 1990, p. 7). Anthropologists who study cultural areas understand that physical environment and sharing space are important elements of culture (Hawley, 1950), but somehow the emphasis on human ecology has lessened in sociological studies as sociology has matured. “The reclaiming of a vital and effective sense of what it is to be public must take place and must be studied in the context of very specific places and of the people who struggle to live in such places” (Kemmis, p. 7).

Culture and environment are two inseparately connected ideas.

Socioeconomic characteristics . . . are important in the analysis of cultural regions. In addition to manifesting important dimensions of regions, they are almost certainly tied to the subjective identities that tend to be the focal point in regional studies . . . One is a reflection of the other. (Toney, Keller & Hunter, in press).

Without understanding the environment, the place where ideas and values emerge, it is impossible to understand the culture of a people and its intricate characteristics such as social problems. Social problems are not merely abstractions. They occur in specific locations and at specific times. Those locations and times are specific to communities that they service. No two places are the same. No two locations have the exact same
challenges. No two groups of people are going to respond to challenges in precisely the same way. Communities are unique social structures.

For the purpose of this theory organizations or subgroups, such as the medical community, or the Christian community, that do not share a geographic area, are excluded from the concept of "community" and the construction of social problems. Non-geographic groupings do not have the same pressures placed on their boundaries as do communities that share geographic space. Membership in such groups is granted only after an individual convinces the group that they belong with that group. These rites of passage can be accomplished by membership rituals (e.g., baptism), completing requirements (e.g., finishing medical training), or paying for admittance (e.g., club dues). Geographic communities, on the other hand, are subject to new membership, through migration or birth, without any formal screening process. There are few, if any, tests to see if the values and beliefs of the newcomer are shared with the other community members. In the United States, community members are not able to formally restrict migration into a community. Potentially, this opens the community to frequent and rapid changes in population and in the values and beliefs of the community members.

However, community members identify with the place that they live. In order to protect the perceived values and customs of the community, geographic communities must exert resistance to change or face losing identity. Non-geographic communal groups do not have this same challenge because they are able to control membership through screening processes and rituals used before membership is granted.

In summary, a community is a group that has common residence in a geographic area, and shares a sense of kinship, loyalty, and culture. Communities generate a broad
consensual reality by designating physical and social boundaries and by specifying what behaviors and people are considered a part of the community and which are not.

Social problems are phenomena that occur to and in communities as part of the process of building and maintaining physical and social boundaries. Community members make coordinated efforts to construct social problems as a part of this process. Communities are where the social problems occur. And community members are primarily affected by social problems whether they are seen as negative social conditions or as social processes involving claims making. Community processes are intimately linked with social problems. Therefore, it is appropriate, even necessary, to study communities in order to understand social problems.

As a result, the study of social problems is really the study of communities. Likewise, the study of communities is really the study of social problems. The two concepts are inseparably connected. However, in the past, both objectivist and constructionist social theorists have bypassed the inclusion of community into their perspectives and, therefore, circumvented the one concept that could synthesize these two approaches.

As a community maintains social and physical boundaries (Erikson, 1966) social problems are constructed. In fact, social problems are boundary designators. Social problems act as a fence for communities indicating the outer periphery of whom and what are included in the group and who and what are excluded from the group. On one side of the social problem, group members are working to build the fence (so to speak). They are active in the process of exerting power to create a social movement by vying for
public consensus that the phenomenon of interest is indeed an appropriate boundary marker.

On the other side of the issue, individuals and groups apply pressure to the designated boundaries by participating in behavior that would do damage to the community barriers. Outsiders (Becker, 1963), those that are pushed out of the group by boundary maintenance activities, are the same persons who participate in behaviors that are seen as problematic. Becoming an outsider is not a chance occurrence but happens in one of two ways. The community can redefine behaviors of a new or undesirable group as problematic. That is, the community boundaries can shift to exclude a group using the behaviors of the group to justify their exclusion, thereby constructing social problems. Or, those excluded from the community may in turn reject the community and strike out with behavior that is opposed to community norms giving themselves the status of outsiders. This rebellion increases social problems from an objective viewpoint.

As can be seen from this discussion, social problems are constructed by the powerful members of the community and are objectively realized by individuals and groups who are on the outer periphery of the same community. If we study communities, we can understand both the processes of social problem construction and the objective realization of social problems.

*Change as the Impetus for Social Problems*

This leads to the next step in forming a synthetic theory of social problems. One of the criticisms shared by both constructionists and objectivists is the inability of both theories to account for the timing of social problem emergence. Those touting
explanations of process have been unclear in the details of what would start the social movement (Mauss, 1975) or natural history cycle (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987) of social problem construction. Objectivist theorists, for the most part, have been equally vague in explaining why some behaviors sprout up in some places and fail to develop in other areas that have similar conditions.

Community members rely on maintaining a relatively stable community structure in order to protect community values, norms and customs. Therefore, any changes in the community structure, such as those caused by migration, technology, or birth-death rates, that lead to feelings of anomie, stress, confusion, and fear for some community members are likely to set in motion a social problem movement. Claims making is an attempt for community members to identify the cause and propose a remedy for those feelings caused by structural changes.

Assertion 2:

In essence, boundary maintenance is a communal attempt to reestablish harmony within the community, harmony that is disrupted by social change. Therefore, the second assertion of this theory is that when change in the community creates confusion and anomie among community members, boundary maintenance activities pursue. Persons most closely affected by that change, or persons with a vested interest in the situation, begin to give meaning to the change by making claims. Those persons with enough power to get their claims published by the media have a good chance of seeing the problem gain public consensus validating their claims.

Assertion 3:
The foundation of this dissertation's theory rests on the assertion that social problems exist exclusively in communities. As unique social entities, community members use social problems to identify the boundaries of their communities. Social problems indicate the fringe of society and mark cultural boundaries. Each community is unique not only in the geographic space it occupies but also in culture and values with which the members of the community identify. The process of constructing social problems works to clarify the values of the community.

Assertion 4:

Presumably, if communities were stable entities, then defining boundaries by constructing social problems would only occur once. However, communities are dynamic. They are constantly in flux; therefore, the need to define boundaries is continual. In fact, it is this process that defines communities. The more social change a community experiences the more likely community boundary maintenance processes will result in social problem construction. Conversely, the more social problems experienced by a community, the greater the amount of social change introduced to the community. Therefore, the study of social problem is the study of communities and the study of community is the study of social problems.

Assertion 5:

Furthermore, communities construct social problems through social movements. The natural history model of social movements described by Mauss (1975) explains this process. However, Mauss failed to identify why social problems occur at a particular point in time in a particular community. When we view social problems as the means for maintaining boundaries (Erikson, 1963) the timing of social problems can be explained.
Assertion 6:

*Social problems occur when specific claims makers are able to generate support for their assertions that the borders of the community are being threatened.* Support for such claims is most easily gained when a community is experiencing a change. Change causes disruption and disruption leads to fear. Fear in the community is almost inevitably followed by claims making, which leads to the construction of social problems.

Assertion 7:

As explained by Fuller and Meyer (1941a), the threatening change can come in one of three forms: natural, amoralities, or moral. Natural changes can occur with or without the participation of people. Although Fuller and Meyer looked at these conditions as problematic in and of themselves, that is not the position held here. *Changes that occur in the natural environment only become social problems when they are defined as such by community members.* For instance, a storm may destroy a tremendous amount of property. However neither the storm nor the destruction of property is enough to generate public consensus that something should be done to lessen the effects of future storms or to rectify the damaged property. Instead the storm and the damage only become problematic for the community when interested parties (Mauss, 1975) make claims (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987; Best 1989) concerning the situation.

Assertion 8:

The other two forms of social problems noted by Fuller and Meyer (1941a) are direct results of change in population structure. Demographers have long recognized that the structure and culture of community are intimately linked with the number and types of people present in a community. Communities are never stable entities but are always
fluxuating with migration, births, and deaths. Some of these changes are incidental; some have a great effect on the community. Change that is presented by powerful community members as threatening to the core values of the community results in the formation of social problems. *Because change and the effects of change can be interpreted differently by different members of society, more than one social problem may occur as the result of social change.*

Assertion 9:

It is important to note that unlike the objective description of change, *change in and of itself does not produce social problems nor is it essentially problematic.* Instead, *interested people form groups* (Mauss, 1975) and *make claims* (Spector and Kitsuse, 1987; Best 1989) *about social change.* *If they gain public consensus that a problem exists, the construction of the social problem occurs.* If interest groups fail to gain consensus that the change is problematic, then the change will not result in a social problem.

Assertion 10:

When claims are made in a way to convince the group that the change affects or challenges the core values of the community, then the claims are heeded with more enthusiasm than claims that do not address the core values of the community. Therefore, *interest groups will attempt to appeal to the community’s core values when making claims concerning people or situations.*

Assertion 11:

However, *the construction of social problems most likely results in the objective increase in behaviors and conditions associated with that social problem.* One response
to the construction of social problems is the creation of the negative condition that the claims makers say already exists. This is a side effect of many successful social problem movements. Successful social problem movements bring to the public’s attention descriptions of problems. Those community members that experience anomie as routine already have issues with the community in which they live. They do not see themselves achieving the community stated goals by the community stated means. Therefore, they do not identify themselves with the community and this lack of community identity may result in deviant behavior. Areas that experience high levels of anomie also experience high levels of deviance. Some individuals and groups intentionally rebel in a response to anomie. This rebellion would produce an increase in the objective conditions thought to be the problem in the first place.

The second way that the social construction results in the objectification of social problems involves boundary maintenance. The behaviors of outsiders are redefined as problematic when change occurs in the community and boundary maintenance kicks in. Therefore, communities notice behaviors that have existed all along and treat those behaviors as problematic after they are defined as such by interest groups.

Assertion 12:

In summary, social problems consist of two separate (but related) aspects. Social problems are processes used by communities to designate boundaries and clarify core values. On the other hand, social problems can be manifest ontologically in the form of behaviors or conditions that are claimed to be problematic by interested members of the community. The relationship between the two aspects of social problems is dialectical. Claims are made about an objective condition. And because of the claims, some people
are likely to rebel against the community and to do whatever is most troublesome for the core claims makers. The community, then, is both the impetus and the outcome of social problems.

Additionally, social problems are really special social movements that follow predictable natural history cycles. They have a beginning, the incipiency, sparked by general confusion surrounding social change that leads to the formation of formal and informal organizations designated to address the condition. During this coalescence stage of the movement, these new organizations will seek to find support from both the general public and the government and other traditional institutions. The social problem becomes institutionalized when laws, programs and policies are made to combat the problem. Following a time of success when these organizations gain a level of recognition and push their issue to the policy making stage, the movement will begin to fragment. Some of the social organizations will drift into obscurity. Others will drastically change forms. The media and the public will lose interest in the problem and soon the social movement will experience demise. Only a few organizations will still be associated with the movement. However, changes may occur in the community’s culture as an aftermath of the problem.

One of the residual effects of a social problem social movement is an ontological increase in the behavior said to be problematic. That is, people begin to do what the claims makers say they shouldn’t. Other residuals effects include a change in language, dress styles, music and customs that reflect the problem condition. In this manner, through the construction of social problems in an attempt at boundary maintenance, communities create the problems that they most feared.
The community process of constructing social problems in order to maintain community boundaries that results in a reformation of community goals, values and norms is called the dialectical synthetic theory of social problems. The following section outlines this theory.

**Dialect Synthetic Theory of Social Problems**

- Social problem theories are models of the social world. They are used to help us understand a certain type of social phenomena. They are used to explain conditions and processes associated with disturbances in social order.
  - By definition, models are simpler than what they model. Therefore, models highlight certain aspects of a phenomenon and ignore other aspects.
  - Social Constructionist theorists focus on the process that communities use to define the behaviors of some members and/or some social conditions as problematic. They ignore the objective aspect of social problems. (Like makers of road map who only map the highways while ignoring railroad tracks, foot paths and river-ways) social constructionists find objective conditions irrelevant to their explanation of social problems.
  - Objectivist theorists, on the other hand, seek to explain only the existence of social conditions that are thought to be problematic to the community. They, in turn, ignore the subjective aspect of social problems, treating social problems as objective realities.
Objectivist and Constructionist explanations of social problems can be reconciled when we realize that both are explaining different aspects of the same phenomenon.

- Objectivist theorists view social problems from the bottom up, beginning with empirical factors that combine to form emerging social problems. They claim that social problems are occasioned by facts that are mind-independent and hence, people independent. These facts are taken to be real (ontologically) and comparable to tornadoes and earthquakes.

- Constructionists view the situation from the top down, beginning with desired characteristics of a community and deviations from constructed norms. They assert that people manufacture social problems; therefore artifacts (or better, social facts) based on the learned culture aspects of a community (such as desires, morals, customs, mores, norms, power, status, etc.)

- No genuine incompatibility exists between the two perspectives; rather it is a matter of aspect recognition. Returning to the analogy of the map a person describing an area in terms of the roads and a person describing the same area in terms of the rivers may both be “right” in their descriptions and yet either (or both) would seem to be “wrong” if one was to try to find a river using the road map (or vice versa).

- Objectivist and constructionists are describing two different aspects of a single phenomenon: the process and the conditions.
Social problems have two aspects. They have an objective, ontological element that can be empirically analyzed, and they have a subjective element that is constructed through social process. The relationship between these two elements is dialectical.

- Both social constructionists and objectivist theorists agree that social problems are about conditions.

  - Constructionists argue that social problems are the result of claims that people make about conditions that may or may not exist. They argue that perception of negative conditions can be created without negative conditions existing. But still, the claims made in the process of constructing social problems are about specific social conditions.

  - Objectivist theorists argue that negative conditions exist independently from the claims of persons. Social problems "just are."

- Both social constructionists and objectivist theorists agree that not all negative conditions are seen as social problems. Social problems become social problems only after they designated as such by the community in which they exist.

  - Constructionists argue that the process of transferring a condition (or person) from normal to a social problem (or deviant) is the interesting aspect of a social problem.
• Objectivists argue that the existence of a negative condition is not enough to create a social problem; instead, the community must be aware of the problem and must believe that something can be done to solve it.

  o Change in either the process of constructing a social problem or change in the ontological conditions surrounding a social problem is likely to lead to a relative change in the other aspect of the social problem.

• Social problems are the tools of communities. Social Problems are used to define a community’s boundaries. When boundaries are threatened social problems will emerge.

  o Communities develop unique sets values, beliefs and norms. When it is perceived by community members that the culture of a community is threatened, some of the community members will begin to make claims as to what (or who) is the source of the threat.

  o Community members are threatened by change.

  o Activities (or people) that are related to cultural paradoxes developed by the community are most quickly blamed as the cause of the discomfort community members feel due to social change.

  o As a result the claims makers from within a community will label those activities (or people) as troublesome and will seek to build a barrier between the existing community and the labeled activity (people).
In response to this ostracism from the community, one response of those who are ostracized is to rebel and to do whatever it is that the community fears.

- If a social problem movement is successful it will complete a natural history cycle: Inciency, Coalescence, Institutionalization, Fragmentation and Demise.

  - Inciency: Lack of organized leadership, general feelings of anxiety, informal claims making, letters to the editor, sympathetic public.
  - Coalescence: The emergence of grass-root organizations, alliances, meetings and proposed solutions. Varieties of interest groups make claims. Media plays important role in disseminating information.
  - Institutionalization: Government and other traditional institutions become involved. Laws are made, policies changed, the problem becomes accepted as “real.”
  - Fragmentation: Organizations involved with the movement fade away. Fewer claims are made concerning the problem. Remaining organizations change forms. Organization structure becomes more formal. Leadership becomes routinized. Disagreement over tactics and policies occurs between those remaining in the movement. Often, the organizations have moved to providing the primary income for those still involved with the movement. The media provide less coverage of the problem.
Demise: Often defined as success by the interest groups. There is little outside support for the movement. Small bands of "true believers" (who are seen as extremists) in the movement may resort to extreme "even violent" means to keep the movement alive. Residual effects of the movement can be seen in the community such as changes in language, customs and dress styles.
CHAPTER 3
THE MORMON CULTURAL REGION

Because communities use social problems to designate and maintain social boundaries, it is appropriate to begin any analysis of a social problem with the history and cultural presentation of the community. Each community is unique in the manner in which it is formed, in the values community members’ hold, and the culture it transfers. The peculiarities of the community also extend to the development of cultural contradictions that Erikson (1966) called cultural paradoxes. A culture’s development is a non-rational process. Over time glitches in cultural development produces paradoxical ideals. That is to say, communities develop values and practices that are in competition with each other. It is at the point of paradox that the community’s social boundaries are most vulnerable and the spot where social problems quite frequently emerge.

The construction of social problems is central to maintaining community boundaries. Therefore, in order to understand the process of constructing social problems, it is important to understand the community in which the problem is built. For this reason, this chapter will consider Utah as the core of the Mormon Cultural Region and will highlight some of the unique characteristics of this area. In addition to describing the demographic characteristics of this state, this chapter emphasizes a set of cultural paradoxes inherent in Utah. These paradoxes provide the theme for the emerging social problem of gangs.
Cultural Regions as Communities

This dissertation’s theory asserts that social problems are the work of communities. They can only be understood in the context of culturally distinct geographic areas that share an all inclusive, public interest, a special closeness or bond which unites some persons and differentiates them from others (Gusfield, 1975, p. xiii), and ties of kinship and loyalty (Bell & Newby, 1978; Kemmis, 1990). Cultural areas by definition can be viewed as communities. Criteria for defining cultural regions identified by researchers supports this view point (Hertzler, 1939; Toney et al., in press; Weakliem & Biggert, 1999).

The cultural processes that have operated so vigorously in the Europeanized portions of North America over the past three and a half centuries have given us a set of reasonably homogeneous, contiguous tracts of territory whose inhabitants are at least dimly aware of a common cultural heritage and of differences from other territorial groups. Such tracts can properly be labeled “culture areas,” even though they differ in some notable ways from the standard, classical cultural areas of long settled, slowly evolving communities elsewhere in the world. (Zelinsky, 1973, p. 109)

The Mormon Cultural Region covers all of Utah and parts of Idaho, Arizona, Nevada, Oregon, Colorado, and New Mexico (Zelinsky, 1973). “The concentration of such a large religious group and its great numerical dominance within a particular area are . . . unusual features in America” (Meinig, 1965, p. 191). More important, however, the influence of the Mormon religion and the developing culture is also quite unique (Gastil, 1975). Recent research suggests that the Mormon Cultural Region is distinctly different from the U.S. population in no less than 18 socioeconomic factors and that this pattern of distinction has remained consistent over time (Toney et al., in press). “The implication is . . . that Mormons, as a group, . . . constitute a highly self-conscious
subculture whose chief bond is religion and one which has long established its mark upon the life and landscape of a particular area” (Meinig, p. 191). “As a reflection of the continued geographic concentration of this religious group, while only one% of the nation’s population is Mormon, seventy-one% of Utah’s population is Mormon,” (Toney et al., in press). Typically studies of the Mormon Cultural Region examine the cultural manifestations of the region rather than religion directly although “religion is a feature that may particularly facilitate the perpetuation of regional culture,” (Toney et al.). Indeed, it is reasonable to argue that the Mormon Cultural Region fits the criteria of a rather large community that acts to influence the values, beliefs and behaviors of the members of that community either by membership in or reaction to the Mormon religion.

Researchers of geographic cultural regions have identified three structural characteristics of cultural areas: the core area, the domain, and the sphere (Zelinsky, 1973). In the case of the Mormon Cultural Region, Utah is considered the core area, “displaying the greatest density of occupancy, intensity or organization, strength and homogeneity of the particular features characteristic of the culture” (Zelinsky, p. 114). For the purpose of this study, Utah, as core of the Mormon Cultural Region, will be viewed as a community and serve as the subject of this study. Prior research has indicated that the state borders of Utah form an appropriate boundary for studying the Mormon Cultural Region (Toney et al., in press).

History of the Mormon Cultural Region

Historical accounts of the Mormon pioneers, much like the New England Puritans of the sixteenth century, often describe a “band of refugees who fled from their native
land to found a new civilization in a remote corner of the world” (Erikson, 1966, p. 33). Utah achieved statehood on January 4, 1896; however, the story of this area began many years before that date. In fact, Mormons, officially known as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, residing in Utah often confuse secular celebrations such as statehood and religious celebrations such as the pioneers’ entrance into the Salt Lake Valley because the two are so intertwined in the traditions and accounts of the people. For example, in 1997, the Church celebrated the 150th anniversary of the settlement of Mormon pioneers into the Salt Lake Valley. In conjunction with this celebration, numerous parades, parties, and festive events were sponsored throughout the state. Many people participated in a reenactment of the pioneer trek made by early pioneers. The significance of this celebration is that little distinction was made between the religious and secular celebrations by either the Church or the political leaders. Ironically, little importance was given to the centennial celebration of statehood just a year prior to this event.

The origin of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, nicknamed Mormon, can be traced to Joseph Smith, Jr., a man Mormons believe to be a prophet. In 1820, Smith claimed to have received a vision from God in answer to his prayer concerning the truth of religious sects of his time (see The Church Educational System, 1993). Although Smith received this “First Vision” (as Mormons term his vision) in Palmyra, New York, near his family’s farm, Smith’s ancestors arrived in Massachusetts from England during the early and mid-1600. Without a doubt the Puritan influence of New England had a great effect on Smith’s spiritual experiences and continues to influence the behaviors of his present day followers (see The Church Educational System,
These influences can be seen in the conservative way of life, the construction of communities, and manner in which religion becomes an all encompassing factor of life for most Mormon communities. Additionally, during the 1820s Western New York State was known in United States’ history “as the “burned-over district” because of the innumerable religious revivals held there. Never in our history has so much religious fervor been packed into one geographical area. Bibles, revelations, preachers and prophets came (and went) with startling rapidity” (Gordon, 1979, p. 233).

This religious fervor is credited for arousing Smith’s interest in religion and in spurring him to pray to discover which church he should join. His prayer, he said, was answered with a visitation from God, and this experience led Smith to organize the Mormon Church. Ten years after his “First Vision” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was officially organized in Fayette, New York. Followers of Smith were labeled “Mormons” due to their belief in a scriptural book titled the Book of Mormon. Mormons believe that this book is an account of the people living on the American continent from the period of about 600 B.C. to about 421 A.D. and that Smith translated, rather than wrote, the book from a set of gold plates. The plates were said to have contained the Holy record of an ancient people and had been recorded by prophets as directed by God. The Mormon cultural was uniquely influenced by a combination of these early influences. “The Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith’s prophetic leadership, and the experience of the Saints were all crucial components in the creation of Mormonism” (Shipps, 1987, p. 39).

From the time Smith first reported his vision to those in his community, he and his followers were persecuted and chased from one area to the next. Beginning in New
York, the group moved farther and farther west until ultimately settling in the Salt Lake Valley of Utah. In 1846, Smith was killed by a mob while incarcerated in a jail in Carthage, Illinois. The Mormons were led west to Utah shortly after Smith’s death by Brigham Young, the man who became the second president of the Church, and who was also thought to be a prophet.

The first “Saints” (Mormons call themselves Saints, deriving this title from the official name of the church) entered the Salt Lake Valley in July of 1847. Even in Utah, however, the Mormons were in conflict with those not of their faith. Although Utah was made a U.S. territory in 1850 application for statehood was not approved until 46 years later, due to conflicts between the Mormons and the U.S. government. A main source of this conflict was the Mormon practice of polygamy.

The outside pressure took many forms, but it became concentrated in an anti-polygamy campaign of intense virulence in the 1880’s; virtually universal agreement exists, too, that buried within the anti-polygamy campaign were issues as much economic and political as social and moral. (Shipps, 1987, p. 113-114)

U.S. government officials were unwilling to grant statehood until this practice was abolished. During this conflict, severe sanctions were imposed against the Mormons. Among other things, Mormons were jailed, denied the right to vote, forced to testify against spouses, and had their property raided and seized. The U.S. government officially dissolved the Church and seized much of the wealth that had been accumulated by the Church at that time.

The U.S. Government’s actions were in large part responsible for the decline in new Mormon migration to Utah. Additionally, there were conflicts reported between Mormon and non-Mormon business owners, railroad workers, and traders. The Church’s
reaction to these problems with outsiders was to seek independence and separatism from all non-Mormons. "Having removed themselves to the Great Basin, the nineteenth-century Saints tried to stay unspotted from the world by as far as possible separating themselves politically, economically, socially, and psychically from the rest of humanity" (Shipps, 1987, p. 116).

Even today, the Mormons have an extensive hierarchical system of government, a successful welfare system, a vast recreational system, and an established educational system within the religious order. The structure and formation of the existing church can be traced directly to the general attitude of separatism practiced during those early days of social conflict with non-Mormons.

In the nineteenth century, Mormon Church leaders planned nearly every aspect of the community development in Utah including the location of homes to be built, what members should live where, and what industries should be endorsed. The goal of the Church was to build Zion, an orderly paradise.

However, almost in spite of the ongoing push for separateness, the Mormons have from the Church’s conception proselytized in search of new members. The efforts to adopt new members required a substantial mingling of Mormon and non-Mormons. Additionally, new members from diverse backgrounds were likely to threaten the stability of the Mormon culture. Until as recent as the early 1900s new members were encouraged and aided in migration to Zion where they could gather with the Saints in Utah (Hunter, 1984). "The literature is abundant, both inside the Mormon Church and outside, detailing the European migration under the leadership of Brigham Young" (Hunter, p. 3). Keith
Terry, a writer of Mormon history, commenting on the Mormon practice of gathering themselves together in one geographic region, stated:

Mormons thus tended to see themselves as modern children of Israel, chosen to raise a Holy city to the Lord. As Saints of the latter-days looking forward to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, they had to unite and purify themselves.

Besides such religious beliefs there were practical reasons for gathering the Saints together. Persecution had begun almost simultaneously with the birth of the new religion. Scattered believers saw themselves as easy victims of torment; grouped together, they could more easily protect themselves. Then, too, the "world" (Mormons used that word in the New Testament sense) was seen as dominated by corrupt institutions, values and practices. (Terry, 1980, p. 127)

In the process of proselytizing and migrating, the Mormons sought to establish a kingdom that would stretch from the Bay of San Francisco to Hudson Bay (see The Church Educational System, 1993). Although the area dominated by Mormons did not reach as far as hoped by Brigham Young, a significant Mormon presence continues to exist throughout the state of Utah, in the southern areas of Idaho, and in some parts of Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico and Wyoming.

The Mormon culture extended into the economic activities of the area. Brigham Young directed early Mormons to "make agriculture their chief occupation rather than prospect for mineral resources" (Seeman, 1938, p. 300). "Wealth, specifically gold and silver, was looked upon as a hindrance to progression" (Sadler, 1979, p. 236). However, many non-Mormon immigrants came to Utah specifically to mine precious metals.

Between the time of [Col. Patrick Edward] Connor's correspondence [to his superiors concerning gold, silver and copper existence near Salt Lake City in 1863] and Utah's statehood [in 1896], Bingham Canyon (and other claims in Big Cottonwood and Little Cottonwood Canyons, Park City, and Tooele County) generated millions of dollars worth of precious metals for investors and attracted thousands of Chinese, Irish, Greek and Italian miners to the area. (Iber, 2000, p.6).
In addition to miners, other migrants were attracted to Utah as traders, to aid in livestock and agricultural operations, and by the transportation industry. Among these was a contingency of Hispanic persons (Iber, 2000). Although Mormons were surrounded by non-Mormons even in Utah and suffered for food and transportation in the desert environment of Utah,

Brigham Young was determined to limit trade and commerce with the gentile world. Young and the church hierarchy moved to remedy these problems through the founding of more settlements, the establishment of church organizations that shuttled members to and from Salt Lake City (to improve communication between outposts), and cooperative economic endeavors. These self-help efforts established the agricultural and transportation foundations of Utah. The church’s encouragement of local industry, thrift, and “group maneuvers” also served to limit contact with Gentiles. (Iber, 2000, p. 4)

The influence of Church leadership on the neighborhoods in Utah reached beyond the economic activities of the members. Mormon communities were planned communities that had specific goals of (a) equality, (b) community building, (c) defense, and (d) agricultural production (Seeman, 1938). Each part of the communities was organized according to the plan of the Church leaders. It is likely that the emphasis on order was a result of the Church leader’s Puritan roots as well as a reaction to the constant persecution endured by the Saints prior to reaching Utah. The community building efforts of early Mormons has left a hallmark that is unsurpassed at least in the U.S. “The Mormon way of life is expressed in many recognizable ways in the settlement, landscape and economic activities within a region that is more homogeneous internally than any other American culture area” (Zelinsky, 1973, p. 131).

Currently, Mormon Church membership worldwide continues to grow at an unprecedented rate. Estimates of a 50% growth rate per decade seem to be falling short
of the actual Mormon membership (Stark, 1996). Although the Church no longer encourages migration to Utah, selective migration by Mormons into the Mormon Cultural Region continues to occur (Toney, Stinner, & Kan, 1983). As of 1990, nearly 70% of the adults in Utah identified themselves with the Mormon Church (Young, 1996) and of those Utah residents who were members of a religious organization, 90% belonged to the Mormon Church. Clearly, the Church has been and continues to be a powerful influence throughout the state.

The Development of Cultural Paradoxes in the Mormon Cultural Region

Although the structure of communities can be planned and controlled, the development of culture is not a rational, planned process. Therefore, it is not uncommon for paradoxes to exist within a culture and the Mormon culture is no exception. Boundary maintenance activities and social problems develop where boundaries are weakest. Cultural boundaries are weakest where members of the culture are confused or experience ambiguity about cultural values and expectations. Confusion and ambiguity are the result of cultural paradoxes. Three of these contradictions found in the Mormon culture seem especially relevant to the study of youth gangs in this region.

The first of these becomes apparent when examining the origins of the Church and then comparing the original church leadership with the leadership today. Joseph Smith was a boy of fourteen at the time of the first vision and he assumed leadership of the Church 10 years later at the age of 24 years. Many of the prophets described in the Book of Mormon are young members of their communities. Numerous accounts are given in the Book of Mormon of young men stepping forward to lead the people out of
iniquity back to the presence of God. Youthful members of the Nephite nations (a group of people referenced in the Book of Mormon) fought battles, led armies and taught of Christ's coming. Exploration of Book of Mormon scriptures and early Church leadership suggest that it is by the hand of youth that the body of the Church will be saved.

Accounts are also given of how the misbehavior of the youth has resulted in the destruction of groups of people. Half of the people that were in the original party led to the American continent (according to the Book of Mormon) followed errant brothers away from the path to God and as a result led an entire nation astray. A Book of Mormon passage articulates the fear of iniquity of the youth of the Church:

*Behold, O my son, how great iniquity ye brought upon the Zoramites; for when they saw your conduct they would not believe in my words.*

And now the Spirit of the Lord doth say unto me: Command thy children to do good, lest they lead away the hearts of many people to destruction; therefore I command you, my son, in the fear of God, that ye refrain from your iniquities;

That you turn to the Lord with all your mind, might, and strength; but rather return unto them, and acknowledge your faults and that wrong which ye have done.

(Alma 39: 11-13)

For Mormons, the behavior of the youth has effects beyond the salvation of the individual. Not only is there a fear that errant youth are doing eternal damage to the youth's own souls, but their influence on others is thought to be unalterably detrimental to the community.

Even with this fear of the failure of youth, in the typical Mormon congregation, called a ward, young people are awarded leadership opportunities. Young males are
given the priesthood at the age of twelve. Men of 19 years become missionaries and spend two years proselytizing for new converts. Several organizations within the Church are designed to teach and assist youth in the Church to transition through this dangerous age.

The Church also encourages members to marry young and to not postpone having children. As a result, Utah’s birth rate is higher than the national average and the age structure of the state is much younger (Heaton, 1996). There are high numbers of people under 18 years within the Church and within Utah. Issues involving children are of great importance in Utah (Heaton).

However, the current Church leadership is almost exclusively composed of an aging male hierarchy. Elderly holders of the priesthood deliver most of the decisions and directions to the general body of the Church. Although the General Authorities, the governing body of the Church, seem to have the best interest of all Church members in mind, generational gap issues are evident among this culture.

Herein lays the age paradox. While hope and expectations are bestowed on the youth of the Church, trust and leadership are given to the elderly. This contradiction seems more defined than in other cultures due to the origins of the church springing from a youthful charismatic leader combined with the current age of the governing leaders. The general church membership wants to follow the youth and wants to give them trust and leadership responsibilities. Mormon church leaders have long tried to prepare the youth for leadership. For this reason, youthful follies are seen by most members as disastrous rather than trivial affairs that will be outgrown.
It is a common belief among Church members that if the youth do not adopt correct principles when they are young that there is little hope that they will change erroneous behavior later on in life. Mormons give reference to a biblical proverb that states: “Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

The second cultural paradox addresses the issues surrounding Mormon self-isolation and efforts to proselyte. On one hand, Mormons do not generally trust those that are different than them, meaning of another faith. Mormon folklore is filled with stories of persecution by mobs, the U.S. Government, non-Mormon business owners, and neighbors. On the other hand, Mormons have actively sought outsiders to join their religion. Proselytizing has resulted in the conversion of people from many parts of the world. Many of these converts are radically different from those descending from the New England Puritan society. Moreover, because Mormons have encouraged new members to “come to Zion” migration of Mormon converts to Utah is likely to result in diversification of Utah residents. The dilemma of the Church becomes the handling and administration of new members who look different, act different, and have different cultural backgrounds than the traditional white, Anglo-Saxon, English speaking, and middle-class Mormon.

The case history of Hawaiian converts during the mid and late 1800s illustrates this paradox. Many missionaries went to the Hawaiian Islands in search of religious converts during the early days of the Church. Many Hawaiian converts moved to Utah to be near the temple and the body of the Saints (Hunter, 1984). Their reception was different than that of other converts of the time.
Although there were many foreigners in Salt Lake City, most of the immigrants were from the British Islands and Scandinavia. The Hawaiians found many problems here. Employment was difficult to find because of cultural and other differences that separated the Hawaiians from there "brothers and sisters" with American and European traditions. The climate was severe compared with their land of origins. These and other problems led to the missionary sponsors and friends to believe it necessary to find a place which the Hawaiians could call their own, a sentiment shared by the Hawaiians as well. (Hunter, 1984, p. 4)

Hawaiian Mormons were systematically separated, and somewhat isolated, from other Mormons in Utah. They established a settlement in Skull Valley, a place known for its extreme temperatures about seventy miles from Salt Lake City, and this settlement lasted for twenty-eight years. This settlement was dissolved in 1917, after a temple was built in the Hawaiian Islands, and many of the residents of Iosepa (the Skull Valley community) were encouraged and financially aided in migration back to Hawaii.

The Hawaiian example clearly demonstrates the second paradox. Efforts are made to convert new members to the Mormon faith, but inclusion into the fold involves more than baptism. Mormons struggle with the constant transition of separating themselves from non-Mormons and accepting them as new members from different cultures. It is still an accepted, albeit controversial, practice to have Mormon wards in Utah that are separated by language or other cultural variables.

Additionally, Mormons have long adopted attitudes and policies that appear racist. For instance, blacks were systematically denied the rights and privileges of priesthood membership until late 1978. This long-term separation by race has created ambiguities in the minds of some members as to the proper treatment of minorities. Racial separation applied to all individuals not of European descent. Hispanics, Native Americans, Asians and others have also experienced this lack of acceptance by multi-
generational Utah Mormons. "Assimilation has been a dominant theme in church policy for immigrants from northern Europe. However, descendents of Book of Mormon people, such as mestizos, have not been as well accepted by individual church members." (Iber, 2000, p. 29).

Although Mormon membership worldwide includes people from all races, Utah Mormons are distinctively white and from the middle-class. The official position of the Church is that all people are God’s children and all members of the Church have an equal claim on God’s blessings. The recurring message from Church leadership is that Saints have a responsibility and obligation to include and make welcome all people into Zion. However, in practice, there is an inevitable distrust of minority group members among the general population of Utah Mormons. One member of the first designated Hispanic congregation in Utah recalled that prejudice "often came from "those who held high positions in the Church"... some Mormons [were] reluctant to trust Mexicans... [and] refused to work with Mexicans, insisting that they were dirty" (Iber, 2000, p. 29). This attitude continues in Utah today. "Only a generation ago, half of the Salt Lake Mormons... still believed that blacks were under a divine curse as descendents of Cain... The lineage of Cain idea continues to be widely believed even among today’s younger Mormons" (Mauss, 2003, p. 275). These and other racial ideologies work to position racial and ethnic minorities as marginal members of the Mormon communities.

Although tempered by racial and ethnic prejudice, Mormons from minority groups have traditionally fared better in Utah than non-Mormon minorities. "In Utah, those who joined the LDS faith plugged into an ethnic network that tied them directly to the majority population. This provided access to social and economic benefits not
available to those outside the fellowship” (Iber, 2000, p. 22). However, Church
membership does not guarantee that the new member will completely overcome racial
prejudice and minorities are likely to sense the ambiguity associated with their status in
the Mormon culture. For instance, in the U.S., a significant number of minority
Mormons, particularly black Mormons, leave the Church (Mauss, 2003). The reasons for
dropping out are varied but some inferences can be made as to the cause.

These reasons included (in no particular order) discomfort over class and cultural
differences with white Mormons in most congregations; feelings of being treated
categorically as blacks instead of individuals; exaggerated attention as “novelties”
of some kind in their treatment by whites; continuing undercurrents of racism in
such LDS popular beliefs as the curse of Cain; white resistance to intermarriage
or even interracial dating; and in general a level of white acceptance that
considered civil but not warm. (Mauss, p. 244)

It is important to note that racist behaviors such as those mentioned above are not
inherent in Mormon teachings. In fact, the opposite is true. Mormon leaders stress the
importance of loving all people. In comparison to other religious Americans, Mormons
are less, rather than more, racist (Mauss, 2003). “Mormons probably never were
uniquely racist compared with most Christians . . . once the church dropped its internal
racial restriction on the priesthood, Mormons in national surveys came to be among the
least racist Americans in public policy towards blacks” (p. 274). Other research suggests
that any mistreatment of minorities by Mormons is due to factors outside of Church
policy and teachings.

The reason that . . . dark-skinned people faced mistreatment . . . is because possibly
the Mormon subjects simply have not attended to these [Church] teachings, or have
disregarded them. Another possibility . . . is that determinants of prejudice are
mediating or overriding the effects of Mormon tenets on secular racial attitudes.
(Iber, 2000, p. 38).
The third paradox is closely related to the second. Mormons have been given the directive to be “in the world but not of the world” (Hales, 2000, p. 6). The implication of this mandate is that Mormons are not to geographically set themselves apart from non-Mormons, but that a spiritual difference should be detectable. Mormons are expected to act different than non-Mormons. This includes abstaining from alcohol, tobacco, coffee and tea; adhering to a conservative dress standard; restricting many activities seen as normal by non-Mormons; pursuing high levels of education; studying scripture daily; and more. Mormons are counseled against extreme or faddish styles of dress or activities.

However, what is acceptable and what is not is rarely clearly understood. Mormons get caught between wanting to fit in with the non-Mormon population and with following the directives of Church leaders. Routinely Church leaders will call members into check from participating in behaviors that are thought to be unbecoming of good Mormons. For example during a world-wide Conference of the membership of the Church, Gordon B. Hinckley (2000), the acting president-prophet of the Church, reconfirmed the Church’s position on modesty of appearance and clarified the official position of the Church. He told Church members that they should avoid permanently changing or altering their physical bodies. He counseled against tattoos and body piercing stating that the only acceptable body piercing for women was one hole in each ear and that men should not have any piercings at all. Following that conference address many Mormons removed ornamentation from their bodies. Those who did not were viewed critically by the greater part of the Mormon community.
What it means to be Mormon is symbolized by the behaviors of the members. This directive puts Mormons in the often untenable position of trying to decide if their behavior is “of the world” or not. As a result, Mormons are often highly self-critical. Utah is said to have one of the highest suicide rates and the highest use of anti-depressant medication in the U.S. Members have also been accused of placing equally harsh judgments upon others. Not wanting to appear to condone sinful behavior, Mormons separate themselves from anyone who is viewed as being worldly.

The Mormon world is made up of sharpened contrasts such as the age paradox, the separatism/assimilation paradox, and the paradox associated with being in the world but not of the world. It is these vary contradictions that give Mormons their unique identity and their unique set of social problems. It is in fact, the construction of social problems that makes distinctions between cultures possible.
CHAPTER 4

CHANGE AS THE IMPETUS OF SOCIAL PROBLEM CONSTRUCTION

Although cultural paradoxes are the logical weak spots in communities, and the point at which boundary maintenance activities occur, paradoxes can exist in a community for an extended duration without the emergence of a social problem. Paradoxes do not cause social problems and social problems are not spontaneous events. Instead, something has to happen that causes fear in the community. There has to be a perceived threat in order for boundary maintenance activities that cause social problems, to occur.

Social problems are kicked-off by social change in the community. Without social change, communities would operate with a dynamic equilibrium spoken of by the social disorganization theorists. However, since communities are constantly experiencing change, they are constantly open to the construction of social problems. The amount of social change in the community is positively correlated with the development of social problems in the community. In other words, the more a community experiences change, the more likely the residents will experience anomie and will seek to identify the cause and solution for this discomfort. For the Mormon Cultural Region in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, the threat that led to the formation of youth gangs as a social problem was demographic in nature.
Utah Age Structure

Due to the influences of Mormon culture, Utah has always been demographically unique compared to the rest of the United States. The birth and death rates both reflect cultural peculiarities.

Utah's annual population growth rate has, with few exceptions, exceeded the national growth rate since 1970. . . Utah's rapid growth rate proceeds from its high crude birth rate and, to a lesser extent, the relatively low crude death rate. During the 1970-1995 period, Utah's crude birthrate peaked at 29 per 1,000 persons in 1979 and has declined since then to stabilize between 20 and 21 per 1,000. The crude birthrate for the nation has, for the most part, fluctuated between 14 and 16 since 1970. Utah's birthrate has consistently exceeded the national rate, although this crude birthrate gap has been narrowing in recent years. (Perlich, 1996a, pp. 8-9)

The higher than average Utah birth rate is manifest in a concentration of the population of Utah's population in younger age groups. Although not a new phenomenon, changes in birth rates for both the U.S. and Utah have made this difference more obvious.

Both preschool and school-age persons comprise a larger proportion of the population in Utah than in the U.S. And while shares of the Utah and U.S. populations in the under 18 group have declined from 1970 to 1990, the difference between these two proportions has increased over time. In 1970 the under 18 group was 40.1 percent for the Utah population and 34.2 percent for the U.S. population, a difference of 5.9 percent. By 1990 the same group had fallen in both instances to 36.4 percent for Utah and 25.8 percent for the nation as a whole, a 10.6 percent difference. (Perlich, 1996a, p. 20)

The percentage difference in the under age category for Utah as compared to the U.S. nearly doubled between 1970 and 1990. A comparison of the population pyramids (Figure 1) for the U.S. and Utah for 1980, 1990, and 2000 clearly illustrates the structural change that occurred during this time period. The higher birth rate of Utahans left the
1990 Utah population with a larger proportion of children than the nation. This change in the comparable population structure of Utah and the U.S. populations accentuated the need to be concerned with the community boundaries. Since fear surrounding youth in the Mormon Cultural Region was already a factor, the increased proportion of youth in the area accentuated this fear. Not only was there a cultural uneasiness with youth, but also now it seemed that there were more youth to be concerned with. The proportional increase of young people in Utah augmented youth related problems for Utah residents. The concerns and problems associated with these youth were more of an issue in 1990 than in earlier years and contributed to the formation of the social problem of youth gangs.

As part of this research, personal interviews were conducted with representatives from several organizations whose primary goal was to combat the gang problem in Utah. Those interviewed indicated that the age structure in Utah made the region more conducive to gangs than other states with proportionately older populations.

For example, the history and mission statement of the Ogden/ Weber Metro Gang Unit (2000) stated:

Utah has a substantially large population of youth under the age of eighteen. Utah ranks first in the nation in the percent of population under five years of age. As far as youth crime, this represents a special problem for Utah because it has the youngest median age in the country.

The Mormon Cultural Region, with a strong emphasis on religion and middle-class family values, seems at first to be an unlikely place for the formation of youth gangs. However the high proportion of youth in the state appears to offset cultural values that
oppose gangs. Those interviewed see this population as potential gang members. All of those interviewed indicated that the most prevalent ages of gang members were between 13 and 17 years. All agreed that any youth in Utah was capable of becoming a gang member regardless of age, race, and style of clothing, family income, religion, or place of residence. Paul Brenneman (personal communication, 2000), a police officer with the Salt Lake Area Gang Project stated:

Out on the street, any kid out there, White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, [or] Native American, may or may not be a gang member. You have your stereo-typical gang members with baggy clothes, sagging and bagging with the ball cap turned around sideways, with tattoos up and down, who are color-coordinated with only one color. Those are good indicators [that a person is a gang member] but they are not the only indicators of a gangster. Now we are seeing gangsters coming anywhere from a posh Sandy Neighborhood all the way out to the ghetto of the Westside somewhere. That is kind of unique about Utah. Gangsters are not limited by socio-economic level, by the area that they live, or by race.

This observation was universally shared by those interviewed for this research and is congruent with the age paradox previously discussed. As the age structure in Utah becomes comparatively younger, the result is an increase in general suspicion of youthful activities. This general suspicion gives rise to the formation of youthful activities as a social problem. The nature of those activities directs the effort of claims makers and determines the social problem that will be constructed.

On a national level gangs were receiving a lot of attention from the media and from policing agents during the early 1990s as well. Because of this, concern for an increasing proportion of youth materialized into the formation of the gang problem. Additionally, youth in Utah identified with the hip-hop movement and the hip-hop movement were classified with gang activity. As a result, the youth of the 1990s in Utah were in large associated with the gangs.
The youth culture in Utah, as is the case throughout the country, is dominated by a dynamic of living called HIP-HOP. The HIP-HOP culture...consists of four components: 1) DeeJaying, 2) Break-dancing, 3) Rapping, and 4) Graffiti art. Although rap music is the most popular aspect of HIP-HOP culture, graffiti art rivals it in terms of widespread visibility. The merger of gang culture with popular youth culture has made the desecration of property by means of graffiti a commonplace occurrence. (Stallworth, 1995, p. 39)

Cultural ambiguities about the youth population and the emergence of hip-hop as a focal point for the youth culture served as an impetus for the construction of gangs in Utah during the early 1990s. The change in youth culture from hip-hop to Grunge, discussed in Chapter 7, is also associated with the ontological decrease in gang activity.

**Utah Migration**

Although changes in the age structure played an important part in initiating the construction of the gang movement in the early 1990s, other demographic social changes, such as changing migration patterns, were also instrumental. In 1980 the net migration rate in Utah was 16.61 migrants per 1000 population. According to the Utah State Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget, this was the highest rate experienced by Utah since 1943. Following the high migration rate, however, the rates of migration dropped steadily and rapidly. The migration rate for 1981 was only 5.02 migrants per 1000 population. By 1984, Utah was experiencing a negative net migration. In 1988, the rate was -8.61 migrants per 1000 population.

This pattern of net out-migration continued until 1991 when the migration rate recovered almost as quickly as it fell. The migration rate for 1991 was 10.84 and in 1995 it was 11.89 (see Figure 2). This migration pattern was likely due to structural factors in the state.
The cycles of net migration in Utah have been associated with changing economic conditions. The long in-migration period from 1969 through 1983 corresponded to the strength of industries concerned with natural resources (e.g., oil, coal, copper, and other minerals), national defense, and aerospace; while the 1984 through 1990 out-migration was associated with the national recession, structural changes in Utah’s economy, and the reversal of the energy boom. The most recent net in migration—that of the 1991-95 time period—again corresponds to a strong economy. (Perlich, 1996a, p. 12)

Net migration in Utah has been up and down since 1995. In 1998 the migration rate was less than one person per 1000.

Migration patterns can change community structure, size and distribution and create a perceived threat to community members. As was pointed-out by John R. Wecks (1996), “Whether migration is legal or illegal, it can profoundly alter a community or an entire country within a short time” (p. 210). If the survival of a community depends on the members’ ability to protect territory and boundaries of the community then it is no surprise that an increase in migration rates will likely be accompanied by increased

![Figure 2. Population increase. From “Population Growth, 1970-95,” by P. Perlich, 1996b.](image-url)
boundary maintenance activities such as claims making activities and the construction of social problems.

A great body of research has associated community members’ fear of crime with rapid growth rates and other structural changes within a community (Chiricos, Hogan, & Gertz, 1997; Krannich, Berry, & Greider, 1989; Krannich, Greider, & Little, 1985; Perkins & Taylor, 1996; St. John & Heald-Moore, 1996; Taylor & Covington, 1993). Fear of crime by individual community members appears to be associated with the perceived encroachment activities of newcomers and/or people who are perceived as different from the existent community members. It is fear of crime, and other fears such as loss of jobs, that leads to boundary maintenance activities. These activities unite community members and alienate marginal group members and newcomers.

Although all migrants encroach on community members’ territory, those migrants who share similarities with community members are less likely to be the subjects of boundary maintenance activities. Migrants who are culturally and demographically different are often viewed as troublesome or even dangerous. In particular, subculture differences among people living in the same neighborhood increase residents’ fear of crime (Bursik & Grasmik, 1993; Covington & Taylor, 1991; Lane & Meeker, 2000; Skogan, 1995). Fear is greater in areas where the racial mix is changing (Covington & Taylor). Neighborhoods experiencing unexpected increases in minority and youth populations had higher fear levels than stable communities (Taylor & Covington, 1993).

In Utah, the 1980 population was composed of 92.89% white non-Hispanics (see Table 2). Between 1980 and 1990, the Hispanic population “grew by more than 40% (to
Table 2
*Utah Population Comparisons for Non-Hispanic Whites and Minorities, 1980, 1990, and 2000*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Non-Hispanic Whites</th>
<th>Ethnic and Racial Minorities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>percentage</td>
<td>Population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>1,460,745</td>
<td>92.89</td>
<td>103,859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1,722,850</td>
<td>93.79</td>
<td>107,005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2,233,169</td>
<td>82.27</td>
<td>328,904</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data compiled from the U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census for 1980, 1990, 2000

84,597 individuals) and then represented 4.9% of the state’s inhabitants” (Iber, 2000, p. 117). By 1999 the white non-Hispanic population dropped to 88.6%. Even though the proportion of white Utahans was significantly greater than all minority groups combined, the proportionate increase in minorities compared to the non-Hispanic white population constituted a structural change in the community. People could see and feel the growing numbers of racial and ethnic minorities. As a result, as discovered by Covington and Taylor (1991), levels of fear in the community increased.

Throughout the 1980s migration decline the racial and ethnic population growth stagnated at 6.2% of the population. However, the 1990s brought an economic surge to Utah and a corresponding increase in migration rates. As a result, the racial and ethnic population steadily increased until in 2000, nearly 15% of the population belonged to this category. While the Utah population increased by 33% during the 1990s, the minority population increased by 67.47% during the same time period. There is no doubt that in areas where the density of the minority population was the greatest, community members were very aware of the changing composition of the population.
U.S. Census data for 1990 and 2000 show the change in the Utah population racial composition for this 10 year period. Every county in Utah experienced an increase in the proportion of minorities living in the county during this span (see Table 3). The smallest increase was experienced by Summit County with 8.78% increase in minorities residing in the area. Counties with the largest percentage increase of minorities were Uintah at 86.43%, San Juan with 83.40%, Wayne with 79.41% and Millard at 71.14%. These four counties began in 1990 with relatively small numbers of minorities. However, the counties with the largest numbers of minorities in 1990 also experienced a significant proportionate increase of minority residents. Salt Lake County gained 122,721 minority residents, Utah County gained 28,148 minority residents, Weber County gained 24,194, and Davis County gained 18,508. These Wasatch Front counties increased on average the number of minority residents by 44.30%.

Several factors are likely to have influenced growth in the minority population in Utah. First, there seems to be a relationship between the counties economic activities and the proportionate increase in minority residents in those counties. Uintah, Wayne, and Millard counties all under went an increase in mining activity during the 1990s. The Wasatch Front counties also saw increased economic prosperity during the 1990s. Economic boom cycles bring in-migration levels up. Additionally, Uintah and Millard counties both host Indian reservations. Therefore, natural increase in the Native American population is likely to be manifest in the minority population. Finally, the Wasatch Front Counties in Utah experienced the urbanization movement experienced throughout the U.S. Salt Lake City, Provo, Orem, Ogden, and other cities along Interstate 15 route attracted migrants of all races.
In addition to an increase in minorities living in Utah, the age structure of the minorities in these counties also changed. Prior to 1990, the bulk of the minority population was in the working ages (see Figure 1). However, since 1990 that trend has changed. An increasing proportion of the minority residents are under the age of 18. While every county experienced a decrease in the proportion of the white population that was under 18 during the 1990s, nearly half (14 of 29) of the counties experienced an increase in the proportion of the under-age minority residents. Three of the counties—Daggett, Kane and Morgan—experienced an increase of nearly 20% or more in the number of racial or ethnic minority residents under age 18.

This information can be interpreted in one of two ways in relation to the gang problem in Utah experienced during the same time period. The conservative interpretation, and the one commonly adopted by claims makers, is that this increase in minority youth caused the gang problem directly. Since most of the migration into the state was from California (Heaton, Hirschl & Chadwick, 1996) and gangs are prevalent in California, the argument is that the minority migrants into Utah brought with them gang members who started gangs in Utah and then recruited Utah residents into the gang ranks. Several of those working to combat gangs who were interviewed for this research suggested that migration of gangs from California accounted for the origination of gangs in Utah. A serious problem with this assertion is that most gang members are reported as under the age of eighteen. All of those that were interviewed stated that the most gang members in Utah were between the ages of thirteen and seventeen years. Minor youth are not likely to migrate alone. While some persons under the age of 18 years may have moved with their families, and some may have been sent away from home to live with
relatives or in group homes, such as Job Corps, it is not rational to believe that the large number of gang members reported in Utah could have been the result of such movement.

Another fallacy with this migration of gangs argument concerns the potential influence that new members of a community have on existing members. It is an unsubstantiated assumption that a single youth or small groups of youth with a gang background of some sort have enough influence in a new community with largely different values to convert large numbers of youth to form gangs and participate in criminal behavior. To join a gang is to ostracize oneself from the community in which the youth has been raised. Outsiders moving into the community may have the ability to influence some of the marginal members of the community to participate in such activity, but it is highly unlikely that community members in good standing are going to be enticed to abandon status positions to participate in such behavior. Yet, according to gang workers, all youth in Utah were potential gang members. In fact this characteristic was said to be the difference between gangs in Utah and gangs in other states. Therefore, it is not plausible that the gang problem occurred because minority youth members increased in numbers and were able to persuade youth of all races, socio-economic status, and geographic areas to join them in gang activity.

However, a second, more plausible, inference of the racial and age structural changes in relationship to the Utah gang problem can be made. Instead of assuming that migration had a direct influence on the gang problem, I believe that the influx of minorities and the increase of the proportion of juveniles, especially minority youth, throughout the counties of Utah caused anomie in the community. Long-term residents
felt threatened by the influx of minorities and youth and responded with boundary maintenance activities.

In other words, established Utah residents feared the changes that were occurring in the state due to a rapid increase in migration. As a result of that fear, they sought to retain the values, beliefs, and customs of the community. Boundary maintenance activities focused on minorities and youth because of the increasing presence of both. Not coincidently, the Mormon culture had developed to include uncertainty and anxiety concerning both youth and minorities as well. The combination of rapid in-migration and the resulting change in the community structure led to the social construction of gangs in Utah.

The Mormon Cultural Region, based on the cultural paradoxes presented here, has always been open to problems that center on minority youth. For this reason it appears that claims makers easily attached themselves to the national gang movement as an explanation for the problems experienced in Utah because of the changing demographics. The gang problem was custom made for Utah by Utahans and is largely the result of boundary maintenance activities of community members who had a special interest in the gang problem. It gained support from the public because of the existing cultural paradoxes.
### Table 3

**Counties in Utah Population Change by Race, 1990 to 2000**

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**Change from 1990 to 2000**

|                   | White      | Minorities (Race)      |                          |
|-------------------|------------|------------------------|
|                   | growth %   | difference in %         |
|                   | growth %   | difference in %         |

**Note:** Data compiled from the U.S. Census Bureau, decennial census 1990 and 2000
CHAPTER 5

YOUTH GANGS

Although no consensus exists as to what constitutes a youth gang (see Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1997; Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Decker & Kempf-Leonard, 1991; Howell, 1997; Maxson & Klein, 1990), groups referred to as youth gangs have existed in the United States since shortly after the end of the American Revolutionary War (Howell; Sante, 1991; Sheldon, 1898). By the middle of the 19th century, most large city newspapers in the U.S. carried reports of gangs of boys and men banding together and participating in illegal activity (Shelden et al., 2001). However, the attention gangs have received has waxed and waned depending on the social climate of the times (Bookin-Weiner & Horowitz, 1983; Shelden et al.).

For example, during Prohibition and its immediate aftermath (the Depression years), the public seemed enthralled with gangland activities and many gangland’s colorful characters (e.g., the Mob, Al Capone, Bonnie and Clyde, the Ma Barker Gang, and others). Several decades later mass media glamorized those flamboyant actors. Throughout much of the 1940s Americans were distracted by World War II events in Europe and the Pacific and the healing process associated with the closure of a world war. Fascination with the gang was revitalized during the 1950s and the early 1960s (the west Side Story era) by academics who marched behind a theoretical banner that questioned lower-class allegiance to middle-class values (e.g., Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Cohen, 1955; Miller, 1958; Short and Strodtbeck, 1965). By the end of the 1960s Americans were turned into nightly exhibitions of civil disorder (related to the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War), the Vietnam War, and a new type of gang—the hippies. Strangely, with high levels of crime and violence occurring throughout most of the 1970’s, very little attention was paid to gang activities. America’s loss in Vietnam, inflation, fuel shortages, existentialism, and disco captivated the public’s attention.

Public concern about gangs was reinvented during the 1980s and continues today. The rediscovery of gangs has been augmented by an escalation of media presentations about youth gang activities—particularly those gangs located within America’s inner cities. (Shelden et al., 2001, pp. 2-3)
However, conventional wisdom concerning gangs and the relationship such groupings have with the community in which they exist is based "more on popular imagery than on a foundation of research and evidence" (Venkatesh, 1997, p. 83).

Existing research suggests that the varying attention paid to youth gangs cannot be explained by the actual seriousness of gang delinquency alone but is dependent on the social and political conditions, ideology, current sociological theory, available research methods of the times, and the media (Bookin-Weiner & Horowitz; 1983, Shelden et al., 2001).

Others argue that today's youth gangs pose a significant threat to specific U.S. communities and for the U.S. in general. The first annual National Youth Gang Survey, conducted by the National Youth Gang Center (NYGC) (a branch of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice) was completed in 1995. The results of this survey suggested that youth gangs were considered to be a significant social problem in every state in the U.S. Utah was reported to be tenth in the nation for the number of active youth gangs at that time.

The news media were active in shaping this image. Although the "nature and variety of media effects on public opinion are not fully understood" (Mauss, 1975, p. 10), there is no doubt that the media plays an important role in the dissemination of information and ideas that leads to the construction of consensual reality. Historically, the media reports of gang activity were limited to extreme events in socially isolated urban areas such as the poverty stricken portions of Los Angeles and Chicago. During the 1980s and 1990s, however, reports of gangs and gang activities were found in many
newspapers on a daily basis and were expanding to include “ideological messages concerning the meaning and definition of gangs” (Thompson, 2000, p. 409). Because they present “hard news,” the mainstream media offered legitimacy to allegations that gang activity was on the rise, posing a threat to the youth of the community and to the community itself. “The media have experienced great success in raising the public’s level of fear about youth gangs. Gangs are a hot topic in the media with the amount of coverage increasing tremendously during the past two decades” (Shelden et al., 2001, p. 3).

However, stories about youth gangs, like all news stories, represented the media’s social construction of reality (Rowe & Cavender, 1991; Tuchman, 1978). Through the selection of occurrences, interviewees, and emphasized details the news reporters do more than report the news; they organize reality for both the news workers and the news consumers (Gitlin, 1980; Molotch & Lester, 1974). The media play a central role in the typification of events, thereby shaping new social problems (Fishman, 1980; Gans, 1979; Tuchman). This constructed reality emphasizes existing stereotypes and dominant ideologies (Hall, 1977; Hufker & Cavender, 1990). In this way, the media helped structure both the anti-gang movement and the youth gang phenomenon (Johnson & Whitaker, 1996; Thompson, 2000).

The media works as a tool for those with grievances. However, not all citizens of a community have equal access to media in terms of distributing their ideas. Politicians, police, religious leaders, and other public officials have a greater access to media than does the average person. Therefore, they played an important part in the process of constructing the gang problem in Utah.
Fear of Gangs

During the 1990s, people throughout the United States became increasingly alarmed about the alleged increase in the youth gang problem (Bilchik, 1997; Howell, 1997; Shelden et al., 2001). There were varying details but mainly the fears focused on two central themes. The first fear theme concerned what was happening to the youth. The second fear theme focused on what the youth were doing to the community. This double image of youth as both dangerous and threatened was consistent with media depictions of youth involved with other subcultures, such as the hippie movement, the occult movement, and others (Hebdige, 1979; Rowe & Cavender, 1991) and was entered into the common social stock of knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) reflecting the fears of the community concerning youth gangs.

Youth gangs have long been associated with poor economic conditions of ethnic urban neighborhoods (Cohen, 1955; Schur, 1969; Venkatesh, 1997). The social and economic deprivation of the inner city has been thought to produce violent networks of youth who band together in protection of their turf, to gain financially and/or to fight (Miller, 1958).

During the 1990s youth gangs were reported as moving from urban areas to the suburbs and even to rural areas (Burch & Chemers, 1997; Howell, 1997). Because gangs have traditionally been viewed as an outcome of socially isolated, economically deprived neighborhoods (Curry & Spergel, 1988), movement of gangs into other areas implied that gangs had enough power to entice youth to abandon their families and greater community and join a new identity group (Spergel, 1990). Therefore, the first fear was that the youth
of a community would be “captured” emotionally and/or physically and socialized into a deviant gang subculture. The result for the community would be a loss of viable community members. The result for participating youth would be alienation from the community and a loss of identity (Becker, 1963; Campbell, 1984; Flannery, 1997; Gusfield, 1975; Lemert, 1951; Scheff, 1984).

Communities also fear the organized crime that youth gangs are said to commit. Research has clearly demonstrated that gang members are more likely than non-gang members to commit offenses, especially serious and violent offenses and do so with more frequency (Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, & Chard-Wierschem, 1995).

Learning the norms of a community is an age-graded accomplishment. Children are not fully culturally competent. As a result, when children violate norms they have less personal restrictions on their behaviors and are more willing to commit a wide variety of deviant acts. As a result, delinquency in children is unpredictable. This makes the deviant juvenile potentially more dangerous than the older criminal counterpart.

Fear of youth gangs is central to the concepts of this research. A hypothesis of this proposal is that fear caused by demographic and social change in the communities within the Mormon Cultural Region is the driving force behind boundary maintenance and the construction of youth gangs as a social problem in Utah. The objectification of gang activity appears to be a response to the construction of the gang problem by interest groups. It is important to note that fear of crime in general, including gang crime, has more to do with ethnic heterogeneity and social change than with crime itself (Heinz, Jacob & Lineberry, 1983; Shelden et al., 2001). In other words an ontological increase in gang activity is not needed to create a fear of gangs. Simply the changing population
structure from a homogeneous community to a heterogeneous community can create fear of crime. One report stated “there is a direct, independent, and positive connection in the public’s mind between concerns about diversity (e.g., Latino immigration) and worries about crime and gangs” (Lane & Meeker, 2000).
CHAPTER 6

METHODS

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methods employed to test the synthetic community theory presented in this dissertation. The following is a description of the methods and tools employed in analyzing gangs in the Mormon Cultural Region.

The Research Setting

Utah, as the core of the Mormon Cultural Region, is an ideal setting for the study of the social construction of youth gangs and the ontological presentation of gang activity. As the core of the Mormon cultural region, Utah has developed a homogeneous culture ingrained with cultural paradoxes focused on youth, minorities, and non-LDS church members. During the early 1990s in-migration coupled with high birth rates caused an influx of minorities and youth into the state. The increased racial and ethnic heterogeneity caused by this in-migration, coupled with the existing cultural uneasiness concerning minorities and youth, prepared the state for the construction of the gang social problem. Although Utah seemed an unlikely sponsor of street gangs due to the relative prosperity of the residents, the emphasis on church and family, lack of cultural diversity, and the lack of urban ghettos, they were tenth in the nation for the number of reported street gangs in 1995. The cultural homogeneity, sense of community, cultural paradoxes, and structural change of the region, add up to an ideal testing community for the dialectic synthetic theory of social problems presented here.
Media Roles in Social Problem Construction

The media plays a duel role in the natural history cycle of social problems. First, “the media are a major force in cultural change” (Surette, 1998, p. xiii). The media serve as primary agents in the construction of social problems. “Public surveys have reported that as many as 95% of the general population cite the mass media as their primary source of information about crime” (Surette, p. 197). In other words, most people learn what social problems exist not through direct experience with the social problem or criminal activity, but from what the media reports to be social problems. In this manner, the media largely shapes social problems. Those persons able to use the media to publish their claims concerning social problems are much more likely to be successful in constructing a social problem than are those who are unable to use the media.

The second role that the media plays in the natural history cycle of social problems is in the reporting of objective events. By reporting what has happened, the media informs the public of the progress of social problems. Although reporting problems is instrumental in the construction of social problems, it is important to clarify that there are actually two processes taking place. First, the media constructs the problem with loose claims about the nature and extent of the situation and by giving claim makers a forum to present their claims. Then the media is used to report the problem and to provide objective evidence that the problem exists. This reporting of objective conditions gives credence to further claims about the nature of the problem. The media is then instrumental in the cyclic creation and maintenance of a social problem. An evaluation of the media handling of the gang problem in Utah will illustrate this cycle.
Data Collection Procedures

The data for this dissertation were derived from three sources. First, a large quantity of data was drawn from articles from the only statewide newspaper in Utah, *The Salt Lake Tribune* (SLT), between 1990 and 2000. In order to trace the natural history cycle of the gang problem, a computer-aided search was conducted of the archive files of the *Salt Lake Tribune*. The search phrase used in this exploration was “gang or gangs.”

Every article that referenced gang or gangs either in the headline or body of the article was retrieved, read, and coded. Because the *Salt Lake Tribune* did not have computer categorization of articles nor articles catalogued by the word “gang” prior to 1990, a microfiche search of archive articles between 1985 and 1990 was conducted. This search produced only a few references to gangs in the Headlines.

Analysis of these articles was performed with the intention of identifying patterns, themes, claims, and claims makers associated with the constructed image of gangs and their activities over time. Specifically, a careful reading of the articles provided the following information: (a) the date published, (b) the section of the newspaper where the article was printed, (c) the name of and information about the author of the article, (d) the location of the gang referenced, (e) notations as to headline reference or not, (f) the focus of the article, (g) names and information about all persons referenced in the articles, (h) a list of anti-gang organizations referenced, (i) names of gangs referenced, (j) notations concerning race of gang members, and (k) what the article was about. Additionally, notes were taken concerning the claims made in the articles. The claims were grouped into category types. Some of the general categories of claims included explanations for
the “cause of gangs,” race, ethnicity and cultural backgrounds of gang members, descriptions of gangs and gang members, gang crimes, numbers of gangs and gang members, suggested interventions with gangs and gang members, and other general statements about gangs.

From these readings, the names of several anti-gang organizations and persons associated with the anti-gang movement were repeated many times. Among those most often referenced were community and police representatives from the Salt Lake Area Gang Project, government personnel from the Salt Lake City Mayor’s office and from the Utah Governor’s office, a community activist organization called Mobilize Against Gangs in Communities (MAGIC), and an education based organization called Colors of Success.

In order to obtain information concerning the organizations and the processes used to construct the gang problem, representatives from each of these organizations were contacted for interviews. Interviews were conducted with members of each of these organizations except the Salt Lake City mayor’s office. City elections caused a change in the city leadership. The incumbent mayor was not re-elected and was unavailable. Additionally, since all of these were Salt Lake based organizations, two other regional anti-gang groups were included in this study as well: the Ogden/Weber Metro Gang Unit and the Logan-Cache Gang Unit. (At the time of the interviews in 2000, the gang movement had declined and I was unable to locate any non-policing, anti-gang organizations north of Salt Lake that were in operation).

The interviews were conducted individually in each organization’s offices. An open conversational discussion between the representatives and the researcher were
recorded and later transcribed. A list of topic questions was used to guide these interviews. The topics discussed included: The history of the organization represented, the current structure of the organization, relative status of the members of the unit or organization, function of the organization, training, duties and activities of members, associations with other groups, a discussion of the gang problem and gang members in Utah, proposed solutions to the gang problem, the cost of operating the organization, the acquisition of funds, and problems in the organization.

At the onset of this research, interviews were intended to be approximately thirty to forty-five minutes. However, all of these interviews took more time to complete. The longest was with the Salt Lake Area Gang Project. That interview was over two hours long. The shortest was over an hour.

In addition to the interviews, every participating representative provided additional information about the gang problem and their organization. Representatives from the Salt Lake Area Gang Project provided statistics of gang activity and gang membership in the Salt Lake Area, written descriptions of the Project organization and list of community board members, a registration list by organization for the 2000 Utah Gang Conference, newsletters, and a manual titled *Utah Gang Update 2000* (this same manual was offered to me by several other representatives). The director of MAGIC provided two video tapes (prepared by the Utah Attorney General’s office) used to educate youth and parents about the gang problem, the accompanying video training manuals, and literature describing gangs and the solution to the gang problem. The Salt Lake Area Gang Project had generated most of the literature. The director of Colors of Success provided the organization’s annual report for 1997-1998 and several research
reports of the gang problem in Utah. The governor’s office provided copies of gang related legislation and appropriations of funds and a copy of The Governor’s 1993 Summit On Gangs Violence Report. The Ogden/Weber Metro Gang Unit provided information on the history and mission of the gang unit, literature on Utah gangs, and a registration form for a gang conference sponsored by their office in September 2000. The Logan-Cache Gang Unit provided statistical information for gangs and gang crimes in Cache Valley from 1996-1999, literature about the unit, and a nationally generated public access manual describing gangs. All of this information was used to formulate an understanding of the gang problem in Utah and the process used to construct it.

Finally, the FBI Uniform Crime Reports from 1990 to 2000 were used to indicate the general level of crime in comparison to the number of articles referencing gangs. The purpose behind this comparison is to gain an understanding of the ontological manifestation of the gang problem in Utah. Since claims makers assert that gangs are criminal organizations, if there is an ontological increase in gang activity there should be an ontological increase in the crime rate. The uniform crime reports were used to test this assumption. Additionally, because most gang members are thought to be between the ages of 15 and 17, an evaluation of the juvenile arrest rate (as reported in the uniform crime reports) was made. Although arrest rates may, or may not, indicate who commits crimes, they do indicate who is thought to commit crimes. This information was compared to the number and types of newspaper articles referencing gangs.
Analysis

The information from these three sources (newspaper articles, anti-gang organizations, and the uniform crime reports) was used to test the dialectical theory presented here. First, the fact that the gang problem was largely a product of social construction by claims makers from interest groups is established by comparing the quantity of newspaper references to the available statistical information on crime and gang activity for the same time period.

Once it was established that newspaper references did not reflect the ontological presentation of gangs in Utah, the types of claims and the natural history cycle that the movement went through is clarified. A variety of information was used to demonstrate the patterns in the natural history cycle including that gathered from those who were interviewed.

Finally, relying primarily on the interviews, a discussion of the publics and interest groups was included. This discussion illustrates the changes that organizations experience from the beginning of the natural history cycle of a social problem social movement to the end.
CHAPTER 7
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The gang problem emerged in Utah in the year 1990. Although police officers insist that gangs were active in the state prior to that date, the problem of gangs was not presented to the public prior to 1990. However, during the early and mid-1990s gangs were a main focus of the media, policing agents and community groups. This section of this dissertation will present evidence of the natural history cycle of the gang social movement in Utah.

The Social Construction of Gangs

Prior to 1990, there were so few references to gangs in the SLT that no category for “gangs” was included in the archive files of the SLT. However, by 1990 the category was created and the number of articles referencing gangs increased. Figure 3 shows the number of articles referencing gangs in the SLT by year. Between 1985 and 1989, the SLT published an average of 2.6 articles that referenced gangs each year. However, in 1990, thirteen articles were published. In 1991, 1992, and 1993 the number of articles referencing gangs steadily increased from 76 to 139 and 272, respectively. Since 1993, the number of articles reported yearly has steadily decreased.

Objectivist theorists would argue that this increase in articles concerning gangs indicated increased gang activity. Police officers interviewed for this research stated that groups of people banding together are only a gang if “they have a common name, common signs and symbols, such as colors; if they group together on a regular basis; and
Figure 3. The number of Salt Lake Tribune articles referencing gangs published between 1985 and 2000.

last but not least, if they commit criminal activity” (Ogden Weber Metro Gang Task Force representatives, personal communication, 2000). If these articles are a reflection of increased gang activity, then crime rates should have also peaked, or at least increased, during the same time period.

There are no agencies in Utah that keeps track of the gang activity for the state. However, the Salt Lake Area Gang Project maintains a statistical base of identified gang activity and gang membership in the Salt Lake area. The Salt Lake Area Gang Project was founded in 1991 and is operated by the Salt Lake County Sheriff’s department and has cooperation and representation from many police forces and community agencies throughout Salt Lake County.

Salt Lake County has the largest population in the state and reportedly the largest gang problem. Figure 4 represents the number of gang members and the number of gang
crimes in Salt Lake County throughout the 1990s. Although the number of documented gang members increased steadily until 1997, non-graffiti gang crime rates decreased gradually after peaking in 1993. This pattern seems to suggest that claims concerning gang members were accompanied by gang membership and gang crimes. In fact, the pattern of gang crimes reflects the pattern of claims concerning gangs. This suggests that claims making is associated with the increase in gang crimes. However, Salt Lake Area Gang Project representatives warned that the methods used to document gangs and gang activities have changed over time and that a strict adherence to the generated statistics should be avoided. Only two or three agencies were involved with the gang project in the early 1990s, therefore, only two or three agencies reported gang crimes at that time. Other agencies did not perceive a need to be involved.

Similar patterns can be seen when looking at the Utah overall crime rate. Figure 5 depicts the crime rates in Utah between 1980 and 2000. The Utah crime rate in 1993 was lower than it had been for the previous eight years. The amount of reported crime did not peak in Utah until 1995, two years following the peak in the number of published articles referencing gangs and after gang crime in Salt Lake County had reached a plateau.

This demonstrates that if gangs were ontologically increasing in number and activity, they were not substantially impacting the crime rate. In fact, the correlation between gang articles and the crime rate between 1991 and 2000 was extremely low (r equal 0.02). Therefore, the number of articles printed about gangs cannot be considered merely a reporting activity of the media.

Instead of simply reporting existing gang activity, the SLT acted as an agent of claims makers and helped in the construction of gangs as a social problem. The public
was taught about gangs during this time period. They were told that gangs exist and what they look like. A result of the public’s exposure to the idea of gangs was an increase in juvenile arrests.

While there is little evidence that crime increased in Utah due to the emergence of youth gangs, the rate of juvenile arrests did rise (see Figure 6). In fact, the correlation between juvenile arrests and the number of articles referencing gangs was significantly high ($r$ equals 0.72). It seems, then, that although the crime rate went down during this time period, an increasing proportion of those arrested were juveniles. This pattern suggests that juveniles were either (a) responsible for a larger proportion of the crime that was committed, or (b) thought to be more criminal than before and were, in essence, targeted for arrests during this time period. Further research would need to be conducted to decipher the cause of the juvenile arrest rate. However, it seems logical that public opinion toward juveniles and the increase in gang activity both played a role. The correlation between the arrest rates and the newspaper articles referencing gangs is compelling, suggesting that the juvenile arrest rate may have been driven by public opinion.

Kai Erikson (1966) argued “that the amount of deviation a community encounters is apt to remain fairly constant over time” (p. 66). The amount of crime is proportional to the community’s available control apparatus, not the behavior of the members. Crime waves and social problems are not necessarily representative of an increase of deviant behavior but are the result of shifting attention of the public from one problem to another.

Applying this to the Utah gang problem, we can understand that the arrest rates of juveniles may have had little to do with the behavior of juveniles. Evidence does not suggest an objective or substantial increase in crime, yet arrest rates reflect the claims made about youth gangs. More kids were arrested.

Crime and arrest rate data for Utah between 1985 and 2000 (Figure 7) seem to support Erikson’s hypothesis. As can be seen from the following chart, both crime rates and arrest rates remain fairly constant. It is also interesting to note that there is a low correlation between the crime rate in the state and the arrest rate ($r$ equals 0.2). That is, only about four percent of the arrests in the state can be explained by the crime rate. The
number of reported crimes is not a good predictor of the number of arrests for either juveniles ($r$ equals 0.447) or adults ($r$ equals 0.032).

These numbers support the hypothesis of this research that it is claims concerning social problems, not ontological increase in deviant behavior, that lead to boundary maintenance activities.

A second hypothesis of this theory is that claims concerning a social problem and boundary maintenance activities lead to an ontological increase in the designated behavior of the social problem. In other words, in this case, the publicity associated with the gang problem leads to an increase of gang activity. It seems that publicizing gangs makes gangs fashionable and increases the amount of gang activity as well as the report of gangs.

![Graph](image)

I guarantee that if we have one gang with their name in the newspaper, some other gang out there is going to try to compete. If we say someone is the "biggest and baddest," someone else will try to go and "out-do them." (P. Brennenman, Police representative from the Salt Lake Area Gang Project, personal communication, 2000)

This statement shows recognition that media exposure and public perception of social problems will actually increase the amount of gang activity experienced by a community. It is a kind of copycat phenomena. Marginal members of communities are seeking to establish boundaries in the same way that the core members are. When boundaries are shifted to exclude some marginal members from the inner community circle, one response is to rebel: to substitute the community goals and means with other goals and means that are supported by a smaller, sub- or counter-groups of the community. The media keeps all members of the community informed of the battles being waged on the boundaries, allowing for this process to occur.

It is no surprise, then, that the crime rates increased after gangs were established as a problem for Utah. All evidence suggests that 1993 was the year that most claims were made concerning gangs. However, the crime rate and gang activity did not show significant increase until 1995 and continued to increase for several years after the claims concerning gangs decreased.

In the case of Utah gangs, attention was drawn to the existing behaviors of some marginal groups--ethnic and racial minority youth. Their behavior was blamed for the shifting community structure resulting in community fear of gangs. An increasing large proportion of youth--especially, non-LDS, marginal LDS, and minority youth--experienced anomie because of community rejection. As a response to anomie, youth on the fringe of the community formed rebellious sub-groups with values and goals different
from the core cultural values and enlisted illegitimate means to accomplish these goals. The more that gangs were presented to the public by claims makers via the media, the greater the problem became both as a constructed phenomena and as an ontological reality. Marginal community members, mostly youth, attached themselves to gangs because it was an option for them. By making youth gangs into a social problem, the community told them how to rebel.

This seems to support the work of Cloward and Ohlin (1960) discussed in Chapter 2. The appearance of illegitimate gang structures was accompanied by structural restraints for youth in general and minority youth specifically to find status within the legitimate community structure. In Utah, this resulted in the actualization of violent gangs. The creation of these gangs was a reaction to the community response to increasing population change.

Other research on deviant behaviors shows similar patterns. It appears that even extreme forms of deviance, such as mental illness, are the result of individuals playing the part of mentally ill persons (Scheff, 1984; Szasz, 1960) in the same manner that all of us play societal prescribed roles. Individuals learn how to be deviant. They are taught acceptable, or fashionable, ways of being deviant and conform to the roles introduced for deviant individuals by the community in which they live.

Demographic changes in Utah caused fear in the community and the community looked to blame someone or something for the uneasiness experienced. As a result of paradoxical cultural ideals surrounding youth, minorities, and non-LDS persons, normal behaviors of minority groups were redefined in negative terms. Claims makers with the help of the media constructed the gang social problem. Youth, especially minority youth,
were blocked from achieving success in the community and experienced anomie. As a result, these ostracized persons responded to the anomie they experienced by rebelling against the greater community and by doing exactly what the community was afraid that they would do. They formed gangs and began participating in gang activities. Therefore, the social construction and boundary maintenance activities of the community resulted in an ontological increase in gang activity within Utah. The community, lead by claims makers, created that which they most feared: minority, youth-centered, subcultures with values and means that were diabolically opposed to the existing values of the core community, better known as gangs.

The Claims

This section will present and discuss the claims and the claims making process associated with the Utah gang problem. Definite patterns of claims making occurred over time concerning this problem. First will be a presentation of the SLT articles that referenced gangs for the years 1990 to 2000. Then, a discussion of interviews conducted in 2000 with anti-gang workers will be summarized and discussed.

Although there were a total of 2,444 published articles that referenced gangs between September 1990 and January 2001, not all of those articles are equal in the claims made. Articles referenced gangs in four distinct ways. Some of the articles were about gangs. The focus and purpose of the articles were discussions of some type of gang activity. These “focus articles” played the biggest part in presenting the gang problem to the public. Not only did they comprise the largest portion of the published articles, but they also “educated” the public as to the gang problem. These articles
described gang members and their activities, warned against “at-risk behaviors,”
explained the causes of gangs, gave examples of gangs, and proposed solutions to the
problem. They served as a call for action from the public and provided the framework
for the social movement. As can be seen in Table 4, nearly half of the articles written in
1990 and 1991 that referenced gangs had gangs as the main focus of the article. The
category with the largest number of articles was the “Main Focus” category until 1993.
The proportion of articles that had gangs as the main focus declined after 1993 until in
2000, only 9.26% of the articles referencing gangs had Utah street gangs as the main
focus.

The second category of articles included the mention of gangs as a key point in a
discussion about some other phenomena. For instance discussions about problems in
education were often accompanied by reference to gangs. Political candidates were
asked questions about gangs during interviews. Discussion of whether or not a
community needs streetlights would include reference to gangs. In each of these cases,
and many others, the main focus of the article was something other than gangs, but gangs
were used to strengthen the argument. This use of gangs to supplement or strengthen
claims of other problems or conditions also peaked in 1993 and declined following the
initial presentation of gangs as a social problem. This inclusion of gangs in other
discussions served to strengthen the claims maker’s arguments that gangs were a
problem. They were associated with all kinds of issues, and the social problems seemed
to piggyback on the gang problem as well.
A third category of articles only referred to gangs in passing. Gangs were neither the main focus nor a key element of the article but (probably because the gang problem was one of the most relevant social problems in Utah at the time) were referenced to give clout to other issues being discussed. For the most part, if the gang references were removed from the article, the meaning of the article would not change. The proportion of articles using gangs in this manner peaked in 1995 at 38.11%, after the gang problem had been established and institutionalized.

The fourth category of articles referencing gangs referred to some other phenomena than Utah gangs such as “gangs of freedom fighters” in other countries or street gangs in other states. Some articles in this category were references to books or movies depicting gangs. Some in this category used the word gang for an entirely different purpose than to describe any kind of criminal activity.
At first, it would seem that this category of articles should not be included. However, the volume of articles referencing gangs helped to construct the gang problem. For example, when writers chose to write about “gangs in Iraq” and also about “gangs in Salt Lake City,” it suggests to the mind of the reader that the two phenomena are similar. These references tied Utah and its gang problem to the rest of the world. The proportion of articles referencing non-Utah street gangs increased somewhat steadily following 1993. In 2000, nearly 40% of the gang references in SLT published articles were about non-Utah street gangs.

There is a pattern in the focus of the gang articles written during this time period. The inception of the gang problem occurred in 1990 and 1992. Articles and interviews about this time period clearly showed attempts on the part of interest groups to define the gang problem and to establish groups.

The inception of a movement or social problem occurs while it is still in what Blumer calls the general stage, characterized by “groping, uncoordinated efforts . . . unorganized, with neither established leadership nor recognized membership, and little guidance or control” (Blumer, 1955: 200-01). Such following as it has is in the form primarily of concerned public . . . people who have begun to feel a mild threat to the preservation or realization of certain vital interests. They begin to read and write articles in the media, hold occasional ad hoc meetings, write letters to congressmen and the like. (Mauss, 1975, 61-62).

In Utah, the proportionately high numbers of focus articles published marked the inception of the gang problem. There was no real leadership associated with the movement in the beginning. Instead it emerged as Mauss predicted with letters to the editor and phone calls to government officials. The number of letters to the editor and editorial comments that referenced gangs peaked in 1993 and 1994 with 73 and 75 articles, respectively (see Figure 8).
Figure 8. Salt Lake Tribune letters to the editor and editorial comments, 1990-2000.

The visibility of gangs in the newspaper also decreased following 1993. The number of headlines that referred to gangs peaked in 1993 with over a hundred (108) articles and decreased to eight in 2000 (see figure 9). Clearly, 1993 was the year when the most claims concerning gangs were made and when most of the focus was put on gangs as a social problem.

The coalescence stage of this movement, “which is marked by the gradual formation of the two inner rings of the movement” (Mauss, 1975, p. 62), occurred during the early 1990s. “Formal and informal organizations begin to develop out of segments of the sympathetic public that have become the most aroused by perceived threats to the preservation or realization of their interests” (Mauss, p. 62). This is apparently what happened in Utah.
Figure 9. Salt Lake Tribune headline references to gangs. Top Line: Body Only Bottom Line: Headline.

An evaluation of the type of articles published about Utah gangs during this time period shows the emergence of new organizations that openly oppose gangs and are structured to combat the perceived threat imposed by the emergence of gangs. Seventy percent of the articles published in 1993 were meeting announcements, general discussions of the gang problem, or other references to gangs (see Table 5).

Between 1990 and 1995, the SLT made nearly twenty-three hundred references to over fifteen hundred persons involved in the gang social problem in Utah (see Table 6). The most prominent groups of persons associated with the gang problem were the police and policing agencies. Nearly 400 references were made to local police officers in connection with gangs between 1990 and 1995. Reference to this group was followed
Table 5
Topic of Salt Lake Tribune Gang Articles, Percentage by Year, 1990-1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Violent Gang Activity</th>
<th>Non-Violent Gang Activity</th>
<th>Gang Arrests, Prosecution, etc.</th>
<th>Meetings/Events</th>
<th>Discussions of Gangs</th>
<th>Others (Article Not about Gangs)</th>
<th>Non-Utah Gang</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Closely by references to local politicians and government workers (387 references).

33.6% of all references to persons associated with gangs were to either local policing agents or government workers. Table 6 shows the breakdown of references to persons by groups with which they were associated. Persons associated with the gang movement included victims (both gang and non-gang members), students, local and national community leaders, educators, gang members, lawyers, business owners, anti-gang leaders, judges, court authorities, parents, academic university personnel, national politicians, religious leaders, detention center personnel, psychologists and/or counselors, and others. The sheer number of groups referenced in connection to this movement indicates the intensity of the movement.
Table 6  
Number of Claims makers referenced in Gang Articles  
in the Salt Lake Tribune by Interest Groups, 1990-1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic Interest Groups</td>
<td>(Desire to maintain or expand economic or business interests)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business Personnel</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Interest Groups</td>
<td>(Seek to acquire, exercise and/or influence the exercise of power)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government and Political persons</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational Interest Groups</td>
<td>(Desire to maintain or expand the status, importance, or prerogatives of an occupational or professional community.)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Policing Agents: Police, ATF/FBI</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education: Educators, administrators, job corp.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Criminal Justice: Judges, Court officials, Correction Officers, Lawyers, etc.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Newspaper Writers (based on ideals that are seen as having ultimate, or even eternal importance)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Interest Groups</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gang Members: Aggressors and Victims</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community Leaders and Anti-gang Activists</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victims, Parents, Non-Gang Students</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious Leaders (concerned with the common stock of knowledge and definitions of truth)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific Public</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professionals: University personnel, Psychologists, Counsellors (a collection of individuals having certain psychological or emotional needs and dispositions that make them ready recruits for interest groups and movements)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Public</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>777</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>2277</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The gang problem was institutionalized during 1993. Many of the articles made reference to political and government officials. The number of these references increased drastically between 1992 and 1993. In 1992, government officials were associated with the gang problem in the SLT 47 times. That number jumped to 177 in 1993. The number of references to educators, criminal justice workers, and police greatly increased as well. It is clear that "the government and other traditional institutions (took) official notice of (the) problem or movement" and was in the process of working out "a series of standard coping mechanisms to manage it" (Mauss, 1975, p. 63).

It is during this stage [institutionalization] that the movement enjoys its greatest success: the mass media begin to take it seriously, politicians begin to vie for its favor, and some of its spokesmen become fashionable and perhaps well-paid speakers at rallies, meetings, and other public events. Legislation begins to be passed in an effort to "solve the problem" which the movement has defined. Thus, institutionalization means, for the movement, its period of greatest power, support, and fashion ability; for the society, it means taking account of the movement with a repertory of routines which have the effect of greatly increasing the co-optation element in the mix. Repression is now reserved only for the fanatics and extremists, usually very few, who refuse to be "bought off" by the co-optation and begin to try other strategies and tactics to justify their raison d'etre. (Mauss, 1975, p. 63)

Candidates for election during 1992-93 gave accounts of their version of the gang problem and proposed solutions. Many newspaper articles included discussions of what hopeful and incumbent candidates for political offices thought should be done about the Utah gang problem. The mayor's office devised a mid-night basketball program designed to get gang members off the street at night. Gang conferences were held to educate the public as to the problem. School officials debated the use of uniforms to cut down on gang activity in schools. After school programs were developed to keep youth out of gangs. Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E) programs, established in the
early to mid 1980s, were expanded to include an “anti-gang awareness” module.

Programs to keep the youth busy and out of gangs included art workshops, entertainment groups, gardening programs, building programs, the Boy Scouts of America, and other community and church youth groups.

In December 1992, a Criminal Gang Activity Task Force of the Utah Legislature prepared an Interim Recommendations Report to the Utah Judiciary Interim Committee concerning criminal gang activity in Utah. The objective of the interim committee was to review Utah’s Laws on criminal gang activity and consider whether those laws serve the best interest of the state; investigate options, methods, and procedures used in other states; and to propose legislation if amendment or modification of current law is in the best interest of the state. (Criminal Gang Activity Task Force, December 1992, p. 3)

The main purpose was to evaluate and establish polices to deal with what was perceived as a rising gang problem. Claims of the interim committee include the following:

- During their teen years, four out of ten youth in Utah are referred to the Juvenile Court, three out of ten of them for some type of criminal offense.
- Almost 25,000 youth are referred to the Juvenile Court each year, with nearly half of all referrals going to the Third District Juvenile Court.
- During the decade of the 80’s, juvenile arrests increased from 30% to 36% of all arrests made in Utah, even though youth ages 12 to 17 represent less than 10% of the state’s population.
- The Juvenile Court witnessed a 90% increase in criminal referrals during the decade of the 80’s.
- Case processing time for arrest to arraignment has tripled since 1981; it now takes an average of 90 days. The system fails to impose immediate consequences for criminal offenses.
- Gang activity and violent juvenile offenses have risen sharply in recent years, 1988 to 1992.

As of December 4, 1992, 1403 gang members and associates reside in the Salt Lake Valley area, representing 180 different gangs, 20 of which are criminally active on a regular basis. (Criminal Gang Activity Task Force, December 1992, p. 5)
The interim committee described gang activity as a serious threat on Utah. Beginning with the assumption that juvenile crime and specifically gang crime was a growing problem and a threat to the survival of the community and community values, the recommendations of the committee included: (a) support for construction of new secure confinement and detention facilities, (b) collaboration between private and public sectors of the community, (c) preventive and intervention programs, (d) increased staff, treatment options and facilities for the juvenile justice system, including the probation department, and (e) increased funding for secure confinement facilities (Baird & Short, 1992).

In addition to these general recommendations by the interim committee, six different acts were drafted for discussion during the 1993 general legislative session. Each of these acts proposed appropriation of state monies to various anti-gang programs for a total of $597,000 dollars. The 1993 Utah General Legislative Session appropriated $50,000 dollars “from the general fund to the Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice for fiscal year 1993-94 for statewide training seminars on gang suppression and to fund local gang suppression efforts” (Utah House Bill No. 35, 1993 General Session). The appropriation amount for this purpose was $110,000 dollars less than the amount recommended by the Interim Committee. Additionally, the legislature approved $10,000 for the Officer Friendly Program, (S.B. No. 15, 1993 General Session), $19,500 for the D.A.R.E. program (S.B. No. 14, General Session, 1993), $20,500 for D.A.R.E. materials, $100,000 for school-based gang prevention and intervention program (H. B. No. 34, 1993), and $19,000 for creating a legislative task force on Youth-At-Risk (S.B. No. 13, 1993). A total of $308,500 was appropriated by the 1993 general session of congress.
towards intervening with the gang problem; a substantial amount but still $288,500
less than recommended by the interim committee.

On September 1, 1993, a highly publicized gang related shooting spurred the
government agents into offering further intervention with the gang problem. The
shooting occurred at the Triad Center, a large event center in downtown Salt Lake City,
following a rock concert. It involved two 17 year old youth who were both considered to
be outstanding high school students. One of the kids was Aaron Chapman, a clean-cut,
white youth who had just graduated from high school. A local high school football star,
Asi Mohi, shot him. Mohi was a Polynesian kid with known gang connections. The
story put forth by the SLT and the Utah Attorney General’s Office was that Chapman
was mistaken for a gang member when he was “wearing red” and was pulled from his
car, beaten, and shot by Mohi and his gang. However, representatives from three of the
organizations interviewed for this research suggested that Chapman might have had gang
affiliations as well.

The public was outraged. “The Governor’s office received thousands of calls
from citizens wanting to know what was being done about the problem. It was really
perceived as a ‘youth violence’ problem; that the kids were out-of-control” (S. Burke,
personal communication, 2000). Although there had been quite a few gang related
shootings prior to this event, they did not receive the same public out cry as this one did.

Several elements made this shooting different from those previously reported in
Utah. One of the first differences was where the shooting occurred. “People gather
around the Triad Center and go to concerts and go to different activities. It didn’t happen
in some [remote] neighborhood or in some ‘gang hang-out.’ It happened in an
unexpected place” (S. Burke, personal communication, 2000). The second difference was who was involved in the shooting. “It involved an individual who was not necessarily an active gang member, Aaron Chapman” (S. Burke, personal communication, 2000). Although policing agents connected Chapman to gangs, the media presented him as being free from such connections. “Here was a young man who had just graduated. The newspaper presented a very, very glowing account of his life” (S. Burke, personal communication, 2000). The shooting was made to seem random, like it could happen to anyone.

Finally, the race of those involved with the shooting was also an element in arousing the public fear and passion. “I think some of it was racial awareness. Here we have a Polynesian person who murdered a Caucasian person. Some people of the community felt that ‘this could impact me because I am a member of the majority community’” (S. Burke, personal communication, 2000).

In response to the public demand for attention to the gang problem, Governor Mike Leavitt held a summit on gang violence and then called a special legislative session of the state congress in October of 1993 to propose solutions. During that special session, at least eight bills were ratified, putting into effect appropriations in the amount of $2,075,000 for the construction of new juvenile facilities, renovations of existing corrections facilities, for the hiring of 10 new juvenile probation officers and for gang prevention programs administered by the Utah Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice. These new appropriations were 6.73 times as much money as was appropriated in the regular January session of 1993. In addition, ten statutes aimed at getting tough on juvenile offenders were ratified. Clearly, the Mohi-Chapman shooting made the claims
of the interim committee and of the interest groups concerning gangs more believable and worked to institutionalize the movement. Additional anti-gang legislation was passed in 1995.

The Gang problem began to fragment in 1995. By 2000, only traces of the original movement were left in Salt Lake, however, it seems, that attempts to institutionalize the gang problem in counties north of Salt Lake were still being made by claims makers, primarily policing agents. Even so, claims concerning the gang problem decreased much more rapidly than did the reported gang activity.

Much the gang movement's demise in Utah can be contributed to the shift in public attention to a new problem. Salt Lake City sponsored the 2002 Winter Olympics. As a result of this event, the focus of the public, the government, and many interest groups shifted to the planning and preparation for the Olympic events. Roads were reconstructed, towns were cleaned up, performances were planned, and buildings and event centers were built. It became important to the community to present a positive face to the world. Less talk of the gang problem occurred.

In addition to the local change in focus, there was also a national turning from gangs as the primary youth concern. Several events worked in harmony to shift the national emphasis away from gangs. The youth themselves were loosing interest in the hip-hop movement and in the accompanying gang activity. An alternative rock style music labeled "grunge" was receiving a great deal of attention nationally.

Inspired by the do-it-yourself amateurism and fun-over-commerce orientation of the punk revolution, a generation of musicians emerged during the early '80s who didn't move to New York or Los Angeles, didn't jump on the latest chart-topping bandwagon, didn't do whatever it took to get signed by a major label.
Instead, these young musicians stayed in their home towns and focused on things like making the music they wanted to make, developing a regional following, and maybe, playing enough gigs to quit their day jobs. As these bands flourished and multiplied, so did the support community around them—seedy underground clubs, tiny college-radio stations, regional independent record labels.

But most important, the audience grew as more and more listeners turned to alternative music for the same reasons the bands had begun making it: they were frustrated with the tired procession of prefabricated product that mainstream rock had become and longed for a music of their own. (Maurstad, 1992)

In April 1994, one of the main musicians associated with Grunge, Kurt Cobaine from a group called Nirvana, committed suicide by overdosing on heroin. His death pushed the grunge movement into the forefront of the national fashion and music market. Styles began to change from baggy pants, bandanas, and color-coordinated clothing associated with hip-hop towards the un-kept look associated with grunge. T-shirts and frayed hems on pants, sandals, patches and worn and dirty clothing became the uniform of the youth. Primarily a white, suburban phenomenon, the grunge movement found an audience in Utah. A political passiveness also accompanied this movement. As the fashion changed, so did the attraction of mainstream youth to the gang movement. Graffiti Art diminished, and the gang culture was no longer looked at as “cool.” Instead, a new type of individualism and acceptance of other people replaced the focus on personal respect that accompanied the gang era.

To complete this metamorphosis, in 1999, two non-gang youth held a school captive in Columbine, Colorado, and killed several persons in the process before killing themselves. The first response of this shooting was to try to associate the youth with a gang. When this failed, the “fear of youth” shifted nationally from gangs to anti-social youth, those youth who seemed to not have friends or are picked on by their classmates.
Security in the schools shifted from preparing for gang related problems to focusing on attacks from socially isolated or depressed youth.

Those persons in Utah still making claims concerning the gang problem were more and more seen as “fanatics,” or “far-out extremists.” “Only small bands of ‘true believers’ who appear increasingly ridiculous” (Mauss, 1975, p. 65) were left to make claims concerning the gang problem. Even the gang members left in the movement were the extreme “hard-core gangsters” rather than the average kid. As a result of this shift in attention, the gang problem went into demise. It has become increasingly difficult for policing agents and politicians to gain the support of the public in fighting the gang activity that still exists. A letter to the editor published in the SLT on December 1, 2000, shows the change in attitude toward gang activity in Utah.

On the recent Thanksgiving Day we were thankful that Salt Lake City has a new mayor. Note the contrasts: The previous mayor, Deedee Corradini, was barely in office when she called a respected mural “graffiti” and had it vandalized. Mayor Rocky Anderson encourages murals by our talented youth, showing them respect, allowing them to be part of the community. (Corradini campaigned on a vow to get rid of gangs but did not mention her own affiliation with the Main Street gang, as we commoners say.)

Corradini scorned parks and playgrounds for ordinary folks and wanted to shunt minority youths from parks. She brags about her expensive ballpark, but it came riddled with improper political actions. Mayor Rocky wants to save parks for all.

Corradini proposed to have ethnic minorities move to a common locale somewhere southwest of the city, out of the so-called mainstream population. (The word “ghetto” was avoided.) Mayor Rocky held a big party inviting everyone of all cultures to come and say hello to each other.

Corradini let streets crumble while she gave glitzy parties. Mayor Rocky emphasizes practical needs of the city. Corradini put police on horseback to better harass and herd the homeless. Mayor Rocky asks police to enforce the laws appropriately – the degree of courtesy or compulsion indicated by the situation. Corradini wanted the homeless to disappear. Mayor Rocky hopes to have them off the streets, but in a place called home.

Mayor Rocky is relaxed about being human, and thinks it is even OK to have a little enjoyment. Let us give thanks. (SLT, Dec. 2000).
Although this letter is an obvious criticism of Mayor DeeDee Corradini, it also demonstrates the shift in public sentiment away from fearing gangs. During the peak of the gang movement, in 1993-1994, such a criticism of any anti-gang policy was unpublished probably because criticizing the efforts to control gangs would have been seen as siding with gangs.

The life cycle of the gang problem in Utah followed the normal pattern described by Mauss. It was marked by a steep rise in claims and claims making by special interest groups, an acceptance by the general public, and a decline. Mauss (1975) argued that the natural history "life-cycle occurs independently of objective reality for the most part" (p. 66). It is argued here that the life cycle of the claims making process and the objective reality are dialectic in nature. Interest groups and claims making are influenced by objective reality and objective reality is influenced by claims making. In the Utah gang problem clearly demonstrates that there was an increase in gang activity in Utah during the early days of this movement. There really were drive-by shootings, graffiti, and other such activities. However, the claims making concerning the gang problem out paced the gang activity. But, as claims making increased, there followed an ontological increase in gang activity. When claims making decreased, the amount of gang activity also decreased.

Publics and Interest Groups

Mauss (1975) identified six "kinds of publics and interest groups that may be involved in the genesis of social problems" (p. 17). All six of these groups seemed to be
a part of the claims making process in Utah. However, moral, occupational, and political interest groups played the most prominent roles in the construction of the gang problem. Because of the important influence of the these three types of interest groups on the construction of the gang problem, representatives from each of these group types were contacted and interviewed in conjunction with this research. Representatives from the following agencies were interviewed: The Salt Lake Area Gang Project, Ogden-Weber Metro Gang Unit, Logan City Police Gang Unit, Utah State Governor’s Office Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice (CCJJ), Mobilize Against Gangs In Our Community (MAGIC), and Colors of Success. The formation and activities of these organizations clarifies the stages of the natural history cycle of this problem. Prior to 1993, all of these organizations were either loosely banded or non-existent.

*The Salt Lake Area Gang Project*

The Salt Lake Area Gang Project was established some time between 1989 and 1991. It is primarily a policing agency and is operated by the Salt Lake County Sheriff’s department. The Gang Project’s organization consists of three parts: A governing board, a community advisory board, and sworn gang unit personnel. The governing board is made up of police chiefs and administrative personnel for the agencies that participate in the project (Salt Lake Area Gang Project, n.d.)

In 1990 two or three policing agencies participated in the project. As of 2003, fifteen policing and criminal justice agencies participated.

According to the mission statement of the Salt Lake Area Gang Project, the community advisory board

is comprised of community leaders from many different backgrounds. It serves as a link between the Governing Board and the community. This board is responsible for providing community input, supporting constructive legislation, and working to resolve community problems. (Salt Lake Area Gang Project, n.d.)
At the time interviews were conducted with representatives from the Salt Lake Area Gang Project in 2000, the community advisory board was composed of 29 members: five members of government agencies, six criminal justice workers, six educational personnel, five representatives from community improvement organizations, five persons associated with anti-gang and/or anti-drug organizations, one person representing the Intermountain Pediatric Society and one representative of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The third branch of the Gang Project is the policing arm and is filled with police agents from participating organizations.

A Salt Lake County Sheriff’s lieutenant serves as the Project Director and is responsible for every aspect of the Project’s operation. Three sergeants report to the lieutenant and the daily operation of the Project is their responsibility. Each sergeant commands a squad of detectives. (Salt Lake Area Gang Project, n.d.)

The Salt Lake Area Gang Project was the first organization of its type in Utah. It has sponsored an annual conference on gangs, published literature, and effected legislation concerning gangs statewide. In fact, the Utah State Governor’s Office Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice (CCJJ) Anti-Violence Coordinator and Juvenile Justice Specialist, with primary responsibility to the gang problem, received her appointment while working as the first community coordinator of the Salt Lake Area Gang Project. Indeed, the Project is the core of the gang social movement. Many of the policies, organizations, and methods established by the Project have been duplicated in other areas of the state. In fact, much of the literature about gangs generated by the Project is used by other agencies opposed to gangs. The movement’s core leadership originated with the Project. Additionally, Salt Lake Area Gang Project personnel helped
to unite and organize grass-root movements opposed to gangs during the early 1990s, including MAGIC referenced below. Currently the Gang Project continues to provide many of these same services. They act as the central agency that educates both police and others on the gang situation. They also link individuals to existing anti-gang organizations.

Two representatives of the Salt Lake Area Gang Project participated in the interviews for this dissertation, the Community Coordinator, Maria Sanchez, and the lieutenant in charge of operations in 2000, Paul Brenneman.

The Project was formed as a multi-jurisdictional task force because we saw an increase in street gang crime. Up until that point (1990) gang crime had been dealt with by individual agencies. [The task force] was a group of specialized detectives who would deal with the growing gang problem in the [Salt Lake] Valley. (P. Brenneman, personal communication, 2000)

The gang Project evolved from a new policing unit in the early 1990s to the core claims making organization of 1993-95 that organized and represented the many special interest groups in the Salt Lake Valley. By 2000, the Project had changed back to a policing agency with remnants of community interest still being represented. The Project was given several names during this cycle, most of which were unofficial. They include--in addition to the Salt Lake Area Gang Project--the Salt Lake Area Gang Task Force, the Salt Lake Area Gang Unit, and the Metro Gang Task Force. Because the newspapers used these different names randomly, it appeared that more organizations were operating than just one. It gave the reader the impression that the gang problem was very large and so were the number of organizations that were fighting it.

The Salt Lake Area Gang Project has also experienced other changes. It was moved from the Salt Lake City Police Department to the Salt Lake County Sheriff’s
Office, shifting it from a Salt Lake City Problem to a countywide focus. The community council has evolved from a laissez faire discussion type organization that empowered community members in combating gangs, to an organization with elected legal-rational leadership that helps plan the annual gang conference. The governing board has evolved from a committee of two or three administrators to a highly complex organization that includes at least fifteen administrators from fifteen jurisdictions with various needs and visions.

The Project has, since its conception been a product of federal grant monies deriving most of its funding from the Edward Byrne Memorial Crime Control System Improvement Grant (Byrne).

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) is authorized by Congress under this (Byrne) grant program to make grants to states, for use by state agencies and local units of government, to improve the functioning of the criminal justice system with emphasis on violent crimes and serious offenders and to enforce state and local laws that establish offenses similar to offenses established in the Federal Controlled Substances Act. To receive these funds, each state must develop a strategic multi year violence prevention and drug control strategy to demonstrate that funds will be used in accordance with the purposes of the law. (Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, 2003)

Three civilian salaries are paid out of the Byrne Grant. The police lieutenant in charge of the unit administers the rest of the money. Other officers involved with the gang Project have their salaries paid out of the participating policing units’ funds.

Receiving future Byrne Grants requires performance reports. These reports require the agencies to “demonstrate that there is a [gang] problem and that we actually are doing what we say we are going to do to solve the problem” (P. Brenneman, personal communication, 2000, emphasis added).

Our directive or mission is basically to gather intelligence on gang members in Salt Lake County. We are charged with maintaining intelligence files
on those members, and we distribute that information to state agencies and to outside law enforcement agencies that require information.

We accomplish the compilation of that database in a couple of different ways. First we rely on the activities of a suppression unit that goes out in uniform to special activities such as concerts, car shows, firework displays, high school activities, parties, etc. We do a lot of different suppression activities to try to keep gang crime down or at least reduce it. . . . Along with that, we gather information on gangs. We stop and talk to individuals and we document those conversations on a field card. That information goes into the database. . . .

The second activity that we involve ourselves in here is an investigative unit. We do the actual investigation of crimes that have been committed: proactive type stuff that we turned over, or cases that come into us from outside agencies. Through these investigations we gain additional information. (P. Brenneman, personal communication, 2000).

An irony of all of the anti-gang organizations presented here, and of special interest groups in general, is that in order to justify their existence and future receipt of funding, that often includes salaries, they have to demonstrate that a problem continues to exist. Therefore, solving the problem—that is the stated purpose of the special interest group—will result in the demise of the interest group itself. Therefore, interest groups are required to show that their efforts are effective in reducing the problem, but not so effective as to eliminate the need for the organization.

In part, because of the need for this balance, the status and influence of the Salt Lake Area Project seem to have varied with the natural history cycle of the gang movement. During the inception stage, the Project carried high prestige among the police forces and the community. Officers serving on the gang unit “were the cream of the crop” (P. Brenneman, personal communication, 2000). Later, probably around 1995 to 1997 when the ontological gang problem was at its peak and when the public, the media and the outer rings of the social movement were losing interest, the Project

went through a period of time . . . where this unit became perceived as being not effective, or being only involved with crime in the city because that is where most
of the gang crime developed. The administrators [of participating policing agencies] saw the unit as less valuable or as of no benefit to them. . . . So, they started -- instead of sending the cream of the crop that wanted in -- they would send the lesser-qualified officer . . . the sub-standard detective. It wasn’t everybody, and it wasn’t pervasive but some of that did happen. (P. Brenneman, personal communication).

More recently, the Project has again changed in status. It is an established unit that has made it through the first decade. “I think it is on the upstream again” (P. Brenneman, personal communication, 2000). Although the gang unit is still looked at as a training unit by some administrators, it is attempting to get long term commitments out of the participating agencies so that they can prepare “gang experts,” improve communications between units, and coordinate resources.

In essence, the Project has become a primarily a policing agency, once again, dealing with the ontological gang problem that has been left as an after math to the gang movement. Although still in tact, the community advisory board participates in the planning of some education workshops and conferences but plays a less active role than in previous times.

Officers assigned to the unit are dealing with hard-core gang members that are the "extremists" from the gang interest groups and less of the “average kid” population.

Utah Gangs are shifting from kids “looking for respect” to organized crime units.

In Utah it [gang involvement] was about respect [during the early and mid 1990s]. It didn’t matter if you lived in Kearns or if you lived up on the East Bench, the kids were into the mindset that it was all about respect. It didn’t matter how much money your family had, or what you did or didn’t have, it was all about respect. (M. Sanchez, personal communication, 2000)

We are seeing a change [from seeking respect] to making money. People talk about gangster lifestyle as protecting your hood but it goes back to protecting your business. It is all about getting paid. Here in Utah we are seeing gangs make that switch [from seeking respect] to getting paid. How is he [a gangster]
going to make his money? It is by getting paid for selling dope, committing crimes and selling stolen property, committing forgeries or the check offenses; those kinds of things. (P. Brenneman, personal communication, 2000)

Both Sanchez and Brenneman indicated that youth gangs in Utah are changing from violent gangs into organized criminal gangs. This is an interesting transition. Cloward and Ohlin (1960) presented the idea that both violent and criminal gangs inhabited different realms of the illegitimate social structure; however the Utah experience suggests that the type of gangs present in the illegitimate structure may be due to an evolutionary process. The gangs in Utah began as violent bands of youth responding to structural restraints. However the persistent, stable gangs need to evolve into criminal gangs in order to survive after the public attention is drawn away from the gang problem.

Clearly, the natures of both the Salt Lake Area Gang Project and the gangs that they are concerned with have changed. Indeed, it could be argued that they are both entirely different phenomena than existed in the early 1990s. Both have changed as a result of the interaction with the other, as has the nature of the gang problem. The relationship is dialectical.

Colors of Success

Similar patterns can be seen when looking at other anti-gang organizations. In about 1989, an assistant high school basketball coach, Duane Bourdeaux, and another individual, Robert Sawyer, conceptualized Colors of Success. In the beginning these two men sought to build relationships with kids in the halls of the school. They worked as volunteer hall monitors, built rapport with students, and devised individual educational
plans for kids that were seen as “at risk.” From these humble beginnings, the Color of Success has become highly organized and incorporated into at least 19 schools.

We have expanded from a school-based model to work with kids in the juvenile court, and the division of youth corrections. We have also joined with the Boys and Girls Club. We have all type of kids . . . so that is why we try to address this issue [gangs] from a holistic approach. One program may not meet the individual kid’s needs. He might need several things. The more services that we can provide in house, the better we are going to be able to meet his needs. (D. Bourdeaux, personal communication, 2000)

Colors of Success has expanded from a volunteer project to a lucrative (more than a million dollar per year budget) non-profit organization that provides the primary income for Bourdeaux and his staff. The Colors of Success program differs from the other organizations included in this study in several ways. First, it was established prior to the Salt Lake Area Gang Project. The policies, procedures, and the mission of the Colors organization are different than any of the other organizations included in this survey. Colors staff do not oppose gangs, per se, but seek to help kids avoid all kinds of anti-social behavior.

Second, although Colors has established political connections (Bourdeaux was elected to the Utah Legislature) and connections with other gang agencies, the organization has avoided close association with the criminal justice system. They are neither a policing agency nor an affiliation of one. Their political ties are through the educational system. The Colors program is primarily about academic success. The Colors of Success program provides a mentoring program, education planning and assistance, tutoring, goal setting, gang awareness, and 24-hour on call services.

Finally, the view of gangs and gang members held by the Colors staff seems somewhat different from the view held of gangs by the other organizations assessed.
Although they recognize the uniqueness of Utah’s interracially mixed gangs, Colors staff members do not claim that all kids are equally likely to be involved with gangs. Nor do they act as if the gang problem is going to take over the state. Instead, Colors personnel stated that gangs are the result of “needs of individuals not being met” (D. Bourdeaux, personal communication, 2000) and indicated that much of the gang movement is the result of changes, due to migration, of a homogeneous society.

The Colors founder recognized that boundary maintenance activities work to ostracize groups of individuals from obtaining status and goals set by society. Kids that are on the fringe of the society are most likely to be at risk for joining a gang. This includes minority group members and non-LDS youth in Utah. Bourdeaux also stated that the change in cultural such as from Mexico to Utah, from the Polynesian Islands to Utah, or from Asia to Utah is partially to blame for the increase in gang activity.

Bourdeaux recognized both elements of the gang problem outlined here. He saw the ontological increase in gangs and gang activity but realized that the increase was in part the result of social construction and boundary maintenance activities of a changing community (D. Bourdeaux, personal communication, 2000).

*Mobilize Against Gangs in Communities (MAGIC)*

Mobilize Against Gangs in Communities (MAGIC) was organized in about 1990 by four middle class women in the Salt Lake area at the suggestion of Susan Burke. At that time Burke was the community coordinator of the Salt Lake Area Gang Project. In 2000, the only founding member still with the MAGIC organization was Stacey Parker,
who is the mother of a gang member. Parker was also on the community advisory board of the Salt Lake Gang Project at the time of the interview.

MAGIC evolved from a loosely organized grassroots, anti-gang activist group head-quartered in Parker's home in 1990 to an incorporated organization in 1992 to receiving a non-profit tax number from the IRS in 1993. In 1993, MAGIC moved headquarters to the West Valley City office complex. By 2000, at the time of the interview, MAGIC had become a court ordered family service program that had plans to branch from Salt Lake into Ogden. The main focus of the MAGIC program is the family of gang members. Parker gives support, counseling, education, and an eight-week workshop to gang members and their families. “99.9% of our clients come from the juvenile court. They are court-ordered--the family, the parents as well as the kids” (S. Parker, personal communication, 2000). The idea behind MAGIC is that kids involved with gangs come from dysfunctional families.

There are a lot of dynamics that go into it [kids getting into gangs]. It is not just the kid that’s having a problem. The entire family suffers. And it is not just the kid that created the problem either. There are problems within the family. . . . I don’t believe that there is a family that does not have a dysfunction. (S. Parker, personal communication, 2000)

Parker, like other prodigies of the Salt Lake Area Gang Project, sees all Utah kids as vulnerable to gangs. “I used to go to all the presentations that they (the Salt Area Gang Project) put on. I just wanted to learn everything I could” (S. Parker, personal communication, 2000). She stated that she had no idea that her own son was involved with gangs until he “came home one night and said that somebody was going to blow up our house. . . . He was as white as a ghost, and I knew something was really wrong.” That was the night that Parker became involved with the gang movement. “I started
making a lot of phone calls, and we had the police out. I just developed a passion [for
the gang movement] because it was stealing my son. It was taking my son and ultimately
it did take him” (S. Parker, personal communication, 2000).

According to Parker, the majority of “parents [of gangsters] feel ashamed: they
feel guilty, and they feel like they are bad parents.” Parker stated that of the 500 families
completing the MAGIC program, only about ten of those families were second or third
generation gang families. Most of the families referred to MAGIC do not approve of the
gang lifestyle.

Most of the parents that we see don’t want their kids involved [with gangs]. Most
are beating their heads against a wall. . . . They start beating heads, parents and
kids do, and before you know it there’s no communication there and the kid is
doing what he wants anyway. (S. Parker, personal communication, 2000)

According to Parker, the gang problem stems from the over-indulgent attitude of
society and from community rejection of some of the youth of society. Community
members don’t want to take responsibility for wayward youth.

I think the community needs to understand that these are our children . . . not “my
kids” or “your kids”. . . . We are all human beings. What color we are, what race,
doesn’t really matter. . . . Kids are dying left and right. Families are falling apart.
People are not caring anymore. . . . We are really an intolerant society. . . . We
don’t work together anymore. (S. Parker, personal communication, 2000)

It is clear from Parker’s statement that she sees a connection between the
objectification of the gang problem and the treatment of youth and families by society.
Youth who feel rejected or unwanted rebel. That rejection can come in many forms but
one of the ways it manifests itself is in gang activity and membership.
Government officials play an important role in the success of a social problem social movement. Lack of government support for a movement is likely to cause the movement to fail whereas support from the government can produce funding, generate laws and policies, and ensure the “success” of the movement.

As was stated previously, Governor Mike Leavitt and the Utah legislature were instrumental in the institutionalization of the Gang problem in Utah. In 1994 Leavitt added an appointed Anti-Violence Coordinator position to the Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice (CCJJ) office “specifically to provide a statewide response and coordination to gang issues and work with communities on how they could better deal with the growing gang problem” (S. Burke, personal communication, 2000). The Community Coordinator from the Salt Lake Area Gang Project, Susan Burke was moved into that position. Since Burke had been instrumental in establishing policies, ideas, and programs used to combat gangs, her presence in the Governor’s office firmly connected the state with the Salt Lake Area Gang Project.

The CCJJ office intervenes with the gang problem through the granting of monies to various anti-gang organizations. The government appropriations are distributed through this office.

We do it [distribute money] in the form of grants. We send out a request for proposals and then community agencies apply to us. In fact, we just finished a round of awards. This past year we had $375,000 for crime prevention and gang prevention programs. We had 21 applications and then we awarded, I believe, 9 programs. Two of those were specifically through our gang money. We had $80,000 this year specifically for gang programs. (S. Burke, personal communication, 2000).
By controlling the money, the CCJJ office basically molds the gang problem. Interest
groups need financing to exist. Without the government grant money, the organizations
are greatly restricted in their ability to make claims concerning the gang problem.
Therefore, the interest groups funded by the CCJJ are reflections of the policy ideals of
that office. Since, there is a direct tie between the Salt Lake Area Gang Project and the
CCJJ office, the distribution of funds effectively expands the claims of the Salt Lake
Area Gang Project to most of the organizations opposed to gangs throughout the state.

Some of the organizations funded through CCJJ include: Salt Lake Boys and
Girls Club, Girls with a Voice Program, Washington County Community Awareness
Gang Education (CAGE), Crime Prevention Night Out Against Crime, youth police
academies, Logan’s gang prevention education program, and MAGIC. Policing units,
such as the Ogden/Weber Metro Gang Unit and the Logan Gang Unit also receive
funding through the CCJJ office. Colors of Success and other school-based programs are
usually funded out of the educational fund.

_Ogden/Weber Metro Gang Unit and_
_Logan Gang Unit_

Interviews were conducted with two other anti-gang organizations, the
Ogden/Weber Metro Gang Unit and the Logan/Cache Gang Unit. Both of these
organizations are primarily policing agencies that also participate in community
education of gangs. The Ogden/Weber Metro Gang Unit began sometime between 1992
and 1994. Although Weber County assigns an officer to participate in the gang unit, all
of the full time officers as of 2000 were from the Ogden City Police Department. There
were four full time officers, two supervisors, and a community coordinator working with the unit.

The Logan/Cache Gang Project is a very small unit operated by the Logan City Police department. It was established in 1996. In 2000, the Logan/Cache Gang Project had one person assigned full time as the gang coordinator and community educator. Other officers assigned to the unit served in the Project as a secondary assignment. The Logan/Cache Project receives all of its funding from Utah State grants.

The interestingly, these two organizations developed sometimes after the perceived gang problem began. The Salt Lake area, with the largest, most diverse population in the state was the epicenter of the gang problem, both as a claims making process and as an objectively realized phenomenon. The gang problem lessened, in both aspects, the farther one moved away from Salt Lake. The gang problem was time and intensity delayed by geographic area. In other words, Ogden’s gang problem, and the creation of organizations to combat gangs, seemed to reflect the same cycle experienced in Salt Lake Area with a 2- to 3-year delay. Logan, a city even farther north from Salt Lake than Ogden, also smaller in size, began addressing the gang problem 2 or 3 years after Ogden (4 to 6 years after Salt Lake).

The development of the organizations seem to be following the natural history cycle described by Mauss (1975). However, with public sentiment shifting away from gangs statewide and nationally, it is likely that both organizations will fail in convincing the community members that the gang problem is a real threat to them. Unless a dramatic example of gang activity such as the Mohi/Chapman shooting occurs, the public is not likely to accept the claims of these, and other organizations, that the gang problem
is a real threat to them personally, regardless of the ontological presence of gangs and gang members. Failure to gain public support will result in the eventual demise of the anti-gang organizations as they currently exist.

Correlation Between Interest Groups and Social Movements

The study of interest groups associated with social problems clarifies several aspects of the social problem cycle. Based on interviews with representatives of anti-gang interest groups in Utah, the following principles appear to be valid:

- Interest groups do not appear out of nowhere. In other words, all of those associated with the gang problem perceived a problem with gangs prior to making claims about gangs. Change is necessary to initiate the claims making cycle.
- Interest groups follow the same natural history cycle as the problem they are proclaiming. Under optimal circumstances, they go through an incipiency stage, a coalescence stage, an institutional stage, fragmentation, and demise.
- Organizations that do not dissolve will drastically change forms in order to stay viable. These changes in forms may include structural, leadership, policies, regulations, and missions.
- Money is a primary factor in determining the success of an interest group organization. The success of the organization relies on the ability to produce money. Prior to the institutionalization of an interest group organization, various motives (interests) initiate participation in the movement. However, after institutionalization, members of successful organizations will have developed a financial dependence on the organization. Often times, the organization, and therefore the continuation of the
problem, provides the primary income of those persons most involved with the movement.

- Those distributing the money decide the nature of the social problem. They educate the public and other interest groups as to the nature and the solution to the problem.

- Many times seemingly diverse interest groups are informally and formally connected, making the diversity of claims less than it may appear.

- The success of the interest group is dependent on holding the public’s interest rather than its ability to demonstrate an ontological problem. When new claims about different problems (especially those that address the same cultural paradoxes of the community) are presented to the public, the public is likely to support the new claims makers rather than the old claims makers.

Dialectical Correlation Between Claims Makers and Gang Activity

There are two parts to any social problem. There is an objective element and there is a subjective element. The relationship between these two elements is dialectical. As has been demonstrated in this research, it does not seem to matter which emerges first, the conditions surrounding a social problem or claims about the social problem, either can lead to the construction of a social problem. In this event, relatively few violent gang actions resulted in claims making that were aimed at making the public believe that all kids in Utah were vulnerable to gangs. However, the public is a hard audience to keep interested in a social problem. When interest in a social problem wanes for any reason, the success of a social movement is in jeopardy. If the claims makers are unable to retain
the public support for a movement, both the interest groups and the problem will
decline and eventually change drastically or disappear completely.

Public interest is the regulator of the social problem. Radical and fanatical claims
makers on both end of an issue may continue to operate before and after a social problem
is created or goes through demise, but without public support for a social problem, money
and publicity will be withdrawn from the interest groups and the problem will seemingly
disappear. The ontological existence of the conditions proclaimed to be a social problem
might, indeed, get worse following the incipiency and even the demise of a social
problem. However, like the other interest groups, gangs (in this case) had to change
forms once public interest was drawn away from gangs.

In other words, a change in either the conditions surrounding a social problem, or
a change in the public interest will result in a change in the other. They are two parts of
the same process. By knowing this, social problems can be better understood.

In Utah, police report that gangs have been active and troublesome for many years
prior to 1990. However, as far as the general population of Utah is concerned, the gang
problem was primarily a problem in the 1990s. During the 1990s police viewed every
kid in Utah as a potential gang member. Newspaper articles gave accounts of the gang
problem in increasing numbers. Numerous organizations were formed to combat gangs.
Laws were passed and money was appropriated to solve the gang problem.

Following the excitement surrounding the gang phenomena, there was a
substantial ontological increase in gang activity. More individuals and more crimes were
associated with gangs. However, because a community can only focus on a limited
amount of social problems at one time, when Salt Lake won the Olympic bid for the 2000
Winter Olympics, the media and the general public shifted focus to the claims made by the Olympic planning committee and others that were working to ready the city and state for the event. About the same time, popular youth culture shifted from the hip-hop movement associated with gangs to a more passive cultural expression called grunge. This shift influenced the music, styles of dress, the attitudes and the subgroups of the youth. Fewer youth were inclined to participate in gangs. To complete the shift in attention away from gangs, a non-gang related school shooting captured national and local attention. When gangs could not be used to explain this event, other claims makers began to extol the dangers of socially isolated youth instead of youth that ran in gangs.

Many of the organizations in Utah that had formed to combat gangs had disappeared by the year 2000. Those organizations that continued to exist had changed forms drastically. A grass-root organization that began as a support group for families had become a court required workshop for gang members and their families. An organization that had begun as a volunteer effort to keep at-risk students in school had evolved into a structured 24-hour program that was affiliated with a long-standing national organization. Government participation in the gang problem was a more of a reflection of the community sentiment towards the problem than the ontological increase in gang activity. Therefore, as the public attention was drawn away from gangs, less government attention and money were given to the problem. Police agencies that had enjoyed tremendous prestige and power, at the heart of the gang movement experienced a drop in status. Community advisory boards that had served as a voice for business personnel, religious leaders, community activists and other community members had evolved into formal organizations that participated in planning a yearly gang conference.
and not much more. Even the gangs in Utah had changed forms by 1990. Rather
than including youth of all races, ethnic groups and social classes, they had evolved into
organized crime units intent on making money.

Indeed, an evaluation of the Utah gang problem gives support to a social
constructionist approach to the study of social problems. More importantly, it suggests
that there is a dialectical relationship of the objective and the subjective elements of
social problems of a community.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation has outlined and tested a synthetic theory of social problems that explains both the objective and the subjective aspects of social problems within communities. As this work suggests, there is, indeed, a dialectic relationship between these two aspects of social problems. Based on an analysis of gangs during the 1990s in the Mormon Cultural Region, it has been shown that communities use social problems to designate community boundaries at the times when change occurs within the community and causes fear or anomie among the community members.

In the case of the Utah gang problem, Utah experienced rapid change in the structure of the population due to immigration during the early 1990s. This in-migration was coupled with a traditionally high birth rate within the state. As a result, a larger portion of the Utah population was under 18 than in the U.S. in general. Additionally, every county in Utah experienced a substantial growth in the minority population, many of whom were children. The result was a feeling of anxiety among community members.

Cultural paradoxes that had developed in Utah over time had given rise to a general insecurity with youth, minorities, and non-LDS church members. The influx of persons from these groups into Utah spurred the construction of gang problem in the region. The general feeling of insecurity due to the population change led some members of the community to give accounts of what were causing these feelings. One of the most prevalent explanations concerned youth gangs. Youth gang problems had already been established nationally and were associated with a popular youth cultural movement called
“hip-hop.” Hip-hop had originated in inner city black neighborhoods and shared characteristics of gangs.

At the beginning of this gang movement in Utah, policing agencies, members of minority and lower economic communities, and victims of gang activity made claims concerning the gang movement in a relatively informal, unorganized fashion. However, in 1993, following a gang shooting at a downtown public event center where a white boy was killed by a Polynesian boy, the problem was institutionalized. The general population of residents in Utah thought that the gang problem may affect them and they responded by sending thousands of letters to the Utah governor’s office requesting state involvement with the problem. The result was a radical increase in the number of articles published concerning gangs and the number of organizations that were working to solve the problem. Congress passed several laws and appropriated thousands of dollars of tax money to solve the problem.

The result of the claims making activities was an ontological increase in gang activity. The amount of gang activity evidenced in the state peaked two years following the institutionalization of the movement. It seems, then, that claims making led to an increase in participation with gangs. Claims making concerning gangs decreased following the institutionalization by government. Fragmentation of the movement was enhanced by the shift of popular youth culture away from hip-hop to Grunge, the acquisition of the Salt Lake City Olympic bid for hosting the 2000 Winter Olympics, and a series of non-gang school shootings that occurred nationally.

The occurrence of gang activity in the community decreased following the decrease in claims concerning the problem. By the year 2000, only a few organizations
designated to combat gangs continued to exist. All of these organizations had dramatically changed forms. Grass-root organizations had become incorporated into the criminal justice system, government agencies had been expanded to include other problems, school based programs had become incorporated within the larger context of national Boys and Girls club, and community policing units had returned to traditional policing efforts using community advisory boards merely as conference planning agencies. Even those active gang members changed in structure. Gang members still involved in gangs by the year 2000 had moved from participation in the movement as a way to find companionship, adventure and respect, and had turned to using gangs as a source of revenue. The gangs in 2000 were becoming organized crime units.

Residuals of the gang problem can be seen throughout Utah. Many of the policing agencies in the state have units specialized in gang activity, similar to homicide units. Changes in statutes, policies, and regulations of businesses and governing agents reflect these problems. Most significantly, however, there are more active gang members now than before the movement. Although the number of gang members has stabilized (and even shown some decline) since the peak in 1995, the number of gang members is much higher than at the time the community constructed this problem in the early 1990s. However, there seems to be little public concern about the problem. Gangs are accepted as a reality and nothing more. They are not treated as a social problem that requires community-based solutions. Currently, advocates of anti-gang movements are viewed as extremists. These persons, and the organizations that they represent, were once recipients of high status among the community and the context of the greater organizations of which they were apart. By 2000 they had lost status. Their continued involvement in the gang
movement was associated with personal income rather than volunteer time. This research specifically suggests that violent gangs identified by Cloward and Ohlin (1960) may evolve into criminal gangs once public attention shifts away to other concerns.

Clearly these results demonstrate that there is a dialectic relationship between the objective and subjective aspects of a social problem. Additional community based research of social problems is needed to test this theory further. Understanding the relationship between social construction of a problem and the objective manifestation of the problem is necessary to fully understand social problems. Therefore, developing a synthetic theory of social problems that includes both aspects of social problems is the next logical step in social problem research.

The theory developed here asserts that social problems are the tools used by communities to maintain boundaries. The construction of social problems occurs due to anomie experienced by a community following structural change. The anxiety produced by the change leads to claims making and eventually the formation of a social problem. Ironically, the construction of a social problem social movement is likely to produce an increase in the ontological behavior associated with the problem. The focus of the public on the social problem will decrease following the institutionalization of the problem by official and governmental agencies. However, the likelihood that the objective manifestation of the problem will increase is high. The more attention the problem receives the more likely some members of the community will use the problem to rebel against the community’s boundaries. A decrease in the ontological manifestation of the social problem will occur but will be much slower than the decrease in claims making.
By choosing the gang problem to analyze with this synthetic theory, this dissertation expands the realm of social constructionism into "hard crime." The foundation of this theory is that communities construct social problems as a reaction to social change and that all social problems, regardless of the specific conditions surrounding them, are the objective manifestations of boundary maintenance activities of a community. This suggests that by returning to community-based research, we could begin to understand even the most difficult problems faced by the community. No social problems are off limits.

By bridging the objective and the subjective aspects of social problems, this theory provides a fuller understanding of social problems. Not only will this knowledge contribute to the literature in both theoretical camps but offers solutions to policy makers. If social problems are boundary markers and used to protect the values and beliefs of a community, and if they occur at the paradoxical points in the culture, then identifying the trouble spots and seeking solutions to those paradoxes would work to thwart the escalation of social construction. Further research is needed to test this assumption. Although evidence presented here supports a dialectic relationship between the construction and the objectification of a social problem. It is the challenge of future social problems research to extend this study to other problems constructed by other communities.
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