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### **A Policy Analysis of the Case of Junior Guzman Through the Control Theory of Crime**

The case under examination in this paper revolves around a 2018 event in which a 15-year-old teen named Lesandro "Junior" Guzman-Feliz was hunted and murdered by a Bronx-based gang. It started when Junior got lured outside by a friend on the night of June 20, 2018 for the gang to apprehend him. Upon realizing the gory plot against his life, he sought help in the nearest Bodega or deli store only for the store owner to turn him away and try to push him out of the store upon the arrival of the bloodthirsty gang members who had come for him. The gang would then forcefully drag the teen on the floor heading outside the store from where they subjected him to multiple stabbings around the neck area and the body using a machete alongside knives. As the gang members left the vicinity with the intention of letting him die, Junior attempted to run and seek help in the nearby hospital. However, he could hardly enter the hospital due to the extent of the injuries sustained following the multiple and gory stabbings. He ended up dying in front of the hospital with no help.

The case under review in this paper will be analyzed through the theoretical lens of the control theories of crime as discussed by Britt and Roque (2015). According to Britt and Roque (2015), the theory comprises a framework that helps elucidate underlying variables that impact an individual's predisposition toward committing criminal behavior. A key tenet of this theory avers that people are naturally inclined toward deviant behavior, and that stringent efficient mechanisms of control and corresponding social ties work to offset this delinquent propensity.

Britt and Roque (2015) link the development of control theory to the groundbreaking research of Albert J. Reiss, who postulated that a deficiency of social and personal controls is an instigator of delinquent behavior. The researchers further opine those other researchers like Travis Hirschi further improved and broadened the theory, by introducing the idea of social ties or bonds as an important factor in determining compliance. In specificity, Britt and Roque (2015) opine that Hirschi's social bond theory states that people are less likely to participate in deviant behavior if they have significant commitments to traditional relationships and institutions like school, family, and peers. They contend that these social ties encourage a sense of dedication to cultural values, which consequently suppresses criminal tendencies. On the other hand, people who have lost or damaged their social ties are more likely to commit crimes.

The authors opine that control theory's social bond's facet posts that social bonds exist in four critical facets, which include attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. Attachment implies the emotional bonds that people develop with others, especially their peers, and parents, which can serve as a preventative measure against delinquent behavior (Britt & Roque, 2015). A person's commitment includes any investments they may have made in their past endeavors, such their work or education, which they run the danger of forfeiting due to potential involvement in delinquent activity. Involvement entails the degree to which a person participates in conventional

activities, which reduces their time and chance for engagement in potential delinquent behavior. In concurrence, belief describes how someone accepts and internalizes society norms and ideals, which can act as a moral compass to guide their actions.

In a nutshell, control theory provides a fitting framework that elucidates key factors that instigate an individual's propensity towards committing crimes by creating an emphasis for the real-time importance of strong societal bonds, self-control and effective socialization as factors that protect against criminal behavioral participation by individuals.

A careful examination of the scenario in the case in which the bodega owner is noted to have dismissed Junior who he is said to have known from the latter's infancy (Alicea, 2018) reveals an important issue in crime control policy within New York City. From the standpoint of the crime control theory, the Bodega owner's dismissal of a bleeding and helpless Junior urgently seeking their help could be explained by the theory's tenet, which avers that individuals tend to almost always act in their self-interest, which may include committing criminal activity (Britt & Roque, 2015). This is evidenced by the revelation by the bodega owner that he feared for his life and had no more options when it was evident the police whom he called did not intervene in time. In that regard, it must have been to his best interest to send the teen away since he perceived his life to be in danger as well. Moreover, it is also revealed that from the corresponding video footage of the gory killing of Junior, the bodega owner has since become the center of blame with the general society believing that their Cruz and Chiky grocery store should be shut for their role in dismissing Junior rather than helping him, which encouraged the teen's killing (Alicea, 2018). Again, this revelation shows that the society in Bronx, New York City, largely consisting of minority African Americans and Latinos believes that indifference towards victims of violence should not be tolerated and that demonstrating indifference as

exhibited by Modesto Cruz (the bodega owner) is akin to assisting criminals in committing a crime.

Modesto Cruz, the bodega owner's refusal to assist or rescue a helpless Junior seeking help from them is thus interpreted by the community as a selfish attitude and an anti-social behavior that should not be condoned but subjected to some form of punishment evinced in their interminable demands that the bodega should be closed or rendered inoperable due to its owner's selfish behavior. From the crime control theory's perspective, the societal members must have had the belief that as one of them, the bodega owner should have reflected the societal ideals and norms of preventing a crime from happening with such internalized moral norms guiding their action (Britt & Roque, 2015). Their relentless calls for the closure of Modesta Cruz's bodega are thus a reflection of their sense of disappointment with his failure to help Junior in his hour of need against the threat of violence since such behavior does not align with their social expectations.

According to a revelation by Alicea (2018), the community in Bronx, Junior's neighborhood seems to be acting and powered by a belief in the pursuit of personal justice the consequence of, which is the endless perpetration of blame on the bodega owner whom everybody therein seems not ready to forgive. Matters were not helped when the press conference by O'Neill, New York Police Department's Commissioner further suggested that the bodega owner could have done better to help the helpless teen, further apportioning blame to Modesta Cruz, which must have made the society continue to hate him further. From this revelation it is evident that the New York Police Department attempted to absolve itself from its responsibility of protecting citizenry within its jurisdiction from violent criminal activities including those pertaining to mistaken identity, which is an outright abdication of duty, lack of

accountability and a miscarriage of justice (Rowe, 2020). The police department's decision to continuously pile blame on Cruz unearthed significant challenges in policing within the New York Police Department, which is seemingly not keen on promoting police accountability and restorative justice as key values guiding its approach to policing especially within the largely crime-ridden minority neighborhood in Bronx.

It is also evident that there is dire need for the introduction of restorative justice practices in Bronx where Junior met his untimely death in the hands of violent criminal gangs as a way of promoting offender rehabilitation, a culture of forgiveness and reconciliation and community restoration following the occurrence of such crimes. According to Schupak (2022), restorative justice is critical for such societies as Junior's since it seeks to repair torn relations caused by crimes by facilitating meetings that promote healing, reconciliation and forgiveness between the community, victims and offenders. Besides making offenders accountable for their criminal behavior, it would help rebuild torn relations between the community with Cruz, the bodega owner and assist the community to heal and also forgive and accommodate Cruz, who everyone seems to be blaming for Junior's killing rather than look into poverty, which is arguably the taproot of such crimes in Bronx.

## References

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