Looking for Networks in All the Odd Places

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The Data Source Obstacle

- Data is generally difficult to access
  - Offenders
  - Law-enforcement
  - Open sources

- Data has important limits
  - Source biases
  - Missing people
  - Missing links
  - Partial segments of a greater whole

- There are many data source options…
Data Source Options

1) Going straight to the source
2) Law-enforcement/criminal justice cases
3) Official arrest reports (co-offending)
4) Country-level data
5) Open sources
6) Public commissions
7) Art forms
1) Going Straight to the Source

- Memoirs
- Survey and ethnographic data
Criminal Memoirs

- Partial/Selective outlook
- Corroboration is not always possible
- Not much of a tradition
- Academic approval?

- More around less
- Temporal outlook
  - Egocentric/Criminal career focus
- Good starting point
Ethnographic and Survey Data

- **Past research:** Whyte (Boston); Albini (US); Hess (Sicily); Ianni (New York); Fleisher (Various); Zhang (China-US); Kenney (Colombia); Nguyen & Bouchard (Quebec); Morselli and Tremblay (Quebec)

- Not as inaccessible as often believed – *Cressey’s push to get off our ... and into the field*

- Risky research?

- Egocentric and sociometric focus

- Group/Network morphology

- Rethinking a social problem

- Links with capacities or performance
2) Investigative, Intelligence, and Court Data

- Data with heavy law-enforcement influence/bias
- Offender-based data obtained by law-enforcement (conversational analysis, proceeds of crime, accounting data)
Investigative Reports/Interviews with Police

- **Past research**: Tita (Los Angeles); Kennedy (Boston); McGloin (Newark); Garay-Salamanca (Mexico, Colombia)

- Heavily reliant/biased by law-enforcement take on things, but good researchers can compensate for this...
Surveillance Data

- **Past research:** Finckenauer and Waring (Tri-State region); Natarajan (New York); Heber (Stockholm); Varese (Rome); Morselli (Montreal)

- **Electronic and Physical Surveillance**
  - Key/Peripheral player focus
  - Vulnerability, Law-enforcement impact
  - Adaptation, Network disruption

- **Electronic versus Physical Surveillance**
  - Offender interaction strategies (cost avoidance)
  - Robustness of network measures
Archival records

- **Past research:** Blok (Sicily); Baker and Faulkner (California); Gould (Corsica); Papachristos (Chicago)

- **Historical focus**

- **Generally more theory driven**
  - Power brokerage
  - Efficiency-security tradeoffs
  - Conflict resolution alternatives
  - Group contagion
  - Balance theory
Conversational Analysis

- **Past research:** Natarajan (New York); Varese (Rome)
- Better assessment of the inner workings of a network
  - Focus is on the quality of relationships
  - Assess resource exchange between network participants (shifts over time)
Accounting Data

Follow the money

- Working with criminal activity accounting books that have been seized by police (or given by offenders)
- Transactional network
- Key/peripheral player assessment from different outlook than communication-based data
- Network positioning effects on debts or profits
- Limited research tradition, but data is accurate
- Main problem is that the focus is limited to the time of seizure...
- Identities of offenders are (understandably) concealed
The Unusual Suspects

- Affiliation network based on systematically overlooked suspects across police investigations
  - Simple procedure
  - Good starting point when working in law-enforcement settings
  - Good way to demonstrate the biases that often underlie such research and investigative practices
Chemical Composition Data

- Drug seizure data (other criminal markets?)
- Examining commonalities/variations in ‘recipes’
  - Purity level
  - Types of alternative ingredients included
- A higher concentration of similar recipes indicates a smaller number of criminal groups involved in the market (and vice-versa)
3) Co-offending data (co-arrests)

- **Past research:** Sarnecki (Borlange, Stockholm); McGloin (Philadelphia); Van Mastrigt (Northern England); Kleemans (Netherlands)

- **The big picture (denominalized data)**
  - Limited to time of arrest
  - Master network
  - Mix with other methods (capture/recapture estimates)
  - Key players and cut-points
  - Stability/continuity in co-offending (temporal focus)
  - ‘Recruitment’, Intergenerational patterns
  - Crime-specific and overlap patterns
  - Network-Geographical links
4) Country-Level Data

- The bigger picture
  - Based on seizure data at country level
  - Supplier-Destination patterns
  - Transit countries
  - Pricing variations
  - Possible bias based on seizure patterns
  - Aggregate problem – no links within countries...
5) Open-Source Data

- Newspapers and media sources (Krebs)
- Internet
  - Cyber crime (Décary-Hétu)
6) Public Commissions

- Massive transcripts on specific crime operations
  - Often elite-level crime
- Not too good for reconstructing crime/scam networks
- Very good for reconstructing denunciation after the crime/scam
  - Overcome missing person/link problems
- Breaks down apparent major criminal conspiracies into smaller independent criminal operations (Limits of Scandal)
7) **Art as Data**: The Mafia, the Vatican, the Freemasons, and the Limits of Scandal

- Lombardi’s *Inner Sanctum* + Tosches *Power on Earth*
8) Simulation...
Conclusions

- We cannot and do not have to wait for the perfect data
- When data is limited, need diverse sources to validate a proposition
  - Formal versus informal structuring of criminal operations
  - Key players designations
  - Transcending features of criminal operations (within a state or across states, illegal markets and criminal activities)
  - Overlaps between illegal and legitimate spheres
  - Impact on performance
  - Diffusion, endurance, and resilience
Conclusions

- **Bottom line:** A lot of data sources are available, but the necessary condition is that we are able to see the network that could emerge.

- Once our eye is trained for this, the data source obstacle becomes less challenging...
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