

In this article I explore these issues by considering new theoretical developments in neighborhood social ecology that build on the important work of the past. Neighborhoods, after all, show remarkable continuities in patterns of criminal activity. For at least a hundred years, criminological research in the ecological tradition has confirmed the concentration of interpersonal violence in a small number of neighborhoods, especially those characterized by poverty, the racial segregation of minority groups, and the concentration of single-parent families (Sampson et al. 2002). The theoretical challenge is to explain these facts and account for why neighborhoods continue to matter in the modern city.

Social Disorganization Theory and Personal Networks

In the classic work of the Chicago School of urban sociology in the early twentieth century, it was thought that population density, low economic status, ethnic heterogeneity, and residential instability led to the rupture of local social ties, a form of social disorganization that in turn accounted for high rates of crime and disorder (Kornhauser 1978). Later in the century, the concept of social disorganization came to be defined as the inability of a community to maintain effective social order because it failed to realize the common values of its residents. This theoretical definition was formulated systemically—the allegedly disorganized community was viewed as suffering from a disrupted or weakened system of friendship, kinship, and acquaintanceship networks, and thus ultimately of socialization.

More recently, the intellectual tradition of community-level research has been revitalized by the increasingly popular idea of “social capital.” Although there are conflicting definitions, social capital is typically conceptualized as embodied in the social ties among persons. In an influential version of this idea, Robert Putnam (2000) defines social capital as the networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. The connection of social disorganization and social capital theory can be articulated as follows: Neighborhoods bereft of social capital, especially of dense social networks, are less able to realize common values and therefore cannot maintain the social controls that foster safety.

6.1

Social Ecology and Collective Efficacy Theory

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The idyllic notion of local communities as “urban villages” characterized by dense networks of personal ties is a seductive image, one that pervades traditional theoretical perspectives on neighborhoods and crime. The idea is that tight-knit neighborhoods are safe because of their rich supply of close social networks. Yet such ideal neighborhoods appear to bear little resemblance to those of contemporary cities, where weak ties prevail over strong ties and social interaction among residents is characterized more often by instrumentality than by altruism or affection. Moreover, the dark side of community is often neglected—social networks can, and often are, put to use for illegal or violent purposes.

The urban village model of cities is further compromised by the assumption that networks of personal ties map neatly onto the geographically defined boundaries of existing neighborhoods, such that neighborhoods can be conceptualized as independent social entities. In fact, social networks in the modern city frequently criss-cross traditional ecological boundaries, many of which are permeable and vaguely defined. Living in close proximity to high-crime neighborhoods, for example, may increase the risk of crime no matter what the density of social networks in one’s home neighborhood. It follows that neighborhoods themselves need to be conceptualized as part of a larger network of spatial relations, thus motivating the idea of a “neighborhood’s neighbors.”

Although social disorganization theory has enjoyed considerable empirical support in the literature (Pratt and Cullen 2005), there are reasons to question the role of strong social ties in producing low crime rates. First, in some neighborhoods, strong ties may work to impede efforts to establish social control. William Julius Wilson (1978), for example, has argued that residents of very poor neighborhoods tend to be tightly interconnected through network ties but do not necessarily produce collective resources such as social control. He reasons that ties in the inner city are excessively personalistic and parochial in nature—socially isolated from public resources and more tied to familial needs.

Second, networks connect do-gooders as well as they connect drug dealers. In her study of a black middle-class community in Chicago, Patillo (1999) specifically addresses the limits of tightly-knit social bonds in facilitating social control. She argues that dense local ties do promote social cohesion and hence inhibit crime, but at the same time they foster the growth of networks that impede efforts to rid the neighborhood of organized drug- and gang-related crime. In this way, dense social ties have positive and negative repercussions. In a consideration of networks, then, it is important to consider just what is being connected—networks are not inherently egalitarian or prosocial in nature.

Third, shared expectations for social control and strategic connections that yield social action can be fostered in the absence of thick ties among neighbors. As Granovetter (1973) argued in a seminal essay, “weak ties”—less intimate connections between people based on more infrequent social interaction—may be critical for establishing social resources, such as job referrals, because they integrate the community by way of bringing together otherwise disconnected subgroups. Consistent with this view, there is evidence that weak ties among neighbors, as manifested in middle-range rather than in either nonexistent or intensive social interaction, are predictive of lower crime rates (Bellair 1997).

Collective Efficacy Theory

Research on dense social ties reveals a paradox of sorts for thinking about crime. Many city dwellers have limited interaction with their neighbors and yet they appear to generate community-specific social capital. Moreover, urban areas where strong ties are tightly restricted geographically

may actually produce a climate that discourages collective responses to local problems. To address these urban realities, Sampson et al. (1997) have proposed a focus on mechanisms of social control that may be facilitated by strong ties or associations, but do not necessarily require them. Rejecting the unmoderated assumption that neighborhoods are characterized by dense, intimate, emotional bonds, they define neighborhoods in *ecological* terms and focus on variations in social cohesion and the shared expectations among residents for taking action to achieve social control. The theoretical concept of neighborhood *collective efficacy* captures the link between these two related but nonetheless distinct concepts—social cohesion of the collective (e.g., mutual support, trust) and shared expectations for control within that collective. Just as self-efficacy is situated rather than general (one has self-efficacy relative to a particular task), a neighborhood's efficacy exists relative to such specific tasks as maintaining public order and reducing crime.

To measure the social control aspect of collective efficacy, Sampson et al. (1997) asked residents whether their neighbors could be counted on to take action under various scenarios (for example, if children skip school and hang out on a street corner, or if the fire station closest to home is being threatened with budget cuts). The cohesion dimension was measured by items that capture the extent of local trust, willingness to help neighbors, a supportive fabric, a lack of conflict, and shared values. Published results show that after adjusting for a range of individual and neighborhood characteristics, including poverty and the density of friendship ties, collective efficacy is associated with substantially lower rates of violence. Neighborhoods high in collective efficacy predict significantly lower rates of violence, even where earlier experience of violence may have depressed collective efficacy because of fear.

Moving away from a focus on private ties, the use of the term “collective efficacy” is meant to signify an emphasis on shared beliefs in a neighborhood's capability in achieving an intended effect coupled with an active sense of engagement on the part of residents. Some density of social networks is essential, to be sure, especially networks rooted in social trust. But the key theoretical point is that networks have to be *activated* to be ultimately meaningful. In this way, collective efficacy helps to elevate the human agency aspect of social life over a perspective that restricts its attention mainly to the accumulation of stocks of social and economic resources. Distinguishing between the resource potential represented by personal ties and

the shared expectations for action among neighbors represented by collective efficacy helps clarify the dense networks paradox. *Namely, social networks foster the conditions under which collective efficacy may flourish, but they are not sufficient for the exercise of control.* The theoretical framework of collective efficacy therefore recognizes the transformed landscape of modern urban life and holds that community efficacy may indeed depend on working trust and social interaction, yet it does not require that one's neighbor or the local police officer be thy friend.

Nonexclusive Social Networks and Building Collective Efficacy

It is important to recognize that social relationships are neutral in the sense that they can be drawn upon for negative as well as positive goals. Indeed, collective efficacy theory is open to criticism if resources and social ties are used for nefarious purposes rather than for collective benefits. We would not consider racial exclusion in the form of racially defended neighborhoods, for example, to be a desirable result of social networking. It appears that many neighborhood associations in U.S. cities in the 1960s and 1970s were, in fact, exploited by whites to keep blacks from moving into white working-class areas. In judging whether neighborhood structures serve collective needs, the theory of collective efficacy therefore applies the nonexclusivity requirement of a social good: Does its consumption by one member of a community diminish the sum available to the community as a whole? The concern of this article—safety from crime—is a quintessential social good that yields positive externalities of benefit to all residents of a community, especially its children.

As with other resources that produce positive externalities, collective efficacy is dependent on specific normative and structural contexts. The natural question that follows is this: What are the kinds of contexts that promote (or undermine) collective efficacy and nonexclusive social networks? The evidence is incomplete but suggests that the infrastructure of local organizations and voluntary associations help sustain capacity for social action in a way that transcends traditional personal ties. In other words, organizations are in principle able to foster collective efficacy, often through strategic networking of their own. Whether it be disorder removal, school improvements, or police responses, a continuous stream of

challenges faces modern communities, challenges that no longer can be met by relying solely on individuals. Effective action depends on connections among organizations, connections that are not necessarily dense or reflective of the structure of personal ties in a neighborhood. Research supports this position by showing that the density of local organizations and the extent of voluntary associations among residents predict higher levels of collective efficacy, controlling for poverty, social composition, and the crime rate itself (Morenoff et al. 2001).

Inequality in other neighborhood resources also explains the production of collective efficacy. In particular, *concentrated disadvantage* and *residential instability* (especially lack of homeownership) predict lower levels of later collective efficacy, and the associations of disadvantage and housing instability with violence are reduced when collective efficacy is controlled. These patterns are consistent with the inference that neighborhood resources influence violence, in part, through the mediating role of neighborhood efficacy. Social resources and social networks thus create the capacity for collective efficacy, but it is the act of exercising control under conditions of trust that is the most proximate to explaining crime.

Networks of Neighborhoods

As I argued at the outset, networks need not be conceptualized only in personal terms. Neighborhoods are themselves nodes in a larger network of spatial relations. Contrary to the common assumption in criminology of independence among social units, neighborhoods are interdependent and characterized by a functional relationship between what happens at one point in space and what happens elsewhere—a neighborhood's neighbors matter.

Consider first the inexact correspondence between neighborhood boundaries and the ecological properties that shape social interaction. One of the biggest criticisms of neighborhood-level research concerns the artificiality of analytic boundaries; for example, two families living across the street from one another may be arbitrarily assigned to live in different neighborhoods even though they share social ties. Cross-neighborhood ties challenge the urban village and traditional theoretical model, which implicitly assume that neighborhoods represent intact social systems, functioning as islands unto themselves.

Second, spatial dependence is implicated because offenders are disproportionately involved in acts of crime and violence near their homes. From a routine activities perspective, it follows that a neighborhood's risk of violence is heightened by geographical proximity to places where known offenders live or to places characterized by ecological risk factors such as concentrated poverty or low collective efficacy.

A third motivation for studying spatial dependence relates to the notion that interpersonal crimes such as homicide are based on social interaction and thus subject to processes of spatial diffusion where effects may be felt far from the initial point of impact. Acts of violence may instigate a sequence of events that leads to further violence in a spatially channeled way. For example, many homicides are retaliatory in nature; a homicide in one neighborhood may provide the spark that eventually leads to a retaliatory killing in a nearby neighborhood. In addition, most homicides occur among persons known to one another and usually involve networks of association that follow a geographical logic.

There are good reasons, then, to believe that the characteristics of surrounding neighborhoods are crucial to understanding violence in any given neighborhood. Research supports this notion by establishing the salience of spatial proximity and the inequality of neighborhood resources that are played out in citywide dynamics. Racial segregation, manifested in these mechanisms of spatial inequality, explains how, despite similar income profiles, black middle-class neighborhoods are at greater risk for violence than white middle-class neighborhoods because of the former's greater proximity to poor, low collective efficacy areas. In short, crime is affected by the characteristics of spatially proximate neighborhoods, which in turn are affected by adjoining neighborhoods in a spatially linked process that ultimately characterizes the entire metropolitan system. Policies that focus solely on the internal characteristics of neighborhoods, as is typical, are simply insufficient.

Conclusion

The main point of this essay is that social ecology and collective efficacy are key factors in the explanation of why crime is so concentrated in certain neighborhoods. The density of social networks, however, is only one, and probably not the most important, characteristic of neighborhoods

that contributes to collective efficacy in reducing crime. Concentrated disadvantage, residential stability, home ownership, voluntary associations, and organizational density appear to be equally important, if not more so, than interpersonal ties. Furthermore, neighborhoods themselves are part of a spatial network encompassing the entire city—not only are individuals embedded but so are neighborhoods.

The future of neighborhood research will probably be increasingly cross national and comparative in nature. Efforts are now underway seeking to examine the general role of spatial inequality and neighborhood efficacy in cities around the world. For example, Sampson and Wikström (2005) demonstrate that rates of violence are predicted by collective efficacy in Stockholm just as in Chicago, and that collective efficacy is promoted by housing stability and undermined by concentrated disadvantage—again similarly in both cities. These data are in accord with a cross-national theory of neighborhood social ecology and crime. Indeed, even though Chicago and Stockholm vary dramatically in their poverty levels and rates of violence, this does not necessarily imply, nor yield, a difference in the fundamental processes or mechanisms that link communities and crime. The emerging data are also consistent with a general approach to policy that emphasizes ameliorating neighborhood inequality in social resources, including metropolitan spatial inequality, and enhancing social conditions that foster the collective efficacy of residents and organizations.

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6.2

Gangs as Social Actors

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Today, with more than a billion people inhabiting slums in an increasingly urban world (UN-Habitat 2003), and with at least 1.3 billion people living on less than \$1 per day (Castells 1996), gangs are more prevalent than ever. The concepts of classical criminology need reexamination to test their relevance in today's fast-changing world.

In the United States and Great Britain, subcultural explanations have always been among criminological theories possessing the most robust power to explain gangs. These explanations argue that within delinquent subcultures young boys (and a few studies include girls) rebel against the discipline of a dreary future in the factory by conforming to the law-violating norms of the group. Youth learned how to be a delinquent through contact with other delinquents as well as by identifying with and imitating media role models.

On the surface, it appears that subcultural and social learning theories may be well suited to describe the gangs of today. The mass media have much more influence globally than ever before and gangs are to be found in every part of the world: from Mumbai to Moscow; from Chicago to the Cape Flats; from Kono to Kingston. Young people have many more gang members to learn from, and a "gangsta" fashion statement consisting of chains, baggy pants, and "shades" exercises enormous influence over young people worldwide through the glitter of music videos.

This essay examines the industrial-era assumptions of subcultural theories and turns to the work of Manuel Castells and Alain Touraine to