

Next, Chapter 8 discusses how the proposed theory could be empirically tested, with an emphasis on HLM statistical models. Also, Chapter 8 considers how qualitative methods can be fruitfully used in multilevel studies of criminal opportunity and criminal acts.

Finally, Chapter 9 concludes by discussing the compatibility between our dynamic multicontextual criminal opportunity theory and legal and extralegal crime prevention and intervention measures.

#### NOTES

1. See especially Wilcox Rountree, Land, and Miethe (1994) and Wilcox Rountree and Land (1996a, 1996b, 2000).
2. In discussing the varying definitions of theory, Gibbs remarks: "In sociology the diverse conceptions of theory virtually defy description" (1972:15). For understanding the diversity in orientations toward sociological theory compare Blalock (1969), Blumer (1969), Gibbs (1972), Homans (1967), Hooks (1984), Kaplan (1964), Lyotard (1984), Popper (1965), Schroyer (1970), Seidman (1994), Sjöberg and Nett (1997), Stinchcombe (1968), and Zetterberg (1965).
3. See Cunningham and Taylor (1984).
4. See Braithwaite (1989).
5. For discussions of reasoning and theory development see Beveridge (1950), Nagel (1961), and Pearl (2000).
6. See Gibbs (1972:58-79) for a discussion of "dissensus" revolving around the criteria for assessing sociological theory.
7. See Popper (1965).
8. See Gibbs (1989). The criteria for assessing the production and presentation of empirical research is a related matter of crucial concern, but one that is beyond the scope of a book on theory.
9. Issues surrounding "causation," "correlation," and "probabilistic explanation" are key topics related to empirical validity, but are beyond the scope of our book. Kaplan (1964) offers a classic treatment of these issues. For a more contemporary treatment see Pearl (2000).
10. For examples of general social learning theories see Bandura (1969) and Skinner (1953).
11. For an example of this position see Gibbs (1989:188-90).
12. This grounding principle stems from the pioneering work of Cohen and Felson (1979).
13. See Birkbeck and LaFree (1993).
14. See Durkheim ([1895] 1938).
15. For example, see Clarke (1980), Cohen and Cantor (1981), Cohen and Felson (1979), Cohen, Kluegel, and Land (1981), Cook (1986), Cornish and Clarke (1986), Felson and Cohen (1980, 1981), Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo (1978).
16. For example, see Birkbeck and LaFree (1993), Cohen and Land (1987), Miethe and Meier (1990, 1994), Wilcox Rountree (1994), Wilcox Rountree, Land, and Miethe (1994).

## 2

### Criminal Opportunity A Necessary Condition and Central Construct

*Why opportunity?* We have thus far suggested that theory development is a useful and desirable enterprise—it is worth the bother. However, why single out opportunity as the conceptual cornerstone of a multicontextual theory of crime? After all, many concepts could be said to be primary causes of crime. While it may be understandable that a desire for parsimony leads to the identification of a core explanatory factor, it is not transparent as to why opportunity would be selected over all other competitors.

One reason we focus on opportunity is because it is assumed by all theories to be a necessary (if not sufficient) condition of crime. Even though it is widely assumed to be an essential component of any explanation of crime, criminal opportunity is typically left unspecified. The concept of criminal opportunity functions as a *deus ex machina*; that is, crime is said to spring forth from opportunity (among other things) but systematic conceptualizations and theorizing about opportunity as such are largely absent. Given that opportunity is an assumed necessary condition for crime, and given that it is a theoretical black box in that the details of its inner workings are unspecified and unexamined, it seems reasonable to advance a conceptual framework that takes criminal opportunity as its central focus.

While the concept of criminal opportunity has largely been undertheorized, two broad theoretical traditions have explored some of the inner workings of criminal opportunity—routine activities and social control—disorganization theories. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss these two broad traditions to reveal the theoretical origins and foundations upon which we build our criminal opportunity theory. In so doing, we are able to identify criminal opportunity theory's basic assumptions, concepts, and propositions. In addition to considering the history and

basic contours of criminal opportunity theory, we identify areas that have been undeveloped or underdeveloped, suggesting how our modified approach can address those neglected concerns.

### THE ORIGINS AND FOUNDATIONS OF CRIMINAL OPPORTUNITY THEORY

The origins and foundations of criminal opportunity theory can be traced to the birth of criminology in the eighteenth century. While it would be possible to offer a detailed exegesis that documents the continual development of criminal opportunity from the eighteenth century to present, we choose instead to focus on twentieth-century influences primarily. Our sketch of criminal opportunity theory therefore focuses on two major influences: routine activities and social control-disorganization theories.<sup>1</sup> It is certainly true that routine activities and social control-disorganization perspectives could be seen as *competing* approaches, rather than mere complementary variants within the same theoretical tradition. Indeed, within the routine activities tradition itself, there are variations that suggest incompatibility. However, we believe that criminal opportunity theory is strengthened by considering simultaneously routine activities theory, microlevel control theories, and the ecological orientation found in the control variant of social disorganization theory. In the next chapter, we argue that the apparent contradictions between and within the two traditions can be reconciled and integrated into a logically consistent, multi-contextual criminal opportunity theory. Here, we review both traditions because both are indispensable for our development of a criminal opportunity theory that is centered around the individual-environment-temporal nexus.

#### The Routine Activities Tradition

The routine activities perspective does not focus on the emergence of social tendencies in the *criminal*. Instead, the routine activities approach stems from rational choice assumptions and emphasizes the circumstances under which *crime* is most likely. Criminal inclinations are taken as given, and the theory instead focuses on the way in which the circumstances surrounding a criminal event are nonrandomly, socially structured.<sup>3</sup> In doing so, it stresses the interdependence between the activities and behavior patterns of victims and the decisions and behaviors of offenders.<sup>4</sup> By focusing on the circumstances of crime, routine activities theory is well positioned to stress the complementary, symbiotic relationship between criminal offending and victimization experiences.<sup>5</sup> The routine activities perspective is depicted in Figure 2.1, which illustrates

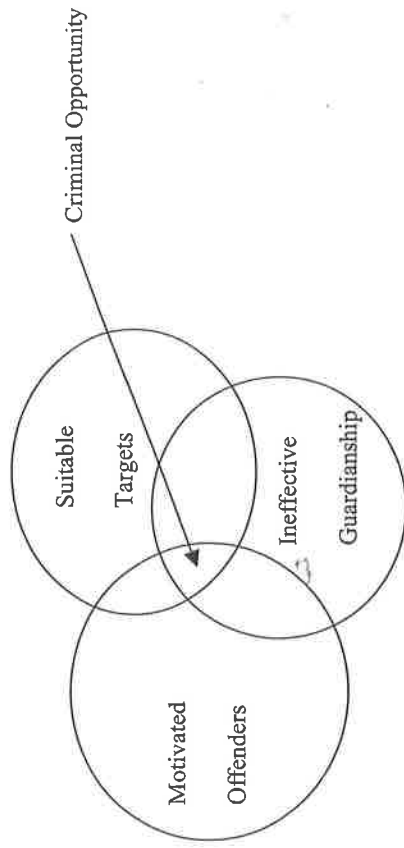


Figure 2.1. Criminal opportunity according to routine activities theory.

that criminal opportunity exists in the intersection of motivated offenders, suitable targets, and ineffective guardianship.

Discussing the development of routine activities theory reveals both micro- and macrostrains of this perspective. A useful starting point for a discussion of routine activities theory is Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo's (1978) *Victims of Personal Crime*. Hindelang et al. were the first to propose the idea that victimization likelihood is a function of lifestyle characteristics. More specifically, their lifestyle exposure model suggests that there are strong sociodemographic correlates (e.g., age, race, sex, income, marital status) with victimization because they serve as indicators of lifestyles that expose one to crime. Hindelang et al. define lifestyle as "routine daily activities, both vocational activities (work, school, keeping house, etc.) and leisure activities" (ibid.:241). From this perspective, lifestyle variations "are important because they are related to the differential exposure to dangerous places, times, and others—i.e., situations in which there are high risks of victimization" (Miethe and Meier 1994:32). Miethe and Meier provide a succinct description of the lifestyle argument:

Differences in lifestyles are socially determined by individuals' collective responses or adaptations to various role expectations and structural constraints. Under this theoretical model, both ascribed and achieved social characteristics (e.g., age, gender, race, income, marital status, education, occupation) are important correlates of predatory crime because these status attributes carry with them shared expectations about appropriate behavior and structural obstacles that both enable and constrain one's behavioral choices. Adherence to these cultural and structural expectations leads to the establishment of routine activity patterns and associations with others

similarly situated. These lifestyles and associations are expected to enhance one's exposure to risky or vulnerable situations that, in turn, increases an individual's chances of victimization. (ibid.)

In essence, Hindelang et al. (1978) represents a microlevel routine activities perspective that explains victimization at the individual level. In fact, most of the tests of routine activities theories have been examinations of this sort of microlevel choice approach. One could even argue that micro-routine activities theory has accounted for much of the explosion in studies of victimization occurring within the past several decades. Micro-routine activities theory's explicit inclusion of the pertinent role of the victim makes it a natural fit for those interested in understanding crime from the standpoint of victimization. In a microlevel application of routine activities theory, *individual risk factors*—including exposure to motivated offenders, proximity to offenders, guardianship of property, and level of target attractiveness—are integral in determining whether or not a *victimization* is likely.<sup>6</sup> These individual risk factors—presumed to be indicated by activities of daily living or lifestyle choices—affect one's likelihood of becoming a victim either by providing or inhibiting criminal opportunity in the form of the likely convergence in time and space of an offender and an unguarded and otherwise suitable target. Thus, though the focus of the micro-routine activities perspective is the act of crime or victimization, behavioral properties of individuals involved in this act (i.e., the victim, third parties) are integral in understanding the dynamics behind a successful criminal/victimization event.

Although the impetus for the development of a lifestyle perspective on victimization can be credited to the pioneering work of Hindelang et al. (1978), Cohen, Felson, Land, Cook, Miethe, and others have been largely responsible for refining such propositions into an explicitly sound, testable routine activities theory. To elaborate, Cohen and Felson (1979) construct an ecological interdependence model that sees individuals acting within particular spatial and temporal contexts. From Cohen and Felson's ecological interdependence perspective, routine activities are "any recurrent and prevalent activities which provide for basic population and individual needs" (ibid.:593). Routine activities encompass work and leisure, and "population and individual needs" include "food, shelter, and other basic needs or desires (e.g., companionship, sexual expression)" (Miethe and Meier 1994:36). Borrowing from Hawley's (1950) human ecology theory, Cohen and Felson (1979:590) see human beings situated in an ecological niche in which macropatterns of routine activities can be characterized by rhythm ("the regular periodicity with which events occur, as with the rhythm of travel"), tempo ("the number of events per unit of time, such the number of criminal violations per day on a given street"), and timing ("the

coordination among different activities which are more or less interdependent, such as the coordination of an offender's rhythms with those of a victim").<sup>7</sup> Structural changes in routine activity patterns impact the convergence in time and space of motivated offenders, suitable targets, and capable guardians, which, in turn, influence crime rates. In other words, social changes in societal patterns of conventional routine activities impact criminal opportunity, which then affects the likelihood that criminal acts will occur. Cohen and Felson (1979) maintain that given offender motivation, routine activities that lead to the space-time convergence of suitable targets and the absence of capable guardians will result in increased crime rates.

Figures 2.2 and 2.3 illustrate several scenarios in which criminal opportunity is produced through this space-time convergence of motivated offenders, suitable targets, and ineffective guardianship. It is clear from these figures not only that criminal opportunity is a function of the amount of convergence (overlap) between a supply of motivated offenders, suitable targets, and ineffective guardianship, but it is important to recognize that the overlap itself is sometimes a function of the actual amount or supply of offenders, suitable targets, and ineffective guardianship. For instance, Figure 2.2 depicts a situation in which the amount of criminal opportunity varies across time 1, time 2, and time 3 as a function of the degree of overlap (in time and space) between motivated offenders, suitable targets, and ineffective guardianship. While the supply of each of the three elements of criminal opportunity is constant at all three time points, time 1 clearly provides the most criminal opportunity of the three scenarios, since the overlap in time and space is greatest. At time 2 there is substantially less convergence, and at time 3 there is no convergence of all three elements. In Figure 2.3, the convergence (in terms of size of overlap) is shown to be partly a function of the potentially changing size of the supply of motivated offenders, suitable targets, and ineffective guardianship.

Borrowing from both Hindelang et al. (1978) and Cohen and Felson (1979), Cohen, Kluegel, and Land (1981) incorporate individual-level lifestyle risk factors with a routine activities emphasis on the convergence of motivated offenders, suitable targets, and ineffective guardianship. Their resulting exegesis represents a significant step toward a criminal opportunity perspective of crime *and* victimization at the microlevel in particular. Specifically, Cohen et al. offer these foundational hypotheses:

1. All else being equal, the more one is exposed to motivated offenders (e.g., the more time one spends outside the home or participating in dangerous activities), the greater is the likelihood for crime/victimization.

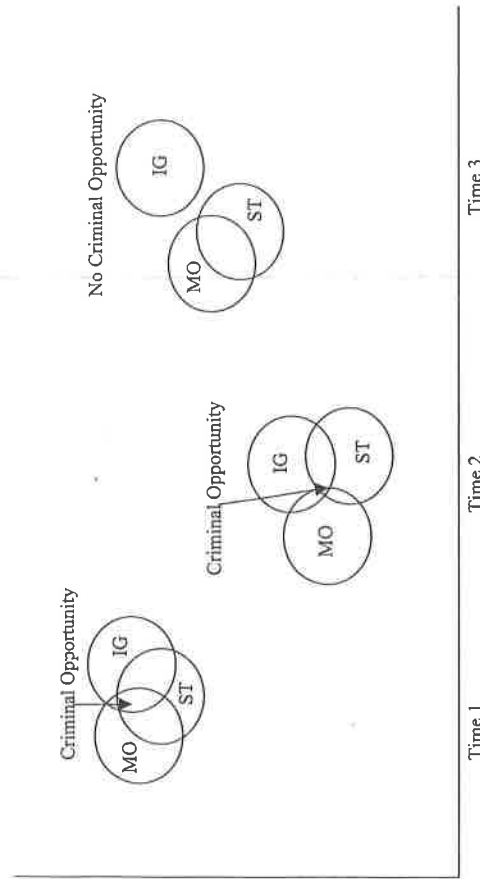


Figure 2.2. A dynamic view of criminal opportunity.

2. All else being equal, the closer one is (in proximity) to areas with high rates of offending, the greater the likelihood for crime/victimization.
3. All else being equal, the less guarded (e.g., nobody home, no alarms, no neighborhood watch, no dog, living alone) a target for crime, the greater is the likelihood that crime will be committed against that target.
4. All else being equal, the more attractive (i.e., valuable) a target, the greater is the likelihood that a crime will be committed against that target.

When considered together, micro-<sup>8</sup> and macrolevel routine activities approaches<sup>9</sup> provide a foundation for developing a multilevel theory of criminal opportunity that incorporates both individual and ecological factors and that is capable of explaining both offending and victimization. We use these different strains of routine activities theory as foundations in our theoretical integration. We use them both in conjunction with several social control-disorganization models—the component to which we now turn.

### The Social Control-Disorganization Tradition

Considered in a very broad sense, the social control perspective in criminology views crime as a result of the exertion of inadequate control on the part of one or more of various social institutions, including but not exclusive to family, school, community, and the criminal justice system. We

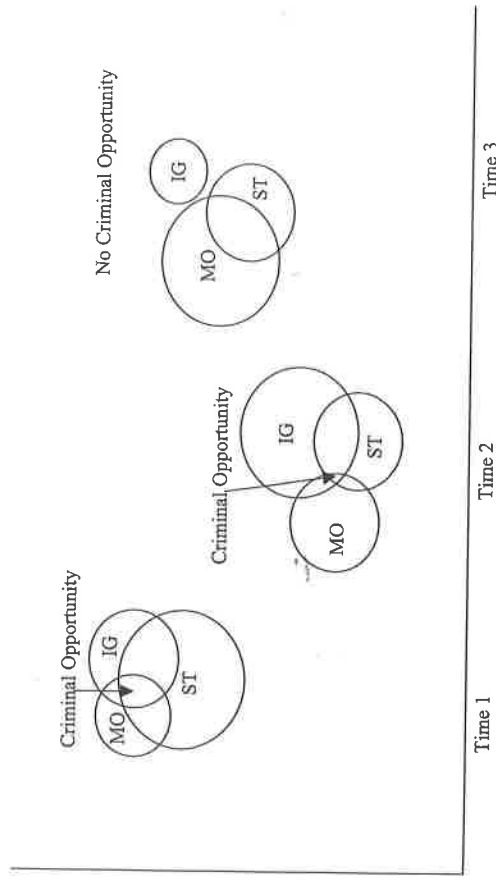


Figure 2.3. Another dynamic view of criminal opportunity.

view both formal and informal controls from both individual and environmental levels of analysis as important in defining criminal opportunity. Hence, our multilevel criminal opportunity theory draws upon a variety of control theories, including social bonding, social disorganization, and deterrence theories.

*Social Bonding Theory.* From a microlevel informal social-control perspective, Hirschi's (1969) ideas regarding social bonding are important. In his exposition of one of the most widely tested theories in criminology, Hirschi posited that delinquency resulted from the absence of a strong social bond. According to Hirschi, an effective social bond consists of four elements: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. Attachment refers to the affective ties between individuals and their significant others. Persons with strong attachment are concerned about the thoughts, feelings, and reactions of these significant others. This concern creates a stake in conformity; attached individuals do not want to disappoint those about whom they care. Commitment refers to the adherence to conventional, age-appropriate "ideals." Social norms dictate that school-age children should adhere to the goal of finishing high school and going to college; children with commitment aspire to do these things. Social norms dictate that young adults should strive to get a well-paying job and get married; adults who are committed share these aspirations. Commitment also provides a stake in conformity and thus enhances social control. Strongly bonded individuals do not want to jeopardize their ability to meet these aspirations. Involvement refers to the level of participation in conventional activities, such as

homework, school clubs, and athletics. It is the behavioral flip side of cognitively based commitment. Hirschi assumed that greater involvement in conventional activities created less time for nonconventional or criminal activities. Finally, belief refers to the acceptance of the value and validity of societal rules. If one believes the rules are "right," a stake in conformity is again established.

Though there is conceptual overlap in Hirschi's concepts, causing researchers to use similar measures to operationalize different concepts, there is fairly consistent evidence in the empirical literature that a strong social bond—especially regarding ties to family and school—does serve to inhibit a variety of crimes.<sup>10</sup> Again, the theory is rooted in the idea that individual-level informal social controls help identify the costs versus the benefits of crime. It is compatible with other theories that emphasize crime costs in the form of controls, including a social disorganization theory emphasizing macrolevel informal social controls and a deterrence theory emphasizing formal social controls. It is to these additional control theories that we now turn.

*Social Disorganization Theory.* The relationships between ecologically based informal control factors and crime are systematically explored by social disorganization theory, developed from the Chicago studies done in the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup> Rooted firmly in the urban ecology tradition, they provide a macrosociological or community-level model that focuses on the characteristics of aggregates that lead to increased likelihood of criminal acts. Shaw and McKay (1942) found that crime rates were differentially distributed across the city in a nonrandom fashion. The communities closest to the city's center were those where crime was most pervasive. These neighborhoods were areas in transition, characterized by aggregate-level low socioeconomic status, high ethnic/racial heterogeneity, and high residential mobility. Despite population succession, these areas continually had the highest rates of crime in the city. From this finding, Shaw and McKay concluded that these elevated levels of crime were not a function of the personal characteristics of the groups inhabiting the communities. Rather, they posited that the structural factors of poverty, high heterogeneity, and high mobility created "social disorganization," and it was community-level social disorganization that was presumed to cause crime.<sup>12</sup>

As depicted in Figure 2.4a, the social disorganization perspective maintains that ecological characteristics of communities in transition produce social disorganization, which then gives rise to criminal acts. It should be noted that we adopt a classification and interpretation of social disorganization theory that entails viewing it as a type of control model—one rooted in the notion that crime results from insufficient social controls. Kornhauser's (1978) seminal analysis of criminological theory revealed two



Figure 2.4a. Model implied by Shaw and McKay's social disorganization theory.

variants of social disorganization theory—a strain variant and a control variant. Kornhauser argued that "the intervening causes of delinquency are in varying pressures (strains) or varying constraints (controls) resulting from varying degrees of social disorganization" (ibid.:24). She ultimately supports the control conceptualization of social disorganization theory over the strain conceptualization, and we follow this lead in our conceptualization of social disorganization as a control model. Accordingly, as stated by Kornhauser:

Delinquency is an omnipresent vulnerability, the resort to which is not of frustrated wants but of the ratio of its costs to its benefits. Thus differential vulnerability to delinquency is determined by variation in the strength of social controls, the sum of which account for the net costs of delinquency. (ibid.)

So, much like bonding theory, crime costs in the form of social controls are emphasized. Here, however, the controls are not in the forms of individual-level social bonds, but rather community-level ties. Weakened community-level attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief is analogous to social disorganization. A community in a state of social disorganization cannot establish or maintain consensus concerning values, norms, roles, or hierarchical arrangements among its members.<sup>13</sup> Such a community lacks the Durkheimian ([1893] 1964) notions of cohesiveness and social solidarity, and it can neither provide a sense of belonging nor easily achieve community goals.<sup>14</sup> With no realization of common values, informal social control is inoperative and opportunities for crime flourish.<sup>15</sup> While Shaw and McKay never actually measured social disorganization—the inability of a community to organize around common norms, achieve goals, and effectively control members—they assumed that the relationships between high crime and structural indicators such as ethnic/racial heterogeneity, residential mobility, and low SES resulted from that unmeasured concept.

During the second half of the twentieth century, criminologists began to dismiss general macrosociological approaches, including social disorganization theory specifically, in favor of social-psychological or individual-level explanations of criminal motivation and behavior. Such a disciplinary

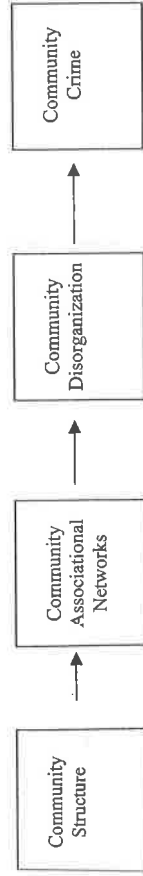


Figure 2.4b. Social disorganization theory based upon the systemic model of community attachment.

environment has generally been unfriendly to the social disorganization perspective, inasmuch as Shaw and McKay's theory resembles a group-level variant of control theory in which criminal motivation is assumed and accounting for conditions in which crime can successfully occur is emphasized.<sup>16</sup> Being group-level *and* motivational has made the theory doubly unpopular during much of the most recent half-century (1950–2000). However, in the past several decades (since ca. 1980), social disorganization theory has been rejuvenated within the discipline, as scholars revamp Shaw and McKay's ideas in an attempt to compensate for an overemphasis on the individual. The contemporary community-crime models in this tradition have been based on the “systemic model of community attachment” as posited by Kasarda and Janowitz (1974). According to Kasarda and Janowitz, community represents “a complex system of friendship and kinship networks and informal and formal associational ties rooted in family life and ongoing socialization processes” (ibid.:328). This idea of systemic community attachment was very similar to Shaw and McKay's notion of social disorganization. In fact, many contemporary tests of social disorganization theory<sup>17</sup> rely upon the idea of systemic community attachment for operationalizing the process of social (dis)organization. While the idea of social networks is implicit in Shaw and McKay's ideas regarding “social disorganization,” the systemic model of community attachment makes this process a more explicit part of the theory. Figure 2.4b shows that the systemic model of social disorganization theory posits that ecological characteristics of communities in transition disrupt community associational networks, thus producing social disorganization, which, in turn, produces criminal acts.

In recent empirical work, researchers have continued to find support for the social ecology of crime argument first put forth by Shaw and McKay and have extended its explanatory coverage in applying the theory to victimization risk as well. Since social disorganization theory focuses on the environmental or structural conditions necessary for criminal acts to occur—not necessarily for criminality to develop within individuals—this perspective is ideal for appropriately accounting for both crime and victimization, as both of these experiences are components of

the same event. Further, social disorganization theory successfully explains crime rates and victimization risks associated with a diverse range of criminal acts—not just the officially recorded juvenile delinquency to which Shaw and McKay referred. Both instrumental and expressive acts—both property and violent events—which have a wide-spread impact upon the community as a whole, are suited for a social disorganization explanation. Bursik (1988), for instance, sees few exceptions to the breadth of crime falling within social disorganization theory's scope, arguing that inapplicability might only characterize crimes for which there is a low degree of community consensus regarding morality/immorality—such as petty crimes—and crimes for which there is no general threat involved—such as white-collar crime. In addition to an emphasis on the physical characteristics of environments (e.g., population density), it should be noted that this view incorporates a temporal dimension by suggesting that rapid social change (e.g., population mobility) is indicative of social disorganization. It should also be noted that this theory argues that social disorganization inhibits informal social control (i.e., guardianship) and thereby provides opportunities for criminal acts.

*Deterrence Theory.* In his seminal work, Gibbs (1975:2) defines deterrence as “the omission of an act as a response to the perceived risk and fear of punishment for contrary behavior. So, much like social bonding theory and the control variant of social disorganization theory, deterrence theory rests on the premise that crime occurs when it is not controlled—when the stake in conformity is diminished. But, deterrence theory deemphasizes informal social control exerted by institutions such as family, school, and community. Instead, it tends to emphasize the control exerted by formal agents, or those associated with the legal/criminal justice system. According to deterrence theory, social control occurs when formal punishments are perceived/fearful to be certain, severe, and swift. It is assumed that certain, severe, and swift punishments will serve to both diminish future crime among those experiencing punishment (specific deterrence) and prevent potential offenders throughout society, who presumably are knowledgeable of the costs of crime, from engaging in criminal acts (general deterrence).

Because deterrence theory relies upon the assumption that it is perceived punishment that is important, skepticism surrounds earlier research<sup>18</sup> focusing on aggregate-level objective measures of certainty (e.g., arrest or clearance rates) and severity of punishment (e.g., time served, presence of the death penalty), including policy impact studies.<sup>19</sup> The aggregate-level studies have produced very mixed results and have introduced important methodological limitations surrounding aggregation bias and temporal ordering.<sup>20</sup> More recently, time series studies (e.g., ARIMA models) of aggregate patterns of control and crime have attempted to refine tests of

deterrence theory. These also yield mixed results, though most fail to support the deterrence argument.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps more consistent with the theory are more explicit measures of *perceived* certainty, severity, and celerity of punishment. Studies utilizing survey-based perceptual measures have, over the past several decades, also yielded mixed results.<sup>22</sup> A thorough recounting of this rather voluminous literature is beyond the scope of this book. In general, we offer that while some perceptual research supports the notion that perceived certainty of punishment, in particular, is important in deterring crime, other research suggests that it is the threat of informal sanctions that deters.<sup>23</sup> However, criticism surrounds the notion of incorporating informal sanctions (e.g., embarrassment, loss of relationships) into the study of deterrence. This criticism suggests that original formulations of deterrence theory clearly focus on the effects of formal sanctions, and therefore interest in informal sanctions represents entry into different theoretical territory.<sup>24</sup> As an alternative to incorporating informal controls into deterrence theory, we offer an integrative perspective that allows social controls of a variety of sorts—formal and informal, and from different levels of analysis—to serve as indicators of guardianship and thus be used in conjunction with routine activities theory in a more general, multicontextual criminal opportunity theory.

While the general criminal opportunity theory offered here tends to emphasize informal controls in the emergence of criminal opportunity contexts, we do not dismiss altogether the potential role of certain forms of formal social control, such as police surveillance. In fact, we suggest that the similar orientations of each of these strains of social control theory (deterrence, bonding, and disorganization) allow them to be used together, and used in conjunction with routine activities theory, in establishing a more comprehensive conceptualization of criminal opportunity.<sup>25</sup> Further, we propose to use this revised conceptualization to explain not only criminal offending, but victimization, and “responses” to crime including risk perception, fear, and constrained behavior. Some very recent work hints at these integrative and extension possibilities. There have been recent lines of inquiry that have served to extend the two traditions of routine activities and social control in new, simultaneous directions. We present two of these recent lines of inquiry here: multilevel opportunity models of crime/victimization and opportunity models of reactions to crime/victimization.

#### MULTILEVEL OPPORTUNITY MODELS OF CRIME/VICTIMIZATION

Recent studies of criminal victimization have moved away from an exclusive focus on *either* micro- or macrolevel processes. Instead, rooted in the

routine activities and social control-disorganization theoretical traditions, multilevel studies have emerged that incorporate *both* micro- and macrolevel factors. More specifically, these multilevel analyses integrate individual- and neighborhood-level variables within traditional linear or logistic regression models to examine the effects criminal opportunity and informal community control have on crime and victimization. Furthermore, studies have begun to examine the simultaneous effects of “opportunity”—conceptualized as individual exposure and proximity to offenders, target vulnerability, and diminished guardianship—and criminogenic ecological context—conceptualized as weakened informal social control, or more recently, diminished “collective efficacy.”<sup>26</sup>

For instance, in a study of individuals and households within 238 neighborhoods (electoral wards) in England and Wales, Sampson and Wooldredge (1987) found individual-level activity patterns, especially those related to exposure and guardianship (e.g., living alone and frequency with which one “goes out” or leaves a home unoccupied), to be important determinants of burglary victimization risk. However, aggregate characteristics of the British neighborhoods—percentage of single-person households, percentage of single-parent households, percentage of unemployed, housing density, and social cohesion—were also directly related to burglary victimization risk.

In their study of fifty-seven U.S. neighborhoods (across Rochester, St. Louis, and Tampa-St. Petersburg), Smith and Jarjoura (1989) also found that household characteristics related to exposure and guardianship *as well as* neighborhood contextual factors such as racial heterogeneity, residential instability, population age structure (percentage aged twelve to twenty), percentage of single-parent households, social integration, and median income affected household burglary victimization.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, Kennedy and Forde (1990), analyzing data from the Canadian Urban Victimization Survey, found increased exposure and low guardianship to have positive effects on both property and violent victimization. In addition, Kennedy and Forde found that characteristics of the census metropolitan areas (CMAs), such as percent unemployed and percentage of families with low incomes, were consistent determinants of victimization across many offense categories. With respect to breaking and entering victimization specifically, Kennedy and Forde found that lifestyle characteristics such as the frequency with which one went walking or driving at night or the frequency with which one attended bars, sporting events, movies, work, or class—all suggestive of diminished guardianship and/or heightened exposure—increased victimization risk. In addition, community-level unemployment—thought to increase neighborhood guardianship—decreased breaking and entering victimization, while percentage of low-income families (an indicator of proximity) increased risk.

Fisher, Sloan, Cullen, and Lu's (1998) study of victimization among over three thousand college students across twelve different institutions incorporated individual-level, institution-level, and census tract-level measures of exposure, proximity, target attractiveness, and guardianship into logistic regression models of both theft and violent victimization. Most of the significant effects in their models were at the individual-level. Fisher et al. state:

Contextual variables suggested by the lifestyle-routine activities approach, however, had only limited effects in predicting property victimization—a finding that was obtained for violent victimization as well. None of these factors was related to violent victimization and only two were related to property victimization. (ibid.:700)

Nonetheless, Fisher et al. speculate that a larger sample of institutions might have revealed greater contextual variation. Another explanation offered for the weak contextual effects—especially at the census tract level—is that college campuses may indeed be “ivory towers” impervious to the effects of the broader social context in which they are situated.

Thompson and Fisher (1996) examined individual- and community-level influences on household larceny. Their findings suggest higher risks for households with children, households in nonurban areas, households with shorter tenure within a neighborhood, and households with low informal social control in terms of neighborly surveillance.

Miethe and McDowall (1993) extended the contextual study of victimization by examining micro-macro interactions. In their study of residents in three hundred Seattle neighborhoods, Miethe and McDowall found target attractiveness (e.g., owning expensive, portable goods) and guardianship measures (e.g., living alone and taking safety precautions) to have neighborhood-specific effects. These routine activity risk factors were weak predictors of burglary victimization risk in socially disorganized areas. Yet, within neighborhoods with high-SES, less mobile populations, these same factors were key predictors.<sup>28</sup>

While the contextual studies reviewed above have advanced knowledge in terms of delineating the mutual effects of micro- and macro-processes as well as the embeddedness of individual-level effects within community-level dynamics, the hierarchical nature of the multilevel data under study—with individuals clustered nonrandomly into neighborhoods—calls for nontraditional modeling methods that would avoid the violation of important assumptions of traditional regression procedures (e.g., assumptions related to independence of errors). To address this issue, Wilcox Rountree et al. (1994) integrated individual-level routine activity variables and neighborhood-level social disorganization variables into hierarchical logistic regression models of violent and property (bur-

glary) victimization using the same Seattle data analyzed by Miethe and McDowall (1993). More complex contextual findings were portrayed in such hierarchical models. For instance, using traditional logistic regression methods, Miethe and McDowall concluded that the likelihood of violent-crime victimization did not vary significantly across Seattle neighborhoods. Further, these researchers found no evidence of variation in the predictors of violent victimization across neighborhood contexts. However, the Wilcox Rountree et al. (1994) study revealed that risk for violent victimization, in fact, differed significantly across Seattle neighborhoods. In addition, the effects that individuals' race and protective behavior had on violent victimization were conditional upon neighborhood context. Key community characteristics that accounted for the variable effects included neighborhood incivility, neighborhood density or traffic, and neighborhood-level ethnic heterogeneity. Similarly, in comparison to Miethe and McDowall (1993), the Wilcox Rountree et al. (1994) study revealed more dramatic contextual effects for ethnic heterogeneity and community incivility on variability of burglary victimization across neighborhood units.

Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997) also integrate individual and community characteristics within hierarchical models in their study of violent crime across 343 Chicago neighborhoods. Using reports of violent victimization as one measure of violence, Sampson et al. found community-level collective efficacy to decrease violent victimization risk, controlling for individual-level risk factors. In addition, collective efficacy mediated much of the effects of structural disadvantage and residential stability, though immigrant concentration remained a significant (positive) predictor of violent victimization risk while controlling for collective efficacy as well as individual-level risk factors. Sampson et al. did not estimate these models with respect to burglary victimization.

Finally, in one of the only studies to date to examine the question of generalizability in multilevel models of victimizations, Wilcox Rountree and Land (2000) compare such models across Rochester, St. Louis, and Tampa-St. Petersburg. Wilcox Rountree and Land (2000) conclude that their findings make a case for the generalizability of opportunity-based multilevel victimization models, as they found substantial consistency across the three cities studied. For instance, mean burglary victimization risk varied significantly across neighborhoods in all cities examined, while the individual-level, opportunity-related covariates of victimization (e.g., family income, living alone) did not vary in their effects across neighborhood or city contexts. Second, much of the variability in burglary victimization risk across neighborhoods was accounted for by the inclusion of neighborhood-level covariates, including average income, ethnic heterogeneity, residential mobility, and social ties.



### OPPORTUNITY MODELS OF REACTIONS TO CRIME/VICTIMIZATION

Further developments in opportunity theory have extended social control-disorganization and routine activities theories to explanations of *reactions* to crime as opposed to crime and/or victimization per se. In his 1986 article, "The Demand and Supply of Criminal Opportunities," Philip Cook delineates a limitation of extant routine activities models such as those used in the research reviewed above. According to Cook, "one important element that is lacking from the life-style model is a 'feedback loop' by which the individual's exposure to risky circumstances is influenced by his concern with being victimized" (ibid.:6). Such a view is built around the assumption that individuals choose their routine activities rationally—they are neither socially constrained nor circumstantial phenomena (ibid.). Thus, individuals base their choice of activities on their perceptions regarding threat of criminal victimization. Furthermore, this perception of threat is rationally conceived on the part of an individual based upon such things as vulnerability and perceived risk, perceived seriousness, actual incidence of victimization, or neighborhood/city conditions.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, if individuals perceive themselves to be vulnerable targets (physically, emotionally, economically, etc.), or if they have been victimized previously or reside in socially disorganized neighborhoods, they will probably engage in compensatory self-protection efforts, thus influencing routine activities.

Liska and colleagues addressed certain aspects of Cook's "feedback loop" in research examining the effects of fear of crime and routine activities.<sup>30</sup> In particular, Liska et al. (1988) demonstrated reciprocity between fear of crime and constrained behavior. They found that fear of crime constrained social behavior in the sense that fearful individuals engaged in fewer activities outside the home or more frequently changed activities because of crime. Liska et al. (1988) also found that constrained social activities increased fear of crime. Later, Liska and Warner (1991) modeled the relationship between fear of crime, routine activities (constrained behavior), and crime across cities using nonrecursive structural equation systems. Their findings indicate that a "feedback loop" is evident; while urban crime rates affected routine activities by constraining behavior through fear, the constrained routine activities, in turn, influenced subsequent crime/victimization rates (decreasing them), presumably by limiting criminal opportunities. Such findings suggest that opportunity not only affects crime but reactions to crime (such as fear), and these reactions can, in turn, affect subsequent activities and future crime.

Social disorganization theory in the control tradition has also been extended into the literature on reactions to crime. While some "fear of

crime" and "risk perception" studies focus on aspects of the social context such as novelty versus familiarity, darkness versus daytime, and being alone versus bystander density,<sup>31</sup> other studies have used structural indicators resembling more closely the social disorganization tradition. In their seminal works, Skogan and Maxfield (1981) and Skogan (1990) test models in which social integration, neighborhood-level crime, and community disorder (boisterousness, drunkenness, untidiness, etc.) are thought to affect levels of fear, and they find that such structural covariates are indeed important in predicting anxiety about crime. Numerous works by Taylor, Ferraro, and their colleagues also suggest strong effects on fear for perceptions of neighborhood problems, or "disorder."<sup>32</sup> Finally, Lewis and Salem (1986) provide evidence from their aggregate study across ten neighborhoods that fear is more than simply a function of crime/victimization within an area; concern about incivility and available networks of social control (e.g., social integration and organizational strength) are also found to be of importance in understanding community levels of concern about crime. Lewis and Salem point out that "the fact that fear levels exceed those measuring both crime awareness and crime concern might be due in most neighborhoods to the compounding effect of the other incivility concerns" (1986:76). So, more general problems of disorder or disorganization which are perhaps perceived by many to be indicative or symbolic of "more trouble to come" (i.e., in the form of crime) increase fear among respondents in studies that include such measures. These findings seem to be consistent with James Q. Wilson and George Kelling's ideas regarding "broken windows":

But the link between order-maintenance and crime-prevention, so obvious to earlier generations, was forgotten. That link is similar to the process whereby one broken window becomes many. The citizen who fears the ill-smelling drunk, the rowdy teenager, or the importuning beggar is not merely expressing his distaste for unseemly behavior, he is also giving voice to a bit of folk wisdom that happens to be a correct generalization—namely, that serious street crime flourishes in areas in which disorderly behavior goes unchecked. (1982:34)

Disorder and incivilities within an area, then, serve to indicate inadequate social control, and the idea is that if a community can not control the sobriety of its members, the tranquility and tidiness of its streets, etc., it is inevitable that it will also be unable to control crime. The limited research done on disorder seems to support the notion that residents of disorderly communities do correctly perceive the relationship between incivility and crime—neighborhood disorder is a significant predictor of anxiety about victimization. Such findings also support the idea originally conceived by Garofalo and Laub (1979)—that "fear of crime" may be more than "fear"

of "crime." Rather, "fear of crime" may represent a more general concern about problems within a community—problems that perhaps often accompany crime-ridden areas and are thus perceived of in a manner similar to crime. In fact, Garofalo and Laub suggest that "fear of crime" may really refer to "urban unease." Thus when people say that they are fearful of crime, they may not only be concerned about crime itself, but also about the contextual conditions conducive to crime.

Beyond the focus on community disorder, other studies of risk perception and fear of crime have suggested that additional contextual variables related to "social disorganization" are important, including population density, poverty, and proportion nonwhite.<sup>33</sup> These studies, which incorporate contextual variables to account for variations in levels of fear, have added substantially to our understanding of this phenomenon. These research findings have forced us to recognize factors that affect fear beyond the psychological level. Further, these studies have expanded the usefulness of social control-disorganization theory, implying that indicators of social disorganization at the aggregate level not only serve to increase crime and victimization in an area, but also to heighten concern over crime.

Recent multilevel work addresses the link between routine activities, structural conditions, victimization, and reactions to crime.<sup>34</sup> Wilcox Rountree and Land's (1996a) secondary analysis of Miethe's (1992) Seattle-based survey data suggest that individual-level routine activities and indicators of ambient disorganization not only affect victimization, but also have direct effects on perception of risk, which, in turn, affects subsequent individual-level precautionary measures. Their subsequent work has attempted to disentangle the effects of routine activities on different types of reactions to crime/victimization, including cognitive risk perception and crime-specific emotionally based "fear." For instance, Wilcox Rountree and Land (1996b) found that indicators of exposure, target attractiveness, and guardianship—including ownership of portable household goods, safety precautions, guardianship barriers on property, access routes to house, and having a corner residence—increased worry (fear) of burglary; similar but fewer effects were found with respect to general, cognitive risk perception. In terms of environmental influences, Wilcox Rountree and Land (1996b) found that incivilities heightened both risk perception and fear of crime. Social integration also increased fear of burglary, but it had a negative effect on crime risk perception.

Though risk perception, as opposed to fear, is thought to be the more rationally driven reaction to crime, the findings of Wilcox Rountree and Land (1996b) suggest that even emotionally based "fears" are often rationally situated within contexts of perceived criminal opportunity. Wilcox Rountree (1998) extended these findings in showing that different crime-

specific fears (including fear of burglary and fear of violence) are influenced by criminal-opportunity-related risk factors at both individual and neighborhood levels, even controlling for previous victimization and perceived risk. Ferraro's (1995) analysis of data from the Fear of Crime in America Survey also shows lifestyle/routine activities characteristics to affect cognitive risk perception, and, in turn, fear of both property and violent victimization and subsequent activities (constrained behavior).

In sum, extant contextual crime and victimization research has found significant direct effects of both individual- and neighborhood-level indicators of criminal opportunity and social control. The more recent studies have shown further that these two types of indicators interact in determining victimization risk, such that neighborhood factors condition or contextualize the effects of individual-level criminal opportunity.<sup>35</sup> Finally, recent research has extended routine activities theory and social control-disorganization theory such that micro- and macroindicators of criminal opportunity are presumed to structure more than just crime/victimization; they can also structure reactions to crime/victimization.

The new developments discussed above—including multilevel work and extensions to reactions to crime/victimization—have typically been rather piecemeal. The evolutionary ecological theory of expropriative crime proposed by Cohen and Machalek (1988) and extended by Vila and Cohen (1993) perhaps comes closest to a more holistic synthesis. The causal model outlined by this perspective (Cohen and Machalek 1988:494) is shown in Figure 2.5. As suggested by Figure 2.5, this perspective posits that selection of alternative behavioral strategies—including production and expropriation—is largely a function of resource holding potential (the whole set of characteristics pertinent to a particular contest), the value placed upon a contested resource, and opportunities for expropriation. Furthermore, these three key variables are all affected by more exogenous biological, psychosocial, and environmental factors, including—as just a few examples—sex, IQ, cognition, and culture. Finally, a key component of the evolutionary ecological approach is that strategy selections (e.g., production versus expropriation) are largely interdependent. For instance, expropriative crime is often countered with target-hardening or victim-resistance strategies, which lead to further evolution in expropriative strategies, and so on. As pointed out by Vila and Cohen, this dynamic approach "allows them to explain how strategies can influence their own proliferation" (1993:874).

This evolutionary ecological approach has several obvious strengths. First, it is explicitly multicontextual. It recognizes that factors from a variety of domains—e.g., constitutional factors, social-psychological states, and individual and group-level behaviors—affect expropriative crime. As such, it is able to synthesize into one model a multitude of variables from

a range of extant criminological theories. Second, it clearly has a dynamic element, with its recognition that changes in expropriative crime occur in reaction to counterstrategies. Thus, societal reactions to crime—including risk perception, fear, and fear-related precautionary behavior—play an important role in explaining the evolution of expropriative crime.

Despite its appeal, this approach also has limitations. While the theory makes great headway in terms of synthesizing current explanations of crime, it is still not as parsimonious as it could be. For instance, as suggested by Figure 2.5, the theory's conceptual model distinguishes "criminal opportunities" as a construct distinct from the exogenous constitutional, developmental, and sociocultural factors as well as resource value and resource holding potential. Our theory, as summarized in Chapter 3 and as detailed further in subsequent chapters, suggests that, instead, criminal opportunity can be indicated by each of these additional variables in the evolutionary ecological perspective. Second, the theory is clearly intended for macrolevel analysis, with the explanation of expropriative rates of crime across societies as its key objective. As suggested by Cohen and Machalek (1988:492):

It is useful to think of populations as composed of various combinations and frequencies of strategy types, rather than individuals. . . . This better enables us to understand how the properties of a particular strategy influence the probability that it will succeed or fail when pitted against other kinds of strategies in various combinations and proportions. Consequently, we are able to take a step forward specifying the relative advantage of a particular strategy in a given social context, independent of differences among individuals with respect to their ability or propensity to execute this choice. (1988:492)

While cross-context differences in strategy selection are certainly of sociological interest, intracontext individual differences in strategy selection are and will remain of great interest. Perhaps an even more transdisciplinary approach would recognize nonrandom, cross-contextual variation in strategy selection, thus estimating contextual effects, yet also recognizing intracontext, interindividual differences in strategy selection. Such is the concern of our theory, to which we now turn.

## NOTES

1. Even though some may contend that aspects of the modern criminal opportunity perspective can be traced to Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) approach, we omit a discussion of this perspective because we believe that their differential opportunity perspective is not compatible with the criminal opportunity tradition upon which we seek to build. Cloward and Ohlin's differential opportunity perspective

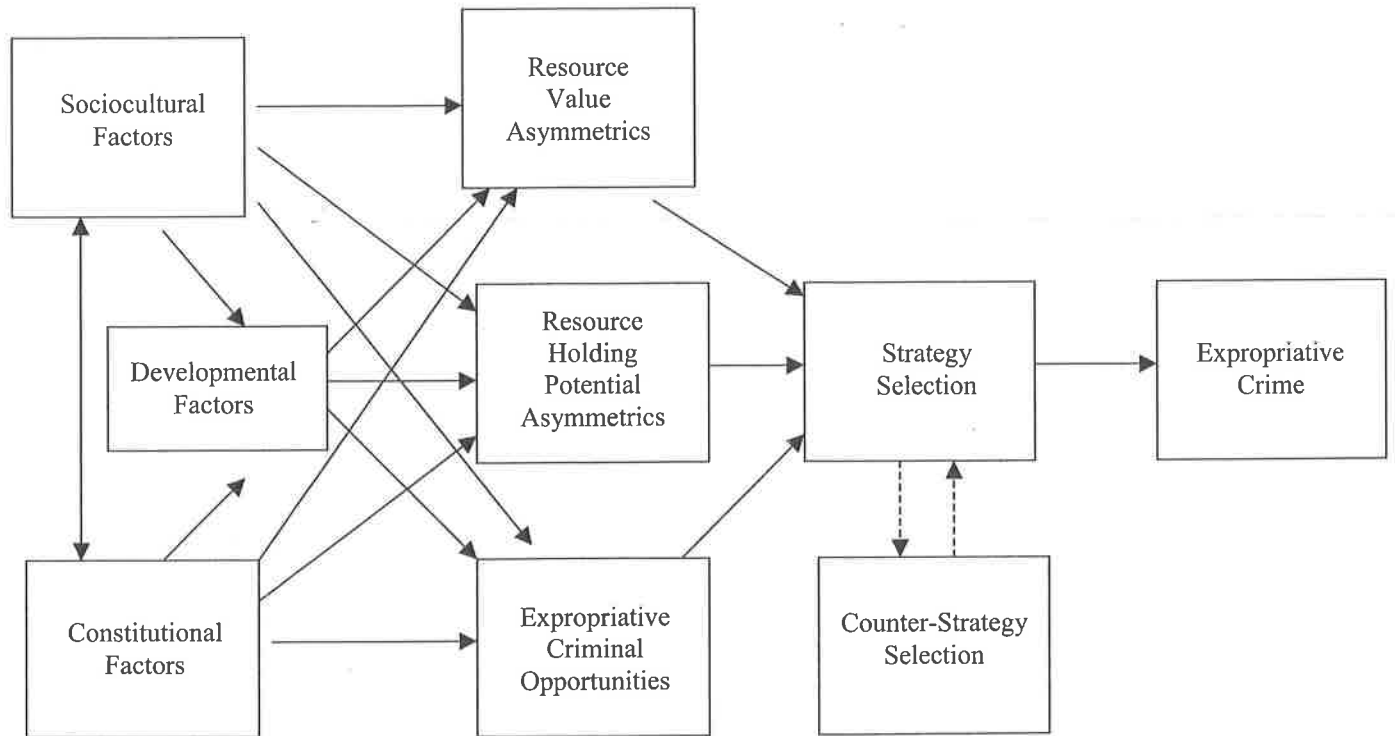


Figure 2.5. Causal model of evolutionary approach to expropriative crime. From Cohen and Machalek (1988:494). Reprinted with permission.

represents a "mixed model" in that criminal opportunity (an amotivational component) allows for subcultural value transmission (suggesting motivation). Cohen and Felson maintain that criminal opportunity "differs considerably from the traditional sociological usage of the *differential opportunity* concept" (1979:593). In a footnote Cohen and Felson argue: "Cloward and Ohlin (1960) employed [differential opportunity] in discussing how legitimate and illegitimate opportunities affect the resolution of the adjustment problems leading to gang delinquency. From their view, this resolution depends upon the kind of social support for one or another type of illegitimate activity that is given at different points in the social structure (Cloward and Ohlin 1960:151). Rather than circumstantial determinants of crime, they use differential opportunity to emphasize structural features which motivate offenders to perpetrate certain types of crimes. Cloward and Ohlin are largely silent on the interaction of this motivation with target suitability and guardianship as this interaction influences crime rates" (ibid.).

2. Chapter 3 considers the assumption of motivated offenders in greater detail.
3. See Felson and Cohen (1980).
4. See Cohen and Felson (1979), Cohen and Machalek (1988), Felson and Cohen (1980), and Maxfield (1987a, 1987b).
5. See Cohen and Felson (1979) and Felson and Cohen (1980).
6. See Cohen et al. (1981) and Cook (1986).
7. It is worth emphasizing at this point that Cohen and Felson's (1979) work provides, at least implicitly, the conceptual foundations for a dynamic multicontextual criminal opportunity perspective with its emphasis on individuals acting within spatial and temporal settings. The centrality of the individual-environmental-temporal nexus is suggested in Cohen and Felson's discussion of Hawley's (1950) work: "While criminologists traditionally have concentrated on the *spatial* analysis of crime rates within metropolitan communities, they seldom have considered the *temporal* interdependence of these acts. In his classic theory of human ecology, Amos Hawley (1950) treats the community not simply as a unit of territory but rather as an organization of symbiotic and commensalistic relationships as human activities are performed over both space and time" (ibid.:589).
8. For example, see Hindelang et al. (1978) and Cohen et al. (1981).
9. For example, see Cohen and Felson (1979).
10. See Chapter 4 for a review of some of this literature.
11. See Shaw and McKay (1942).
12. For more contemporary illustrations see Messner and Golden (1992) as well as Shihadeh and Ousey (1996, 1998).
13. See Kornhauser (1978) and Shaw and McKay (1942).
14. For example, see Crutchfield, Geerken, and Gove (1982) as well as McGahey (1986).
15. See Bursik (1986, 1988), Bursik and Webb (1982), Heitgard and Bursik (1987), Kapsis (1978), Lynch and Cantor (1992), Sampson (1987), Sampson and Castellano (1982), Schuerman and Kobrin (1986), Skogan (1990), Warner and Pierce (1993), Warner and Wilcox Rountree (2000), and Wilson (1987, 1996).
16. See Bursik (1988) and Kornhauser (1978).
17. These are reviewed in Chapter 4.
18. See Nagin (1978) for a comprehensive review.

19. See Cook (1980) for an excellent review.
20. For example, see Decker and Kohfeld (1985) as well as Greenberg, Kessler, and Logan (1981).
21. For example, see Bailey and Peterson (1990), Bursik, Grasmick, and Chamlin (1990), and Loftin and McDowall (1982).
22. For example, see Klepper and Nagin (1989), Paternoster, Saltzman, Chiricos, and Waldo (1983), and Saltzman, Paternoster, Waldo, and Chiricos (1982).
23. For example, see Williams and Hawkins (1986).
24. See Akers (1997).
25. See Cook (1980).
26. See Sampson et al. (1997).
27. While Smith and Jarjoura (1989) examine a multilevel model of victimization, their focus was to expose the individual and neighborhood influences on victimization, *not* to examine the generalizability of these micro- and macroeffects across the cities in their sample. Therefore, Smith and Jarjoura do not run separate analyses for each city, nor do they control for "city" in their models.
28. Smith, Frazee, and Davison's (2000) recent study is not multilevel (the unit of analysis is the face block only), so it is not reviewed here. Nonetheless, its findings have implications for the integration of routine activities theory and social control-disorganization theory. They found that land use characteristics indicative of exposure and target attractiveness interacted with indicators of social disorganization. As mentioned earlier, the positive effects of motels/hotels and hot spots on street robbery were exacerbated in areas with many single-parent households (presumably indicating weakened informal social control) and tempered in areas with few single-parent households.
29. For example, see Balkin (1979), Bursik and Grasmick (1993), Chiricos, Hogan, and Gertz (1997), Cook (1986), Garofalo (1981), LaGrange, Ferraro, and Supancic (1992), Liska, Lawrence, and Sanchirico (1982), Perkins and Taylor (1996), Skogan and Maxfield (1981), Stafford and Galle (1984), and Warr and Stafford (1983).
30. For example, see Liska et al. (1988) as well as Liska and Warner (1991).
31. See Warr (1990).
32. For example, see Ferraro (1995), LaGrange et al. (1992), Perkins and Taylor (1996), Taylor (2001), Taylor and Covington (1993), as well as Taylor and Hale (1986).
33. For example, see Chiricos et al. (1997), Lee and Ulmer (2000), Liska and Baccaglini (1990), Liska et al. (1982), as well as Taylor and Covington (1993).
34. For example, see Wilcox Rountree and Land (1996a, 1996b), Wilcox Rountree (1998), as well as Ferraro (1995).
35. For example, see Miethe and McDowall (1993) and Wilcox Rountree et al. (1998).