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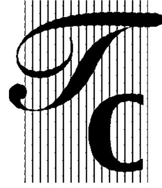

Institutional strength, social control and neighborhood crime rates

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Abstract

While the systemic model that today's theories of social disorganization are based on acknowledges that neighborhood-based institutions may vary in their ability to contribute to effective social control, relatively little attention has been given to their role in understanding neighborhood rates of crime. At the same time, there is contradictory evidence about the role of social networks, which have been the focus of much research attention. This article builds upon past work to present a model of neighborhood-based institutional social control to address this lack of attention. The model centers on a conceptualization of institutional strength that distinguishes between the dimensions of institutional strength, and the causes and effects of variation in institutional strength.

Key Words

institutional strength • social disorganization

Introduction

Social disorganization theory is based on the work of Chicago School theorists, in particular Shaw and McKay (1942). In their study of crime in Chicago, Shaw and McKay found that crime was not evenly distributed across the city. In fact, they found a strong pattern to crime in which rates of crime diminished as one moved away from the inner city. They soon

recognized that the areas with the highest crime rates were also those characterized by other social ills and posited that social disorganization was the cause of the high and stable crime rate in these areas.

In addition to identifying social disorganization as a central factor explaining crime in disadvantaged neighborhoods, Shaw and McKay (1942) were interested in the causes of social disorganization. Three causes in particular were identified: poverty, mobility and racial/ethnic heterogeneity. Poverty, while not posited to directly cause high rates of neighborhood crime, was predicted to disrupt the development of social control. Poor neighborhoods, for example, are more likely to have unsupervised teenage groups and low organizational participation because of scarce funds and other resources needed to defend collective interests. Mobility was theorized as hampering the ability of neighbors to establish the stable and strong social networks necessary for effective social control. Finally, racial/ethnic heterogeneity was also predicted to play an important role. By impeding effective communication and understanding among neighborhood residents, racial/ethnic heterogeneity was predicted to lower the strength of social networks and thus their supervisory ability (Bursik and Grasmick, 1993).

After dominating criminology in the first half of the 20th century, the theory of social disorganization waned in popularity. However, since the 1980s, social disorganization theory has undergone substantial theoretical and empirical development. Current models of social disorganization (Bursik, 1988; Bursik and Grasmick, 1993; Sampson et al., 1997) are based on a systemic model of control (Janowitz, 1967 [1951]; Kasarda and Janowitz, 1974) wherein emphasis is placed on the role of social networks in laying the groundwork for neighborhood social controls. In fact, the model specifies how these networks mediate the effect of structural characteristics on neighborhood rates of crime. In systemic models, social networks are seen as critical to social control for they are the mechanism through which individuals in a neighborhood come to know each other, establish common values and carry out informal social control. In addition, recent work has recognized that social networks are critical in the distribution of and access to social capital and social support (Bursik, 1999). Without access to these resources, the ability to intervene is diminished for there is no effective way to reward conformity or punish deviance (for examples see Valentine, 1978; Sullivan, 1989; Bursik, 1999). It is structural characteristics of neighborhoods that are often predicted in the theory of social disorganization to shape social networks.

Beyond improving past models of social disorganization by carefully specifying the relationship between neighborhood structural characteristics, social networks and neighborhood rates of crime, these models have also improved on past models through their inclusion of considerations of control at private, parochial and public levels. According to Hunter (1985), the private level of control is based on personal ties of affection and is found in private institutions such as family, friends and intimate others.

Public control, though, is based on civil ties and is found in the formal agencies of the state (Hunter, 1985). Public control refers to the level of control emerging from public institutions. It also involves the ability of citizens to access public resources since the level of resources given by public agencies to a problem or area hinges at times on the demands of citizens. Between these two extremes is parochial control, which deals with control among neighbors and acquaintances.

Thus far, research has found support for the role of neighborhood structural characteristics in understanding neighborhood rates of crime (see Bursik, 1988; Sampson and Lauritsen, 1994). The hard task has also begun of uncovering factors that mediate the relationship between neighborhood structural characteristics and crime. Factors such as collective efficacy (see Sampson et al., 1997; Morenoff et al., 2001), neighboring (Sampson and Groves, 1989; Warner and Rountree, 1997; Bellair, 2000) and monitoring (Sampson and Groves, 1989; Bursik and Grasmick, 1993; Sampson et al., 1997) have been argued to mediate at least some of the relationship between structural characteristics and neighborhood rates of crime. While research on social disorganization has until now included tests based on data only from the United States and Britain, it is possibly applicable to urban areas in other similarly industrialized countries.

In the specific area of social networks, though, research has been less fruitful (see Warner and Rountree, 1997 for a discussion of this research). Despite the prediction that dense social networks are important in understanding neighborhood crime rates, research remains relatively rare and findings are inconsistent. Some studies find that social networks are important in understanding neighborhood levels of crime and risk of victimization (Sampson and Groves, 1989; Sampson et al., 1997; Sampson and Raudenbush, 1999; Veysey and Messner, 1999; Velez, 2001). For example, the work of Sampson and his colleagues on collective efficacy finds that social cohesion is negatively related to crime rates in Chicago (Sampson et al., 1997; Sampson and Raudenbush, 1999). Simcha-Fagan and Schwartz (1986), however, found no relationship, and Warner and Rountree (1997) found that the relationship of social networks to neighborhood rates of crime varies by type of crime and type of neighborhood. In particular, Warner and Rountree (1997) found that social networks do not decrease crime in mixed or minority neighborhoods. They concluded that social networks might not be as important in understanding social control in some neighborhoods as others. Ethnographic research supports this conclusion, pointing to neighborhoods with dense social networks that still have high crime rates (Pattillo, 1998).

The contradictory findings regarding social networks have led social disorganization theorists to look for other factors that may help mediate the relationship between neighborhood structural characteristics, levels of social control and crime and, at the same time, explain the inconsistent findings on social networks. One area of developing interest is the role that

neighborhood-based institutions play in understanding neighborhood levels of informal social control and rates of crime. The idea, found in the work of Shaw and McKay (1942; see especially Kornhauser, 1978), is that neighborhoods vary in the degree to which a neighborhood-based institution can contribute effectively to neighborhood levels of social control. Thus far, however, theoretical development is lacking and empirical testing is scant. At the theoretical level, while the importance of institutions is often acknowledged, ways to distinguish between the causes, effects and indicators of variation in institutional strength are largely unexamined. In empirical testing, the role of institutions, when examined at all, is largely limited to an examination of organizational participation (Taylor et al., 1984; Sampson and Groves, 1989; Bursik, 1999; but see Peterson et al., 2000).

The purpose of this article is to present a model of institutional social control which proposes an initial solution to these two difficulties. In addition, social networks are placed here in an analytic framework that may help to explain present contradictory findings. The article begins with a discussion of a model of institutional control and neighborhood crime. This is followed by a review of the existing empirical support for various paths in the model. The discussion then turns to the role of social networks. The article concludes with some thoughts on the limitations of, and challenges posed by, the present model.

A model of institutional control and neighborhood crime

Figure 1 displays a model of neighborhood-based institutional control. This model attempts to fill two holes in our present understanding of the role of institutions in neighborhood rates of crime by: (1) specifying dimensions of institutional strength, and (2) distinguishing between the causes and effects of variations in institutional strength.

Dimensions of institutional strength

Institutions and institutional strength are at the center of the model proposed in this article. Institutions, such as the family, educational and economic systems and the government are patterned and regularized ways of meeting such needs of society as socialization, production and distribution of goods and the maintenance of social order (Tumin, 1973; Wright et al., 1975; Newman, 1995). Institutions are able to pattern and control behavior, and meet the needs of the society through the existence of roles that define expectations for behavior (Stryker, 1980) and through the role they play in the distribution of social capital and social support (Lin, 2001).

Though institutions are important sources of social control, variations in

institutional strength influence their ability to contribute effectively to neighborhood levels of social control. Drawing on criminological and sociological literatures, we identify four interrelated characteristics that define institutional strength: stability, resources, a clear delineation of rules and statuses, and interconnectedness (Tumin, 1973; Wright et al., 1975; Kornhauser, 1978).

The first characteristic defining institutional strength, stability, refers not only to the lack of change but also to the ability of the institution to function in the face of change through maintenance of institutional structures and roles (see Table 1). Stability is necessary for effective social control for four basic reasons. First, it aids the institution in its ability to guide behavior; without stability, clear guidelines for behavior would not exist. Second, stability is important in the development of, and access to, paths to conventional commitments. Third, interrelationships between institutions are directly related to their stability. Institutions that are unstable are not able to develop strong connections with other institutions. Finally, the stability of institutions is also important because it dramatically affects the emergence and distribution of social capital and social support (Coleman, 1990; Lin, 2001), important resources characterizing strong institutions.

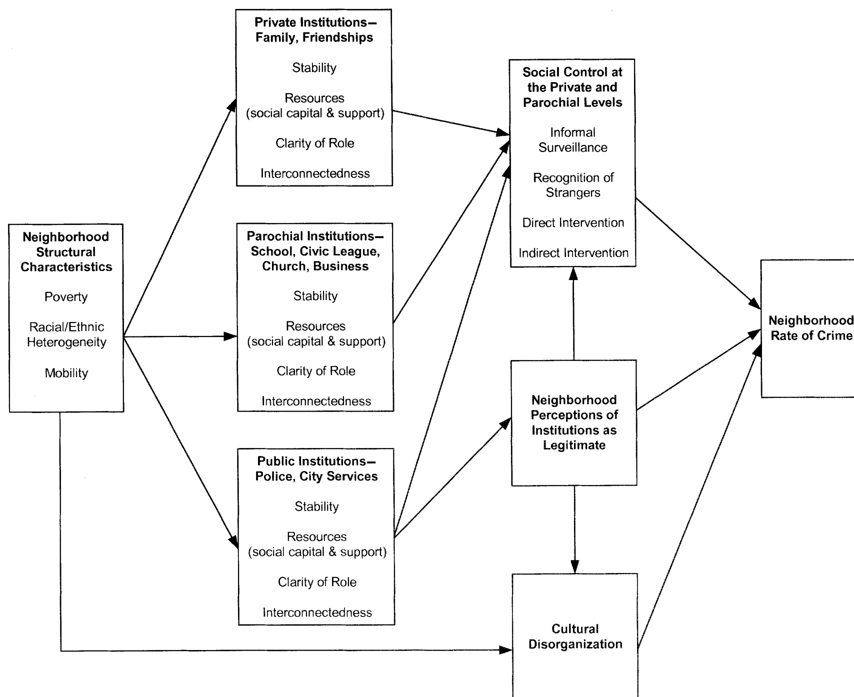

Figure 1 Theoretical model of neighborhood-based institutional control

Table 1. Characteristics defining institutional strength

Characteristic	*Examples*
Stability: Lack of change in structure and/or roles. Stability also includes the ability to function in the face of change through maintenance of institutional structures and roles	*Private*: Level of change in family structure and size *Parochial*: Level of change in the number of teachers and students in schools *Public*: Level of change in philosophy regarding the distribution of services (i.e. movement from crime control to community policing)
Resources: The level of social capital and social support within the institution as well as the ability to access these recourses	*Private*: Family members' ability and willingness to provide money, contacts, information and emotional supports. Ability and willingness of friends and acquaintances to provide money, contacts, information and emotional support *Parochial*: Level of school funding, information, number of contacts, quality of facilities, number and quality of teachers, civic league funding and access to funding *Public*: Level of funding for local police, willingness of police to provide services to neighborhood
Clear delineation of roles and statuses: Clear expectations regarding role appropriate and inappropriate behavior expected of and by the institution as well as clear hierarchical arrangement of roles	*Private*: Parents' willingness and ability to fulfill traditional parental roles *Parochial*: Degree to which school is seen as relevant and important for child's future success *Public*: Degree to which police are seen to be providing order maintenance, crime control and crime prevention services
Interconnectedness: Existence of linking structures and functions between institutions within and across levels	*Private to Parochial*: Level of ties between parents and school *Public to Public*: Degree of coordination between public service agencies *Public to Parochial*: Number of neighborhood-based organizations connected to public agencies such as crime watch programs

The second characteristic defining institutional strength is the level of resources embedded in, or capable of emerging from, an institution and its activities. Following the lead of Coleman (1990) and Cullen (1994; Cullen et al., 1999), we define two broad types of resources as important for institutional strength: social capital and social support. Social capital is defined as 'the set of resources that inhere in family and community social organization and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person' (Coleman, 1990: 300) that can be 'accessed and or mobilized for purpose of action' (Lin, 2001: 25). Social support, on the

other hand, is typically defined as 'the perceived or actual instrumental and/ or expressive provisions supplied by the community, social networks, and confiding partners' (Lin, 1986: 18; see also Cullen, 1994). It too is embedded in, or emerges from, institutions in communities and is demonstrated at the community level in 'social altruism' (Chamlin and Cochran, 1997) or 'capacity for compassionate action inherent in the neighborhood' (Silver, 2000: 1049).

Social capital and social support are necessary for effective social control for several reasons (see Cullen, 1994; Rose and Clear, 1998). First, resources aid institutions' ability to reward conformity and punish deviance. Second, social capital and social support allow institutions to assist individuals in accessing socially defined roles (Tumin, 1973; Wright et al., 1975). Finally, resources both allow and promote interactions between individuals and institutions, and between institutions. These interactions increase the chance for social control as they increase the articulation of common values and goals.

A clear delineation of roles and statuses is a third important characteristic defining institutional strength. Roles refer to the expectations regarding behavior that are learned through the process of socialization, while statuses refer to hierarchical arrangements of roles and positions (see Stryker, 1980). Both roles and statuses exist to the extent that there are structured relationships in a society (Stryker, 1968). Institutions, as key structures in a society, are important in establishing and maintaining, through socialization, roles and statuses. A clear delineation of roles and statuses is important in informal social control for it gives guidance regarding appropriate and inappropriate behavior. Some have even argued that roles define appropriate forms of deviant as well as conforming behavior (see Harris, 1977).

A final characteristic indicative of institutional strength is interconnectedness which deals with '. . . linking structures and functions' found between institutions both within and across the private, parochial and public levels (Kornhauser, 1978: 79). As Messner and Rosenfeld (1994, 2001) point out, the importance of interconnectedness comes from the recognition that the effectiveness of one institution is inextricably related to the effectiveness of another. In addition, the interconnectedness of institutions is important for social control as it provides the framework through which social networks that reach across contexts are established (Coleman, 1990). If institutions are interconnected, social control is enhanced since individuals will be tied to each other in multiple ways. If institutions are not connected, the fragmentation increases the chance that when an individual breaks ties with one group it will not harm the ties to another, decreasing the effectiveness of social control. We do recognize, however, that there is the possibility that interconnectedness can have a negative impact on crime rates. As Braithwaite (1989) suggests, this can occur when interconnections lead to the stigmatization and exclusion of individuals from the community.

Causes of weakened neighborhood-based institutions

Having now discussed a way of conceptualizing institutional strength, we turn to the model of neighborhood-based institutional control. The first part of the model (see Figure 1) predicts that neighborhood structural characteristics cause variation in institutional strength. Specifically, poverty, mobility and racial/ethnic heterogeneity are predicted to lead to 'weakness' in neighborhood-based institutions. This path has been predicted by social disorganization theory since the early work of Shaw and McKay (1942). We can examine a few examples at the private, parochial and public levels to see how this process works.

At the private level, neighborhood structural characteristics affect the stability of family and friendship ties, significantly weakening their breadth and depth (Bursik and Grasmick, 1993). Furthermore, families and friends in disadvantaged areas may not have the levels of social capital or social support needed to assist each other in times of need. In terms of social capital, families in disadvantaged neighborhoods are less likely to have sufficient money for all that is needed, and are less likely to have the information and connections that can make a difference for youths in the areas of education and employment. In terms of social support, disadvantaged neighborhoods characterized by racial/ethnic heterogeneity and mobility are predicted to have lower levels of social support among residents (see Cullen, 1994). Racial/ethnic heterogeneity increases the likelihood of social distance among diverse neighbors, decreasing the probability that neighbors will be supportive of each other. In addition, high rates of mobility affect the chance that neighbors will know, and thus, support each other in times of need. The delineation of roles at the private level is also affected by neighborhood structural characteristics. For example, when a neighborhood is characterized by poverty and few employment opportunities, family roles might become unclear (see, for example, Miller, 1958). As far as interconnections are concerned, individuals in disadvantaged neighborhoods are predicted to participate in, or be serviced by, institutions that are relatively less well connected to one another. For example, local voluntary organizations may have fewer connections to groups outside the neighborhood. Neighborhood businesses are less likely to be part of a nation- or even state-wide chain.

It is not difficult to find arguments that the stability of parochial-level institutions is affected by neighborhood structural characteristics. Kornhauser (1978) argues that institutions such as businesses and local voluntary organizations are difficult to establish in neighborhoods characterized by mobility and racial heterogeneity. Hagan (1997) connects poverty and racial heterogeneity at the neighborhood level with processes of capital disinvestment (see also Hagan and Peterson, 1995). The levels of resources of parochial-level institutions are affected as well by neighborhood structural characteristics. A good example of this is the funding of schools by

the local tax base. Finally, the development and use of local voluntary organizations, which have been argued to be important in understanding neighborhood levels of social control (Greenberg et al., 1982), provides an example of the effects neighborhood structural characteristics can have on the ability of parochial institutions to offer a clear delineation of roles. It may well be that the role of these organizations is unclear since high mobility and racial/ethnic heterogeneity, along with impeding the development of common goals, may also affect agreement on the role of these organizations in the neighborhood.

At the public level, it is not the institutions themselves that are predicted to be affected by neighborhood structural characteristics but the level and quality of service they provide to a neighborhood. Some scholars have long argued that the delivery and distribution of public services is inequitable and often political (Nardulli and Stonecash, 1981; Rich, 1982; Miranda and Tunyavong, 1994). The urban conflict model, which emphasizes power struggles among urban groups, posits that the politically powerless and the poor are losers in the distribution of public services (Jones et al., 1980; Page, 1983). Further, a clear delineation of roles may also be problematic for these institutions in the neighborhood. Are public agencies, such as the police and city services, viewed as public servants working for the neighborhood or seen as outsiders representing other interests (see Anderson, 1999)?

Finally, the model predicts that interconnections among institutions, particularly cross-level interconnections such as private to parochial, and parochial to public, are diminished in neighborhoods characterized by poverty, racial/ethnic heterogeneity and mobility. One cross-level connection often recognized in the literature is between the family at the private level and the school at the parochial. The ability of parents and schools to join together, sharing knowledge of, and expectations for, a child, is an important factor in the effectiveness of each in controlling behavior. To the extent that both parents and teachers are aware of the child's behavior and reinforce each other's expectations for that child's behavior, the ability of each is enhanced.

Another example of the importance of interconnections comes from Wilson's (1996) analysis of work. Wilson connects employment rates in the neighborhood to family and friendship ties. He argues that when work is unstable or absent from large numbers of individuals in the neighborhood, primary social networks are more likely to include individuals who doubt their ability to participate in work and who participate in an illicit economy. Further, he argues that when unemployment is a neighborhood problem, the problems of one family are compounded by the inability of neighbors to assist. Hagan and Peterson (1995) make a similar argument, noting that the capital disinvestment occurring in many disadvantaged neighborhoods creates family disadvantages including a lack of educational and employment opportunities for youths.

The results of institutional weakness

The next paths in the model define the results of variation in institutional strength. There are two important outcomes of weak neighborhood-based institutions. First, the model predicts that neighborhoods characterized by weak private, parochial and public institutions have a diminished ability to participate in informal social control in all its forms (see LaFree, 1998a for a discussion of the role of institutions in social control). We focus here on the control that occurs at the private and parochial levels though Hunter (1985) argues that all three levels of control are mutually interdependent. Second, the model predicts that strength of public institutions significantly affects neighborhood perceptions of institutions as legitimate. Neighborhoods characterized by strong public institutions are dominated by perceptions of these institutions as legitimate; while neighborhoods characterized by weak institutions are less likely to perceive these institutions as legitimate.

There are four reasons for the prediction that weak institutions diminish neighborhood levels of social control at the private and parochial levels. First, weak institutions do not provide the stability among neighbors that is needed for effective informal social control to develop. As social disorganization theorists have noted since the work of Shaw and McKay (1942), instability and the changes it brings are key factors in understanding levels of informal social control. In the context of change, the ability of neighbors to supervise and intervene is diminished. Second, weak institutions diminish individual and neighborhood access to the resources needed to enact effective informal social control. Without adequate resources, either social capital or social support, the ability to reward conformity and punish deviance is diminished. Third, we also argue that weak institutions are less effective at informal social control because they are less able to provide effective guides for behavior. Without clear roles or stability in structure and roles, expectations for behavior remain uncertain and, thus, less effective as guides. Finally, institutions, like social networks, are structures within which individuals interact, connecting to each other and to the society of which they are a part. Weak institutions are unable to provide the structures for effective interaction, thus affecting the development of social networks and their ability to serve in a capacity of social control.

A second result of institutional weakness is seen in the path from 'weak' public institutions to neighborhood-based perceptions of institutions as legitimate. Legitimacy is defined as public confidence that social institutions are fair and equitable (Tyler, 1990). This sense that institutions are unfair comes from the disparity individuals see between the ideal they are taught and the reality of their situation, a reality that is clearly demonstrated by the distribution of public resources. As strain theorists recognize (Merton, 1938; Cohen, 1955; Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Agnew, 1992, 1999, 2001), the fact that our culture espouses equal opportunity in the context of a structure that limits opportunities can cause alienation from the larger

culture. From this perspective, the behavior of public institutions that distribute resources or provide services as representatives of the polity are seen as an indicator of the legitimacy of the system.

The effects of weak informal social control and low perceptions of legitimacy

Next, the model predicts that weak informal social control and low perceptions of institutions as legitimate are significant factors in neighborhood rates of crime. Following the lead of social disorganization theory, the model predicts a direct effect of social control on neighborhood crime rates. Lower levels of informal social control in the neighborhood lead to higher rates of crime as disorder increases, youths remain unsupervised and illegitimate businesses become established.

The model also proposes that perceptions of legitimacy affect neighborhood rates of crime both directly and indirectly through neighborhood levels of social control. There are three ideas behind the prediction of a direct effect of perceptions of legitimacy on crime rates. The first idea, coming from strain theories (see Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Agnew, 1992), is that perceptions of the system as less than legitimate break or inhibit the bonds that prevent individuals from breaking the law. When this sense of unfairness pervades a neighborhood, it can even begin to dominate the perspective and behaviors of those who are trying to avoid involvement in crime. Also behind this prediction is Sherman's (1993) defiance theory. This theory predicts, in part, that individuals who are treated, or see others treated, in what they perceive as an unfair way are more likely to offend or re-offend than those who see their treatment as fair (Sherman, 1993). It predicts further that individuals' anger at the unfairness is often displaced (Sherman, 1993). The final idea on which this prediction is based is found in studies reporting the development of self-protective measures that arise out of the perception of the system as unjust and ineffective (Venkatesh, 1997; Anderson, 1999).

One central idea is at the root of predictions that neighborhood perceptions of institutions as illegitimate affect crime rates indirectly through neighborhood levels of social control (see also LaFree, 1998a). In a context of pervasive distrust of institutions (particularly public institutions like the police) stemming from feelings of injustice, individuals may not feel that their values are supported by the larger community. This may in turn affect the feeling that they have a right to intervene. They might also feel that their attempts at control will not be supported by the system. The reluctance to participate in control ranges from an unwillingness to supervise teens to an unwillingness to call the police.

Role of culture

The focus of our model is on institutions and the structure of neighborhoods. However, following the work of Sampson and Wilson (1995), we

predict that the same structural factors implicated in understanding levels of social control also have an impact on culture. In particular, neighborhood structural characteristics have a direct effect on cultural responses. As Sampson and Wilson argue, social disorganization results in cultural disorganization, that is in 'the attenuation of societal cultural values' (1995: 49). This cultural disorganization is also predicted to be shaped by neighborhood perceptions of institutions as legitimate. When public institutions are commonly perceived as untrustworthy and uncaring, the ability of a neighborhood to support even commonly held values is diminished. Cultural disorganization, in turn, has a direct effect on neighborhood crime rates.

In a neighborhood characterized by structural disadvantage, where institutions are 'weak', social control is ineffective and where there is a general perception of institutions such as the police as less than legitimate, cultural adaptations are predicted to develop. These cultural adaptations start with the individual who has a variety of emotional and behavioral strategies available for dealing with the disorder and threat of the situation. The emotional impact of this is mistrust of those outside one's own social network (Ross et al., 2001). Here the actions of others are interpreted as self-serving or dishonest. In terms of behavioral strategies, Merry (1981) argues that individuals respond in one, or in a combination, of three ways: cognitive mapping, defensive withdrawal or offensive strategies. Cognitive mapping refers to an individual's identification of some people and places as safe, and others as not. Strategies can then be developed for the avoidance of those designated as dangerous. Defensive withdrawal refers to the 'retreat into homes fortified by locks, bars and dogs, from which one ventures only in the glare of daylight, armed with guns and accompanied by allies' (Merry, 1981: 167). Recent research by Taylor (1997) supports the use of both cognitive mapping and defensive withdrawal by individuals in areas where crime is likely to be high. Finally, offensive strategies involve such activities as developing a reputation that prevents attacks. Sometimes simply taking a particular posture may do this, while at other times specific action may be required (Anderson, 1999).

Present empirical support for the model

No test of the overall model proposed here exists but the various paths described in the model have received varying levels of support from past empirical research.

Neighborhood structural characteristics and weak institutions

Research links neighborhood structural characteristics such as poverty, racial/ethnic heterogeneity and mobility to different dimensions of our conceptualization of institutional strength. However, this research has not

been systematic, examining each neighborhood structural characteristic in relation to each dimension of institutional strength. The review that follows organizes this past research by whether particular studies have concentrated on private, parochial and/or public levels.

At the private level, research has investigated the impact of neighborhood structural characteristics on family and friendship ties. For example, some research directly connects racial segregation, joblessness and poverty to family disruption (Rainwater, 1970; Sampson, 1987; Wilson, 1987, 1996; Nightingale, 1993) while other studies suggest friendship ties are less extensive in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Sampson and Groves, 1989; but see Wilson, 1996). In terms of resources, Sullivan's (1989) study of three urban neighborhoods demonstrates the importance of neighborhood structural characteristics in shaping family and friendship connections, possible forms of social capital.

At the parochial level, research on local voluntary organizations demonstrates the importance of neighborhood structural characteristics in understanding institutional strength. For example, studies have found that local voluntary organizations are more difficult to start in disadvantaged neighborhoods even when professional organizers are called for assistance (Skogan, 1989, 1990). In addition, evidence suggests that the quality of services provided by parochial institutions is affected by neighborhood structural characteristics. For example, Rabrenovic (1996) reports that individuals in poor neighborhoods are likely to be overcharged for services and goods they receive, and that disadvantaged neighborhoods are unlikely to have supermarkets or retailers that are part of a larger chain. In addition, research suggests that schools in poor neighborhoods are more likely to be under-funded (Zatz and Portillos, 2000).

While not directly tied to parochial-level institutions, research on social support is suggestive of variation across parochial-level institutions. In this area, research is beginning to provide support for Cullen's contention that social support varies across neighborhoods. Though their work examines variation across cities, Chamlin and Cochran (1997) found that their measure of social support was significantly related to structural characteristics of cities including the percentage of African Americans, cultural heterogeneity and economic inequality. More recently, at the neighborhood level, Silver (2000) found that neighborhoods characterized by poverty, unemployment and a high percentage of African Americans have lower levels of social support available to psychiatric patients.

At the public level, research is also scarce and what does exist focuses on the distribution of resources. Reports indicate an unequal distribution of public services based on heterogeneity and racial segregation in suburban and smaller cities (Williams, 1980; Massey, 1990). Zatz and Portillos (2000) confirm this in their finding that the South Phoenix neighborhoods they studied received 'few municipal resources. Public transportation is practically nonexistent, and roads are poorly maintained. Few streetlights

illuminate the darkness at night . . . schools are underfunded' (2000: 379–80).

Beyond general city services, the literature also contains studies of the distribution of police services. These studies show that inequality of delivery and distribution of police service has long persisted along lines suggesting racial and ethnic biases (Myrdal, 1944; LaFave and Remington, 1965; Brown and Coulter, 1983). In addition, a review of the research on the neighborhood context of police behavior by Smith (1986) finds that the police do act differently in different neighborhoods. Further, research has found differences by arrest as well as the recording of crimes by neighborhood racial and economic composition (see, for example, Warner, 1997).

It is important to consider the level of public services available to disadvantaged neighborhoods when assessing research about the ability of neighborhoods to access the public level. Research has shown that neighborhoods characterized by structural disadvantage are not often successful in accessing public-level support (Henig, 1982; Zatz and Portillos, 2000). This does not mean that disadvantaged neighborhoods are unable to mobilize for action, but simply that the combination of poverty, racial/ethnic heterogeneity and high mobility make it less likely and more difficult (Henig, 1982). Still when disadvantaged neighborhoods do organize to access public-level services, they can have a dramatic effect on the level of services delivered (Henig, 1982; Rooney, 1995; Rabrenovic, 1996). Further, research indicates that developing the ability to access public-level services has a greater impact on disadvantaged communities than other communities (Velez, 2001).

Finally, in terms of interconnectedness, ethnographic work draws a link between neighborhood structural characteristics and low levels of interconnectedness. For example, Sullivan's (1989) analysis of young males in three Brooklyn neighborhoods found variation across neighborhoods in the level in which families were involved in and knew about school activities. Sullivan proposed that families in La Barrida, the neighborhood with the highest level of school drop out, lacked the resources that allowed families to establish ties with, and to be involved in, the local school.

Weak institutions and neighborhood social control

An important prediction of the model is that neighborhoods characterized by weak institutions are more likely to have lower levels of social control. The research that supports this prediction is generally limited to the private level, dealing with disorganization in families and their ability to provide social control.

In terms of families, the importance of stability is supported by the finding that family disorganization is a strong predictor of crime and victimization even when controlling for neighborhood characteristics (Sampson, 1986; see also Sampson and Groves, 1989). In terms of resources, Sullivan (1989) provides us with a good example of how family

social capital affects social control in the form of commitments to school and work. He found that the decisions of youths in the neighborhoods researched to invest in school, work or crime 'begins at a point defined by the resources of their families' (1989: 20). Specifically, Sullivan found that jobs held by family members and neighbors were central to the development of commitments to work. These connections provided youths with the information and contacts they needed to obtain, and remain in, jobs. In the area of social support, Cullen et al. (1999) review research showing that lack of love and nurturance (social support) in families is significantly related to the development of self-control in children (see also Wright and Cullen, 2001). Finally, research suggests that a lack of interconnections between the family and other private and parochial institutions diminishes social control by reducing the ability to supervise and thus socialize youths. Again we turn to Sullivan (1989) for an example and support. Sullivan found that school drop-out rates were noticeably high in one of the neighborhoods he studied, La Barrida. He argued that the difference in drop-out rates across the neighborhoods came, at least in part, from the contact between parents and schools. Parents in the La Barrida neighborhood, with their much-limited resources, had less contact with the school. This allowed youths from the neighborhood to deceive their parents about their attendance for a longer period of time.

Weak public institutions and neighborhood perceptions of institutions as legitimate

We are not aware of any research that directly examines the relationship between the strength of institutions and neighborhood perceptions of these institutions as legitimate. We can, though, examine the growing literature on one institution, the police, particularly in terms of relationships between provisions of service and attitudes. This research suggests that those groups who can be anticipated to receive a different level of service are more likely to view the criminal justice system as suspect. For example, Hagan and Albonetti (1982) found that African Americans and lower-class members were more likely than others to view the system as unjust. Others, finding that African Americans are less supportive of punitive crime control policies, have hypothesized that this results from a history with the criminal justice system that has been characterized by distrust and perceptions of discrimination (Browning and Cao, 1992; Wilson and Durham, 2001). At the neighborhood level, research shows that residents of poor neighborhoods are more likely than residents of more wealthy neighborhoods to have poor relationships with the police (see Skogan, 1989, 1990). Further, recent research by Sampson and Jeglum-Bartusch (1998) finds that residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods have high levels of cynicism toward the law and dissatisfaction with the police. Importantly, they conclude that these high levels of cynicism are not accounted for by the characteristics of

the individuals but are significantly affected by neighborhood structural characteristics.

Yet the richest discussions of perceptions of the police in disadvantaged neighborhoods, where services and resources are less likely to be evenly distributed, are found in ethnographic research. An excellent example is Anderson's (1999) description of Germantown Avenue. Here the residents report the police as indifferent in some situations and abusive in others, creating a problem they did not see happening in other neighborhoods. As a result,

> In the community the police are often on the streets, but they are not always considered to have the community's best interests at heart . . . In the inner-city community there is a generalized belief that the police simply do not care about black people . . . Many assume that the police hold the black community in low repute and sometimes will abuse its members. As a result, residents are alienated from the police and police authority.
> (Anderson, 1999: 320–1)

Neighborhood perceptions of institutions as legitimate and neighborhood social control

Little direct evidence exists about the effects of neighborhood perceptions of institutions as legitimate on neighborhood social control. However, a close examination of research on perceptions of the police shows a relationship between neighborhood perceptions and one type of control, namely willingness to work with the police.

Empirical studies on the connection between citizens' negative attitudes toward police and the unwillingness to call the police are relatively rare but the results are fairly consistent. For example, some researchers examining battered women have connected racial differences in mistrust and previous problems with police to the decision not to call the police (Rasche, 1988; Fleury et al., 1998). Others have found that the seriousness of a crime is a better predictor of the decision to call the police than citizens' attitudes toward police performance and relations between police and citizens (Birkbeck et al., 1993). Attitudes remain important, however. At the neighborhood level, Zatz and Portillos' (2000) research on South Phoenix neighborhoods supports the conclusion that distrust of police is related to an unwillingness to call them, even in the face of a serious crime. There they found that while part of the neighborhood was willing to support the police in controlling gangs, another part was unwilling to do so because of their distrust of the police.

Neighborhood perceptions of institutions as legitimate and neighborhood rates of crime

Empirical evidence of a negative relationship between perceptions of legitimacy and rates of crime at the neighborhood level is lacking. Yet

studies support the idea that individuals obey the law most when they have a sense that the system is just in its procedures (see research by Tyler, 1990; Tyler and Degoey, 1995; Paternoster et al., 1997; Kuperan, and Sutinen, 1998). Further, confirming several ideas of defiance theory, Sherman (1993) cites evidence from the evaluation of the Milwaukee domestic violence experiment, which shows that arrestees who believed they did not get to tell their story to the police were significantly more likely than other arrestees to re-offend.

Further support for the importance of legitimacy comes from recent work by LaFree (1998a, 1998b). LaFree is interested in the role of the legitimacy of institutions in understanding changes in US crime rates since the Second World War. He predicts that decreasing legitimacy of institutions explains increases in crime between the Second World War and the early 1990s. Further, he argues that increases in legitimacy account for recent decreases in rates of crime. LaFree's (1998a, 1998b) research supports both of his predictions.

While empirical evidence is lacking at the neighborhood level, ethnographic work confirms a relationship between perceptions of legitimacy and crime. For instance, Venkatesh (1997) describes the development of a working relationship between neighborhood members and street gangs in the face of the failures of police to provide protection. One resident is quoted saying:

> Yeah, right [Saints] makes our lives miserable, but if we piss them off, police ain't going to come 'round here and help us out. And, shit, I gotta tell you, that most of the time it's nice, 'cause they make sure I don't get robbed up in here, they walk through the buildings like . . . police never did that!
>
> (Venkatesh, 1997: 103)

Thus Venkatesh suggests that neighborhood residents may come to support the activities of their less law-abiding neighbors in order to at least procure some semblance of control. Similarly, Anderson (1999; see also Jankowski, 1991) shows how the code of the street develops in large part out of a belief of individuals in the neighborhood that the police are uncaring, unconcerned and ineffective. Thus attempts to survive in a situation where control is lacking end in the development of a code that sometimes appears to support violence and other forms of criminal activity.

Neighborhood levels of social control and neighborhood rates of crime

Research by social disorganization theorists has found support for the contention that neighborhood levels of social control are significantly related to neighborhood rates of crime. But this research is limited, focusing primarily on intervention and supervision. A good deal of work has been done by Sampson and his colleagues (1997; Morenoff et al., 2001) on collective efficacy, and supports the prediction that intervention leads to lower levels of crime in neighborhoods. This finding has been further

confirmed by Bellair's research on surveillance (2000), which concluded that informal surveillance has significant effects on rates of robbery and stranger assault, though not on burglary.

Role of culture

Consistent with most research on the theory of social disorganization, this article focuses on neighborhood structural characteristics that affect residents' ability to control crime at the private, parochial and public levels. Yet Sampson and Wilson (1995) make a strong argument for including culture and the role of neighborhood structural characteristics in shaping cultural adaptations, using ethnographic work to ground this assertion. The work of Suttles (1968), Hannerz (1969), Rainwater (1970) and Anderson (1999) suggests, in common, that isolation resulting from poverty and segregation affects culture; in turn, this affects individual and neighborhood behavior.

Social networks and criminal others

For purposes of developing our model of institutional control, two other issues need to be addressed. Each deals with concepts embedded in the model but not explicitly pictured in Figure 1, namely the role of social networks and the inclusion of criminal others in social networks.

Social networks

Operating as links between individuals and institutions (Bott, 1957), social networks play a critical role in recent systemic models of neighborhood crime (see Bursik and Grasmick, 1993). Systemic models are based on the idea that the more people know each other, the more likely they are to supervise activities, recognize strangers and intervene. In addition, recent work has recognized that social networks are critical in the distribution of and access to social capital and social support (Bursik, 1999). Without access to these resources, the ability to intervene is diminished for there is no effective way to reward conformity or punish deviance (for examples see Valentine, 1978; Sullivan, 1989; Bursik, 1999).

Social networks play a critical role in the present model as well. Following past work, we include them in the model as avenues through which families access needed resources. The friends and acquaintances that make up a family's social network can provide financial support in times of need, information and contacts (social capital) and emotional support (social support). As the systemic model suggests, families need access to these resources since effective intervention requires means for rewarding conforming behavior and punishing deviance.

Within this framework, the strength and number of social ties is important; all else being equal, these ties are thought to increase the chance

that resources needed for social control will be available to the family. However, three reasons suggest that strong ties, in particular, are not sufficient for effective social control. First, there is a growing body of network research showing that weak ties are significant for the transmission of resources. Granovetter argues the case for weak ties when he writes that they are 'indispensable to individuals' opportunities and to their integration into communities' (1973: 1378). He argues further that strong ties alone, though they could increase the level of cohesion between individuals locally, can lead to overall fragmentation. This is because there are only a limited number of people to whom an individual will be strongly tied; without weak ties to bridge the connection between groups, individuals could remain divided in isolated cliques, thus limiting access to resources. Second, Krohn (1986) has argued that social ties that are multiplex are important for social control. Multiplexity occurs when individuals interact with each other in more than one context. This increases the ability for social control since an individual cannot break ties with the network in one context without affecting ties in other contexts. Finally, the reality is that a family's social ties may not be with individuals who are able to share resources, and, in fact, are sometimes with people who drain a family's resources (Belle, 1987; Gainey et al., 1995).

The inclusion of criminal others in social networks

In addition to considering the strength, number and variety of social network ties, we must also consider what happens when social networks include others engaged in criminal activities. Research shows that context, as well as personal preferences, shape an individual's associations and friendships (Huckfeldt, 1983). Also, the inclusion of others involved with criminalized activities in a social network is not uncommon in high-crime areas, even when some members of the network may strongly object to these parties' activities (Valentine, 1978; Miller, 1986; Pattillo, 1998; Anderson, 1999). The inclusion of others involved with criminal activities in the social network of a family is important to consider for it decreases the level of resources available for rewarding conformity and punishing deviance. People involved with crime are less likely to have the contacts and information needed for success in the legitimate world, and to provide emotional support for legitimate activities than those who are not involved in criminal activities. At the same time, the inclusion of people involved with crime increases the chance that there are rewards for deviance. Those involved in criminal activities will also be able to provide information and contacts, and the social support needed to succeed in the illegitimate world (Miller, 1986).

The inclusion of criminal others in social networks thus decreases the ability of members of a social network to enact effective social control. It may also decrease the willingness of members of the social network to enact social control. Consider the following two points. First, beyond the

impact of the ability to punish deviance and reward conformity, people in a family's social network who are involved with crime may be important sources of both the social capital and social support needed for a family's survival (Miller, 1986; Sullivan, 1989; Jankowski, 1991; Venkatesh, 1997). In this context, family members may be unwilling to risk the survival of the family by, for example, calling the police, even when the criminal behavior is disapproved. Second, those who are involved in criminal activities in the social network, like everyone else, fill multiple roles (Pattillo, 1998). As Patillo (1998) so effectively argues, these are not just people involved in crime: in addition, they may be uncles or aunts, fathers or mothers, sisters or brothers, the family's cool head in a time of crisis and the person most willing to spend time with the children. Even those who disapprove of the criminal activities of a member of the social network then may find it hard to see this person as deserving of punishment because of all his/her other attributes.

At the neighborhood level, the resources available to parties involved with crime may also inhibit the willingness of the neighborhood to enact social control. Jankowski (1991) argues that gangs can and often do provide needed resources to a troubled community. They can provide protection, sometimes better than the police, because of their knowledge of the neighborhood and the fact that there are no proscriptions on immediate action. Besides protection from crime, Jankowski argues that they can also be useful in protecting the neighborhood from outside threats such as the plans of the city (see Bursik, 1989 for a discussion of this possibility). Thus the result of the inclusion of people involved with crime in social networks may well be that both the family and the neighborhood are both less able and less willing to effectively intervene.

Conclusion

Systemic models of social disorganization are built around acknowledgement of the important role social networks and institutions play in understanding social control at the private, parochial and public levels, and thus neighborhood rates of crime. While research examining the effects of neighborhood structural characteristics and social control of social networks on neighborhood crime rates has increased, less attention has been paid to the role of institutions at the parochial and public levels. The purpose of this article was to present a model of institutional control that attempts, first and foremost, to expand our thinking on ways that institutions affect neighborhood levels of control and crime, and, second, to solve some of the problems encountered in the literature on social networks.

Our attempt to expand our thinking about the role of institutions centers on, first, developing a conceptualization of institutional strength that allows it to be distinguished from its causes and results. Based on the sociological literature on institutions, the present model proposes that

institutional strength is best defined in terms of four characteristics: stability, resources, clear roles and statuses, and interconnections. The causes of variations in institutional strength are proposed to be neighborhood structural characteristics. Specifically the model predicts that poverty, racial/ethnic heterogeneity and mobility, as social disorganization theories have traditionally predicted, weaken neighborhood-based institutions by diminishing their stability, level of resources, clarity of roles and interconnections. We then hypothesize that variations in institutional strength lead to variations in social control and perceptions of institutions as legitimate. Weakness in institutions at the private, parochial and public levels is predicted to cause lower levels of neighborhood social control and to decrease neighborhood perceptions of institutions as legitimate. In turn, low perceptions of institutions as legitimate decrease neighborhood social control and directly affect neighborhood crime rates. Lower levels of neighborhood social control then lead to higher rates of neighborhood crime.

While the focus of the model was on institutions and the structure of neighborhoods, we also recognize the importance of culture and social networks. The model predicts that cultural adaptations result from neighborhood structural characteristics and variations in perceptions of institutions as legitimate. In turn cultural adaptations are predicted to directly increase the level of crime in disadvantaged neighborhoods. The model also recognizes the importance of social networks. Along with institutions, social networks are one of the two key building blocks of social structure. Our discussion of social networks is based on two basic ideas dominant in the literature. First, social networks are structures that link individuals and families to other individuals and institutions; second, these networks are formed through reciprocal relationships.

With these assumptions in mind, we incorporated social networks into the model as the path through which institutions, particularly the family, access resources. Families with social ties that provide resources, both social capital and social support, lay the groundwork for social control in the neighborhood. Social ties, however, sometimes drain resources. When resources are weak, ability to intervene is weakened, for there are limited means for punishing deviance or rewarding conformity. When social networks include parties involved with criminal activities, the ability of the family to intervene is diminished at the same time that the ability to reward deviance increases. Beyond the ability to intervene, willingness to intervene is diminished since parties involved with crime can be sources of emotional and material support, and because these parties play multiple roles within communities (only some of which are related to criminal activities). When a diminished ability for social control occurs in the context of unwillingness to intervene and distrust of the system, the effects are detrimental at both the individual and neighborhood level. At the individual level, cognitive mapping, withdrawal and defensive strategies develop, leading to cultural adaptations at the neighborhood level.

We believe the model of institutional control we describe adds to our understanding of variation in neighborhood crime rates. Institutions and social networks are the two major building blocks of social structure. From this point of view, a theory of neighborhood crime that focuses on social networks alone is missing half the story. On the one hand, institutions are the structures through which social networks interact and communicate. If strong, institutions shape these relationships, providing support in terms of both social capital and social support, clear guidelines for behavior and a stability that goes beyond that often found in relationships among individuals. On the other hand, the movement of people in social networks from one institution to another provides links between institutions necessary for effective social control.

Though we do not provide a test of the model, the model was built around existing theoretical developments as well as support from a wide variety of qualitative and quantitative research. As such, we believe the indirect support for the model is substantial. However, it is important to provide more direct tests to see if the model actually does increase our understanding of neighborhood rates of crime.

A second area in need of attention is the lack of consideration in the model of the effect of neighborhood crime on institutions and neighborhood social control. There is a growing body of theory and research that demonstrates the powerful effects that high rates of crime can have on a neighborhood (Bursik, 1986; Bursik and Grasmick, 1993). It is also certainly important to consider the effects that high rates of crime would have on parochial-level institutions, such as businesses, that provide employment opportunities and services, and private institutions, such as families.

Finally, we would also like to include the role of politics at the national, state and local levels on neighborhoods' levels of social control and institutional strength. Research has documented the effects that public policies can have on neighborhoods. Examples of such policies include placement of highways and public housing (see Sampson and Lauritsen, 1994 for a review; see also Henig, 1982; Bursik, 1989; Rooney, 1995; Sampson and Wilson, 1995). Less developed is an understanding of the increasing role that private reinvestment is playing in neighborhoods (Henig, 1982). This literature demonstrates the need to include an understanding of both to fully capture the causes of variations in institutional strength.

The theory of social disorganization is important because it helps us understand variations in crime and quality of life in cities in the USA and in other countries as well. The work of Shaw and McKay (1942) also has important policy ramifications. We believe a more complete consideration of the role of institutions in neighborhood crime both adds to academic knowledge and aids in making policy decisions. Because linkages between neighborhood structural characteristics, social networks and good local, state and federal policies are not always clear or readily discerned, an

understanding of just how institutions affect neighborhood rates of crime will help establish policies that better address the needs and demands of neighborhood institutions.

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