The Chicago School and Cultural and Subcultural Theories of Crime

This section will examine the origin and evolution of the Chicago or Ecological School theory, otherwise known as the ecological perspective or the theory of social disorganization. We will also discuss modern research on this theory, which assumes that the environments people live in determine their behavior. Finally, we will discuss the assumptions and dynamics of cultural and subcultural theory in society, highlighting differences in certain models emphasizing inner-city subcultures and other modern examples of subcultures (e.g., street gangs). We will finish by reviewing the policy implications that have been suggested by this perspective of crime.

The Chicago School evolved during the late 19th and early 20th centuries when the city of Chicago desperately needed answers for its exponentially growing problem of delinquency and crime. This became a primary focus in Chicago, where total chaos prevailed at the time.

A significant portion of the Chicago perspective focused on the transmission of cultural values to peers and even across generations as the older youths relayed their antisocial values and techniques to the younger children. Thus, the cultural and subcultural perspective is also a key area of this theoretical model. This cultural aspect of the Chicago model is also examined in this section, as are other subculture frameworks of offending behaviors.

The Ecological School and the Chicago School of Criminology

Despite the fact that its name specifies one city, the Chicago School of Criminology represents one of the most valid and generalizable theories we will discuss in this book in the sense that many of its propositions can be readily applied to the growth and evolution of virtually all cities around the world. The Chicago School, which is often referred to as the Ecological School or the theory of social disorganization, also represents one of the earliest examples of balancing theorizing with scientific analysis and at the same time guiding important programs and policy implementations that still thrive today. Perhaps most important, the Chicago School of Criminology was the epitome of using theoretical development and scientific testing to help improve conditions in society when it was most needed, which can be appreciated only by understanding the degree of chaos and crime that existed in Chicago in the late 1800s and early 1900s.
Cultural Context: Chicago in the 1800s and Early 1900s

Experts have determined that 19th-century Chicago was the fastest-growing city in U.S. history. Census data show that the population went from about 5,000 in the early 1800s to more than 2 million by 1906; put another way, the population more than doubled every decade during the 19th century. This massive rate of growth—much faster than that seen in other large U.S. cities such as Boston, Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia, and San Francisco—was due to Chicago’s central geographic position. It was in many ways landlocked because, although it sits on Lake Michigan, there was no water route to the city from the Atlantic Ocean until the Erie Canal opened in 1825, which provided access to the Great Lakes region for shipping and migration of people. Three years later came the first U.S. passenger train, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, whose route extended from the mid-Atlantic to central areas of the country. These two transportation advancements created a continual stream of migration to the Chicago area, which increased again when the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869, linking both coasts with the U.S. Midwest.

It is important to keep in mind that, in the early to mid-1800s, many large U.S. cities had virtually no formal social agencies to handle the problems of urbanization—no social workers, building inspectors, garbage collectors, or even police officers. Once police agencies were introduced, their duties often included finding lost children and collecting the garbage, primarily because there weren’t other agencies to perform these tasks. Therefore, communities were largely responsible for solving their own problems, including crime and delinquency. By the late 1800s, however, Chicago was largely made up of citizens who did not speak a common language and did not share each other’s cultural values. This phenomenon is consistent with U.S. Census Bureau data from that era, which show that 70% of Chicago residents were foreign born and another 20% were first generation Americans. It was almost impossible for these citizens to organize themselves to solve community problems because, in most cases, they could not even understand each other.

This resulted in the type of chaos and normlessness that Émile Durkheim predicted would occur when urbanization and industrialization occurred too rapidly; in fact, Chicago represented the archetype of a society in an amonic state, with almost a complete breakdown in control. One of the most notable manifestations of this breakdown in social control was that children were running wild on the streets in gangs, with adults making little attempt to intervene. So, delinquency was soaring, and it appeared that the gangs controlled the streets as much as any other group.

The leaders and people of Chicago needed theoretical guidance to develop solutions to their problems, particularly regarding the high rates of delinquency. This was a key factor in why the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago became so important and dominant in the early 1900s. Essentially, modern sociology developed in Chicago because this city needed it the most to solve its social problems. Thus, Chicago became a type of laboratory for sociological researchers, and they developed a number of theoretical models of crime and other social ills that are still shown to be empirically valid today.

Ecological Principles in City Growth and Concentric Circles

In the 1920s and 1930s, several new perspectives of human behavior and city growth were offered by sociologists at the University of Chicago. The first relevant model was proposed by Robert E. Park, who claimed that much of human behavior, especially the way cities grow, follows the basic principles of ecology that had been documented and applied to wildlife for many years at that point. Ecology is essentially the study of the dynamics and processes through which plants and animals interact with the environment. In an application of Darwinian theory, Park proposed that the growth of cities follows a natural pattern and evolution.

Specifically, Park claimed that cities represent a type of complex organism with a sense of unity composed of the interrelations among its citizens and groups. Park applied the ecological principle of symbiosis to explain the dependency of various citizens and units on each other. Everyone is better off working together as a whole. Furthermore, Park claimed that all cities would contain identifiable clusters, which he called natural areas, which would take on a life or organic unity of their own. To clarify, many cities have neighborhoods that are made up of primarily one ethnic group or are distinguished by certain features. For example, New York City’s Hell’s Kitchen, Times Square, and Harlem represent areas of one city that have each taken on unique identities; however, each of them contributes to the whole makeup and identity of the city. The same can be seen in other cities, such as Baltimore, which in a two-mile area has the Inner Harbor, Little Italy, and Fell’s Point, with each area complementing the other zones. From Miami to San Francisco to New Orleans, all cities across America, and throughout the world for that matter, contain these identifiable natural areas.

Applying several other ecological principles, Park also noted that some areas (or species) may invade and dominate adjacent areas (species). The dominated area or species can recede to another location, or die off.

3These dates were taken from The World Almanac, 2000 Millennium Collector’s Edition (Mahwah, NJ: Primedia Reference, 2000).

In wildlife, an example is the incredible proliferation of a plant called kudzu, which grows at an amazing pace and has large leaves. It grows on top of other plants, trees, fields, and even houses, seeking to cover everything in its path and steal all the sunlight needed by other plants. Introduced to the United States in the 1800s at a world exposition, this plant was originally used to stop erosion but got out of control, especially in the southeastern region of the United States. Now kudzu covers the government more than $350 million each year because of its destruction of crops and other flora. This is a good example of a species that invades, dominates, and causes the recession of other species in the area.

A similar example can be found in the introduction of bison on Santa Catalina Island off the Southern California coast in the 1930s. About three dozen buffalo were originally imported to the island for a movie shoot, and the producers decided not to spend the money to remove them after the project, so they have remained and multiplied. Had this occurred in other parts of the United States, it would not have caused a problem. However, the largest mammal native to the island before the bison was a 4-pound fox. So, the buffalo—now numbering in the hundreds, to the point where several hundred were recently shipped to their native Western habitat—have destroyed much of the environment, driving to extinction some plants and animals unique to Catalina Island. Like the kudzu, the bison came to dominate the environment; in this case, other species couldn’t move off the island and die off.

Park claimed that a similar process occurs in human cities as some areas invade other zones or areas, and the previously dominant area must relocate or die off. This is easy to see in modern times with the growth of what is known as urban sprawl. Geographers and urban planners have long acknowledged the detriment to traditionally stable residential areas when businesses move in. Some of the most recent examples involve the battles of longtime homeowners against the introduction of malls, businesses, and other industrial centers in districts previously zoned residential. The media have documented such fights, especially with the proliferation of such establishments as Walmart and Kmart supercenters, which residents perceive, and perhaps rightfully so, as an invasion. Such an invasion can create chaos in a previously stable residential community due to increased traffic; transit populations; and, perhaps most important, crime. Furthermore, some cities are granting power to such development through eminent domain, by which the local government can take land from homeowners to rezone and import businesses.

When Park developed his theory of ecology, he observed a trend in which businesses and factories were invading the traditionally residential areas of Chicago, which caused major chaos and breakdown in the stability of those areas. Readers, especially those who were raised in suburban or rural areas, can likely relate to this—going back where they grew up, they can often see fast growth. Such development can devastate the informal controls (such as neighborhood networks or family ties) because it promotes invasion by a highly transient group of consumers and residents who do not have strong ties to the area.

This leads to a psychological indifference to the neighborhood in which no one cares about protecting the community any longer. Those who can afford to leave the area do, and those who can’t afford to get out remain until they can save enough money to do so. When Park presented his theory of ecology in the 1920s, having factories that moved into the neighborhood often meant having a lot of smoke billowing out of chimneys. No one wanted to live in such a place, particularly at a time when the effects of pollution were not understood and smokestacks had no filters. Certain parts of Chicago and other U.S. cities were perpetually covered by the smoke; these factories created. In highly industrial areas, the constant and vast coverage of smoke and pollutants made it seem to be snowing or overcast most of the time. It is easy to see how such invasions can completely disrupt the previously dominant stable residential areas of a community.

Park’s ideas became even more valid and influential with the complementary perspective offered by Ernest W. Burgess, who proposed a theory of city growth in which cities were seen as growing not simply on the edges, but Burgess claimed that the source of growth was in the city’s center. Growth of the inner city puts pressure on the next zone, which leads to pressure on the adjacent zones and so forth.

An example of this can be seen by watching a drop of water fall into the center of a bucket filled with water. The waves from the impact will form circles that ripple outward. This is exactly how Burgess claimed that cities grew, where only trees or barren land existed before, the reason for growth is the pressure forming at the very heart of the next zone, leading to pressure on the adjacent zones and so forth. Burgess also specified the primary zones—five pseudodistinctive natural areas in a constant state of flux due to growth—that all cities appear to have. He depicted these zones as a set of concentric circles. The first, innermost modern skyscrapers that are home to banks, chambers of commerce, court houses, and other essential business, and political centers such as police headquarters and post offices. Just outside the business district was the unnumbered factory zone. It was perhaps the most significant in terms of fostering crime because it invaded the previously stable residential areas in Zone II, which Burgess identified as the zone in transition. Zone II was appropriately named because it was in a state of transition from residential to industrial, primarily because it was the area of the city in which businesses and factories were invading residential areas. Zone II was the area that most significantly subjected to the ecological principles Park suggested: invasion, domination, recession, and succession. Subsequent criminological theorists focused on this zone.

According to Burgess’s theory of concentric circles, Zone III was the workingmen’s homes, relatively modest houses and apartment buildings; Zone IV consisted of higher-priced family dwellings and more expensive apartments; and Zone V was the suburban or commuter zone. These outer three zones Burgess identified were of less


importance in terms of crime, primarily because, as a general rule, the farther a family could move out of the city, the better the neighborhood was in terms of social organization and the lower the rate of social ills (e.g., poverty, delinquency). The important point of this theory of concentric circles is that the growth of each inner zone puts pressure on the next zone to grow and push into the next adjacent zone.

It is easy for readers to see examples of concentric circles theory. Wherever you live in the United States, any major city provides real-life evidence of the validity of this perspective. For example, whether people drive on Interstate 95 through Baltimore or Interstate 5 through Los Angeles, they will see the same pattern of city structure. As they approach each of the cities, they see suburban wealth in the homes and buildings, often hidden by trees off the highway. Closer to the cities, they see homes and buildings deteriorating in terms of value. Because parts of the highway systems near Baltimore and Los Angeles are somewhat elevated, drivers entering Zone II can easily see the prevalence of factories and the highly deteriorated nature of the areas. Today, many 20th-century factories have been abandoned or have limited use; these factory zones consist of rusted-out or demolished buildings. Zone II is also often the location of subsidized or public housing. Only the people who can't afford to live anywhere else are forced to live in these neighborhoods. Finally, as drivers enter the inner city of skyscrapers, the conditions improve dramatically because the major businesses have invested their money there. Compared to Zone II, this innermost area is a utopia.

This theory applies around the world, and we challenge readers to find any major city throughout the world that didn't develop this way. Nowadays, some attempts have been made to plan community development, and other cities have experienced the convergence of several patterns of concentric circles as central business districts (i.e., Zone Is) are developed in what was previously suburbia (i.e., Zone Vs). However, for the most part, the theoretical framework of concentric circles still has a great deal of support. In fact, even cities found in Eastern cultures have evolved this way. Therefore, Park's application appears to be correct: Cities grow in a natural way across time and place, abiding by the natural principles of ecology.

Case Study: Los Angeles Gangs

Although most case studies we review in this book are about individuals, in this case we concentrate on groups, which is fitting for this section because virtually all the theories we will cover in this section are macro- or group-level theories. A recent scientific study by researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles, showed that when Los Angeles gangs and incidents of gang activities are mapped, the places with the highest frequency of violence are on the borders between two or more rival gangs.1

This 2012 report showed that, contrary to popular belief, the most dangerous places to be in Los Angeles are not the regions deeply within the territory of a dominant gang but rather on the boundaries of gang territories, perhaps due to turf disputes or the increased likelihood of encountering rival factions. We shall see that this recently observed phenomenon among established gang territories was to some extent predicted and explained by Chicago School theories of crime and city growth proposed

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Shaw and McKay's Theory of Social Disorganization

Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay drew heavily on their colleagues at the University of Chicago in devising their theory of social disorganization, which became known as the Chicago School theory of criminology.2 Shaw had been producing excellent case studies for years on the individual (i.e., micro) level before he took on theorizing on the macro (i.e., structural) level of crime rates.3 However, once he began working with McKay, he devised perhaps the most enduring and valid model of why certain neighborhoods have more social problems, such as delinquency, than others.

In this model, Shaw and McKay proposed a framework that began with the assumption that certain neighborhoods in all cities have more crime than other parts of the city, most of them located in Burgess's Zone II, which is the zone in transition from residential to industrial due to the invasion of factories. According to Shaw and McKay, the neighborhoods that have the highest rates of crime typically have at least three common problems (see Figure 7.1): physical dilapidation, poverty, and heterogeneity (which is a fancy way of saying a high cultural mix). There were other common characteristics that Shaw and McKay noted, such as a highly transient population, meaning that people constantly move in and out of the area, as well as unemployment among the residents of the neighborhood.

As noted in Figure 7.1, other social ills are included as antecedent factors in the theoretical model. The antecedent social ills tend to lead to a breakdown in social organization, which is why this model is referred to as the theory of social disorganization. Specifically, it is predicted that the antecedent factors of poverty, heterogeneity, and physical dilapidation lead to a state of social disorganization, which in turn leads to crime and delinquency. This means that in a neighborhood that fits the profile of having a high rate of poor, culturally mixed residents in a dilapidated area, people cannot come together to solve problems, such as delinquency among youth.

One of the most significant contributions of Shaw and McKay was that they demonstrated that the prevalence and frequency of various social ills—such as poverty, disease, and low birth weight—tend to overlap with higher delinquency rates. Regardless of what social problem is measured, higher rates are almost always clustered in the zone in transition. Shaw and McKay believed there is a breakdown of informal social controls in these areas and that children begin to learn offending norms from their interactions with peers on the street, through what the researchers call play activities. Thus, the breakdown in the conditions of the neighborhood leads to social disorganization, which in turn leads to delinquency in children who learn criminal activities from older youths. Ultimately, the failure of the neighborhood residents to organize themselves allows the older youths to govern the behavior of the younger children. Basically, the older youths in the area provide a system of organization where the neighborhood adults cannot, so younger children follow them.

One of the best things about Shaw and McKay's theoretical model is that they supported their propositions with data from U.S. census and city records, showing that neighborhoods with high rates of poverty and physical dilapidation and high cultural mixes also had the highest rates of delinquency and crime. Furthermore, the high rates of delinquency and other social problems were consistent with Burgess's framework of concentric circles in that the highest rates were observed for the areas that were in Zone II, the zone in transition. There was one exception to the model: The Gold Coast area along the northern coast of Lake Michigan did not have the high rates of social problems, particularly delinquency, even though it was geographically in Zone II according to the otherwise consistent model of concentric circles and neighborhood zones.

Thus, the findings of Shaw and McKay were as predicted in the sense that high delinquency rates occurred in areas where factories were invading residential districts. Furthermore, Shaw and McKay's longitudinal data showed that it did not matter which ethnic groups lived in Zone II; all groups (with the exception of Asians) that lived in that zone had high delinquency rates during their residency. On the other hand, once most of an ethnic group had moved out of Zone II, the delinquency rate among its youths decreased significantly.

This finding rejects the notion of social Darwinism because it is clearly not the culture that influences crime and delinquency but rather the criminogenic nature of the environment. If ethnicity or race made a difference, the delinquency rates in Zone II would fluctuate based on who lived there, but the rates continued to be high from one group to the next. Rather, the zone determined the rates of delinquency.

Reaction and Research on Social Disorganization Theory

Over the past few decades, the Chicago School theoretical framework has received an enormous amount of attention from researchers. Virtually all of the research has supported Shaw and McKay's version of social disorganization and the resulting high crime rates in neighborhoods that exhibit such deprived conditions. Modern research has supported the theoretical model proposed by Shaw and McKay, specifically in terms of the high crime rates in disorganized neighborhoods. Also, virtually every city that has an elevated highway (e.g., Richmond, Virginia; Baltimore, Maryland; Los Angeles, California) visually supports Shaw and McKay's model of crime in concentric circles. Drivers entering those cities can see the pattern of dilapidated structures in the zone of transition surrounding the inner-city area. Before and after this layer of dilapidated structures, drivers encounter a layer of houses and residential areas that seem to increase in quality as the driver gets farther away from the inner-city area.


Some critics, however, have raised some valid concerns regarding the original model, arguing that Shaw and McKay's original research did not actually measure their primary construct: social disorganization. Although this criticism is accurate, recent research has shown that the model is valid even when valid measures of social disorganization are included.¹² Such measures of social disorganization include simply asking members of the neighborhood how many neighbors they know by name or how often they observe unsupervised peer groups in the area.

Additional criticisms of Shaw and McKay's formulation of social disorganization focus on the emphasis that the theory places on the macro, or aggregate, level of analysis. Although their theory does a good job of predicting which neighborhoods have higher crime rates, the model does not even attempt to explain why most youths in the worst areas do not become offenders. Furthermore, their model does not attempt to explain why some youths—although a very small number of them—in the best neighborhoods (i.e., in Zone V) choose to commit crime. However, the previously cited case studies completed and published by Shaw, such as The Jack roller and Brothers in Crime, attempted to address the individual (micro) level of offending.

Also, there was one notable exception to Shaw and McKay's proposition that all ethnic and racial groups have high rates of delinquency and crime while they live in Zone II. Evidence showed that when Japanese Americans made up a large portion of residents in this zone in transition, they had very low rates of delinquency. Thus, as in most theoretical models in social science, there was an exception to the rule.

Perhaps the biggest criticism of Shaw and McKay's theory, one that has yet to be adequately addressed, deals with the fact that they blatantly neglected to propose ways to ameliorate the most problematic source of criminality in Zone II neighborhoods. Although they clearly point to the invasion of factories and businesses into residential areas as a problem, they do not recommend how to slow such invasion. This is likely due to political and financial concerns: Owners of factories and businesses partially financed their research and later were the primary funders of implementation of their policies. Neglect is further represented in their failure to explain the exception of the Gold Coast in their results and conclusions.

Despite the criticisms and weaknesses of the Chicago School perspective of criminology, this theory resulted in one of the largest programs to date in attempting to reduce delinquency rates. Shaw was put in charge of establishing the Chicago Area Project (CAP), which created neighborhood centers in the most crime-ridden parts of Chicago. These centers offered activities for youth and tried to establish ties between parents and officials in the neighborhood. Although this program was never scientifically evaluated, it still exists, and many cities have implemented programs based on this model. For example, Boston implemented a very similar program, which was evaluated by Walter Miller.¹³ This evaluation showed that, although the project was effective in establishing relationships and interactions between local gangs and community groups and in providing more educational and vocational opportunities, it seemed to fail in reducing delinquent and criminal behavior. Thus, the overall conclusion made by experts was that the Boston project and other similar programs, like the CAP, typically fail to prevent criminal behavior.¹⁴

Case Study: Whitey Bulger

Whitey Bulger (James Joseph "Whitey" Bulger Jr.) is perhaps the most notorious gangster from the South Boston area, which is also known as "Southie," as they call it. Bulger was a key figure of a criminal organization from the early 1970s to the mid-1990s and head of this organization for much of that time. Under heat from authorities, he fled in 1994, and for 12 years he was on the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Ten Most Wanted list. Bulger was apprehended with his long-term girlfriend, Catherine Greig, in Santa Monica, California, in 2011. He was sentenced on November 14, 2013, to two terms of life imprisonment, plus 5 years.

Bulger is believed to have been largely in charge of narcotics distribution and extortion rackets in the Southie area during most of the 1980s and early 1990s, along with the violence inherent to such a position. Interestingly, most sources show that he was also an FBI informant during much of this time period, which allowed him to essentially "get away with murder" and his other illegal activities.

Perhaps most related to this section, Bulger was seen locally as a type of Robin Hood figure, considered by most people on the streets as a sort of guardian protecting the interests of the neighborhood or local area. After all, Bulger had been a key element of organized crime in that area for many years, and this led to a subcultural or cultural climate placing him as an authority for all that happened in that locale. Furthermore, much of his business dealt with narcotics distribution and extortion, so his motives fit the other theories in this section of being largely based on finding criminal opportunities despite the relatively poor and depraved conditions of the South Boston region.

As alluded to before, Bulger likely saw the draw of organized crime as being his only way to accomplish the higher financial and/or social status that could be obtained in the South Boston area. After all, there were not many legitimate opportunities open to him given his early criminal record, not to mention the deprivation and lack of stable employment in that region. Furthermore, he probably also desired to become an important figure in the subculture or culture of that area, and the only likely way to do that was to become a prominent figure in the organized crime syndicates.

Think About It
1. Can you relate to Bulger’s local community’s attitude toward him as a type of hero?
2. How do you think such a subculture develops in local communities for such prominent gangsters?

Sources:

Cultural and Subcultural Theories of Crime

Cultural and subcultural theories of crime assume that there are unique groups in society that socialize their children to believe that certain activities that violate conventional law are good and positive ways to behave. Although it is rather difficult to find large groups of people or classes who fit this definition, it may be that some subcultures or isolated groups of individuals buy into a different set of norms than the conventional, middle-class set of values.

Early Theoretical Developments and Research in Cultural and Subcultural Theory

One of the key developments of cultural theory is the 1967 work of Franco Ferracuti and Marvin Wolfgang, who examined the violent themes of a group of inner-city youths from Philadelphia. Their primary conclusion was that violence is a culturally learned adaptation to deal with negative life circumstances and that learning such norms occurs in an environment that emphasizes violence over other options. These researchers based their conclusion on an analysis of data that showed great differences in the rates of homicide across racial groups. However, Ferracuti and Wolfgang were clear that their theory was based on subcultural norms. Specifically, they proposed that no subculture can be totally different from or totally in conflict with the society of which it is a part. This brings the distinction of culture and subculture to the forefront.

A culture represents a distinct set of norms and values among an identifiable group of people—values that are distinct from those of the mainstream culture. For example, communism is distinctly different from capitalism because it emphasizes equality over competition, and it values utopia (i.e., everyone gets to share all profits) over the idea that the best performer gets the most reward. So, it can be said that communists tend to have a different culture than capitalists. There is also a substantial difference between a culture and a subculture, which is typically only a pocket of individuals who may have a set of norms that deviate from conventional values. Therefore, what Ferracuti and Wolfgang developed is not so much a cultural theory as it is a subcultural theory.

This is also seen in the most prominent (sub)culture theory, which was presented by Miller. Miller’s theoretical model proposed that the entire lower class had its own cultural value system. According to this model, virtually everyone in the lower class believes in and has been socialized to the values of six focal concerns: fate, autonomy, trouble, toughness, excitement, and smartness. Fate means luck, or whatever life has dealt you; it disregards responsibility and accountability for one’s actions. Autonomy is the value of independence from authority. Trouble means staying out of legal problems as well as getting into and out of personal difficulties (e.g., pregnancy). Toughness is maintaining your reputation on the street in many ways. Excitement is engaging in activities, some illegal, that help live out an otherwise mundane existence of being lower class. Smartness emphasizes street smarts or the ability to con others. Miller thought that members of the lower class teach these focal concerns as a culture or environment (or “milieu,” as stated in the title of his work).

A more recent subculture model, proposed by Elijah Anderson, has received a lot of attention in the past few years. This theory focuses on African Americans; because of the very deprived conditions in inner cities, Black Americans who live there face a sense of hopelessness, isolation, and despair. Anderson asserted that he clearly noted that, although many African Americans believe in middle-class values, these values have no weight on the street.
CRIMINOLOGICAL THEORY: A TEXT/READER

particularly among young urban males. According to Anderson, the "code of the street," which is the appropriate title of his book, is to maintain one's reputation and demand respect. For example, to be treated with disrespect ("dissed") is considered grounds for a physical attack. Masculinity and control of one's immediate environment are treasured characteristics; the immediate environment is perceived as the only thing people can control, given the harsh conditions (e.g., unemployment, poverty) in which they live.

Criticisms of Cultural Theories of Crime

Studies on cultural theories of crime, at least in the United States, find no large groups that blatantly deny the middle-class norms of society. Miller's model of lower-class focal concerns is not consistent across the entire lower class. Studies show that most adults in the lower class attempt to socialize their children to believe in conventional values, such as respect for authority, hard work, and delayed gratification, and not the focal concerns that Miller specified in his model.7 Ferracuti and Wolfgang admitted that their research findings led them to conclude that their model had more of a subcultural perspective than one emphasizing a distinctly different culture. There may be small groups or gangs who have subcultural normative values, but that doesn't constitute a completely separate culture in society. Perhaps the best subculture theories are those presented by Cohen or Cloward and Ohlin (see Section VI) in their variations of strain theory that emphasize the formations of gangs among lower-class male youths. A recent example of a specific group that seems to embrace a different normative code is that of adult male bar fighters, which was presented by Heith Copes and his colleagues.25 So apparently there are subcultural groups in U.S. society; however, they seem to make up a very small percentage of the population, which somewhat negates the cultural and subcultural perspective of criminality, which claims that crime-fostering subcultures make up a large, distinctive portion of the population. Still, this type of perspective may be important regarding the criminality of select subgroups of offenders, such as street gangs.

Policy Implications

Many of the policy implications suggested by the theoretical models proposed in this section are rather ironic. Regarding social disorganization, a paradox exists in the sense that the very neighborhoods most desperately in need of becoming organized to fight crime are the same inner-city ghetto areas where it is, by far, the most difficult to cultivate that organization (e.g., through neighborhood watch or block watch groups). Rather, the neighborhoods that have high levels of organization tend to be those that already have very low levels of crime because the residents naturally police their neighbors' well-being and property; they have a stake in the area's remaining crime free. Although there are some anecdotal examples of success of neighborhood watch programs in high-crime neighborhoods, most of the empirical evidence shows that this approach is "almost uniformly unsupportive" in its ability to reduce crime there.26 Furthermore, many studies of these neighborhood watch programs find that the groups actually increase the fear of crime in some places, perhaps due to the heightened awareness of crime issues in these areas.27

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On the other hand, other types of community crime prevention programs do seem to show some success according to a 2017 systematic review by David Weisburd and his colleagues.28 Specifically, the study concludes that improving street lighting and adding closed-circuit television cameras can lower crime rates in neighborhoods. The researchers also conclude that the most effective strategies to mobilize communities against crime are programs that involve proactive engagement with the police and other civic partners to enhance social cohesion.29

Perhaps the most notable programs that resulted from the Chicago School or social disorganization model—the CAP and similar programs—have been dubbed failures in reducing crime rates among the participants. Still, as mentioned previously, there have been some advances in trying to get residents of high-crime areas to become organized in fighting crime. The more specific the goals regarding crime reduction (a specific goal might be careful monitoring of high-level offenders through more intensive supervised probation, repeat victimization prevention programs), the more effective the implementation.30

Regarding cultural and subcultural theories, some promising intervention and outreach programs have been suggested by such models. Many programs attempt to build prosocial attitudes among high-risk youths—often young children. For example, a recent evaluation showed that a program called PeaceBuilders, which focuses on children in early grades, was effective in producing gains in conflict resolution, development of prosocial values, and reductions in aggression; a follow-up showed that these attributes were maintained for a long period of time.31 Another recent anti-aggression training program for boys in foster care showed positive effects in levels of empathy, self-efficacy, and attribution style among boys who had exhibited early-onset aggression.32 Ultimately, there are effective programs out there that promote prosocial norms and culture. More effort should be given to promoting such programs to help negate the antisocial cultural norms of individuals, especially among high-risk youths.

Conclusion

In this section, we examined theoretical perspectives proposing that the lack of social organization in broken-down and dilapidated neighborhoods leads to the inability to contain delinquency and crime. Furthermore, we discussed how this model of crime was linked to processes derived from ecological principles. This type of approach has been tested numerous times, and virtually all studies show that the distribution of delinquents and crime activity is consistent with this model.

We then discussed the ability of cultural and subcultural theories to explain criminal activity. Empirical evidence shows that cultural values make a contribution to criminal behavior but that the existence of an actual alternative culture in our society has not been found. However, some subcultural pockets, particularly inner-city youth gangs, certainly exist and provide some validity for this perspective of crime. Furthermore, the Chicago School perspective plays a role, because these subcultural groups tend to be found in zones of transition.

3Bernard et al., Vold's Theoretical Criminology.
6Ibid.
8Ibid.
9Landman, Prevention and Control; Sampson and Groves, "Community Structure"; Bernard et al., Vold's Theoretical Criminology; Weisburd et al., "What Works in Crime Prevention."
Finally, we examined policy implications suggested by these theoretical models. Regarding social disorganization, we noted that neighborhood crime-fighting groups are hardest to establish in high-crime neighborhoods and easiest to build in those neighborhoods with an already low rate of crime. Nevertheless, there have been some successes. We also looked at intervention and outreach programs based on cultural and subcultural perspectives.

SECTION SUMMARY

- We examined how principles of ecology were applied to the study of how cities grow, as well as to the study of crime, by researchers at the University of Chicago and how the resultant theories became known as the Chicago (or Ecological) School of Criminology.
- Examples from wildlife were presented as an analogy to illustrate how such ecological principles also apply to criminal elements invading and dominating city areas.
- We learned the history of Chicago and why that history made the city uniquely suited for the development of criminological theory.
- We reviewed the various zones of the concentric circles theory, also a key contribution of the Chicago School of Criminology, and explored which zones are most prone to crime.
- We examined why the findings from the Chicago School of Criminology showed that social Darwinism was not accurate in attributing varying crime rates to ethnicity or race.
- We reviewed much of the empirical evidence regarding the theory of social disorganization and examined the strengths and weaknesses of this theoretical model.
- We discussed the cultural and subcultural model presented by Ferracuti and Wolfgang as well as the cultural model of inner-city urban youths presented by Anderson.
- We discussed Miller's theory of lower-class culture, particularly its six focal concerns.
- We reviewed the strengths and weaknesses of cultural and subcultural theories of crime based on empirical evidence.

KEY TERMS

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Identify and discuss an example of the ecological principles of invasion, domination, and succession among animals or plants that was not discussed in this section.

WEB RESOURCES

Chicago School of Criminology

http://userpages.umbc.edu/~lutters/pubs/1996_SWLNote96-1_Lutters_Ackerman.pdf

Subcultural Theories

http://www.umsl.edu/~keerl/200/subcult.html
https://www.slideshare.net/RSJones/crime-and-deviance-subcultural-approach