SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION AND THEORIES OF CRIME AND DELINQUENCY: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS*

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After a period of decline in the discipline, the social disorganization model of Shaw and McKay is again beginning to appear in the literature. This paper examines five criticisms of the perspective and discusses recent attempts to address those issues and problems that are still in need of resolution.

INTRODUCTION

After a relatively brief period of prominence during the 1950's and 1960's, many criminologists came to view the concept of social disorganization developed by Shaw and McKay (Shaw et al., 1929; Shaw and McKay, 1942, 1969) as largely marginal to modern criminological thought. Arnold and Brungardt (1983: 113), for example, flatly dismiss its relevance to theories of crime causation since "clearly, as we usually think of it, it is not even a necessary condition of criminality, let alone a sufficient one." Similarly, Davidson (1981: 89) argues that social disorganization "should be seen as a descriptive convenience rather than a model of criminogenic behavior." In fact, as recently as 1987, Unnever's review of Byrne and Sampson (1986) stated that "as the authors themselves note, Shaw and McKay's theory of social disorganization, which gave birth to this area of research, has been soundly dismissed" (p. 845).[1]

The past few years, however, have seen the publication of three major works (Byrne and Sampson, 1986; Reiss and Tonry, 1986; Stark, 1987) and many related papers that clearly indicate that the perspective continues to have important ramifications for modern criminology. This paper examines two basic aspects of the revitalization of the social disorganization approach.

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1. Readers of the Byrne and Sampson collection may be somewhat surprised by this characterization, for one of the central themes of the book concerns extensions and revisions of the original Shaw and McKay perspective. I consider the book to be anything but a total dismissal of the social disorganization perspective.

First, five central criticisms that led to the temporary dormancy of the social disorganization tradition are discussed, and the attempts of recent formulations to address the problematic theoretical and empirical aspects of the earlier work are examined.[2] Second, some successful extensions of the framework into substantive areas not traditionally associated with social disorganization are reviewed.

THE SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION APPROACH OF SHAW AND MCKAY

Although the work of Shaw and McKay is still widely cited, it is primarily in respect to the finding that the economic composition of local communities is negatively related to rates of delinquency. It is important, however, to stress the central difference between their documentation of that negative association and their theoretical interpretation of the relationship, for it has led to some very basic misunderstandings of the social disorganization perspective. Shaw and McKay did *not* posit a direct relationship between economic status and rates of delinquency.[3] Rather, areas characterized by economic deprivation tended to have high rates of population turnover (they were abandoned as soon as it was economically feasible) and population heterogeneity (the rapid changes in composition made it very difficult for those communities to mount concerted resistance against the influx of new groups).[4] These two processes, in turn, were assumed to increase the likelihood of social disorganization, a concept that is very similar to Park and Burgess's (1924: 766) formulation of social control as the ability of a group to engage in self-regulation.

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2. The Shaw and McKay social disorganization approach is often referred to as ecological. Unfortunately, other very different theoretical models are also classified as such, which can lead to a great deal of confusion. In this paper, the focus is restricted to ecological research within the social disorganization perspective. Therefore, the paper does not discuss the large body of work that has been grounded in Blau's (1977) structural (inequality) perspective, nor does it examine the routine activity (opportunity) approach, except as it pertains to the social disorganization framework. Similarly, the Shaw and McKay work focuses on the dynamics of local communities (i.e., neighborhoods) that are related to crime and delinquency. Therefore, the paper does not discuss ecological work that has analyzed larger aggregates such as cities, counties, or SMSA's.

3. In their discussion of the indirect relationship between socioeconomic composition and local delinquency rates, Shaw and McKay drew from many sociological traditions. For example, they argued that certain structural conditions could lead to the formation of subcultures conducive to illegal activity. However, as Kornhauser (1978) has shown, these differing perspectives were not well integrated into a single, coherent mixed model. This paper focuses exclusively on the development of their argument pertaining to the dynamics of social disorganization. Very clear discussions of the role of economic composition in the Shaw and McKay model are provided by Kornhauser (1978) and Tittle (1983).

4. These assumptions have their source in the human ecology model of Park and Burgess (1924) and Burgess (1925). For a discussion of this relationship, see Bursik (1986).

In its purest formulation, social disorganization refers to the inability of local communities to realize the common values of their residents or solve commonly experienced problems (Kornhauser, 1978: 63; Thomas and Znaniecki, 1920). Population turnover and heterogeneity are assumed to increase the likelihood of disorganization for the following reasons:

1. Institutions pertaining to internal control are difficult to establish when many residents are "uninterested in communities they hope to leave at the first opportunity" (Kornhauser, 1978: 78).
2. The development of primary relationships that result in informal structures of social control is less likely when local networks are in a continual state of flux (see Berry and Kasarda, 1977).
3. Heterogeneity impedes communication and thus obstructs the quest to solve common problems and reach common goals (Kornhauser, 1978: 75).

The causal linkage between social disorganization and neighborhood delinquency rates was not clearly explicated by Shaw and McKay. In various sections of their work, they freely draw on elements of strain, cultural conflict, and control theories, but the logical implications of those frameworks are at times inconsistent (see Kornhauser, 1978). Given the intimate theoretical connection between processes of rapid ecological change and the social disorganization framework, a control-theoretic approach offers perhaps the best general basis for understanding the process. That is, the dynamics of social disorganization lead to variations across neighborhoods in the strength of the commitment of the residents to group standards. Thus, weak structures of formal and informal control decrease the costs associated with deviation within the group, making high rates of crime and delinquency more likely. Framed in this manner, the Shaw and McKay model of social disorganization is basically a group-level analog of control theory and is grounded in very similar processes of internal and external sources of control (for a good discussion of the similarities, see Pfohl, 1985).

CRITICISM I: THE DISCIPLINARY SHIFT IN EMPHASIS

Short (1985) has presented an excellent summary of the dangers involved in confusing the levels of analysis implied by various theoretical models. Macrosociological models, such as social disorganization, refer to properties of *groups*; that is, they assume that there are important community-level dynamics related to crime that are not simple reifications of individual motivational processes. Some, however, dismiss the social disorganization perspective simply because its findings do not (and usually cannot) lead to predictions concerning individual behavior. Although such criticisms are based on an inappropriate standard of evaluation (for a similar position, see

McBride and McCoy, 1981), they are understandable given an important historical trend in the orientation of criminological research.

Many of the early sociological theories of crime and delinquency assumed that a full understanding of the etiology of illegal behavior was only possible through an examination of the social structure, the individual, and proximate social contexts (such as primary groups) that mediated between the individual and that structure. Given the macrosocial thrust of the broader frameworks upon which these approaches were based, however, the individual-level aspects of these theories were only roughly developed. For example, although Merton's presentation of strain theory is concerned with the perceived disjuncture between an individual's goals and the ability to reach those goals through legitimate means, his emphasis was primarily on how this frustration was resolved by social groups rather than the potential sources of individual variation in that resolution (Merton, 1938). The revisions of his model that followed, in particular the work of Cohen (1955) and Cloward and Ohlin (1960), assumed that the intraclass variation in these adaptations could be explained by other group contexts, such as the gang or the neighborhood. Similarly, Thrasher's (1927) research on gangs and Sutherland's differential association perspective (Sutherland and Cressey, 1955) clearly focused on the group nature of illegal behavior. The social disorganization approach of Shaw and McKay was an important part of this group-oriented tradition.

In recent years, however, the traditional emphasis on group dynamics and organization has given way to a concern with the sources of individual motivation. This is perhaps most apparent in the resurgence of deterrence research in the discipline and its relatively recent concern with individual perceptions of the certainty and severity of punishment. Yet, it is also true of other theoretical perspectives that at one time strongly emphasized group dynamics. The influential reformulation of control theory by Hirschi (1969), for example, is basically an individual decision-making model of delinquency, in which one weighs the benefits of an illegal activity against the potential costs of losing investments one has made in conventional behaviors, institutions, and persons. This reorientation is even more striking in the recent revisions made to the theory of differential association. Although Sutherland's original learning theory of crime and delinquency was framed in terms of cultural transmission (i.e., a group process), the most important recent developments in the area have emphasized the psychological process of operant conditioning (see Akers, 1985; Akers et al., 1979). As Arnold and Brungardt (1983) have argued, the group dynamics implicated in this newer formulation are not fully specified.

This disciplinary trend had a particularly devastating effect on the development of the social disorganization approach with the publication of Robinson's (1950) classic article on ecological correlation. The basic thrust of

Robinson's argument concerned the problematic nature of making individual-level inferences on the basis of aggregate data; nowhere in the paper does he suggest that an aggregate level of measurement is inappropriate for the investigation of all theoretical issues. Yet, as Borgatta and Jackson (1980: 8) observe, "the caution became, for many, a rigid taboo on the use of aggregated data."

In this regard, Robinson's use of the term "ecological" was especially unfortunate for the development of the theory of social disorganization given its historical identification with Park and Burgess's (1924) theory of human ecology. As noted by Brantingham and Brantingham (1981: 17), many researchers (especially those who were interested in finding the causes of criminal motivation) used Robinson's findings to conclude that ecological models of crime were fairly meaningless (see Baldwin, 1979). This sentiment resulted in an important shift in the orientation of spatial research from models that emphasized social disorganization to "opportunity models" of crime, which focus on the geographic distribution of targets of crime and the means of crime commission, the routine activities of people that may lead to an increased likelihood of crime and victimization, and the situations in which crime takes place (see, e.g., Brantingham and Brantingham, 1981; Cohen and Felson, 1979; Cohen et al., 1981; Harries, 1980; Messner and Tardiff, 1985; Pyle et al., 1974; Roncek, 1981). Even though such models often used aggregate data in their analyses, the ensuing inferences had a very individualistic flavor until relatively recently.

The increased focus on individual motivation provided a necessary balance to the previous overemphasis on group processes and resulted in important theoretical modifications and developments. The discipline has, however, in a sense, overcompensated in that the group aspects of criminal behavior have almost ceased to be examined and at times are virtually ignored. As Stark (1987: 894) laments, "poor neighborhoods disappeared to be replaced by individual kids with various levels of family income." That is, most of our theories became more social-psychological than sociological (see Erickson and Jensen, 1977; Johnstone, 1978).

Some criminologists have strongly resisted the reincorporation of group dynamics (especially those pertaining to social disorganization) into models of crime and delinquency, even when the focus of an analysis is on the neighborhood. At best, many believe that such considerations should occupy a distinctly secondary position since "a test of the significance of area research requires study of individuals" (Nettler, 1984: 117). Group- and individual-level dynamics, however, are actually complementary components of a comprehensive theory of crime. This is well illustrated in Stark's (1987) paper, in which several of the propositions concerning the volume of crime that he deduces on the basis of community characteristics converge in a very interesting manner with those developed by those opportunity theorists who have

focused on individual motivational processes. In fact, Reiss (1986: 7–8) argues that a full understanding of many criminological issues is only possible through the linkage of the two traditions. As will be discussed below, one of the most important recent extensions of the theory of social disorganization has used contextual analysis to examine the relative effects of individual and community characteristics on the likelihood of illegal behavior. In addition, as will be shown, such an integration has greatly broadened the scope of traditional theories of victimization.

In sum, the group orientation of the social disorganization perspective is not in itself a valid basis for criticism. Rather, it emphasizes certain social processes that have tended to become somewhat marginal to "mainstream" criminology over the years. Yet, Bookin-Weiner and Horowitz (1983) have noted periodic shifts in the dominant theoretical orientations to juvenile crime, and there appears to be a resurgence of interest in group dynamics in their own right. Unfortunately, other, very serious criticisms of social disorganization have hindered its general reacceptance as a theoretical model.

CRITICISM II: THE ASSUMPTION OF STABLE ECOLOGICAL STRUCTURES

The concept of social disorganization is grounded in the human ecology theory of urban dynamics, in which the notions of change and adaptation are central. Thus, the full set of dynamics that may lead to such disorganization can only be discerned when long-term processes of urban development are considered. Luckily, Shaw and McKay had access to a unique set of data that enabled them to analyze the relationship between ecological change and delinquency over a period of several decades. Without such a research strategy, it would have been impossible for them to document their central finding that local communities tend to retain their relative delinquency character despite changing racial and ethnic compositions (see the discussion of Stark, 1987). The compilation of such information over an extended period of time is often extremely difficult and costly, however. With the important exception of Schmid (1960a, 1960b), the subsequent studies in this tradition were typically forced to rely on cross-sectional data. Since it is impossible to study change in such a design, cross-sectional studies must assume that local communities are not undergoing a redefinition of their role in the ecological system, i.e., the spatial distribution of crime and delinquency rates is relatively stable. Yet, as Schuerman and Kobrin (1983, 1986) have argued, the ecological stability assumed to exist by Shaw and McKay disappeared after World War II, when an acceleration in the rate of decentralization in urban areas significantly altered the character of urban change.[5] The effects of such

5. McKay notes in his afterword to the 1969 edition of *Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas* that he and Shaw could also not foresee other important trends, such as the

developments on the distribution of crime and delinquency are impossible to detect without longitudinal data. Thus, the cross-sectional models of social disorganization were grounded in a basic assumption of stability that was simply not justified by historical evidence.

The reappearance of the social disorganization perspective has been accompanied by a renewed emphasis on the dynamics of urban change and their reflection in changing spatial distributions of crime and delinquency. Bursik (1984, 1986a; Bursik and Webb, 1982), for example, has shown that the ecological structure of Chicago was relatively stable between 1930 and 1940, but dramatic changes in that structure began to appear after 1940. The redefinition of the ecological position of Chicago's local neighborhoods was accompanied by significant changes in the relative levels of delinquency found in those areas. Bursik and Webb (1982) attribute this pattern to changes in the dominant forms of population invasion and succession that characterized northern urban centers after World War II.

Schuerman and Kobrin (1983, 1986) have examined in detail the sequence of ecological changes involved in the transition of an area from a low-crime to high-crime neighborhood in Los Angeles. Changes in land-use patterns from predominantly owner-occupied dwellings to rental units led to changes in the population composition, population turnover, and socioeconomic composition of an area. The culmination of this process was a decrease in the prevailing controls in the area (i.e., the degree of social disorganization), which in turn increased the likelihood of crime and delinquency.

The changing role of communities within an ecological system has also been the subject of intensive examination by Lyle Shannon and his associates (1982, 1984), who argue that there was little evidence of a significant relationship between the amount of change in the characteristics of an area and related changes in the local arrest rates of Racine, Wisconsin, between 1950 and 1970. This finding has several possible interpretations from a social disorganization perspective. It is possible that local community adaptations to changes in urban dynamics stabilized much earlier in Racine than in larger urban areas. Or, it is possible that the effects of those changes were simply much less pronounced in Racine than elsewhere, although Shannon does point out that there were major processes of decentralization in Racine similar to those that characterized Chicago and Los Angeles.

The apparent incompatibility of the Racine findings with those for Chicago and Los Angeles highlights an important drawback of these data sets: they pertain to particular ecological units with sometimes unique social histories of development. Thus, the degree to which the findings found in, say, Chicago

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effects of open housing decisions and the greatly expanded role of urban planning programs.

can be generalized to other cities is unclear. However, the number of available longitudinal ecological data sets for the testing of social disorganization models within various urban areas has been increasing in recent years. In addition to the Chicago, Los Angeles, and Racine material, for example, research is beginning to appear that examines the relationship between ecological change and crime and delinquency rates in Cleveland and San Diego (Roncek, 1987a, 1987b) and Baltimore (Covington and Taylor, 1988; Taylor and Covington, 1987). As the number of cities for which such data are available increases, much more confidence can be placed in the inferences that can be made concerning the general dynamics of social disorganization.

CRITICISM III: THE MEASUREMENT OF SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION

Operationalizing Social Disorganization

A good indication of the confusion that the concept of social disorganization has generated is the existence of at least four extended efforts to explain the assumptions of the Shaw and McKay approach (Finestone, 1976; Kobrin, 1971; Kornhauser, 1978; Short, 1969). Of the four, Kobrin's is the most historically interesting because it was an internal memo at the Institute for Juvenile Research (which had housed the Shaw and McKay research) written while McKay was still employed there. This suggests that Shaw and McKay's model may not have been completely clear even to those people working with them.

Two specific sources of confusion concerning social disorganization have been especially recurrent. First, and most basically, Shaw and McKay sometimes did not clearly differentiate the presumed outcome of social disorganization (i.e., increased rates of delinquency) from disorganization itself. This tendency led some to equate social disorganization with the phenomena it was intended to explain, an interpretation clearly not intended by Shaw and McKay and their associates (1929: 205–206). For example, Lander (1954: 10) concluded that the value of the social disorganization construct "is dubious in view of the fact that social disorganization itself has to be defined as a complex of a group of factors in which juvenile delinquency, crime, broken homes . . . and other socio-pathological factors are included." Thus, Lander defined delinquency *as* social disorganization and focused his research efforts on determining the other community characteristics that should be included in this general complex. It must be noted that Shaw and McKay were not totally responsible for this muddled distinction. Pfohl (1985: 167) has pointed out that the classic social disorganization theorists in general often used a single indicator, such as a delinquency rate, as "both an example of disorganization and something caused by disorganization" (see his example concerning Faris and Dunham, 1939).

The common confounding of cause and effect added a great deal of confusion to the evaluation of the Shaw and McKay model. Yet, as Berry and Kasarda (1977: 55–56) note, the ecological model of Park and Burgess (1924), which provided the intellectual context for the work of Shaw and McKay, was an early version of the systemic approach to local community structure, which considers a neighborhood to be a complex system of friendship and kinship networks and associational ties. Drawing from this orientation, a recent body of work has attempted to clarify the unique conceptual status of social disorganization by defining it in terms of the capacity of a neighborhood to regulate itself through formal and informal processes of social control. Such an operational definition has made it much easier to differentiate social disorganization conceptually from the ecological processes that make internal self-regulation problematic and from the rates of crime and delinquency that may be a result.[6]

This current formulation of social disorganization assumes that the breadth and strength of local networks directly affect the effectiveness of two forms of community self-regulation. The first reflects the ability of local neighborhoods to supervise the behavior of their residents. The dynamics of this dimension of local community social control have been most fully developed in the work of Greenberg and her colleagues (1982a, 1982b, 1985), who identify three primary forms:

1. Informal surveillance: the casual but active observation of neighborhood streets that is engaged in by individuals during daily activities.
2. Movement-governing rules: avoidance of areas in or near the neighborhood or in the city as a whole that are viewed as unsafe.
3. Direct intervention: questioning strangers and residents of the neighborhood about suspicious activities. It may also include chastening adults and admonishing children for behavior defined as unacceptable (1982b: 147–148).

Sampson (1986, 1987) has provided an excellent discussion of the causal dynamics by which these processes of informal control mediate between general ecological change and delinquency in the overall social disorganization model. As he argues (1987: 102), rapid rates of population turnover and increases in structural density lead to a greater proportion of strangers in a neighborhood, who are less likely to intercede on behalf of local residents in crime-related situations (see the related argument of Stark, 1987).

It is important to note that informal processes of social control are the

6. A large literature is developing that applies the systemic formulation of social disorganization to the analysis of energy-dependent boomtowns. Since this research does not focus on local neighborhood differentiation within those towns, this paper does not discuss that body of work. Interested readers are urged to consult Albrecht (1982), Finsterbusch (1982), Freudenburg (1984), or Wilkinson et al. (1982).

central elements of Sampson's (1987) discussion of the supervisory capacity of local communities. Although he recognizes that rapid ecological change can decrease the level of participation in local formal organizations (1986: 26; see also Bursik, 1986a; Bursik and Webb, 1982), he argues that "they are in large part controlled by city, state and national networks of power" (1987: 102). Thus, although such institutions can have important effects on the prevention of delinquency, much of their effectiveness is determined by sources outside the local community.

There is no question that externally determined funding priorities and program requirements are an important set of contingencies that shape the role of local institutions as supervisory agencies in a community (see the discussion of Spergel and Korbelik, 1979: 109). Yet, the existence of certain types of formal local organizations is a direct reflection of a neighborhood's attempt to regulate itself. For example, local neighborhood associations with community crime prevention as a primary goal have arisen in many areas. As Greenberg et al. have argued (1982b), these groups provide a forum in which such developments are discussed and evaluated, thereby increasing the sensitivity of the residents to the risks involved in the commission of crime in that area. Although the empirical evidence is somewhat ambiguous due to some important methodological problems (see the discussion of Greenberg et al., 1985: Ch. 9), there is a growing body of evidence that indicates that such programs do in fact have a significant effect on crime rates.[7]

The systemic formulation of social disorganization does not assume that networks of affiliation and association have solely a supervisory effect on local rates of crime and delinquency. In fact, to concentrate exclusively on this form of self-regulation would seriously distort the original argument of Shaw and McKay for, as Kornhauser (1978: 38) has argued, they were centrally concerned with the "effectiveness of socialization in preventing deviance." Shaw and McKay (1969: 172) argued, for example, that children living in areas of low economic status "are exposed to a variety of contradictory standards and forms of behavior rather than to a relatively consistent and conventional pattern." Such a statement obviously indicates that there are subcultural aspects to the general Shaw and McKay model. In fact, they eventually concluded that certain neighborhoods were characterized by a "coherent system of values supporting delinquent acts" (1969: 173). This aspect of their model has been extensively discussed by Kornhauser (1978), who concludes that the cultural assumptions are not a necessary component of the social disorganization model. Rather, she argues that it is more consistent with the control-theoretic assumptions of their general model to focus on

7. There is some evidence that local churches may also have important functions as local agencies of social control, although the relationship has not been examined in detail in the recent literature (see Guest and Lee, 1987).

variability in the effectiveness of local structures of conventional socialization. Current models of social disorganization have also downplayed the notion of subcultural variability and have emphasized the viability of the institutions of socialization imbedded in the local networks of association and affiliation. Thus, the second form of community self-regulation implicit in the notion of social disorganization reflects the socializing, rather than supervisory, capabilities of a neighborhood (for an excellent discussion of these capabilities, see Janowitz, 1978: 283–300).

Few criminologists would dispute the contention that the family represents one of the key socializing agencies in our society, and many studies have examined the relationship between the distribution of family structures and crime/delinquency rates within local communities (see, for example, Sampson, 1986). The educational system also has played an increasingly important role in the socialization of children in the United States and has been a central component of other macrosociological theories of delinquency (such as the strain/subcultural model of Cohen, 1955). Social disorganization models, however, have generally failed to consider the degree to which the socializing capabilities of local schools are a source of neighborhood self-regulation, although it has been shown that rates of high school suspension are related to the neighborhood contexts in which the schools are imbedded (see Hellman and Beaton, 1986).

The recent ethnographic work of Schwartz (1987) has suggested that the failure to consider the role of educational institutions within the larger context of the neighborhood may seriously limit our understanding of the processes of internal self-regulation. For example, he notes the example of Parsons Park, in which the local schools serve as "the cultural battleground of the community" (p. 50); in this neighborhood, it is primarily through the educational system that ethnic traditions, religious faith, family patterns, and other community standards are "woven into the fabric of local institutions." Yet, in a second neighborhood located in the same city, the local high school is characterized as generally disorganized and "is experienced in the classroom as having little connection with the larger society's goals and values" (p. 222). It is no coincidence that these two areas also have very different rates of juvenile delinquency; the second, for example, has a heavy concentration of gang activity.[8]

Given the central role of educational systems in our society, social disorganization models will not be fully specified until the role of such institutions is integrated into the larger conceptualization of community self-regulation.

8. Two studies have examined the relationship of school location and the areal distribution of crime (see Roncek and Faggiani, 1985; Roncek and LoBosco, 1983). This research, however, has emphasized the opportunities for crime provided by such institutions rather than the organizational characteristics of the neighborhoods in which they are located.

However, this will be a very complicated task for several reasons. First, neighborhoods are rarely served by a single school; rather, the children of local residents attend a varying mixture of public and private schools. Second, due to busing, the existence of "magnet" schools, and so forth, many of the schools attended by these youths are outside the local community. Third, school districts (both public and private) rarely correspond to the boundaries of local communities. Finally, and not inconsequentially, a consideration of local educational systems entails the collection of a dramatically different kind of data concerning the structure and characteristics of those systems; in some areas, this information may be very difficult to gather. Nevertheless, future research within the social disorganization framework must begin to pay greater attention to the role of educational institutions.

The Traditional Study Design

In addition to the confusion that has surrounded the conceptualization of social disorganization, the perspective has been characterized by a second major problem pertaining to the empirical deficiencies of the study designs typically used in such research. Most studies have used the population of local community areas within a given urban context as the unit of analysis. Shaw and McKay, for example, analyzed the distribution of delinquency in 140 square-mile areas of Chicago. More often, census boundaries (or some rearrangement of those boundaries) are used to demarcate the local community areas.[9] Arrest and/or court referral records are then geographically aggregated and the corresponding rates are computed. The compilation of such records in itself is a formidable task, but the information is usually housed in a central location and the costs of data collection (especially if the records are in a computerized form) are not especially high.

It is fairly easy to derive measures of the ecological dynamics pertinent to the social disorganization model (i.e., socioeconomic composition, population turnover, and population heterogeneity) from published census materials. This is not the case for the concept of social disorganization itself, however, except to the extent that it is reflected in the distribution of family structures in a community (see Sampson, 1986). The collection of relevant data would entail a very intensive series of interviews, surveys, and/or fieldwork within each of the local neighborhoods in the urban system. The logistic and economic problems of such an approach are obvious in large metropolitan areas, which may have over a hundred locally recognized communities. Thus, even the most recent studies of entire urban systems (such as the research discussed in the preceding section) have been forced either to rely on very crude

9. The determination of socially meaningful neighborhood boundaries is not as straightforward as is sometimes implied in the literature. See the discussion of Hunter (1974), Shannon (1982), and Bursik (1986a).

indicators of social disorganization or to concentrate on the relationship between ecological processes and crime/delinquency, assuming that this central unmeasured process intervened between the two (see Bursik, 1986a).

As might be expected, such a state of affairs has compounded the confusion that already existed concerning the measurement and conceptualization of social disorganization (see Byrne and Sampson, 1986: 13–17). It becomes hard to distinguish the various components of the Shaw and McKay model and, because only the ecological indicators appear in most models, the social disorganization framework may therefore appear to many to implicitly assume that lower class neighborhoods with a large proportion of black or foreign-born residents are disorganized. Yet, it is important to emphasize that this is definitely *not* an inherent assumption of the theory. Rather, the degree to which these ecological processes are associated with the ability of a community to regulate itself is an empirical question. This is especially clear in McKay's later work (1967: 115), in which he interpreted the decline in the delinquency rates of several black communities in Chicago as representing a movement toward institutional stability in those areas (see also Bursik, 1984, 1986; Bursik and Webb, 1982; Schuerman and Kobrin, 1983, 1986).

The theoretical status of social disorganization also suffered from a development that followed the publication of Lander's (1954) research. His definition of delinquency *as* social disorganization led him to focus his research efforts on the identification of other related community characteristics that should also be considered to represent social disorganization. Such an emphasis represented an additional impetus away from the dynamic causal processes found in the Shaw and McKay model and toward a concern with simple, cross-sectional associations.

Because Lander's results apparently contradicted the model of Shaw and McKay, an important series of replications were conducted (Bordua, 1958–59; Chilton, 1964; Gordon, 1967; Rosen and Turner, 1967). Although these studies verified the zero-order predictions of Shaw and McKay, the inability to directly measure social disorganization meant that the full implications of the Shaw and McKay model could not be addressed (see also Polk, 1957–58; Quinney, 1964). Given the somewhat confusing presentation of the social disorganization concept by Shaw and McKay in the first place, such research was taken by many to mean that the concept of social disorganization was equivalent to the ecological indicators used in the analysis. Thus, it was erroneously assumed that neighborhoods characterized by low socioeconomic status and high degrees of minority composition were, by definition, disorganized (see the discussion of Pfohl, 1985: 167).

To date, the only feasible way to obtain relatively direct indicators of social disorganization in order to analyze the full Shaw and McKay framework has been to concentrate on a relatively few communities. Kapsis (1976, 1978), for example, conducted an extensive series of interviews with adults, adolescents,

and community leaders who resided in three neighborhoods in the Richmond-Oakland area. His results suggest that communities with broad networks of acquaintanceship and organizational activity have lower rates of delinquency, even when the racial and economic composition of the area would predict otherwise. The effects of such controlling networks are most striking in his discussion of each neighborhood's response to a local racial disturbance that occurred in 1969. There were significant increases in law-violating behavior in the less organized neighborhoods, but the crime rate actually decreased in the most organized one as an indigenous citizen patrol committee emerged. Kapsis cautions (1978) that his findings are drawn from a limited number of communities from one geographic region and that the full implications of the similarities and differences among those neighborhoods are not clear. Nevertheless, his studies do indicate that the level of social disorganization may have an important mediating effect between the ecological composition of a community and its delinquency rate.

Recently, Simcha-Fagan and Schwartz (1986) have published the results of a very ambitious attempt to measure social disorganization on a larger scale, based on the study of 553 adolescent males residing in 12 New York City neighborhoods. In addition to collecting the traditional census materials for each of the neighborhoods, Simcha-Fagan and Schwartz (1986: 676–677, Appendix) also administered survey questionnaires to each of the adolescents and their mothers. Included in the survey were a series of items directly analogous to those implicated in a systemic approach to social disorganization: the extent of informal neighboring, the level of neighborhood attachment, the size and breadth of local networks, neighborhood organizational involvement, and the extent of local personal ties. Given the very limited number of areas included in the study, it is impossible to determine reliably the extent to which the mean values of the variables are related to a neighborhood's delinquency rate. Significant effects were found at the individual level, however.

Overall, it has not been possible to collect appropriate data concerning social disorganization for all of the neighborhoods in an ecological system due to some very practical limitations. Unfortunately, a full test of the model on the scale of the traditional studies will be impossible without an enormous outlay of funds for data collection by an interested funding agency. Nevertheless, the results of these smaller scale analyses are very supportive of the predictions made by the Shaw and McKay model.

CRITICISM IV: THE MEASUREMENT OF CRIME AND DELINQUENCY

Despite the problems inherent in the measurement of social disorganization, other theories have faced similar problems and still have remained central perspectives in the discipline. Research guided by the differential

association framework, for example, continues to appear with some frequency in the literature, although some of its theoretical components were not specified with much more clarity by Sutherland than social disorganization was by Shaw and McKay. This section and the one following address two criticisms particularly associated with the social disorganization model that seriously question the findings of such studies even when the model has been completely and correctly specified.

The first criticism focuses on the official nature of the data that have been typically used to compute the rates of crime and delinquency for the local community areas. As early as 1936, Robison criticized the use of official records in the Shaw and McKay research, arguing that systematic biases existed in the juvenile justice system that gave rise to the differences among local community areas and that the "actual" distribution of delinquency would be more evenly dispersed throughout the city (see the discussion of Gold, 1987). Shaw and McKay were very aware of the less-than-ideal nature of their official data sources. They noted, for example, the possibility that areal variations in delinquency may only reflect variations in the number of offenders that are apprehended, raising the question "Is there not just as much real delinquent behavior in areas of low rates as there is in areas of high rates?" (Shaw et al., 1929: 199).

It is interesting that Shaw and McKay foresaw one aspect of the individual-level resolution of the official record versus self-report debate—the ability of each approach to measure behaviors of varying seriousness—by stating "there is not evidence to show that the children living in areas of low rates are involved in such serious behavior . . . if they were involved in such offenses, it is certain that their names would appear in the records of juvenile probation officers." Studies that have examined the relative validity and reliability of these data sources, however, have primarily concentrated on characteristics of individuals (such as class, race, and gender; see Elliott and Ageton, 1980; Hindelang et al., 1981) or changes in police organizational priorities (such as DeFleur, 1975; Peterson and Hagan, 1984) that may lead to differential handling by the justice system. Very few studies have examined the extent to which neighborhoods themselves are a consideration in police and court decisions, although DeFleur's argument strongly suggests that such biases exist.

There are two important exceptions to this general state of neglect. A very interesting study by Hagan et al. (1978) suggests that a significant degree of community-specific bias may exist within police departments. Not only did they find that police impressions concerning the distribution of delinquency among 72 Canadian neighborhoods were more strongly related to the socioeconomic status and residential density of those areas than to the actual rates of citizen complaints to the police, but those impressions were more strongly associated with variation in the official delinquency rate than with the rate of

complaints. As Hagan et al. admit, the findings can only be considered tentative given the nature of the city, which they describe as "over-policed." In addition, some questions can be raised concerning the reliability of the "police impression" variable because it is based on the responses of six officers who worked in the youth bureau, and not the impressions of more general officers making arrests in the field. Nevertheless, the findings of Hagan et al. suggest that the official rates analyzed in traditional social disorganization research are not free of systematic bias (see DeFleur, 1975). Rather, they may represent a mixture of differentials in neighborhood behavior patterns, neighborhood propensities to report behavior, and neighborhood-specific police orientations.

The findings of the Hagan et al. study are also supported by the recent research of Smith (1986). In his analysis of police behavior in 60 neighborhoods under the jurisdiction of 24 metropolitan police departments, Smith found that the probability of arrest is highest in areas of low socioeconomic status even after controls are imposed for the nature of the offense, characteristics of the suspect, and the dispositional preferences of the complainant. These findings should be considered with some caution because the study design implicitly assumes that the relationship between police contact and arrest is constant across all 24 agencies used in the analysis. Nevertheless, they again highlight the potential error of assuming that the sole sources of variation in neighborhood delinquency rates are the factors implicated in the social disorganization model.

To date, the degree to which the relative distribution of neighborhood rates of crime and delinquency is an artifact of police decision-making practices has not been extensively examined due to the limited availability of the appropriate data. The ideal situation would entail the collection of alternative indicators of neighborhood delinquency rates (based on self-reported measures or victimization data) to be used in conjunction with the official records as multiple indicators of this construct (see the argument of Austin, 1976). It would then be possible to separate the mutual covariation of these indicators (i.e., the degree to which each reflects the single underlying construct of a crime or delinquency rate) and the variation unique to each indicator that is not related to neighborhood behavioral patterns. Unfortunately, this resolution faces the same practical problems that were previously discussed concerning the collection of direct indicators of social disorganization.

The limited work that has been done indicates that, despite the possibility that systematic bias in police records may distort the actual spatial distribution of crime and delinquency, social disorganization is still an important determinant of this distribution. The Kapsis and Simcha-Fagan and Schwartz research discussed earlier in this section analyzed both official records and self-reported data and found patterns in accordance with those

predicted by social disorganization. In addition, the victimization rates analyzed by Sampson (1985, 1986) also provide strong support for the viability of the perspective. Thus, although only a few studies have examined alternative indicators, evidence has been consistently presented that officially based distributions of neighborhood crime and delinquency rates are not primarily an artifact of police decision-making biases. Nevertheless, the full examination of the extent to which the two alternative sources of variation account for the spatial distribution should be an important part of the future research agenda in the area of social disorganization.

CRITICISM V: THE NORMATIVE ASSUMPTIONS OF SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION

The definition of social disorganization as the inability of a local community to regulate itself in order to attain goals that are agreed to by the residents of that community implies that the notion of consensus is a central component of the model. With the increasing emphasis in the criminological literature on the dynamics of power, the political ramifications of crime control, and the relativistic nature of definitions of behavior as crime, the normative assumptions of the social disorganization framework appear to many to be insensitive to the realities of political and social life.

In one respect, this aspect of social disorganization is not nearly as restrictive an assumption as it may appear. As Janowitz argues (1976: 9–10), a normative approach to social control (i.e., community self-regulation) does not necessarily mean rigid control and social repression. Rather, nonconformity in an area can be tolerated as long as it does not interfere with the attainment of a commonly accepted goal. In this regard, all that has to be demonstrated is that the residents of an area value an existence relatively free of crime; it is not necessary to accept the assumptions of the other "universal human needs" that Kornhauser detects in the work of Shaw and McKay, such as economic sufficiency, education, and family stability (Kornhauser: 63). The widely replicated findings of the body of research on the perceived seriousness of crime (Rossi et al., 1974; Sellin and Wolfgang, 1964) indicate that the assumption that residents desire a life-style at least free from the threat of serious crimes (such as index offenses) is reasonable.

Nevertheless, the social disorganization framework does not seem suitable for the study of all behaviors that have been designated as criminal. This inability arises from two sources. First, the findings of the research on the perceived seriousness of crime show that for many, less serious offenses a strong degree of consensus does not exist. It would be inappropriate to examine a community's ability to attain a mutual goal of minimizing the incidence of such crimes within its boundaries when such general agreement cannot be demonstrated.

In addition, for certain extremely serious crimes the social disorganization model may not provide an especially powerful explanation. Schrager and Short (1980), for example, compare the perceptions of seriousness for organizational crimes (such as manufacturing and selling drugs known to be harmful, selling contaminated food, overcharging for credit, selling unsafe cars, and price-fixing) and crimes more commonly analyzed in social disorganization models (such as homicide, burglary, robbery, and theft). They present strong evidence that organizational and common crimes with the same type of social impact (either physical or economic) are rated very similarly (pp. 25–26). Thus, since organizational offenses are considered to be a serious as the types of "street crime" discussed by Shaw and McKay, it might be reasonable to expect the social disorganization approach to provide a viable explanation of their distribution in neighborhoods.

Unfortunately, as noted by Pfohl (1985), the social disorganization framework has not generally been applied to white collar crime. Thus, to some extent, the applicability of the perspective is still unknown. There are reasons to expect, however, that the framework *as it has traditionally been used* would not successfully predict rates of such crime. Janowitz (1967) and Suttles (1972) have described modern local neighborhoods as "communities of limited liability," i.e., characterized by the partial and differential involvement of their residents. Thus, "action on behalf of the community of limited liability becomes specialized and self-consciously oriented toward limited issues" (Suttles, 1972: 59). Street crime committed within the boundaries of an area presents an immediate threat to the members of that community and provides a focus on which the residents can unite. At times, as for example in the case of a price-gouging supermarket or landlord, white collar crime might also generate enough perceived common threat to set the processes of self-regulation into action. On the other hand, white collar crime committed by residents of the community but having no widespread impact on that community may not be subject to the same internal processes of social control.

The caveat concerning the traditional emphasis of the model reflects its ongoing concern with local community processes. If the notion of the "group" is expanded from the neighborhood to any collectivity with an interest in self-regulation, then white collar crime might easily be explained within a similar framework. In this respect, the notion of the organization would supplant the notion of the community. It would then be possible to determine the extent to which high rates of employee turnover and employee heterogeneity affect the ability of the organization to regulate itself and, in turn, whether this ability is related to white collar crime. Such research would appear to be a fruitful extension of the social disorganization framework in the future.

In addition to the obvious considerations concerning the feasibility of assuming that a consensus exists concerning the control of crime within a

neighborhood, a much more subtle normative assumption is imbedded in the Shaw and McKay model that is even more problematic. Shaw and McKay at least implicitly assume that the ecological distribution and movement of populations within an urban area reflect the "natural" market of housing demand; they did not discuss in any detail the degree to which population turnover, population heterogeneity, and social disorganization could in fact be manipulated by nonmarket mechanisms. Suttles (1972: 41), for example, has noted that modern neighborhoods not only reflect the economic processes considered by Shaw and McKay but also "politics and some cultural image of what the city ought to be like" (see the criticism of their model by Snodgrass, 1976). Thus, as Finestone (1976) has shown, the primary thrust of Shaw and McKay's model gives the impression that the composition and internal organization of local communities are relatively independent of the broader political and economic dynamics of the city (see also Bursik, 1988).

Skogan (1986: 206–207), for example, has highlighted four key factors with sources outside the local community that can affect neighborhood stability: disinvestment, demolition and construction, demagoguery (i.e., real estate panic peddlers and politicians) and deindustrialization. The effects of such processes on the distribution of populations within Chicago have been strongly documented by Hirsch (1983), who presents evidence suggesting that the activities of slumlords in Chicago's traditional Black Belt may have accelerated movement out of that area over what might have been expected given the economic status of the residents.

Such market manipulation has not been solely determined by private initiative. As Guest notes (1984: 293), large bureaucracies have arisen since World War II that "undoubtedly have important influences over the political processes in determining the allocation of land." One of the reasons for the increase of such bureaucracies is that with the rise of suburbanization and the resulting decline in the population of the central cities, local governments are finding themselves facing extreme fiscal strain, i.e., an imbalance between government spending or debt and the resources of the private sector (such as reflected in the median family income, tax bases, and property values; see Clark, 1981). A common response to this crisis has been the creation of zoning regulations that attempt to maximize the tax yield from the properties in an area and simultaneously minimize the public dollars necessary to service the community (Foley, 1973: 111).

In addition, as Suttles (1972: 82–86) has indicated, incentives have been offered to potential builders/developers that were not necessary in the past. As he argues, current decisions to develop are not simply based on an economical use of land, but also on expectations concerning the future potential of adjacent property (p. 86). Because few developers or realtors are large enough to control such a large block of land and because many private firms are reluctant to risk a major investment in an area in which the future is

problematic, the local government is forced to provide inducements to such developments, such as the financing of construction, the clearance and sale of land, and the establishment of standards for builders (p. 82).

Such developments external to the local community can have three kinds of effects on the relative distribution of crime and delinquency rates. First, they may directly affect those rates by providing inducements to high-risk populations to move into a specific neighborhood. Bottoms and Wiles (1986: 103), for example, have shown that the allocation of housing in the public rental sector of Great Britain had very pronounced effects on the distribution of offenders.

Second, these developments may indirectly affect the rates of crime and delinquency by accelerating (or decelerating) the degree of residential stability in a neighborhood. Bursik (1988), for example, shows that the construction of new public housing projects in Chicago between 1970 and 1980 was associated with increased rates of population turnover, which in turn were related to changes in local delinquency rates. It is important to note that this relationship did *not* reflect the effect of changing racial compositions.

A third, and somewhat surprising, effect is also possible. Suttles (1972: 35) has given the label of "defended community" to areas in which residents attempt to maintain a stable neighborhood identity in the context of changes that appear to be imposed on them by city planners, realtors, politicians, and industry. In such neighborhoods, gang activities are often seen as a protection of local residents from a perceived threat of invasion from "undesirable" residents of nearby communities. Thus, the increased level of internal organization of the community may in fact result in *higher* rates of crime and delinquency. Research in support of this proposition in Chicago has been presented by Heitgerd and Bursik (1987).

Thus, in an important sense, the social disorganization model that has traditionally appeared in the literature is conceptually incomplete. A full specification will require a broadening of the perspective to include the broader economic, historical, and political dynamics in which the development of local communities is imbedded. This will be much more feasible than it has been in the past in that the reappearance of longitudinal data sets will make it possible to examine these processes in detail.

Such a development reflects the recent broad efforts in criminology to integrate apparently disparate theoretical orientations in an attempt to obtain a more complete understanding of a phenomenon (see Elliott et al., 1985; Liska et al., 1988). There is nothing wrong with the social disorganization framework in particular for failing to have successfully completed such an integration. Thus, the preceding arguments do not imply that the model as it has generally been used in the past should be rejected in any way; rather its focus should simply be expanded.

NEW EXTENSIONS OF SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION

As the preceding sections have indicated, a great deal of effort has been expended in recent work to deal with the important criticisms that have been made of the social disorganization perspective. By and large, the resolutions of the various problems are still in a period of formulation. Those attempts, however, have also opened up new avenues of investigation that were not traditionally considered by disorganization theorists. Three in particular are especially worth noting.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD AS A CONTEXT FOR INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOR

It was noted earlier in this paper that the classic criminological theorists recognized the necessity of linking individual and group-level dynamics into a single "grand" theory. Yet historically, as also noted, research has been characterized by a shifting emphasis on only one of these dynamics. One of the most exciting developments in social disorganization research has been the appearance of efforts to achieve the linkage of these two traditions (Reiss, 1986). Stark (1987), for example, has presented a series of theoretically derived propositions that can easily form the basis of a research agenda aimed at understanding the effects of neighborhood contexts on motivational processes that may lead to the commission of a delinquent or criminal act. Unfortunately, since such study designs require extensive data at both the individual and community level, they are not yet common. Two basic approaches to the contextual-effects issue have emerged, however.

The first approach integrates individual-level official records with aggregate statistics pertaining to the community or residence (see Bursik, 1983; Gottfredson and Taylor, 1983). Since the existence of such an individual record indicates that some official court or police action has taken place in response to that person's illegal behavior, these studies have primarily focused on the likelihood of recidivism within particular neighborhood contexts. Bursik (1983), for example, examines variations in the effectiveness of juvenile court sanctions that are associated with the crime-related characteristics of a youth's community. He finds that the effect of these sanctions on recidivism is not consistent across communities: it differs according to the rate of crime in the area and the likelihood that illegal behavior in that community receives official handling by the police and courts.

Gottfredson and Taylor (1983, 1986) have examined the effects of more general aspects of the community on the likelihood of arrest after release from prison. They present evidence that the neighborhood context not only has a significant effect on the likelihood of recidivism (1986: 151–152), but it

also has an additional effect through an interaction with individual characteristics. Those offenders with an extensive past history of criminal involvement, for example, were more likely to be rearrested if released from prison into socially disorganized neighborhoods.

The second solution to the design of such contextual analyses does not restrict itself to the use of official records in its characterization of the individual; although such information may be used, it is supplemented by other data collected through self-reported techniques. This added source of information significantly increases the power of such studies. Not only does it broaden the types of problematic behavior that can be examined, but it also increases the types of social data that can be collected pertaining to individual processes.

Although the costs of such an approach are generally large, several important studies have appeared. Johnstone (1978) has examined the degree to which the economic structure of a youth's community affects the relationship between family socioeconomic status and delinquency; he found that low-status youths tend to be more delinquent if their families live in relatively affluent communities rather than poor ones. The work of Shannon (1982, 1984) is even more ambitious, for he collected longitudinal data from three birth cohorts and examined how neighborhood dynamics shaped the nature of individual careers in delinquency. Although he found a significant degree of variation in typical career patterns among different communities, those patterns were not consistently related to the structure and organization of the neighborhood.

A more recent contextual analysis within the framework of social disorganization appears in the Simcha-Fagan and Schwartz (1986) article discussed earlier in this paper. Recall that they collected extensive information concerning the formal and informal networks of control within a set of neighborhoods in New York City. Not only do many of the various dimensions of the neighborhood context continue to have significant effects on the rate of delinquency after controlling for individual characteristics, but Simcha-Fagan and Schwartz also provide evidence of important indirect effects.

To date, such contextual research has appeared rarely in the literature, and much of it has an admittedly exploratory quality. Only the Simcha-Fagan and Schwartz piece tests an explicitly developed theory of the contextual effects of social disorganization. Such studies, however, provide a clear indication of the role that social disorganization can play in the development of a "full" criminology. The continuation of such research is essential to the vitality of the ecological approach.

SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION AND VICTIMIZATION

Reiss (1986) has argued that one of the clearest areas in which the individual and community traditions in criminology can be linked is in the area of victimology. At first glance, this may seem to be an unusual extension of social disorganization, which has almost without exception focused on the group regulation of offending behavior. The formal and informal dynamics of social control that have been discussed throughout this paper, however, are very similar to the notion of guardianship developed by Felson and Cohen (1980) within their "routine activities" approach. If, as they argue, the spatial structure of a city partially determines the rate at which motivated offenders meet criminal opportunities, then the degree to which a local community is disorganized should be reflected in its ability to supervise the interaction of potential offenders and opportunities and, therefore, affect the rate of victimization. This is the approach to victimization taken by Sampson in a recent pair of papers (1985, 1986). As he argues, areas with high levels of organization are able to take note of or question strangers, watch over property, supervise youth activities, and intervene in local disturbances.

Unfortunately, although the theoretical connection is fairly straightforward, victimization data at the local community level are extremely limited. The sampling design of the National Crime Survey (NCS), for example, does not warrant the analysis of victimization rates in such small geographic units. Sampson has attempted to overcome this limitation by cleverly aggregating the NCS data into pseudoneighborhoods with similar ecological characteristics (1985, 1986). Although his analysis indicates that proxy measures of social disorganization are related to the victimization rates in such groupings, the aggregation makes it impossible to examine the full dynamic implications of the disorganization model.

An important exception to the general lack of suitable alternatives to the NCS data can be found in the recent work of Smith and Jarjoura (1988). The data set used in that analysis, reflecting the patterns of victimization in 57 neighborhoods, has two great advantages over the traditional NCS victimization data.[10] First, the sampling design enables robust estimates of neighborhood-level effects. Second, Smith and Jarjoura are able to distinguish between all acts of victimization and those that occur within the boundaries of the local community. This second group of victimizations is the one most pertinent to the notion of community guardianship and social control.

Smith and Jarjoura use these data to examine the main and conditional effects of poverty, residential mobility, and heterogeneity (as well as several other structural variables) on rates on victimization in the 57 neighborhoods.

10. This is the same data set analyzed in Smith (1986).

Their findings are very consistent with the predictions of social disorganization for burglary victimizations, but for violent crimes they find that the effect of residential mobility depends on the level of poverty in a neighborhood. This leads them to conclude that a community's capacity for social control "must be viewed in relation to other community characteristics that can facilitate criminal activity" (p. 46).

The social disorganization-based approaches of Sampson and Smith and Jarjoura represent important extensions of our understanding of victimization. In addition, such work has the exciting potential to integrate fully two perspectives (social disorganization and opportunity theories) that have been traditionally seen as competing, alternative explanations of the spatial distribution of crime and delinquency. The continuation of this work in the area of victimology will be an important component of future research in the area of social disorganization.

THE NONRECURSIVE ASPECTS OF THE SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION MODEL

The research discussed in this paper has generally focused on the extent to which rates of crime and delinquency depend on the ability of local communities to regulate themselves. It may be, however, that most models of social disorganization are substantively incomplete by failing to consider the degree to which rates of crime and delinquency may also affect a community's capacity for social control.

The rationale for the consideration of a reciprocal relationship between crime and social disorganization has been most thoroughly developed by Skogan (1986) in his discussion of neighborhood feedback loops. As Skogan argues, the level of crime in a neighborhood has a marked (although imperfect) effect on the fear of crime experienced by the residents of that area. High levels of fear, in turn, may result in the following:

1. Physical and psychological withdrawal from community life.
2. A weakening of the informal social control processes that inhibit crime and disorder.
3. A decline in the organizational life and mobilization capacity of the neighborhood.
4. Deteriorating business conditions.
5. The importation and domestic production of delinquency and deviance.
6. Further dramatic changes in the composition of the population.

In turn, these conditions can increase the existing level of crime.

Such nonrecursive implications of the social disorganization model have not been completely ignored in the literature. Shannon (1982), for example,

investigated the possibility that delinquency rates have an effect on the composition of a neighborhood. Although he concludes that such effects are "not only weak, but inconsistent over time" (p. 25), it is not clear how well his findings from Racine can be generalized to other areas. In fact, other evidence exists in support of the nonrecursive nature of the social disorganization model. For example, Bursik (1986b) found that the rate of increase in the nonwhite population in Chicago's local communities between 1960 and 1970 was significantly related to simultaneous increases in the delinquency rate. The magnitude of the effect of racial change on delinquency change, however, was not nearly so great as that for the effect of changes in delinquency rates on concurrent changes in the racial composition of an area. Such findings suggest that a large part of the traditionally high association between race and crime may reflect processes of minority groups being stranded in high-crime communities from which they cannot afford to leave. Schuerman and Kobrin (1986) also provide evidence in support of the nonrecursive nature of the social disorganization model in their study of Los Angeles between 1950 and 1970. On the basis of cross-lagged correlation and regression analyses, they concluded that increases in the crime rate are followed by shifts (in turn) in local land uses, population and socioeconomic composition, and normative structures.

Given the very few nonrecursive models that have examined the social disorganization perspective, such results should be accepted only tentatively. A great deal of work must be done concerning the identification of these models, appropriate methods of estimation, the selection of instrumental variables, and so forth. But they do represent the source of potentially important revisions of the social disorganization models in the future.

CONCLUSION

This paper has addressed some serious criticisms that have been leveled at social disorganization models of crime and delinquency. The framework is currently undergoing a significant reformulation from that presented by Shaw and McKay and many problems remain to be resolved. Yet, the findings that are emerging from this work are sufficiently relevant to the current issues facing criminology to ensure a revived appreciation of the model within the discipline.

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