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Social Disorganization Theory

Jeffery T. Walker
University of Arkansas, Little Rock

A description of the history and current state of social disorganization theory is not a simple undertaking, not because of a lack of information but because of an abundance of it. From its beginnings in the study of urban change and in plant biology, research related to social disorganization theory has spread to many different fields. These areas of concentration range from simple spin-offs of the original studies (Bordua, 1959; Chilton, 1964; Lander, 1954), to the variety of research in environmental criminology (Brantingham & Brantingham 1981), to the growing field related to crime mapping (Chainey & Rafcliffe, 2005), to such far-reaching topics as the behavior of fighting dogs (Stewart, 1974). Given the space limitations, this chapter limits its discussion to studies closely related to the original principles of the theory.

Precursors of Social Disorganization Theory

The forerunners of social disorganization research are probably more varied than any other area of criminological thought. The ecological study of delinquency is the result of the unlikely combination of the study of change in France, plant biology, and the growth of the urban city.

The direct lineage of social disorganization research is found in the study of plant biology. Warming (1909) proposed that plants live in "communities" with varying states of symbiosis, or natural interdependence. Communities containing plants predominantly of the same species were more in competition with nature than with each other. Communities with several different species, however, competed for limited resources more among themselves than with the environment. Warming called this relationship a *natural economy* because of the use of resources by the plants. This natural economy was expounded on by a Haeckel (1866), who used the German word *oikos,* from which economics was formed to coin the term *ecology.*

One of the first social ecological studies was conducted by Guerry in 1833. Guerry compared the crime rates in 86 departments (counties) in France from 1825 through 1830. His study showed that crime rates had marked variation in different cities in the country. Similar studies compared different regions and cities in England (Mayhew 1862/1983), different countries in the United Kingdom (Rawson, 1839), and England and European countries (Bulwer, 1836).

The relationship between a city's central district and juvenile delinquency was first explored by Burt in 1925, who proposed that areas in London with the highest rates of delinquency were located adjacent to the central business district, and areas with the lowest rates were located near the periphery of the city.

One of the first ecological studies undertaken in the United States was conducted by Breckinridge and Abbott in 1912. They examined the geographic distribution of the homes of juvenile delinquents in Chicago. A map showing

the location of these delinquents indicated that a disproportionate number of the juveniles' homes were located in a few areas of the city.

Park and Burgess (1928) used the terminology of Haeckel, the concepts of Warming, and the research of Breckenridge and Abbot to develop what they called *human ecology.* Specifically, Park and Burgess used the concept of symbiosis to describe the phenomenon in human communities where people work together for common goals and at the same time compete for resources. They also applied Warming's concepts of dominance and succession to describe a situation in which a stronger group would disrupt the community through change and eventually reestablish order by replacing (succeeding) a previously dominant group.

Park, Burgess, and McKenzie (1969) expanded on Park and Burgess's (1928) work by observing that certain characteristics of the population tended to cluster in rings set at about 1-mile increments from the center of Chicago and that the patterns changed dramatically from one ring to the next. For example, Part et al. found a zone of manufacturing enterprises immediately surrounding the central business district of the city. Outside this factory zone was an area of very low-income housing. In the third concentric ring, the dominant residential characteristic was working-class homes. The fourth and fifth rings from the center of the city were middle- and upper-class homes. Park et al. labeled this pattern the *Burgess zonal hypothesis.*

Development of the Theory: Shaw and McKay

Shaw and McKay (1942) used the ideas of human ecology to study the association between urban ecological characteristics and juvenile delinquency. On the basis of this research they developed *social disorganization theory.* Their study of social disorganization centered around three sets of variables: (1) physical status, (2) economic status, and (3) population status.

Shaw and McKay (1942) used three variables to measure the physical status of an area: (1) population change, (2) vacant and condemned housing, and (3) proximity to industry. They proposed that areas with high delinquency rates tended to be physically deteriorated, geographically close to areas of heavy industry, and populated with highly transient residents. The primary characteristic Shaw and McKay examined was population change. They found that as population rates increased or decreased there was a corresponding increase in delinquency. They proposed that population shifts influenced delinquency because of the process of *invasion, dominance, and succession,* a term they used for disruption of the social organization of an area because members of one (typically ethnic) group moved into another group's neighborhood. The disruption in order caused a rise in crime that would get progressively worse until the invading group became the majority; then crime rates would return to near their previous level. To analyze the relationship between proximity to industry and delinquency, Shaw and McKay mapped industrial areas and the home addresses of juvenile delinquents. Borrowing from Park and Burgess (1928), they found that surrounding the central business district was a zone of manufacturing and industry. Surrounding the industrial zone was a ring characterized by high levels of the physical, economic, and population factors they were studying and a corresponding high delinquency rate. Moving toward the outskirts of the city, they found a reduction in the prevalence of these characteristics and the rate of delinquency. The final physical characteristic Shaw and McKay analyzed was the number of vacant and condemned homes in an area. They found that there was an association between the number of vacant and condemned homes in an area and its delinquency rate.

Next, Shaw and McKay (1942) analyzed the association between the economic status of an area and its delinquency rate. They used three variables for this analysis: (1) the number of families receiving social assistance, (2) the median rental price of the area, and (3) the number of homes owned rather than rented. Shaw and McKay found that, as the number of families receiving social assistance increased, there was a corresponding rise in delinquency rates. They concluded that delinquency was higher in areas with low economic status relative to areas with higher economic status. Next, Shaw and McKay analyzed the relationship between the median rental price and delinquency. They found that delinquency rates dropped as the median rental price of the area rose. Finally, Shaw and McKay examined the relationship between the percentage of residents who owned their own homes and the delinquency rate. Their findings revealed a significant negative relationship between home ownership and delinquency. Where home ownership was low, there were high rates of delinquency. As home ownership increased, even in small increments from the lowest level, the level of delinquency dropped, being lowest in areas with the highest levels of home ownership.

In explaining the influence of economic status on delinquency, Shaw and McKay (1942) suggested that economic conditions indirectly influence delinquency rates. They asserted that affluent areas offered an atmosphere of social controls, whereas areas of low affluence produced an environment conducive to delinquency because of the diversity of the residents. This diversity influenced rates of delinquency in the area because of the disparity in social norms. In areas of low delinquency, a substantial majority of people would not tolerate abnormal behavior. In areas of high rates of delinquency, however, some of the residents condoned delinquent acts, thus offering tacit support for these behaviors. Finally, Shaw and McKay proposed that economic status influenced delinquency in the case of owning one's home in that people who could afford to own their homes had a greater stake in the neighborhood where they would be permanent residents, whereas people renting would

expend less effort to maintain the social organization or decrease the delinquency rate of the neighborhood.

The final analysis included in Shaw and McKay's (1942) study was the relationship between the population composition of an area and its rate of delinquency. Shaw and McKay found that areas with the highest delinquency rates contained higher numbers of foreign-born and black heads of household. They cautioned that this finding does not mean that nativity or ethnicity was the cause of crime. Delinquency rates in areas containing foreign-born and minority heads of households remained constant despite the total population shift to another group. Delinquency rates also remained constant in areas where the displaced population moved. Shaw and McKay concluded that the area of study, and not the nativity or ethnicity of its residents, was the factor contributing to delinquency.

On the basis of their findings, Shaw and McKay (1942) concluded that the ecological conditions existing in areas with high delinquency were contributing to a breakdown in the social order of the area, resulting in conditions conducive to delinquency. Shaw and McKay found that conventional norms existed in high-delinquency areas but that delinquency was a highly competitive way of life, such that there was advantage for some people to engage in delinquency and there were fewer consequences. This became the core of social disorganization theory. Shaw and McKay replicated their Chicago findings in at least eight other cities. Their research also spawned a wealth of other research, becoming one of the key theoretical seeds for most of the current criminological theories.

The Second Wave: Replications of Shaw and McKay

Shaw and McKay's (1942) research generated several replications spanning more than a decade. Each added to the knowledge base of ecological literature by examining the relationships first considered by Shaw and McKay in slightly different ways. None of the replications, however, drew substantially different conclusions from those in the original study.

Lander (1954) correlated 8,464 juvenile delinquents tried in the Baltimore Juvenile Court from 1939 through 1942 with demographic variables taken from the 1940 census. Specifically, Lander analyzed juvenile delinquency in terms of the median years of school completed, median monthly rent, homes with 1.51 or more persons per room, homes needing substantial repairs or having no private bath, foreign-born and non-white residents, and owner-occupied homes.

Lander's (1954) findings followed the concentric ring pattern established by Shaw and McKay (1942). Lander noted, however, that the use of 1-mile increments for the zones oversimplified the spatial distribution of delinquency because it obscured the range of delinquency rates within each zone.

Lander's (1954) findings did not support Shaw and McKay's (1942) correlation between high delinquency rates and close proximity to industry. His results indicated that the delinquency rate in census tracts with less than 50% of the area zoned for industrial purposes was lower than the city average. Lander, however, found a more pronounced relationship in Baltimore in areas zoned for commercial use. He concluded from these findings that Shaw and McKay were correct in identifying areas close to the center of the city as the highest in delinquency but that this was primarily due to ecological factors other than proximity to industry. Lander also found no support for the correlation between population change and delinquency. Lander's conclusions are not wholly contradictory to those of Shaw and McKay, however. His findings showed that the tract with the third-highest delinquency rate had a population increase of 20% and that tracts with population increases of 40% or more and decreases of 20% or more had substantially different delinquency rates than those with little or no population change. Lander found a substantial ($r = .69$) but nonsignificant relationship between delinquency and substandard housing. He added overcrowding as an additional measure of the physical status of the area and found a substantial ($r = .73$) but nonsignificant relationship between overcrowding and delinquency.

In Lander's (1954) analysis, the median rental value of housing units in Baltimore was not significantly related to delinquency. Lander reasoned that economic variables such as rental values were an unreliable predictor because they were merely indicators of where a person might live. Lander did find a significant relationship, however, between homes owned in an area and delinquency. In fact, home ownership was the most highly correlated variable in Lander's analysis.

Lander's (1954) analysis of population status followed Shaw and McKay's (1942). Zero-order correlation of the variables demonstrated that these variables were better predictors of delinquency than physical or economic variables. Although Lander's conclusions generally supported those of Shaw and McKay, there were some differences in the findings. For example, Lander found a statistically significant, inverse relationship between delinquency and number of foreign-born residents. Lander explained this by noting that many of the foreign-born Chicago residents were recent immigrants, whereas in Baltimore most of the foreign-born residents were well integrated into the community, characterized by a high degree of home ownership. Lander also found that in areas with a moderate proportion of blacks there was a high rate of delinquency. As the percentage of blacks rose above 50%, however, the rate of delinquency dropped proportionately.

Bordua (1959) attempted to replicate part of Lander's (1954) study in an effort to clarify some of the issues that had drawn criticism. Bordua's study used delinquency data from the Detroit, Michigan, juvenile court for 1948 through 1952 and census tract data from the 1950 U.S. Census.

Bordua's (1959) physical status analysis only included substandard housing and overcrowding. His findings were generally supportive of Lander's (1954) and contradictory to Shaw and McKay's (1942). Bordua found a weaker but significant relationship between overcrowding and delinquency. Also supporting Lander and counter to the findings of Shaw and McKay, Bordua found a nonsignificant relationship between substandard housing and delinquency.

Bordua's (1959) findings regarding economic status essentially supported those of Lander (1954). Bordua found the median rental value to be nonsignificant and less substantial than Lander did. Bordua also found a significant but less substantial relationship between the percentage of homes owned and delinquency. Bordua added median income to represent economic status in the analysis and found that income was not a statistically significant indicator of delinquency.

Bordua's (1959) analysis of population variables was supportive of Shaw and McKay's (1942) research but contrary to Lander's (1954). Bordua's findings revealed that foreign birth was significantly related to delinquency but that number of black heads of households was nonsignificant. On the basis of these contradictions, Bordua chose the ratio of unrelated individuals to the total number of families as an additional measure of population status. Lander found that unrelated individuals was significantly correlated with delinquency.

Chilton (1964) used juvenile court data from Indianapolis, Indiana, from 1948 through 1950 and data from the 1950 U.S. Census to compare the findings of Lander (1954) and Bordua (1959) with those in Indianapolis. The results of Chilton's analyses of the relationship between physical characteristics and delinquency essentially confirmed the findings of the other replications. Chilton's findings of the relationship between delinquency and substandard housing showed a substantial but nonsignificant correlation with delinquency. Chilton also found a substantial correlation between overcrowded conditions (more than 1.5 persons per room) and delinquency. Unlike the other two studies, though, the degree of overcrowding in Indianapolis was one of two statistically significant indicators of delinquency. Chilton's analyses of economic variables essentially confirmed those of Lander's and Bordua's studies. The relationship between median rental value and delinquency was found to be nonsignificant and similar to Lander's. Chilton's findings concerning home ownership also supported the other replications. His findings related to population characteristics tended to refute both Shaw and McKay (1942) and the other replications. Chilton found both percentage of foreign-born people and percentage of black people to not be significantly related to delinquency in Indianapolis. He concluded that ecological research can identify general conditions associated with delinquency but that differences between cities exist such that they cannot be addressed with traditional social disorganization theory.

The findings of Lander's (1954), Bordua's (1959), and Chilton's (1964) studies suggest that although the relationship between the physical characteristics of an area and delinquency may vary by city there appears to be a sustained relationship at some level. Shaw and McKay's (1942) findings concerning the relationship between economic characteristics and delinquency were supported by the replications, but not completely. Finally, Shaw and McKay's findings concerning population characteristics and delinquency were generally not supported by the replications.

The Lean Times: Social Disorganization in the 1970s and 1980s

After the replications that followed Shaw and McKay's (1942) research, social disorganization as a theory began to decline. This was primarily a result of attacks on the use of official data in crime studies and growing criticism of theoretical problems with the theory. A few studies, however, continued to follow the principles of social disorganization. The general direction of these studies followed that of Shaw and McKay, but few followed their design closely enough to be considered replications. For example, these studies examined population status through scale measurement and analysis of change in population characteristics rather than single-variable correlations. In analyzing the association between economic status and delinquency, research in this era focused on the economic status of individuals rather than the housing conditions studied by Shaw and McKay. These studies typically measured economic characteristics through educational levels and the occupational status of residents. Because of the contradictory findings of earlier research and the growing contention that foreign birth had little to do with delinquency, these studies began to look to additional measures of population status in an effort to better measure its relationship with delinquency.

Quinney (1964) obtained data from Lexington, Kentucky, in 1960 and analyzed them with *social area analysis.* Quinney's research included three dimensions: (1) economic status, (2) family status, and (3) ethnic status. Quinney's family status was the variable most closely associated with Shaw and McKay's (1942) physical status. Quinney used census data concerning women in the workforce, fertility rates, and single-structure housing. The results of his analysis showed that family status was negatively correlated with juvenile delinquency. These findings were significant even when interaction effects of economic variables were included. Quinney used two variables to examine economic status: (1) number of school grades completed and (2) number of blue-collar workers. The results showed that juvenile delinquency was negatively correlated with economic status. Quinney used the census variable race to examine ethnic status. The racial makeup of a census tract was found to be the most highly correlated with delinquency. Quinney then conducted a second analysis to determine the degree of

delinquency exhibited by each race. This analysis revealed that white delinquency rates were lowest in areas with less than 2% blacks and increased steadily as the proportion of blacks increased, peaking in the 15% to 40% black grouping. Black delinquency, however was highest in areas with less than 2% black or more than 50% black but was lowest when the racial mix was predominantly, but not completely, white. In a third analysis, census tracts were divided into areas of high and low economic status and high and low family status. In this analysis, delinquency rates varied in relation to economic status; however, the presence of high family status always lowered the rate of delinquency.

In a partial replication of Quinney's (1964) study, and to address the criticism of using official data in social disorganization research, Johnstone (1978) used self-reported data to test social disorganization theory. In this study, Johnstone administered self-reported delinquency questionnaires to 1,124 youth aged 14 through 18 living in Chicago. Johnstone also used a modified Shevsky–Bell social area analysis using "area status measures" and "family status measures." The results of a factor analysis revealed that area-status measures had a positive but nonsignificant relationship with fighting and weapon-related crimes and a negative and nonsignificant relationship with all other delinquency measures. In regard to family status measures, lower-class status was significantly associated with fighting and weapons offenses, burglary–larceny–robbery offenses, Uniform Crime Report Index offenses, and arrests.

An enduring criticism of Shaw and McKay's (1942) research was the assumption of a stable delinquency pattern in the community rather than one experiencing change. Bursik and Webb (1982) attempted to test this hypothesis by examining data from Chicago. They used Shaw and McKay's own data and updated it to the time of their study to facilitate an examination from 1940 to 1970 in 10-year increments. Data were drawn from all male referrals to the Chicago juvenile court in the years of 1940, 1950, 1960, and 1970 and from census data for the corresponding years. A regression analysis revealed that delinquency was not associated with the indicators of change between 1940 and 1950. For the two following periods, however, this trend was reversed. Bursik and Webb also found that communities exhibiting the most rapid change were characterized by the highest increases in delinquency. The analysis showed that communities with the highest rates of population change had an average of 12 more offenses per 1,000 youth than areas with either moderate or slow change. They concluded on the basis of these findings that it was the *nature* of the change, not the *people* involved in the change, that was affecting delinquency. In explaining how their findings differed from Shaw and McKay's, Bursik and Webb concluded that the earlier study was not wrong but that it was conducted "within a specific historical context and grounded . . . in a model of ecological process that [has] changed dramatically since the publication of the 1942 monograph" (p. 36).

Four years later, Schuerman and Kobrin (1986) conducted a study similar to Bursik and Webb's (1982) with a 20-year historical analysis of Los Angeles County. This was accomplished by gathering data from the juvenile court for 1950, 1960, and 1970 and correlating them with measures of land use, population composition, socioeconomic status, and subculture.

Schuerman and Kobrin (1986) proposed that neighborhoods travel through three stages: (1) emerging areas, with very low delinquency rates; (2) transitional areas, with moderate levels of delinquency; and (3) enduring areas, which maintain high levels of delinquency for many years. They also proposed that deterioration preceded a rise in delinquency in early stages of transition (supporting Shaw and McKay, 1942) but that as the city moved to the enduring stage, rises in the delinquency rate preceded deterioration.

In analyzing the relationship between land use (physical status) and delinquency, Schuerman and Kobrin (1986) found that the number of homes owned and land use type was inversely related with delinquency. They also found high mobility levels in persons living in high-delinquency areas. A cross-lagged regression analysis revealed that physical deterioration was most highly associated with increases in delinquency in emerging areas. As the area continued to deteriorate and delinquency rose, however, the most significant factors shifted to economic characteristics. Schuerman and Kobrin argued that the speed of change rather than the change itself that resulted in a neighborhood moving from low to high crime rates.

In analyzing the influence of socioeconomic factors on delinquency, Schuerman and Kobrin (1986) examined the occupation, unemployment, education, and housing characteristics of census tracts. This analysis revealed expected results of a low number of professional and skilled workers and a low percentage of people with advanced education in high-delinquency areas. The trend among housing characteristics in Schuerman and Kobrin's study also supported the findings of Shaw and McKay (1942) and the replications. There was a general trend from owner- to renter-occupied housing and from single to multiple housing units as one moved from low-delinquency to high-delinquency areas. This supported Shaw and McKay's proposal that delinquency was positively correlated with the percentage of people renting and negatively correlated with the percentage of homes owned. There were also significant increases in the degree of overcrowding in high-delinquency areas, which supported the findings of Lander (1954), Bordua (1959), and Chilton (1964). Unlike physical status characteristics, economic variables were not a significant factor of delinquency in emerging areas of Schuerman and Kobrin's study. Socioeconomic status preceded increases in delinquency only in transitional and enduring stages.

Schuerman and Kobrin (1986) examined four population characteristics: (1) white and (2) non-white population

and (3) white and (4) non-white female participation in the labor force. In high-delinquency areas, the percentage of blacks in the population rose slightly from 1950 through 1970, while the percentage of whites decreased dramatically in the same areas. Similar trends occurred in the female labor force participation. From 1950 through 1970, the black female participation in the labor force dropped slightly in high-delinquency areas, but the white female labor force dropped substantially. These findings were even more substantial in the cross-lagged analysis. Schuerman and Kobrin concluded from this analysis that rapid change in population characteristics, along with high rates of deterioration and population turnover, were preceding and greatly influencing the rate of increase in delinquency.

Sampson and Groves (1989) tested social disorganization theory using data from a survey of 10,905 residents in 238 localities in Great Britain. Their rationale was that previous research had relied on census data that were not valid measures of community structure or crime. Sampson and Groves also argued that survey data were superior to Shaw and McKay's (1942) reliance on official crime. They also proposed that "low economic status, ethnic heterogeneity, residential mobility, and family disruption lead to community social disorganization, which in turn, increased crime and delinquency rates" (p. 775). On the basis of their analysis, Sampson and Groves concluded that social disorganization theory was supported, stating that "between-community variations in social disorganization transmit much of the effect of community structural characteristics on rates of both criminal victimization and criminal offending" (p. 774). Furthermore, they argued for expanded support for social disorganization theory in that "Shaw and McKay's model explains crime and delinquency rates in a culture other than the United States" (p. 776).

An ironic major drawback of social disorganization research has been the relative lack of theory to guide or explain the research (Bursik, 1988). Much of the research in this area has paid tribute to social disorganization in the literature review and then simply conducted analyses with little theoretical explanation for the findings. Two authors (Sampson, 1986, and Stark, 1987) attempted to advance the theory itself and to provide a better link between neighborhood-oriented research and the theoretical foundation.

Responding to criticisms that ecological research lacked an intervening factor between the variables and criminality, Sampson (1986) proposed that a breakdown in informal social controls is this link. With this premise in mind, Sampson set out to show the link among ecological characteristics, social disorganization, loss of informal social control, and delinquency. The first link he attempted to make concerned the structural density of a neighborhood. In an earlier work, Sampson (1985) proposed that increases in density reduced the ability of a neighborhood to maintain surveillance and guardianship of youth and strangers. As the number of persons in a given living area increased, it was more difficult to know who lived in the area. When this occurred, residents were less able to recognize their neighbors or be concerned with their activities, resulting in an increased opportunity for delinquency. Sampson also proposed a link with residential mobility whereby he argued that neighborhoods with a high population turnover had a greater number of new faces, making it difficult to distinguish between new residents and strangers. Sampson proposed that economic status was related to delinquency through the attachment or social bond a person had to the neighborhood and the neighborhood's willingness to maintain informal social control. He also proposed that people who owned their own homes had a greater attachment and commitment to the neighborhood and took steps to maintain neighborhood networks and social control. He examined two-parent versus one-parent families and their relative ability to maintain informal social control. Sampson proposed that two-parent families provided increased supervision and that because of this they were aware of and intervened in predecessors of involvement in more serious delinquent activities.

Stark (1987) furthered Sampson's (1985, 1986) effort to add a theoretical framework to social disorganization research by formalizing some of the more important aspects of Shaw and McKay's (1942) findings in developing a set of 30 propositions. The primary focus of Stark's propositional framework was on Shaw and McKay's physical status variables. The factors Stark used to analyze population status were transience of population, mixed-use neighborhoods, and overcrowding. Stark (1987) proposed that "transience weakens voluntary organizations, thereby directly reducing both informal and formal sources of social control" (p. 900). Stark also sought to provide a basis for understanding how proximity to industry and mixed-use areas influenced delinquency. Stark argued that in areas where residents lived close to commercial or industrial businesses there was more opportunity to commit delinquent acts (e.g., theft) because targets were readily available and close by. In purely residential areas, however, juveniles who wanted to commit such thefts might have to travel a great distance to get to a place where such acts could be committed. Stark proposed that economic status was linked to delinquency in two ways (physical status and population status). First, he proposed that homes in poor areas were typically more crowded; therefore, there was more anonymity and less supervision of children. Stark also linked economic status to delinquency through physical status in his proposition that "poor, dense neighborhoods tend to be mixed-use neighborhoods" (p. 902). In relating population status to delinquency, Stark proposed that physically unattractive areas reduced people's commitment to their neighborhood. This proposition also supported Shaw and McKay's conclusion that physically deteriorated areas in close proximity to industry and with a highly transient population cannot maintain commitment

to the area by the residents and cannot maintain social control of delinquency.

A Resurgence: Social Disorganization Theory in the 1990s

At least within criminology and criminal justice, the focus on neighborhoods experienced a resurgence in the 1990s. This was largely based on recognition of the increasing decline of American cities, increasing crime rates, and the popularity of community policing. This renewed focus produced a great deal of research on neighborhoods. Most of the research paid homage to social disorganization theory but largely abandoned it as a theoretical basis. Some studies, however (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997), maintained at least some of the tenets of social disorganization theory. These studies often attempted to further the understanding of neighborhoods and crime with better methodological techniques and more appropriate data.

In one of the more extensive statements of neighborhoods and crime in the 1990s, Bursik and Grasmick (1993) presented a reformulation of social disorganization theory by placing it "within a broader systemic theory of community, which emphasized how neighborhood life is shaped by the structure of formal and informal networks of association" (p. 55). Bursik and Grasmick used as a backdrop to their argument a three-level system of relationships influencing informal social control. The first level, the strength of individual relationships within a neighborhood, formed the base for the next two levels. Bursik and Grasmick argued that strong relationships among residents would result in strong neighborhood networks, which was the second level. Bursik and Grasmick argued that when neighbors know each other, they are more likely to pay attention to events that are influencing the common good of the community. The final level of relationships were those between residents and organizations external to the neighborhood, such as local government officials or the police. This was the level at which a neighborhood would be able to marshal resources to combat invasions into the neighborhood, such as unwanted organizations (e.g., a halfway house) or crime (e.g., drug dealers).

Bursik and Grasmick (1993) found that instability greatly reduced the neighborhood residents' ability to exert social control. At the level of residents, high population turnover made it difficult to maintain ties to other residents. For example, a tenant in a public housing unit may live there for years and never form a relationship with his or her neighbors. Residents who do not know the children of the area were less likely to intervene when the children displayed unacceptable behavior. Instability also negatively influenced the security of the neighborhood because it reduced informal surveillance. A strong neighborhood network reduced the places crime could hide from surveillance, whereas weak networks increased the ability of crime to occur in the open without being detected.

A large part of research related to social disorganization in the 1990s began to fragment and examine only portions of social disorganization theory. For example, Elliott et al. (1996) analyzed the ethnic diversity of neighborhoods (measured by the number of different languages spoken) to examine the influence of crime based on differences in values and norms between the ethnic groups. Elliott et al. proposed that when there were a variety of languages being spoken, communication could be difficult, and consensus concerning appropriate values and behaviors for the community might not be reached. There was also considerable research related to a breakdown of the family unit. Much of this research (e.g., McNulty & Bellair, 2003) sought to examine the influence of single-family units (especially related to race) on crime. The research of P.-O. Wikström and Loeber (2000, p. 1135) indicated that youth in public housing were more likely to participate in serious offending. They argued that this could be due to the serious neighborhood disadvantage of public housing and a lack of the residents' ability to collectively defend against crime (as stated by Bursik & Grasmick, 1993).

By the end of the 1990s, the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN) began to change the nature of social disorganization research. This project used social disorganization theory as a basis for a reexamination of neighborhood crime patterns in Chicago. This was easily the most extensive research in criminology since the work of Shaw and McKay (1942) and perhaps in the history of criminology research. It spawned a wealth of publications related to social disorganization theory but that took different conceptual paths. For example, Sampson and Raudenbush (1999, p. 627) took Bursik and Grasmick's (1993) research on the capacity of neighborhoods to control crime and introduced the concept of *collective efficacy,* defined as "cohesion among neighborhood residents combined with shared expectations for informal social control of public space" (p. 3; see also Sampson & Raudenbush 2001, p. 1).

Sampson et al. (1997) argued that collective efficacy was an intervening variable between structural conditions of neighborhoods (poverty, residential instability) and crime. They examined collective efficacy using data on 343 Chicago neighborhoods and their residents as part of PHDCN. In their analysis, Sampson et al. examined structural characteristics (disadvantage, residential stability, immigrant concentration, etc.), characteristics of residents (race, age, socioeconomic status, etc.), and collective efficacy in relation to violent crime measures. They found that collective efficacy had a statistically significant relationship to violent crime regardless of structural or individual characteristics of neighborhoods. They argued that in low-crime neighborhoods, residents used informal control to regulate the behavior of members by developing rules and collective goals for the neighborhood. For this to occur, residents must

develop relationships and trust among one another. When a neighborhood's residents had a high level of social cohesion and trust among them, informal control was easier to exert, and social disorder and crime were less likely.

In addressing the influence of collective efficacy on crime, Sampson and Raudenbush (1999) followed many of the variables used in early social disorganization research. For example, they argued that a high percentage of immigrants in an area was often associated with high levels of disadvantage. This in turn increased the disorder in the neighborhood, which would lead to high levels of crime. One of the most innovative and extensive parts of the PHDCN research involved driving down selected streets using video equipment to capture measures of physical and social disorder. Sampson and Raudenbush found that both social and physical disorder were observed in neighborhoods characterized by a diverse commercial and residential use of property. They concluded that the level of crime could be explained by collective efficacy, meaning that disadvantage, not race or the ethnic composition of a neighborhood, was responsible for high levels of crime.

Social Disorganization Theory in the 21st Century

By the turn of the 20th century, social disorganization theory had largely died out in its original form. It was replaced with (a) research paying tribute to the theory but straying from its original intent, (b) research focused on collective efficacy, and (c) research focused on neighborhood characteristics but using a different theoretical base (including the variety of research conducted under the term *environmental criminology*).

A number of studies acknowledged social disorganization but did not use the theory. These studies paid tribute to the theory by using the term *social disorganization* to describe neighborhoods, but they rarely used the tenets of the theory. These studies found that juveniles from socially disorganized neighborhoods were more likely to engage in aggressive and delinquent behaviors (P.-O. Wikström & Loeber, 2000), sexual activity at an early age (Browning, Leventhal, & Brooks-Gunn, 2004), and violence. In addition, juveniles in these neighborhoods were more likely to witness violence and develop mental health problems. P. H. Wikström and Sampson (2003) argued that the development of antisocial and delinquent propensities among children and adolescents was influenced by community socialization and that this relationship was due to the level of collective efficacy present in the neighborhood. Neighborhoods low in collective efficacy produced children who were often unsupervised, and there was little threat of repercussions for negative behaviors.

Sampson and Raudenbush (2001) also indicated allegiance to social disorganization but strayed from its original connotation. They conceded that the ability to understand social disorganization is crucial to fully understanding urban neighborhoods. In their research, however, social disorganization consisted primarily of visual indications of neighborhood physical deterioration. They proposed that this physical deterioration was an indication of what was happening in the neighborhood, such that "disorder triggers attributions and predictions in the minds of insiders and outsiders alike, changing the calculus of prospective homebuyers, real estate agents, insurance agents, and investors" (p. 1).

Sampson and Raudenbush (2001) proposed that neighborhood structure rather than social disorganization influenced the level of disorder. Where physical and social disorder was low, high levels of collective efficacy were usually found. They proposed, however, that disorder did not produce crime. They found no relationship between disorder and homicide, suggesting that crime and disorder were both influenced by something else. They proposed that the common underlying factor comprised the characteristics of the neighborhood and the cohesiveness and informal social control of its residents (Sampson & Raudenbush, 2001). This would feed into Sampson and others' research on collective efficacy.

Continuing the line of research of Sampson and Raudenbush (2001), Morenoff, Sampson, and Raudenbush (2001) made a connection between social disorganization and what they termed *social capital.* They viewed local communities as complex systems made up of friendships, kinships, and acquaintances. They argued these groups were tied to each other through family life and other aspects of their social lives. Morenoff et al. (2001) used *social capital* to describe the social ties between people and positions. They argued social capital increases the social organization and trust within networks, which helps maintain cooperation. They proposed that neighborhoods devoid of social capital were less able to hold common values and maintain social control. This lack of control lead to an inability of the neighborhood to ward off unwanted social problems, including increases in crime. Morenoff et al. did concede that if strong expectations of social control were shared among a community, few ties were necessary among neighbors.

In one of the few articles that refocused on social disorganization, Kubrin and Weitzer (2003) stated that experimental and analytical work on the connection between crime and community characteristics has led to clarification of social disorganization theory. They argued that social disorganization theory was aided in recent research by addressing it as more of a systemic model that included both intra- and extra-neighborhood factors. They argued, however, that substantive and methodological issues remained that needed to be overcome if social disorganization theory were to continue to advance.

The substantive improvements proposed by Kubrin and Weitzer (2003) included advancements in the operationalization of key concepts and the addition of mediating variables between neighborhood structural characteristics and

crime. They argued that the primary variable that has improved the theory is collective efficacy. Kubrin and Weitzer argued that, although social control was not central to social disorganization theory, formal social control (police, code enforcement, etc.) was a critical concept in social disorganization research and should be brought into future research. Finally, Kubrin and Weitzer bemoaned the fact that the culture of the neighborhood has largely been ignored in recent research. They proposed that there should be a return to the neighborhood culture included in Shaw and McKay's (1942) original work.

Kubrin and Weitzer (2003) described recent "methodological innovation" in social disorganization theory that had helped researchers test key propositions and clarify relevant causal models. They identified these innovations as dynamic models, reciprocal effects, contextual effects, and spatial interdependence. They correctly pointed out that one of Shaw and McKay's (1942) principal findings was the changing nature of cities. They decried the research following Shaw and McKay's as dismissing urban dynamics, and they called for a return to including dynamic models of neighborhood change in social disorganization research. Kubrin and Weitzer also indicated that although the reciprocal effects of crime and community were beginning to be addressed, the inclusion of models in which community characteristics could influence crime and crime could then influence community characteristics is still not sufficient. Drawing on the current trend in multilevel modeling, Kubrin and Weitzer proposed that contextual effects addressing the connection between the neighborhood and its effect on individual outcomes should receive greater attention in social disorganization theory research. Finally, Kubrin and Weitzer argued that *spatial interdependence,* whereby spatially adjacent neighborhoods could influence one another's level of disorganization, should be more fully developed in social disorganization theory and research.

Kubrin and Weitzer (2003) concluded that more complete and more rigorous testing of social disorganization theory's propositions was possible because of methodological innovations. They conceded that although researchers continued to be challenged with the proper measurement of central concepts and methodological shortcomings, social disorganization theory could greatly increase the understanding of crime at the neighborhood level with the improvements outlined in their article.

Combining many of the developments from the previous 15 years, Warner (2007) sought to delineate the forms of social control (and collective efficacy) by examining the willingness of residents to directly intervene in a situation rather than relying on formal means of control (typically the police, but also avoidance or tolerance). Like many of the previous studies, Warner paid tribute to social disorganization theory in the introduction and literature review but did little to support the theory in the research, only including disadvantage and residential mobility as classic social disorganization variables. Other independent variables included by Warner were social ties and faith in the police. Warner found that the relationship between neighborhood disadvantage and social control was nonlinear. She argued that this meant that both highly disadvantaged and highly advantaged people were likely to use indirect methods of control (the police) or to avoid or tolerate the situation, whereas people in the middle were more likely to take direct action. Warner stated this is in opposition to the tenets of social disorganization theory, which would hold a more linear pattern of the most disadvantaged using indirect methods and the likelihood of direct action increasing as the disadvantage of the neighborhood lessened. Warner found similar patterns for residential mobility: Mobility was significantly and positively related with the likelihood of using indirect methods of social control (police, avoidance, etc.), but it was not related to the likelihood of using direct methods. Warner found support for these results in confirming the tenets of social disorganization theory.

Overall, social disorganization theory in the first decade of the 21st century seemed to fare no better than in the last part of the 20th century. The theory still received some support from research on neighborhoods, but most of the research included only parts of the theory, a few of the variables, or simply paid tribute to the theory in the literature review and then conducted neighborhood research that was faintly consistent with the theoretical foundation of social disorganization.

Future Directions

One could argue that the future of social disorganization theory looks bleak. Although it is likely to still be considered one of the major theories, especially given a continued focus on neighborhood research, it may very well dissipate in its classic form. Other than a few articles likely to be related to dissertation work, it is likely that replications or semireplications of Shaw and McKay's (1942) work will disappear. Two directions do look promising for the vestiges of social disorganization theory, however: (1) studies using data from the PHDCN and its associated collective efficacy theory and (2) work from environmental criminology.

Life course theory and research from the PHDCN has dominated much of the theoretical work over the past 20 years. Sampson and other researchers have produced many publications detailing the intricacies of crime related to neighborhood change in Chicago. The availability of these data for other researchers and its current popularity probably means that research will be using these data for at least another decade. Furthermore, the popularity of Sampson's work on collective efficacy has probably ensured numerous publications in this area for the foreseeable future.

Beginning in the late 1970s with the work of crime prevention through environmental design (Jeffery, 1971), a new area of neighborhood research was formed. This quickly

developed into what is now termed *environmental criminology.* This line of research is typically based more in routine activities theory (among other theoretical foundations) than social disorganization theory, but the tenets of social disorganization theory can easily be found in much of this line of study. A recent development in environmental criminology may signal a larger place for social disorganization theory within environmental criminology. Walker (2007) used complex systems science in an effort to improve the ability of social disorganization theory to explain neighborhood change and crime. Walker termed this new theory *ecodynamics theory* after the various theoretical traditions on which it was based (social disorganization, human ecology, environmental criminology, and complex systems theory). A few conference papers at an annual meeting on environmental criminology gave rise to the argument that social disorganization theory may continue to be tested more in its classic form by these researchers than by others in criminology.

Conclusion

Social disorganization theory has its roots in some of the oldest research in criminological theory, dating back to the early 1800s. Studies of neighborhoods, including crime characteristics, rose almost simultaneously with the development of the field of sociology. As Park began to build the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago, he centered on the concept of human ecology. This examination of human behavior, mostly at the neighborhood level, gave rise to Burgess's research and ultimately to the hiring of Clifford R. Shaw and Henry D. McKay, who went on to become the most influential social disorganization researchers in the first half of the 20th century.

Shaw and McKay's (1942) work resulted in the formal development of social disorganization theory as an explanation of the behavior and characteristics of neighborhoods and how changes in those characteristics could influence the level of crime. After this, social disorganization theory enjoyed a time of prominence in criminological thought, producing many replications and research through the early 1960s.

Social disorganization theory fell into disrepute in the 1970s as a result of sharp criticism of Shaw and McKay's (1942) work and because of a move away from official data concerning crime. As a consequence, not much research using social disorganization theory was conducted during this time. The research that was conducted downplayed the theory, foretelling social disorganization theory's future.

Social disorganization theory made a brief resurgence in the 1990s as the deterioration of American neighborhoods and rising crime rates produced a new interest in understanding the characteristics of neighborhoods. Even during this period, however, social disorganization theory was seldom tested in its classic form, and researchers again downplayed the theory in relation to new methods and theory. By the end of the century, the PHDCN began to produce a new line of theory based on collective efficacy.

After the turn of the 20th century, most research paid tribute to the historical importance of social disorganization theory but did little to bring its tenets into modern research. Research on collective efficacy prevailed, as did research focusing on neighborhoods but doing little to further the theory itself.

The future of social disorganization theory appears close to its current status. A few criminologists are testing the theory close to its original configuration. Most of the research is likely to follow more along the lines of collective efficacy theory or to examine neighborhoods with only parts (or even none) of the tenets of true social disorganization theory.

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