Taking Stock

The Status of Criminological Theory

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Collective Efficacy Theory: Lessons Learned and Directions for Future Inquiry

Robert J. Sampson

In this essay I consider the role of neighborhoods in the modern city. Despite our increasingly global and interconnected world, neighborhoods show remarkable continuities in patterns of criminal activity. Indeed, for at least a hundred years, criminological research in the ecological tradition has continually confirmed the non-random concentration of crime in certain neighborhoods, especially those characterized by poverty, the racial segregation of minority groups, and the concentration of single parent families. But why? By focusing primarily on correlates of crime at the level of community social composition—especially poverty and race—traditional neighborhood research has tended toward a risk-factor rather than an explanatory approach. The aim of this paper is to move away from community-level correlations, or markers, to a theory of the underlying *social mechanisms* theoretically at work. I conceptualize a social mechanism as a theoretically plausible (albeit typically unobservable) contextual process that accounts for or explains a given phenomena (Sorenson 1998), in this case crime rates.

I specifically "take stock" of the social-mechanistic theory of collective efficacy with which I have been associated. I begin with a brief review of its intellectual legacy and the basic ideas that animate collective efficacy theory. I then turn to a synthesis of relevant empirical literature, although I do not intend this as a comprehensive review. Fortunately, independent scholars have undertaken the task of summarizing the evidence to date through rigorous meta-analysis, leaving me the opportunity to make a case for the larger patterns and implications. After laying out the main ideas and the empirical regularities, I then turn to the future—where do we go from here? Science advances

through the reasoned criticism of received knowledge and so my goal is to lay out the challenges to collective efficacy theory and, potentially, fruitful avenues of future work. Along the way I introduce key methodological issues and work in progress that I hope sharpens our theoretical approach to community level theories of crime.

From Social Disorganization to Networks

The idyllic notion of local communities as 'urban villages' characterized by dense personal networks has proven to be a durable and seductive image, one that traditional perspectives on neighborhood crime find hard to resist. A reigning image is that tight-knit neighborhoods produce safety because of their rich supply of social networks. In the classic work of the Chicago School of Urban Sociology in the early twentieth century however, it was hypothesized that density, low economic status, ethnic heterogeneity and residential instability led to the rupture of local social ties which, in turn, accounted for high rates of crime and disorder. The prototypical scholar of the Chicago School of "community lost" was Louis Wirth (1938) who analyzed modernity in terms of its deleterious effects on primary relationships.

The concept of social disorganization emerged out of the Chicago School, defined theoretically as the inability of a community to realize the common values of its residents and maintain effective social order (Shaw and McKay 1942; Kornhauser 1978). This definition came to be operationalized in systemic terms—the allegedly disorganized community was viewed as suffering from a disrupted or weakened system of friendship, kinship and acquaintanceship networks and, as a consequence, ongoing processes of socialization (Sampson and Groves 1989). More recently, the intellectual tradition of community-level research has been revitalized by the increasingly popular idea of "social capital." Although there are many definitions, social capital is typically conceptualized as a resource embodied in the social ties among persons (Putnam 2000). The connection of social disorganization to social capital theory was articulated by Bursik (1999) as follows: neighborhoods bereft of social capital, indicated primarily by depleted social networks, are less able to realize common values and maintain the social controls that foster safety. Dense social ties thus play a key role in social capital/disorganization theory.

Although social disorganization theory, in particular, has enjoyed considerable support in the literature, there are reasons to problematize both its conceptual definition and the role of social networks—especially dense personal ties—in generating low crime rates. On the former, it seems to me that social disorganization is still defined largely in terms of outcome. How do we know a neighborhood is unable to achieve social order? By social *dis*order? That, in fact, is what passes for much community disorganization and crime research in which indicators of social disorder, themselves usually comprised of some violation of law, are used to measure the cause of crime (see Sampson

and Raudenbush 1999). But if the cause is defined in terms of the outcome, we really have no explanation at all. Put differently, if crime and disorder are part of the same process, with disorder and crime both the observable indicators or markers for a lack of order, we have described a matrix of risk but not independent causal mechanisms or processes.

For this reason social disorganization research has moved to the operationalization of its concepts largely in systemic terms, most notably with respect to the density of social ties (Bursik 1999; Warner and Rountree 1997; Sampson and Groves 1989). Although a necessary move away from tautology, problems remain. First, there is evidence that in some neighborhood contexts strong ties may actually impede efforts to establish social control. Wilson (1987), in particular, has argued that residents of very poor neighborhoods tend to be tightly interconnected through network ties but without necessarily producing collective resources such as social control. He reasons that ties in the inner city are excessively personalistic and parochial in nature—*socially isolated* from public resources. This is so, in part, because survival mechanisms and local support takes precedent over activities centered on the collective good (Stack 1975).

Second, networks connect do-gooders just as they connect drug dealers. In her study of a black middle-class community in Chicago, Pattillo-McCoy (1999) specifically addresses the limits of tight-knit social bonds in facilitating social control. She argues that although dense local ties do promote social cohesion, at the same time they foster the growth of networks that impede efforts to rid the neighborhood of organized drug- and gang-related crime. Venkatesh (1997) finds a similar pattern in a low-income neighborhood of Chicago. Dense social ties thus potentially have both positive *and* negative ramifications, reminding us that in a consideration of networks it is important to ask what is being connected—networks are not inherently egalitarian or prosocial in nature (see also, St. Jean 2005). This argument has a long pedigree in the urban sociological and gang literature, perhaps going back as far as William F. Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1943).

Third, shared expectations for social control and strategic connections that yield action can be fostered in the absence of thick ties among neighbors. As Granovetter (1973) argued in his seminal essay, 'weak ties'—less intimate connections between people based on more infrequent social interaction—may be critical for establishing social resources, such as job referrals, because they integrate the community by way of bringing together otherwise disconnected subgroups. Consistent with this view, there is evidence that weak ties among neighbors, as manifested in middle-range rather than either nonexistent or intensive social interaction, are predictive of lower crime rates (Bellair 1997). Perhaps more interesting, and as elaborated below, there is emerging evidence that computer technology (e.g., neighborhood list-serves) may do for coordinating social interactions and collective action among neighbor-

hood residents what strong personal ties allegedly did in the past (Hampton and Wellman 2003).

Finally, the reality is that in modern cities the idyllic urban village endures mainly, if only, in myth. Even if we had the time or energy, most people, including me, do not want to be friends or close with their neighbors. They certainly do not want to eat dinner with them!

Collective Efficacy

To address these challenges and new urban realities, my colleagues and I have proposed a focus on mechanisms of social organization that may be facilitated by, but do not necessarily require, strong ties or associations. This move allows us to reject the outmoded (and normative) assumption that the ideal neighborhood is characterized by dense, intimate, emotional bonds. Instead, neighborhoods are defined in ecological terms where analytic properties of social organization are allowed to vary. We have also introduced a science of studying community processes—ecometrics—that is rooted in the idea that we have to take seriously the measurement of community properties in its own right (Raudenbush and Sampson 1999).

A key form of social organization that I will focus on here is *collective efficacy*. The concept of collective efficacy unites social cohesion, the "collectivity" part of the concept, with shared expectations for control, the social action or efficacy part of the concept (Sampson et al. 1997). In other words, we combine a particular kind of social structure (cohesion, with an emphasis on working trust and mutual support) with the culturally tinged dimension of *shared expectations* for social control. Moreover, we argue that just as self efficacy is situated rather than general (one has self-efficacy relative to a particular task), a neighborhood's efficacy exists relative to specific tasks. We therefore conceive of collective efficacy as a higher-order or organizing theoretical framework that draws attention to variations in the nexus of social cohesion with shared expectations for control. Viewed another way, collective efficacy theory unites the constructs of mutual support (Cullen 1994), which largely defines cohesion, with a collective-action orientation, in this case the activation or generation of community social order.

One reason I believe cohesion and support are important is that they are fundamentally about *repeated* interactions and thereby expectations about the future. There is little reason to expect that rational agents will engage in sanctioning, or other acts of social control or support, in contexts where there is no expectation for future contact or where residents mistrust one another. The insight of collective efficacy theory is that repeated interactions may signal or generate shared norms outside the "strong tie" setting of friends and kin. Another conceptual move of collective efficacy theory is its emphasis on agency. Moving away from a focus on private ties, use of the term collective

efficacy is meant to signify an emphasis on shared beliefs in a neighborhood's capability for action to achieve an intended effect, coupled with an active sense of engagement on the part of residents. Some density of social networks is essential, to be sure, especially networks rooted in social trust. But the key theoretical point is that networks have to be activated to be ultimately meaningful. Collective efficacy, therefore, helps to elevate the 'agentic' aspect of social life over a perspective centered mainly on the accumulation of stocks of social resources as found in ties and memberships (i.e., social capital). This conceptual orientation is consistent with the redefinition by Portes and Sensenbrenner (1998) of social capital in terms of "expectations for action within a collectivity."

Distinguishing between the resource potential represented by personal ties, on the one hand, and the shared expectations for action among neighbors represented by collective efficacy on the other, therefore, helps clarify the dense networks paradox: *social networks foster the conditions under which collective efficacy may flourish, but they are not sufficient for the exercise of control.* The theoretical framework I propose recognizes the transformed landscape of modern urban life, holding that while community efficacy may depend on working trust and social interaction, it does not require that my neighbor or local police officer be my friend.

Collective efficacy theory also addresses the valence of social ties and, ultimately, collective action by applying the 'non-exclusivity requirement' of a social good to judge whether neighborhood structures serve collective needs. Does consumption of a social good by one member of a community diminish the sum available to the community as a whole? I would argue that safety, clean environments, quality education for children, active maintenance of intergenerational ties, the reciprocal exchange of information and services among families, and the shared willingness to intervene on behalf of the neighborhood are capable of producing a social good that yields positive 'externalities' of benefit to all residents—especially children. As with other resources that produce positive externalities, I believe that collective efficacy is widely desired but much harder to achieve, owing, in large part, to social constraints.

Empirical Results: Taking Stock

My colleagues and I tested the theory of collective efficacy in a survey of 8,782 residents of 343 Chicago neighborhoods in 1995. Applying ecometric methods, a five-item Likert-type scale was developed to measure shared expectations about social control. Residents were asked about the likelihood that their neighbors could be counted on to take action if: (i) children were skipping school and hanging out on a street corner; (ii) children were spray-painting graffiti on a local building; (iii) children were showing disrespect to an adult; (iv) a fight broke out in front of their house; and (v) the fire station closest to home was threatened with budget cuts. Our measurement relied on

vignettes because of the fundamental unobservability of the capacity for control—the act of intervention is only observed under conditions of challenge. If high collective efficacy leads to low crime, then at any given moment no intervention will be observed precisely because of the lack of need. Like Bandura's (1997) theory of self efficacy, the argument is that expectations for control will increase behavioral interventions when necessary, but the scale itself taps shared expectations for social action—in our case ranging from informal intervention to the mobilization of formal controls. The emphasis is on actions that are generated "on the ground level" rather than top down.

The "social cohesion/trust" part of the measure taps the nature of community relationships and was measured by coding whether residents agreed that "People around here are willing to help their neighbors"; "People in this neighborhood can be trusted"; "This is a close-knit neighborhood"; "People in this neighborhood generally get along with each other"; and "People in this neighborhood share the same values." As hypothesized, social cohesion and social control were strongly related across neighborhoods and, thus, combined into a summary measure of collective efficacy, yielding an aggregate-level reliability in the .80 to .85 range.

In our research we found that collective efficacy was associated with lower rates of violence, controlling for concentrated disadvantage, residential stability, immigrant concentration, and a comprehensive set of individual-level characteristics (e.g., age, sex, SES, race/ethnicity, home ownership) as well as indicators of dense personal ties and the density of local organizations (Sampson et al. 1997; Morenoff et al. 2001). Whether measured by official homicide events or violent victimization as reported by residents, neighborhoods high in collective efficacy consistently had significantly lower rates of violence. This finding held up controlling for prior neighborhood violence which was negatively associated with collective efficacy. This pattern suggests a reciprocal loop where violence depressed later collective efficacy (e.g., because of fear). Nevertheless, a two-standard deviation elevation in collective efficacy was associated with a 26 percent reduction in the expected homicide rate (1997: 922).

Another finding is that the association of disadvantage and stability with violence is reduced when collective efficacy is controlled, suggesting a potential causal pathway at the community level. This pathway is presumed to operate over time, wherein collective efficacy is undermined by the concentration of disadvantage, racial segregation, family disruption, and residential instability, which, in turn, fosters more crime (Sampson et al. 1997, 1999). Morenoff et al. (2001) also showed that the density of personal ties and organizations were associated with higher collective efficacy and, hence, lower crime, even though the former did not translate directly into lower crime rates. These findings are consistent with, although do not prove, the hypothesis that

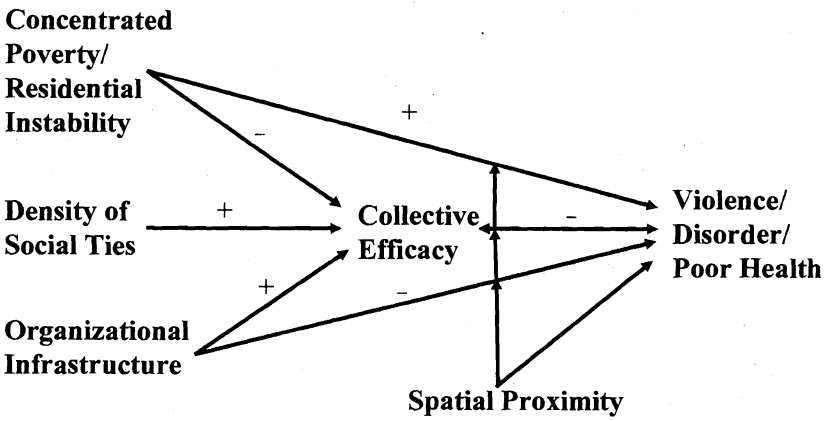
collective efficacy mediates the effect of both structural resources (e.g., affluence, home ownership, organizations) and dense systemic ties on later crime.

As noted at the outset, neighborhoods are, themselves, nodes in a larger network of spatial relations. Contrary to the common assumption in criminology of analytic independence, neighborhoods are interdependent and characterized by a functional relationship between what happens at one point in space and what happens elsewhere. The idea of spatial dependence challenges the urban village model which implicitly assumes that neighborhoods represent intact social systems, functioning as islands unto themselves. Our findings support the spatial argument by establishing the independent effects of spatial proximity—controlling for all measured characteristics internal to a neighborhood, collective efficacy and violence are significantly and positively linked to the collective efficacy and violence rates of surrounding neighborhoods, respectively (Sampson et al. 1999; Morenoff et al. 2001). This finding suggests a diffusion, or exposure-like process, whereby violence and collective efficacy are conditioned by the characteristics of spatially proximate neighborhoods, which, in turn, are conditioned by adjoining neighborhoods in a spatially linked process that ultimately characterizes the entire metropolitan system. The mechanisms of racial segregation reinforce spatial inequality, explaining why it is, that despite similar income profiles, black middle-class neighborhoods are at greater risk of violence than white middle-class neighborhoods (Sampson et al. 1999).

An oversimplified sketch of the major argument made to this point is shown in Figure 5.1. This model makes clear that collective efficacy theory is not merely an attempt to push the burden of social control or support onto residents, "blaming the victim" as some have claimed. Inequality in resources matters greatly for explaining the production of collective efficacy. Concentrated disadvantage and lack of home ownership, for example, predict lower levels of later collective efficacy, and, vice versa, the associations of disadvantage and housing instability with violence are significantly reduced when collective efficacy is controlled (Sampson et al. 1997). These patterns are consistent with the inference that neighborhood resources influence crime and violence, in part, through the mediating role of neighborhood efficacy. The capacity to exercise control under conditions of trust is, thus, seen as the most proximate to explaining crime. Collective efficacy theory has also been extended to explain community well-being and population health, although I do not cover that here (Sampson 2003; Morenoff 2003).

In theoretical terms, Figure 5.1 posits that organizations and institutional strength represent a mechanism that can sustain capacity for social action in a way that transcends traditional personal ties (see also Tripplet et al. 2003). In other words, organizations are, at least in principle, able to foster collective efficacy, often through strategic networking of their own. Whether garbage removal, choosing the site of a fire station, school improvements or police

Figure 5.1
Main Lines of Emphasis in Collective Efficacy Theory



responses, a continuous stream of challenges faces modern communities, challenges that no longer can be met (if they ever were) by relying solely on individuals. Action depends on connections among organizations that are not necessarily dense, or reflective of, the structure of personal ties in a neighborhood. Our research supports this position, showing that the density of local organizations and voluntary associations predicts higher levels of collective efficacy, controlling for prior crime, poverty and the social composition of the population (Morenoff et al. 2001).

What about evidence from beyond Chicago? Rather than provide a narrative review of the evidence on collective efficacy theory that might be biased by my priors, I rely on an independent assessment. Recently, Pratt and Cullen (2005) have undertaken a painstaking review of more than 200 empirical studies from 1960 to 1999 using meta-analysis. The bottom line is that collective efficacy theory fares well with an overall correlation of -.303 with crime rates across studies (95 percent confidence interval of -.26 to -.35). By meta-analysis standards this is a robust finding; and the authors' rank collective efficacy number 4 when weighted by sample size, ahead of traditional suspects such as poverty, family disruption, and race. Although the number of studies and, hence, empirical base, is limited and, while there is considerable variability in operationalization across studies, the class of mechanisms associated with social disorganization theory and its offspring, collective efficacy theory, shows a robust association with lower crime rates (see also reviews in Sampson et al. 2002: Kubrin and Weitzer 2003).

Advances in Community-Level Theory

Despite progress that has been made in recent research, there are a number of important challenges in making inferences about the causal role of neighborhood effects in general and the social mechanism of collective efficacy in particular. In another paper I consider in more depth the methodological issues in assessing neighborhood effects, such as selection bias, when estimating contextual effects on individuals (Sampson 2005). For present purposes, I focus on what I consider fruitful new directions for a better understanding of collective efficacy theory.

Before doing so, it is important to emphasize that a theory of *crime rates*, especially one that aims to explain how neighborhoods fare as units of social control over their own public spaces in the here and now, is logically not the same enterprise as explaining how neighborhoods exert long-term or developmental effects on *individual development* and, ultimately, individual crime (Wikström and Sampson 2003). Both set of mechanisms may be at work, but one does not compel the other. For example, we may have a theory that accurately explains variation of crime event rates across neighborhoods regardless of who commits the acts (residents or otherwise), and another that accurately explains how neighborhoods influence the individual behavior of residents no matter where they are. In the latter case, neighborhoods have developmental or enduring effects (e.g., Wheaton and Clarke, 2003), in the former, situational effects. The logical separation of explanation is reinforced by considering the nature of routine activity patterns in modern cities in which residents traverse the boundaries of multiple neighborhoods during the course of a day. Urbanites occupy many different neighborhood contexts outside of home, especially when it comes to adolescents in the company of peers (Wikström and Ceccato 2004).

Interestingly, it turns out that recent research on the Chicago PHDCN data finds that collective efficacy does not, in fact, predict individual rates of self-reported violence based on the residence of the subjects (Sampson et al. 2005). It is hard to know whether this finding is partly due to the way violence was measured (self reports), but if we set that issue aside, it appears that whereas collective efficacy predicts the event rate of violence in a neighborhood, it does not necessarily predict rates of offending by neighborhood youth, the latter of which may occur anywhere in the city. Put differently, collective efficacy may be more situational than even the original theory suggested, with little "staying power" once residents are outside its purview.

Turning it Around: "Structure" as Endogenous

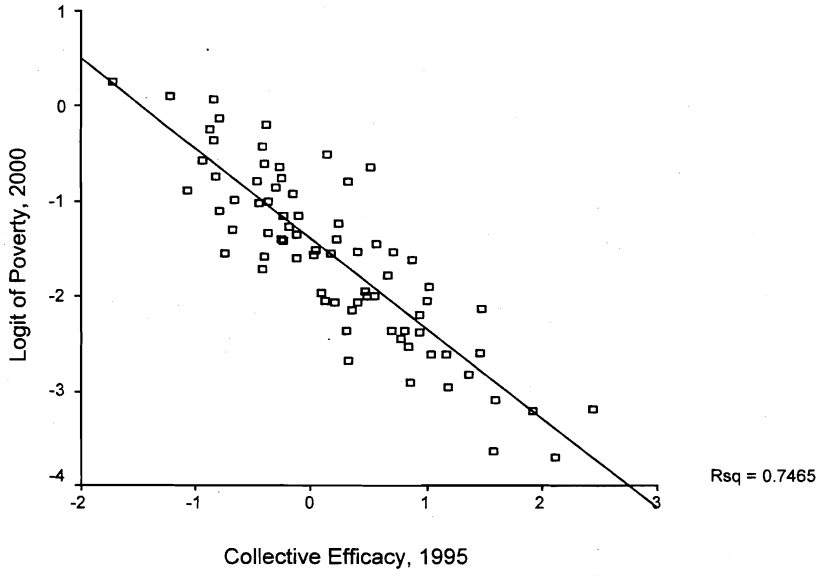
I now turn to the frontiers of collective efficacy theory. I consider first the rather fundamental possibility that the standard account of mediation in com-

munity-level theories of crime may simply be wrong. The standard view, one that I have advocated, is that social processes, like collective efficacy, "mediate" the effects of social structure, especially concentrated disadvantage (Sampson et al. 1997). This account is so plausible and hegemonic that no one has really challenged its logic. Yet why should collective efficacy, or any other social process, necessarily be endogenous to structure? Weber and the endogeneity of capitalism aside, the whole point of Robert Putnam's *Making Democracy Work* (1993) was to reverse the causal chain and posit social capital as the driver of economic development in Italy. Rather than see poverty as the cause of declining economic fortunes, Putnam argued that the lack of civil society was the key ingredient that held back the southern provinces of Italy (see also Banfield 1958).

A similar logic can be applied to present day America and the neighborhoods of Chicago. Areas low in trust, cooperation, and the fundamentals of collective efficacy may lead to the out-migration of those who can afford to live in more harmonious environments. As a recent mover, I can attest to the fact that real estate brokers are attuned to the cohesion of neighborhoods, a subtle, but nonetheless salient, factor that gains special currency among families with children. (It is not a coincidence that the city I chose to live in is endowed with considerable social capital and collective efficacy.) Moving beyond personal anecdotes, collective efficacy, by the terms of the theory, is expected to be correlated with the production of a number of collective goods that matter to residents, including the allocation of city services (e.g., road repair, economic development and investment). Bryk and Schneider's (2002) recent work also shows collective efficacy in the schools is a major predictor of student achievement, a point surely not lost on some parents. In short, there is reason to believe that collective efficacy is a causal factor bound up in the structural disadvantage of a community. If so, then traditional models may have gotten it backwards by controlling for disadvantage in estimating the "direct" effect of collective efficacy—under the above scenario the effect of collective efficacy *should* vanish.

There is preliminary evidence to support this position. Consider the simple prediction of future poverty from the current state of collective efficacy. Figure 5.2 demonstrates a correlation that is surprising even by social science standards—for all intents and purposes the relationship is about as strong as one could expect (R^2 = 75 percent). Areas with high collective efficacy are strongly *predictive* of where that community will end up in the stratification hierarchy. But is this just due to past poverty? The answer is no, for when we control for poverty in 1990, socioeconomic status in 1995, racial composition in 1995 *and* the violent crime rate in 1995, the direct association of collective efficacy in 1995 is strong and significant (B = -. 25, t-ratio = -4.36). The magnitude of prediction is second only to prior poverty and almost its equal.

Figure 5.2
Turning it Around: Poverty as Predicted Outcome of Low Collective Efficacy in Chicago Neighborhoods, 1995-2000



These results undermine the simplistic models that are often specified in the criminological literature. As the late Allen Liska warned us, reciprocal structural dynamics are at work in urban social systems, such that crime, itself, can be considered a path in the causal chain (see also Bellair 2000; Markowitz et al. 2001). We have already found evidence that crime and collective efficacy are reciprocally related in a self-reinforcing process (Sampson and Raudenbush 1999). Taken a step further, there is reason to argue that collective efficacy is an independent factor in the future economic trajectory of a community. If so, then structural disadvantage is, in some sense, endogenous to collective efficacy, completely the reverse of current practice. Although this hypothesis cannot be easily established, the key point for consideration is that the status of collective efficacy, as other social processes (culture), is ambiguous under the traditional model specification in criminology. Indeed, if collective efficacy has any role in the determination of prior values of structural disadvantage, then controlling that effect serves to partial out part of the causal pathway by which it leads to crime.

Discriminant Validity and the Role of Theory

A second problem, that is at once theoretical and methodological, turns on the discriminate validity of the concept of collective efficacy. Thomas Cook and his colleagues (1997) have argued that researchers of community need to pay increased attention to the "lumping" among social processes. In its simplest form, the question is whether there is just one big factor that underlies the correlations among seemingly disparate social processes. A similar point was made about the lumping among structural covariates by Land et al. (1990)—disentangling and estimating independent effects within a set of highly collinear predictors is a recipe for methodological confusion. More recently, Taylor (2002) has correctly pointed out the strong empirical overlap among many indicators of social disorganization, informal social control, and collective efficacy.

Unfortunately, resolution of this legitimate issue is not easy. The critics are right that many community concepts overlap empirically, but that does not mean they tap the same concept or that statistical methods necessarily help to resolve the problem. It is instructive to recall the debate between Bernard Lander and his critics some fifty years ago. In using factor analysis, Lander (1954) identified a concept he called anomie, which carried high loadings for home ownership, percent black, and crime, among others. As Kornhauser (1978) argued, however, Lander included in the explanatory factor (anomie) the outcome itself—crime. From Lander's perspective, the indicators could not be separated empirically (there was a lack of "discriminant validity"), but from a theoretical perspective, we would not want to say that crime is the same construct as home ownership. Rather, they are ecologically intertwined in a social process.

Fast forwarding to the present, ecological scholars are well aware that percent black typically loads on a factor defined by poverty. We can complicate this even more by adding in violent crime, reminiscent of Lander. As a simple exercise, I entered the percent poverty, unemployment, percent black and the violent crime rate in a principal components analysis for Chicago neighborhoods in 1990 and 2000. Only one factor emerged! Surely we would not want to interpret this factor as saying crime is the *same concept* as race or poverty. What the factor taps is the empirical entwinement of the multiple indicators—the factor tells us nothing about causality, sequential order, mediation or anything else of ultimate interest. The same goes for social processes. If we throw in a series of indicators from the PHDCN Community Survey, it turns out disorder loads with collective efficacy (negatively). Again, does this mean they are the *same* construct? As earlier, I would argue no—I believe disorder is a marker for low collective efficacy, like crime, but my argument derives from logic and theory, not simply from the data. All this goes to say that ecological mechanisms of allocation and segregation create groupings of variables that

are difficult to interpret and even harder to study with respect to crime. No statistical method can solve what is fundamentally a theoretical issue about causal mechanisms.

Although resolution of this complex issue is surely beyond this paper, I should like to emphasize one point, however, that speaks in favor of collective efficacy theory. As I have been at pains to argue, one of the distinguishing features of collective efficacy theory is its insistence that agency and control are not redundant with dense personal ties. In point of fact, this assertion is supported despite the otherwise lumpy nature of the data when it comes to factor or principal components analysis. Specifically, indicators of control and cohesion (and yes, disorder) consistently load together on a separate factor from density of personal and friendship ties. This finding has recently been confirmed with a repeated cross-sectional replication of the 1995 Chicago Community Survey in 2002. There is also evidence that collective efficacy is highly stable over time, as is the separate construct of dense ties. Based on theory and empirical evidence, then, we have some confidence to maintain the core analytical distinction between efficacy (social action) and dense ties, all the while recognizing that there the correlations among social processes, just as among structural covariates, are high. The larger point is that neither statistical methods (e.g., LISREL) nor the correlations among social processes and structural features of the city ("the data") speak for themselves—an organizing theoretical model is needed.

Comparative Studies

A third concern I have about extant community research is its seeming disregard for the establishment of generality in causal mechanisms. The prime example is that most of our knowledge has been gained from U.S. cities and only a few of them at that. Yet nothing in the logic of collective efficacy is necessarily limited to specific cities, the United States or any country for that matter. Just how far can we push collective efficacy theory? Is it applicable in societies like France, where republican values and strong norms of state intervention, rather than individual responsibility, might conflict with the notion of neighbors intervening? Does it hold in welfare states where concentrated disadvantage is less tenacious, or in former Soviet states where public spiritedness is allegedly on the wane? Our comparative knowledge base is, unfortunately, limited—very few multi-level studies have been carried out with the explicit goal of cross-national comparison of crime rates and community social mechanisms.

An exception is found in a recent comparison of leading cities in Sweden and the U.S. Although Chicago and Stockholm vary dramatically in their social structure and levels of violence, this does not necessarily imply a difference in the processes or mechanisms that link communities and crime. In fact,

Sampson and Wikström (2004) show that rates of violence are significantly predicted by low collective efficacy in Stockholm as in Chicago. Furthermore, collective efficacy is fostered by housing stability and undermined by concentrated disadvantage—again, similarly, in both cities. These findings are rather remarkable given the vast cultural and structural differences between the countries in question. Sweden is a modern welfare state with highly planned residential communities. "Race" groups are non-existent and immigration comes primarily from Turkey and Morocco. Chicago is the quintessential American city, rank with inequality and the segregation of African Americans and with neighborhoods that are emblematic of unplanned market sorting. Immigration flows are also very different, coming primarily from Mexico rather than Europe or Africa.

That the data show an almost invariant pattern despite these differences is, thus, consistent with the general theoretical approach of this paper that emphasize neighborhood inequality in social resources and contextual conditions that foster the collective efficacy of residents and organizations. But this is only one study. The empirical application of neighborhood studies to other societal contexts is badly needed if we are to make further progress in understanding the generalizability of the link between community social mechanisms and crime rates.

Technology Mediated Efficacy

My final point of emphasis is the most speculative but it circles back to the issue raised at the outset: What produces collective efficacy if not (or besides) dense personal ties? I have offered two general hypotheses thus far that I believe are supported by the data, one in the form of structural resources (e.g., home ownership; stability, economic status) and the other in terms of the density of non-profit organizations. But this seems insufficient in the world I described at the outset, one of fleeting social ties. My speculative answer is that a partial solution may well lie in technology, although its realization will take time. My argument is that rather than undermining social organization, modern technology has the *potential* to knit together weak community ties for the purposes of building collective efficacy. We have all heard anecdotally about how the internet was effectively used to mobilize protests against the International Monetary Fund in Seattle a few years back. Internet use was also widely used in the Howard Dean campaign and on both sides of the political spectrum in the recent presidential election.

What about in the more prosaic neighborhood? Three lines of evidence suggest an interesting scenario. One, Barry Wellman and his colleagues show that, contrary to common belief, the more "wired" local residents are with respect to computer technology, the more their local contacts and involvement in community issues (Hampton and Wellman 2003; Wellman 2004). For

example, compared to non-wired residents, wired residents of the Toronto community they studied recognized three times as many of their neighbors, visited 50 percent more often and more often made use of email for local contacts. Second, Keith Hampton, in an intriguing project called E-Neighbors (see http://www.i-neighbors.org/), is attempting to use technology as a means to increase community well being. Although the results are preliminary, some of the trial neighborhoods he is studying are showing positive results, such as a significant increase in the number of local social ties, more frequent communication on and offline and higher levels of community involvement. The I-Neighbors website is an attempt to apply this model to neighborhoods across the U.S. and Canada.

Third, in an on-going collaborative research project directed by Bob Putnam at Harvard, we are looking at the potential social-capital inducing effects of Meetup-Com, a technology that organizes not chat rooms in cyber or virtual space, but real meetings between people in physical spaces (see http://www.meetup.com/). From book clubs to politics to lovers of Golden Retrievers, Meetup.com brings people together in physical space to share common interests. Although many of the groups seem trivial at the outset (dog lovers, knitting, Goths), it appears that political action, in fact, generates many of the meetups. Besides, if Putnam (2000) is right and social interaction has spin-off externalities for collective action, and possible the generation of collective efficacy, then even the trivial groups should not be dismissed out of hand.

Fourth, it is now possible to imagine how the rapid spread of technology can be harnessed to improve dissemination of crime data and the mapping of "hot spots" of crime. Already some cities allow citizens to access police data and map when and where incidents of crime are occurring, almost in real time (e.g., http://12.17.79.6/ctznicam/ctznicam.asp). Although knowledge about the realities of crime's distribution and frequency might be alarming at first, such knowledge ultimately could lead to a sense of increased collective efficacy and community participation on the part of residents and, perhaps, demands that ameliorative efforts be undertaken by the appropriate authorities. After all, one of the things that research has taught us is that even in high crime areas, most areas are safe most of the time (St. Jean 2005).

It is too soon to know, of course, but rather than taking the stance of Luddites and assuming in a Wirthian manner that community automatically declines in the era of cell phones and instant messaging, these lines of evidence suggest that we need to add networks of technology to our theoretical toolkit of community social organization and collective efficacy.

Conclusion

In this paper I have "taken stock" of the theory of collective efficacy and considered four agendas that I believe are crucial to the advancement of theoretical knowledge—collective efficacy as a potential cause rather than simply

mediator of structural disadvantage; discriminant validity of social-processes that constitute collective efficacy; the need for comparative studies and general theory; and role of technology in promoting collective efficacy. There are others of course, but these seem to me to cut to the core of questions that have been raised about collective efficacy. What causes it? Is collective efficacy a theoretically distinct concept? Is it doomed to be impotent in mass, modern society? What is the association with concentrated disadvantage and is it cause or consequence? Is collective efficacy merely a "Chicago" phenomenon? If this paper is any guide, progress has been made on all these fronts even though there is much work to be done. I would argue that collective efficacy does have unique theoretical value, is general in import, may be fostered under conditions of modernity and predicts not only crime but possibly community social structure itself through reciprocal, self-reinforcing processes.

In one way or another, social networks cut across all these agendas, right down to considering technology as another form of network. We live in a network society we are told, but not all networks are created equal and many lie dormant. A key mistake has been to equate the existence of networks with mechanisms of effective social control. As Arthur Stinchcombe (1989) put it in a useful analogy, just as road systems have their causal impact through the flow of traffic, so systems of links among people and organizations (and in this case, neighborhoods) have their causal impact through *what flows through them*. The problem, then, becomes obvious—through networks (whether personal, spatial, organizational or technological) flow the full spectrum of life's realities, whether criminal knowledge, friendship, or social control.

The basic theoretical position articulated in this article is that collective action for problem-solving is a crucial causal mechanism that is differentially activated under specific kinds of contextual conditions. The density of personal networks is only one, and probably not the most important, characteristic of neighborhoods that contributes to effective social action and mutual support. Attacking the agendas outlined in this paper will hopefully move us a bit closer to a better understanding of the causes and effects of collective efficacy in the modern city.

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