

Box 3.2 The Minimum Wage and Poverty

A minimum-wage job paying \$7.25 per hour (the federally mandated level in 2016; a growing number of cities and states have raised their minimum wages) yields an annual income of \$14,500 ($\$7.25 \times 40 \text{ hours/week} \times 50 \text{ weeks}$). If two parents who have two children, both have minimum-wage jobs, their total annual income is \$29,000, which is higher than the 2016 official federal poverty level for a family of four (\$24,250). The problem is that minimum-wage jobs are not always full-time jobs. If both parents work only 30 hours a week at the minimum wage, their combined annual income of \$21,750 falls below the poverty line.

The most disturbing aspect of the poverty figures is the percentage of children in poverty. The National Center for Children in Poverty calculates that about half of all children live in poor families (with poor defined as families at or below the official federal poverty level). And because of the 2008–2009 recession, the percentage in low-income families has risen. The racial and ethnic disparities are stark and very alarming. While 28 percent of white non-Hispanic adolescents live in low-income families, the figures are 33 percent for Asian Americans, 58 percent for Native Americans, 60 percent for Hispanics, and 61 percent for African Americans.²⁷

The implications of these figures for delinquency and crime are obvious. Childhood poverty is associated with so many other factors that are in turn associated with misbehavior and ultimately serious criminal activity: inadequate nutrition and health care, which affect physical and intellectual development; educational achievement; residence in higher-crime neighborhoods, with the resulting concentration of peers already involved in delinquency, crime, and gangs; the lack of job opportunities in the immediate neighborhood; and so on.

Lack of health insurance makes a big difference in a person's life. If you cannot take care of routine health problems, you are likely to develop major health problems that affect your economic status. If you are chronically sick, you miss work and eventually have trouble holding a steady job. One of the major advantages of expanded health care is access to preventive medical care that helps to identify and correct problems that might eventually lead to much more serious problems. Prenatal health care is extremely important for the health of the fetus, with major impacts later in life. Lack of health insurance can also affect a person or family's economic status. In 2015, 62 percent of personal bankruptcies in the United States were due to medical bills not covered by insurance.²⁸ Bankruptcy can cause many families to fall from middle- or even upper-middle-class status to lower-middle-class or even to poverty status.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND CULTURAL CAPITAL

A person's current social status and future prospects involve more than just money. Also important are what are called social capital and cultural capital. Social theorist Pierre Bourdieu identified three different types of capital. *Economic capital*, obviously, refers to financial resources. *Social capital* includes a person's network

of friends, relationships, and other contacts. *Cultural capital* includes education, knowledge, or skills that give a person an advantage.²⁹

Social capital is defined by the World Bank as "the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality or quantity of a society's social interactions."³⁰ The sources of social capital include families, communities, and organizations. With respect to employment, one important form of social capital is having family, friends, or neighbors who may own a business and can offer a job, or who are able to refer a young person to their employer for a possible job. Family and friends can also offer specific advice or assistance about a problem that has arisen.³¹

Social capital can also be collective in form, particularly at the neighborhood level. A neighborhood, for example, may have many strong religious institutions, which promote neighborhood activity and social cohesion that benefit the entire area. We will explore the importance of this later in our discussion of social disorganization theory (pp. 134).³²

Criminologist Elliot Currie described how some people benefit from social capital while other people do not by citing a study of juvenile delinquents who graduated from the Lyman School in Massachusetts and the Wiltwyck School in New York in the 1950s. The predominantly white Lyman graduates often had personal connections who helped them find good employment. One graduate explained: "I fooled around a lot when I was a kid. ... But then I got an uncle on the [police] force. When I was twenty he got me my first job as a traffic man."³³ The predominantly African-American and Hispanic graduates of Wiltwyck did not have similar kinds of personal resources. As a result, they returned to criminal activity at a much higher rate. In short, the conditions of extreme poverty diminish the human and social capital that young people possess and, as a consequence, contribute to higher rates of criminal activity.

The noted sociologist Alejandro Portes points out, however, that social capital can also have a downside. The most obvious example is neighborhood gangs. A drug gang provides friends, income, self-esteem, and protection from other gangs. It also provides work experience, including negotiating skills, leadership skills, and experience in handling money (but also the skills of lying, threatening people, and using guns). All these skills are gained in the service of criminal activity that might lead to prison or even death. Nonetheless, the positive aspects of the gang experience are a major part of the attraction of gangs, which is far stronger than moralizing about how bad gangs, drugs, and crime are.³⁴

The World Bank argues that government institutions, "the public sector," are an important part of the network of social capital. Assume that a neighborhood has stable families and a strong sense of community. Responsive government institutions can help translate their aspirations and efforts into effective services: good schools, attractive parks for recreation, streets that are repaired, a public transportation system that allows people to find and hold jobs, and so on.³⁵

The police and the criminal justice system are also important elements of the public aspect of social capital. If the police effectively control crime and disorder, community members will feel better about their neighborhood and feel empowered to work for its improvement. The community policing movement began

with the idea that policing can be made more effective by developing partnerships with community organizations and developed programs that reduce crime and disorder. The resulting feeling among neighborhood residents that they can effectively influence neighborhood conditions is what criminologists call collective efficacy. We will discuss this in more detail shortly.

The Debate over the Underclass

Some of the most pessimistic observers of inequality in America use the term *underclass* to describe the very poor who are concentrated in the inner cities. The idea of an underclass is more than a matter of semantics. It is not merely another euphemism for poor people, along with "the poor," "the deprived," "the impoverished," "the disadvantaged," "the at-risk," and so on. It describes a new kind of poverty, from which people are not able to escape, and the conditions of poverty recreate.³⁶

Extended periods of poverty lead to dysfunctional families, which in turn lead to children who do poorly at school, become involved in delinquency and crime, and become negative peer influences for other kids in the immediate neighborhood. Kids who are arrested acquire criminal records that bar them from many job opportunities. Gangs dominate street life, disrupting positive social relations. And on it goes, and the underclass perpetuates itself.

Evidence suggests that the nature of urban poverty has changed in significant ways. First, the industrial sector of the economy has eroded, eliminating the entry-level jobs that were historically available to the poor. Second, conditions in the underclass generate circumstances, particularly concentrated disadvantage, and the resulting behavior that perpetuate poverty.

Gary Orfield and Carole Ashkinaze's study of economic conditions in Atlanta during the 1980s found growing inequality amid overall growth and prosperity. The authors found that although most people in the Atlanta metropolitan area fared better economically, "the dream of equal opportunity is fading fast for many young blacks in metropolitan Atlanta." For the African-American poor in the inner city, "many of the basic elements of the American dream—a good job, a decent income, a house, college education for the kids—are less accessible ... than was the case in the 1970s."³⁷ Most of the economic growth occurred in the largely white suburbs, whereas opportunities declined in the predominantly African-American inner city. At the same time, most of the expanding opportunities occurred in the service sector of the economy: either in white-collar professional-level jobs, health care professions, or in minimum-wage service jobs (e.g., fast food restaurants). The poor cannot realistically compete for the professional-level jobs, and many of the service-sector jobs do not pay enough to support a family or are out of reach by public transportation.

Patterns of residential segregation contribute to the development of the urban underclass. Job growth over the past 30–40 years has been strongest in suburban areas outside the central cities. Inner-city residents, regardless of color, find it extremely difficult both to learn about job opportunities and to travel to and from work. Public transportation systems are either weak or nonexistent in

most cities, particularly with respect to traveling to suburban areas. A private car is almost a necessity for traveling to work. Yet one of the basic facts of poverty is the lack of sufficient money to buy a reliable car. And as we already discussed, people returning from prison often lack a driver's license. Concentration of the very poor and their isolation from the rest of society erode the social networks that are extremely important for finding employment. And, finally, as we have already mentioned, the recession has hit poor and low-income people particularly hard, aggravating the trends over the previous 30 years.

COMMUNITY SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The social structure of communities has an important impact on crime. *Community* in this respect refers to both large metropolitan communities and local neighborhoods. The social structure of a community involves the spatial distribution of the population, the composition of local neighborhoods, and the patterns of interaction between and within neighborhoods. Our focus is on the social structure of local residential neighborhoods.

Residential Segregation

American metropolitan communities are characterized by strong patterns of residential segregation. Segregation itself is nothing new. Historically, American cities have always been segregated by income, ethnicity, and race. One of the central insights of the Chicago School of Sociology was that new arrivals to the city—either immigrants from other countries or migrants from rural areas—settled in the central city, with older immigrant groups and the middle class moving to neighborhoods farther out or to suburban communities. (We discuss the Chicago School of Sociology again, on pp. 134.) Racial and ethnic segregation in housing has been the result of several factors: the historic practice of *de jure* segregation, covert discrimination, and group choice. In the southern and some northern communities, local ordinances prohibited African Americans from living in white neighborhoods.

Particularly in the North, many property owners adopted restrictive covenants that prohibited the sale of property to African Americans or Jews. The Supreme Court invalidated restrictive covenants in 1948 in the case of *Shelley v. Kraemer*.³⁸ Real estate agents maintained segregation by steering minority buyers away from white neighborhoods. Banks and savings and loan companies refused to offer mortgages in poor and minority neighborhoods—a practice known as “redlining.” (The term comes from the idea that real estate agents and banks drew red lines on maps to designate disfavored areas for sales and mortgages).³⁹ Finally, segregation has been maintained by personal choice. People often prefer to live among members of their own group. Thus, European immigrants tended to form distinct ethnic neighborhoods, many of which still exist (e.g., Little Italy).

Despite federal and state laws outlawing housing discrimination, residential segregation persists today. Social scientists have devised an index of residential segregation that measures the proportion of neighborhoods in any city that are

racially homogeneous. The data indicate that in the 1980s, from 70 to 90 percent of the people in the major cities lived in racially homogeneous neighborhoods. The residential segregation indices for both Detroit and Chicago in 1980, for example, were 88, meaning that 88 percent of all people lived in either all-white or all-African-American neighborhoods.⁴⁰

"Distressed Communities":

The Growing Gap in Community Well-Being

The growing gap between family incomes, which we discussed earlier, is also reflected in an increasing economic status gap between communities. The Economic Innovation Group developed a Distressed Communities Index, analyzing changes in 26,000 zip code areas (covering 99 percent of the U.S. population) between 2010 and 2014, using seven factors: percentage of adults (25 years old or older) without a high school degree; housing vacancy rate; adults not working; poverty rate; median income ratio (compared with the state median income); change in the number of jobs (plus or minus); change in the number of business establishments in the area.⁴¹

The report found a widening gap in community well-being between 2010 and 2013. In the wealthiest communities, the number of jobs increased by 20 percent, while in the poorest, jobs fell sharply. In the poorest neighborhoods, the number of businesses fell by 10 percent. In the most distressed communities 55 percent of the adults were not working, 27 percent of the residents lived in poverty, and 14 percent of the homes were vacant.

Crime and Neighborhood Deterioration

The concentration of low-income people in particular neighborhoods has a direct impact on crime by concentrating high-rate offenders in one area. This is a major part of what is called concentrated disadvantage. As a result, law-abiding residents of those areas suffer high rates of robbery, burglary, and other predatory crimes. The National Crime Victimization Survey found that in 2014 the household burglary rate was almost three and a half times higher for the poorest households (less than \$7,500 annual income) than the highest income group (\$75,000 a year or more). The robbery and auto theft rates were also higher.⁴² The obvious questions are: Why do burglars prey on the households that have the least? Why not go where there is more to steal? The answer to both is that burglars themselves are generally poor, and they attack the most available homes, those in the immediate neighborhood.

The concentration of high-rate offenders in an area increases the influence of crime-involved peers among young people. As Robert Crutchfield points out, unemployed or marginally employed people in the secondary labor market "spend more time with each other," and as a result, they are more likely to influence each other in the direction of a greater propensity to commit crime.⁴³ Even in stable families, the sheer weight of this peer influence overwhelms positive parental influence. In the worst of situations, teenagers are coerced into joining

crime-involved gangs. Thus, many individuals are socialized into crime when this would not be the case if they lived in a more diverse neighborhood with less crime.

In one of the great ironies of recent history, some of the great gains of the civil rights movement have hurt the poorest racial minority communities. Since the 1960s, the civil rights movement has opened up employment opportunities in business and the professions, creating a greatly expanded African-American middle class. The end of blatant residential racial segregation created housing opportunities for families in that new middle class. Following the example of their white counterparts, these families move out of low-income, inner-city neighborhoods and into the suburbs where there is less crime and better schools.

The result is that the old neighborhoods abandoned by the African-American middle class are stripped of important stabilizing elements—what William Julius Wilson refers to as a “social buffer.”⁴⁴ The neighborhood loses its middle-class role models, who help socialize other children into middle-class values, and an important part of its natural leadership, the people who are active in neighborhood associations and local school issues. Wesley G. Skogan reports that educated, middle-class, home-owning residents are more likely to be involved in neighborhood organizations than are less educated, poorer, renting residents.⁴⁵ And, as we have already noted, the middle class is composed of the people who can provide the social networks that lead to good jobs. In short, we are left with concentrated disadvantage in the old neighborhoods.

All of these factors contribute directly to neighborhood deterioration and indirectly to crime. As more of the people with better incomes move out, the overall economic level of the neighborhood declines. Houses often go from owner-occupied to rental property. As the area loses purchasing power, neighborhood stores lose business and close. James Q. Wilson and George Kelling, two of the early theorists of community policing, argue that the physical deterioration of a neighborhood (abandoned buildings and cars, unrepaired houses, and so forth) is a sign that people do not care and, consequently, is an “invitation” to criminal behavior.⁴⁶ As the composition of the neighborhood changes, meanwhile, an increasing number of crime-involved people move in, changing the context of peer pressure in the neighborhood.

Skogan describes the impact of fear of crime on neighborhood deterioration as a six-stage process. It begins with withdrawal. People choose to have less contact with other neighborhood residents; the ultimate form of withdrawal is to move away. This leads to a reduction in informal control over behavior by residents: people no longer monitor and report on the behavior of, say, their neighbors’ children. Then, organizational life declines: fewer residents are active in community groups. These factors lead to an increase in delinquency and disorder. As the neighborhood becomes poorer, commercial decline sets in. Local shops are closed, and buildings are abandoned. The final stage of the process is collapse. At this point, according to Skogan, “there is virtually no ‘community’ remaining.”⁴⁷

Community policing and problem-oriented policing are designed to stop the process of neighborhood deterioration. They do this in several ways. First many programs address small signs of disorder that cause people to withdraw accumulated trash in the neighborhood, graffiti, parks with broken playground

equipment, and so on. Second, police-initiated partnerships and block meetings are designed to strengthen networks among residents and help to give them a feeling of empowerment or collective efficacy in dealing with neighborhood problems. Block meetings were one of the core elements of CAPS, the Chicago community policing initiative.⁴⁸

Much of the gun violence in high-crime neighborhoods involves conflict between gangs seeking to control drug trafficking. This was particularly true during the crack cocaine epidemic in the mid-1980s. The violence resembled the famous "beer wars" in Chicago in the late 1920s, as rival gangs fought for control of bootlegging during Prohibition.⁴⁹ Because of drive-by shootings and other gang-related violence, the streets are even less safe than before. This is the stage in neighborhood decline that Skogan describes as neighborhood "collapse."

Well-Being

The quality of neighborhood life affects residents' sense of *well-being*. The purely economic factors of income and wealth are important, of course, but well-being includes many other factors. In a 2015 report on *America's Children*, the Urban Institute identified seven different domains that affect well-being. In addition to economic circumstances, they include the family and social environments (e.g., living arrangements, child care, child maltreatment), health care, the physical environment and safety (e.g., the risk of criminal victimization), personal behavior (e.g., smoking, alcohol or drug use), education, and health.⁵⁰ Pride in the neighborhood and social relations with neighbors are important factors. Poor neighborhoods are typically filled with dilapidated or abandoned buildings. It is hard to take pride in this kind of area. People who do take pride in their neighborhood invest time and energy in keeping up their own residence, even when they are renters. They pick up loose trash, take care of the lawn, fix a fence, and don't leave old furniture on the porch or on the lawn.

An important part of vibrant and healthy neighborhoods is social bonds among residents and participation in organizations such as religious institutions and civic groups. Knowing other people and believing that they care about you and the neighborhood provides a great deal of satisfaction. As we will see later (pp. 135), criminological research has found that neighborhoods with these kinds of bonds are likely to have lower rates of crime than similar neighborhoods that do not have these bonds. Being able to work together to fight disorder and crime is referred to as "*collective efficacy*."⁵¹

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON INEQUALITY AND CRIME

Inequality has both direct and indirect impacts on crime. As a result, the significant racial and ethnic and economic and social inequalities have a disparate effect on the likelihood of poor people of color participating in crime, being the victim

of crime, and suffering inequalities at the hands of the criminal justice system. In the next section, we examine the major theories of crime and discuss how each one explains crime and criminal justice.

Social Strain Theory

Robert Merton's social strain theory holds that each society has a dominant set of values and goals along with acceptable means of achieving them. Not every one is able to realize these goals, however. The gap between approved goals and the means people have to achieve them creates what Merton terms *social strain*. If someone cannot achieve his or her goals through legitimate means, he or she may turn to illegitimate means: crime. Let's say, for example, that you want to be rich but are a high school dropout with no job skills. You might become a drug dealer in order to get rich.⁵²

As Steven F. Messner and Richard Rosenfeld argue in *Crime and the American Dream*, the dominant goals and values in American society emphasize success through individual achievement.⁵³ Success is primarily measured in terms of material goods, social status, and recognition for personal expression (e.g., through art or athletics). The indicators of material success include a person's job, income, place of residence, clothing, cars, and other consumer goods.

The accepted means of achieving these goals are also highly individualistic, emphasizing hard work, self-control, persistence, and education. The traditional American work ethic holds that anyone can succeed if only he or she will work hard enough and keep trying long enough. Failure is regarded as a personal, not social, failure. Yet, as we have seen, many people in the United States do not experience success in these terms: unemployment rates remain high, and millions of people are living in poverty. Minorities are the victims of racial and ethnic discrimination.

Merton's theory of social strain holds that people respond to the gap between society's values and their own circumstances in several different ways: rebellion, retreatism, and innovation. Some of these involve criminal activity.

Rebellion involves a rejection of society's goals and the established means of achieving them, along with an attempt to create a new society based on different values and goals. This stage includes revolutionary political activity, which in some instances might be politically related criminal activity such as terrorism. Rebellion can also take the form of artistic expression. Many famous artists rebelled against established norms, created new art forms, and eventually became famous. Think of some of the most famous rap music artists.

Retreatism entails a rejection of both the goals and the accepted means of achieving them. A person may retreat, for example, into drug abuse, alcoholism, vagrancy, or an alternative lifestyle. Retreatism helps explain the high rates of drug and alcohol abuse in America. Many forms of drug abuse involve criminal behavior: the buying and selling of drugs, robbery or burglary as a means of obtaining money to purchase drugs, or involvement in a drug-trafficking network that includes violent crime directed against rival drug dealers.

There is considerable debate among criminologists over the relationship between drugs and crime.⁵⁴ Studies of crime and drugs have found

patterns: some individuals begin their criminal activity before they start using drugs, whereas for others, drug use precedes involvement in crime. Moreover, some individuals "specialize" and either use (and/or sell) drugs but engage in no other criminal activity, or they commit crimes but do not use illegal drugs.⁵⁵

Innovation involves an acceptance of society's goals but different means of attaining them. Some people may choose to be highly innovative with the normal means (think of the famous pioneers in the digital age). Others may choose alternative and even illegal means. Crime is one mode of innovation. The person who embezzles money seeks material success but chooses an illegitimate (criminal) means of achieving it. Some Wall Street investors pushed the limits of the law in developing new ways to make money. In some cases, they did break the law and were eventually caught and prosecuted. In today's digital world, computer fraud is a possible avenue of crime. Gang formation and drug trafficking are manifestations of entrepreneurship and neighborhood networking. Unfortunately, they include lawbreaking and often have destructive side effects (e.g., gang-related shootings) rather than law obedience. These are examples of what Alejandro Portes and Patricia Landolt refer to as the "downside" of social capital.⁵⁶ The person who steals to obtain money or things is seeking the external evidence of material success through illegal means.

Applying the Theory

Social strain theory helps explain the high rates of delinquency and criminal behavior among racial and ethnic minorities in the United States. Criminal activity will be higher among those groups that are denied the opportunity to fulfill the American dream of individual achievement. The theory also explains far higher rates of retreatist (e.g., drug abuse) and innovative (e.g., criminal activity) responses. The high levels of economic inequality experienced by minorities, together with continuing discrimination based on race and ethnicity, mean that minorities are far less likely to be able to achieve approved social goals through conventional means.

Differential Association Theory

Edwin Sutherland's theory of differential association holds that criminal behavior is learned behavior. The more contact a person has with people who are already involved in crime, the more likely that person is to engage in criminal activity.⁵⁷

Applying the Theory

Given the structure of American communities, with its high degree of both economic and racial and ethnic segregation, differential association theory has direct relevance to the disproportionate involvement of racial and ethnic minorities in the criminal justice system. A person who is poor and African American and lives in a high-crime neighborhood, for example, will have more personal contact with people who are already involved in crime than a middle-class white person.

The concentration of people involved in crime in underclass neighborhoods produces enormous peer pressure to become involved in crime. In neighborhoods where gangs are prevalent, young people often experience tremendous pressure to join a gang simply as a means of personal protection. In schools where drug use is prevalent, juveniles will have more contact with drug users and are more likely to be socialized into drug use themselves. As noted earlier, Crutchfield argues that the secondary labor market brings together high concentrations of people with a weak attachment to their work and the future, who then socialize with one another and influence one another's propensity to commit crime.⁵⁸

Parents have a basic understanding of differential association theory: they warn their children to avoid the "bad" kids in the neighborhood and encourage them to associate with the "good" kids. This also explains choices people make in where they live. They choose to live in what they see as "good" neighborhoods, where there are "good" schools and where their children will not meet "bad" kids.

Social Disorganization Theory

The Chicago School of urban sociology developed the social disorganization theory of crime.⁵⁹ Focusing on poor inner-city neighborhoods, this theory holds that the conditions of poverty undermine the institutions that socialize people into conventional, law-abiding ways of life. As a result, the values and behavior leading to delinquency and crime are passed on from one generation to another.

The Chicago sociologists found, for example, that recent immigrants tended to have lower rates of criminality than the first American-born generation. Immigrants were able to preserve old-world family structures that promoted stability and conventional behavior. These older values broke down in the new urban environment, however, which led to higher rates of criminality among the next generation. The Chicago sociologists noted the spatial organization of the larger metropolitan areas, with higher rates of criminal behavior in the poorer inner-city neighborhoods and lower rates in areas farther out.

The conditions of poverty contribute to social disorganization and criminality in the ways we have already discussed in this chapter. Poverty and unemployment undermine the family, the primary unit of socialization, which leads to high rates of single-parent families. Lack of parental supervision and positive role models contributes to crime and delinquency. The concentration of the poor in certain neighborhoods means that individuals are subject to strong peer-group influence tending toward non-conforming behavior. Poverty is also associated with inadequate prenatal care and malnutrition, which contribute to developmental and health problems that, in turn, lead to poor performance in schools.

The principal proponent of social disorganization theory today is Robert J. Sampson, whose research has focused on Chicago neighborhoods. Out of his research has emerged the related theory of collective efficacy.⁶⁰ If the people in a neighborhood have resources they can rely on as a group, they can resist and possibly even overcome the impact of social disorganization. Measures include

friendship networks, control of teenagers' activity on the streets, and participation in neighborhood organizations. These resources include bonds among neighborhood residents based on mutual trust; strong neighborhood institutions such as churches, synagogues, or mosques; and neighborhood leaders such as small business owners or religious leaders. Effective community policing or problem-oriented policing programs can reinforce these resources.

Applying the Theory

Social disorganization theory helps explain the high rates of crime and delinquency among racial and ethnic minorities. As our discussion of inequality suggests, minorities experience high rates of poverty and are geographically concentrated in areas with high rates of social disorganization. Sampson's research on Chicago found that neighborhoods with higher levels of collective efficacy had lower levels of violent crime, after controlling for other variables.

In Baltimore, Maryland, Ralph Taylor, Stephen Gottfredson, and Sidney Brower interviewed residents of 687 households, asking whether they belonged to neighborhood organizations and whether they felt responsible for conditions in their neighborhood. People who answered affirmatively to both questions were more likely to live on neighborhood blocks with lower levels of violent crime than people on blocks who did not belong to organizations and did not feel responsible for their area.⁶¹

Social disorganization theory is consistent with other theories of crime. It is consistent with social strain theory, in that persons who are subject to conditions of social disorganization are far less likely to be able to achieve the dominant goals of society through conventional means and, therefore, are more likely to turn to crime. It is consistent with differential association theory, in that neighborhoods with high levels of social disorganization will subject individuals, particularly young men, to strong influences tending toward delinquency and crime.

Social disorganization theory and the related theory of collective efficacy underpin a number of criminal justice innovations, particularly community policing and problem-oriented policing. As Sampson puts it, the more promising approach to controlling crime is in "changing places, not people."⁶² Traditional rehabilitation programs seek to change people; community policing and related approaches seek to change the quality of life in neighborhoods. Community policing and problem-oriented policing, for example, seek to reduce social disorder and to make neighborhoods appear safer and actually be safer. Reducing the fear of crime helps to keep people from moving out of the area and also to be more involved in neighborhood activities. "Hot spots" policing, meanwhile, is directed toward specific areas where crime is concentrated. Crime prevention through environmental design seeks to eliminate features that invite crime (e.g., hidden walkways or unlighted building entrances).⁶³

One of the basic principles of community policing and problem-oriented policing is that neighborhood-focused police efforts can help communities develop the resources (including trust in the police) that represent collective efficacy.⁶⁴

Culture Conflict Theory

Culture conflict theory holds that crime will be more likely to flourish in heterogeneous societies where there is a lack of consensus over society's values.⁶⁵ Human behavior is shaped by norms that are instilled through socialization and embodied in the criminal law. In any society, the majority not only defines social norms but also controls the making and the administration of the criminal law, which punishes behavior that deviates from the established norm (hence, the concept of deviant behavior). In some instances, certain groups do not accept the dominant social values. They may reject them on religious or cultural grounds or feel alienated from the majority because of discrimination or economic inequality. Conflict over social norms and the role of the criminal law lead to certain types of lawbreaking.

One example of religiously based culture conflict involves peyote, a cactus that has mild hallucinogenic effects when smoked and that some Native American religions use as part of their traditional religious exercises.⁶⁶ Today, many observers see national politics revolving around a "culture war" involving such issues as abortion, homosexuality, and religion in the public schools.⁶⁷ Some groups believe that abortion is murder and should be criminalized; others argue that it is a medical procedure that should be governed by the individual's private choice. Homosexuality is a dramatic example of how cultural norms can change dramatically. Up until the 1960s, homosexuality was regarded as a deviant behavior and was illegal in many respects. Yet, many states today have made discrimination based on sexual orientation illegal and have enacted statutes legalizing same-sex marriage, and in 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage.

Applying the Theory

Culture conflict theory helps explain some of the differential rates of involvement in crime in society, which is extremely heterogeneous, characterized by many different races, ethnic groups, religions, and cultural lifestyles. The theory encompasses the history of racial conflict—from the time of slavery, through the Civil War, to the modern civil rights movement—as one of the major themes in U.S. history. There is also a long history of ethnic and religious conflict. Americans of white, Protestant, and English background, for instance, exhibited strong prejudice against immigrants from Ireland and southern and eastern Europe, particularly Catholics and Jews.⁶⁸

An excellent example of cultural conflict in American history is the long struggle over the consumption of alcohol that culminated in national Prohibition (1920–1933). The fight over alcohol was a bitter issue for nearly 100 years before Prohibition. To a great extent, the struggle was rooted in ethnic and religious differences. Protestant Americans tended to take a very moralistic attitude toward alcohol, viewing abstinence as a sign of self-control and a means of rising to middle-class status. For many Catholic immigrant groups, particularly Irish and German, alcohol consumption was an accepted part of their cultural lifestyle. The long crusade to control alcohol use represented an attempt by middle-class Protestants to impose their lifestyle on working-class Catholics.⁶⁹