Major Principles of Sociological Theories

7.1 What is the nature of sociological theorizing, and what are the assumptions upon which sociological perspectives on crime causation rest?

Audio

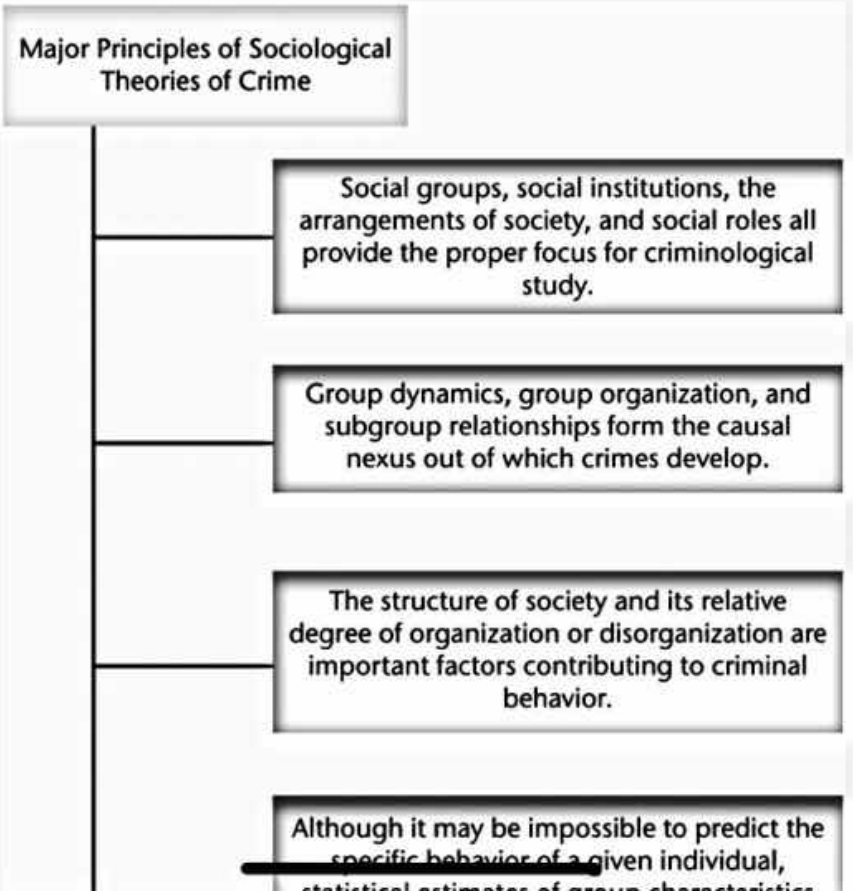
Listen to the Audio

Listen to audio

Theories that explain crime by reference to social structure are only one of three major sociological approaches to crime causation. The other two are social process theories and social conflict approaches (which we describe in **Chapters 8** and **9**). Although sociological perspectives on crime causation are diverse, most build upon the principles shown in **Figure 7–1**.

Figure 7–1

Major Principles of Sociological Theories of Crime



Although it may be impossible to predict the specific behavior of a given individual, statistical estimates of group characteristics are possible. Hence, the probability that members of a certain group will engage in a specific type of crime can be estimated.

Source: Schmalleger, Frank, *Criminology*. Printed and Electronically reproduced by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

Sociological theories examine both institutional arrangements within a social structure (i.e., interrelationships among society's institutions) and social processes (i.e., interactions between and among different social institutions, groups, and individuals) as they affect socialization and have an impact on social life (i.e., social interaction). In contrast to more individualized psychological theories, which have what is called a "micro" focus, sociological approaches utilize a "macro" perspective, stressing the type of behavior likely to be exhibited by group members rather than attempting to predict the behavior of specific individuals. As noted in **Chapter 1**, sociological thought has influenced criminological theory construction more significantly than any other perspective during the past half century, due (at least in part) to a widespread concern with social problems including civil rights, the women's movement, issues of poverty, and the decline in influence experienced by many traditional social institutions, such as the family, government, organized religion, and educational systems.

A homeless man asks for assistance. Ecological theories suggest that crime shows an unequal geographic distribution. Why might certain geographic areas be associated with identifiable patterns of crime?

MegWallacePhoto/Fotolia

Although all sociological perspectives on crime share some characteristics, particular theories give greater or lesser weight to selected components of social life. We can identify three key sociological explanations for crime:

1. Crime is the result of an individual's location within the structure of society. This approach focuses on the social and economic conditions of life, including poverty, alienation, social disorganization, weak social control, personal frustration, relative deprivation, differential opportunities, alternative means to success, and deviant subcultures and subcultural values that conflict with conventional values. (These are the primary features of *social structure theories*, which are discussed in this chapter and in **Chapter 10** in the section "Structural Explanations for Homicide.")

2. Crime is the end product of various social processes. This approach stresses inappropriate socialization and social learning as well as interpersonal relationships, strength of the social bond, lack of self-control, and personal and group consequences of societal reactions to deviance as they contribute to crime. (These are the primary characteristics of *social process theories* and *social development theories*, which are discussed in **Chapter 8**, and in **Chapter 10** where the subculture of violence thesis is described.)

3. Crime is the product of class struggle. This perspective emphasizes existing power relationships between social groups, distribution of wealth within society, ownership of the means of production, and economic and social structures of society as they relate to social class and social control. (These are the primary features of *social conflict theories*, which are discussed in **Chapter 9**.)

Social Structure Theories

7.2 What do sociologists mean by the term social structure, and how might the organization and structure of a society contribute to criminality?

Audio

Listen to the Audio

Listen to audio

Watch

Social Structure Theories

Social structure theories explain crime by reference to the economic and social arrangements (or structure) of society. They see the various formal and informal arrangements between social groups (i.e., the structure of society) as the root causes of crime and deviance. Structural theories predict that negative aspects of societal structure, such as disorganization within the family, poverty or income inequality within the economic arrangements of society, and disadvantages due to lack of success in the educational process, produce criminal behavior.

Although different kinds of social structure theories have been advanced to explain crime, they all have one thing in common: They highlight those arrangements within society that contribute to the low socioeconomic status of identifiable groups as significant causes of

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Types of Social Structure Theories

7.3 What are the three types of social structure theories of crime that are discussed in this chapter, and what are the characteristics of each?

Audio

Listen to the Audio

Listen to audio

This chapter describes three major types of social structure theories: (1) social disorganization theory (also called the *ecological approach*), (2) strain theory, and (3) culture conflict theory (also called *cultural deviance theory*). All have a number of elements in common, and the classification of a theory into a subcategory is often a matter of which aspects a writer chooses to emphasize rather than any clear-cut definitional elements inherent in that theory (see the **Theory in Perspective** box in this chapter).

Theory in Perspective

Types of Social Structure Theories

Social structure theories emphasize poverty, lack of education, absence of

Theory in Perspective

Types of Social Structure Theories

Social structure theories emphasize poverty, lack of education, absence of marketable skills, and deviant subcultural values as fundamental causes of crime. These theories, which portray crime as the result of an individual's location within the structure of society and focus on the social and economic conditions of life, are divided into three types.

Social Disorganization

Depicts social change, social conflict, and the lack of social consensus as the root causes of crime and deviance; an offshoot, social ecology, sees society as a kind of organism and crime and deviance as a disease or social pathology.

> **Period:** 1920s–1930s with continued influence on current research
>
> **Theorists:** Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, W. I. Thomas, Florian Znaniecki, Clifford Shaw, Henry McKay, Oscar Newman, James Q. Wilson, George L. Kelling
>
> **Concepts:** Social ecology, ecological theories, social pathology, social disorganization, Chicago School, Chicago Area Project, demographics, concentric zones, delinquency areas, cultural transmission, collective efficacy, social cohesion (criminology of place, crime prevention through environmental design [CPTED], environmental criminology, defensible space, crime pattern theory, and the broken windows theory represent, at least in part, a contemporary reinterpretation of early ecological notions.)

Culture Conflict

Sees the root cause of crime in a clash of values between variously socialized groups over what is acceptable or proper behavior.

> **Period:** 1920s–present
>
> **Theorists:** Thorsten Sellin, Frederic M. Thrasher, William F. Whyte, Walter B. Miller, Gresham Sykes, David Matza, Franco Ferracuti, Marvin Wolfgang, Richard A. Cloward, Lloyd E. Ohlin, Albert Cohen, many others

Social Disorganization Theory

Audio

Listen to the Audio

Listen to audio

Social disorganization theory (which depicts social change, social conflict, and lack of social consensus as the root causes of crime and deviance) is closely associated with the ecological school of criminology. Much early criminology in the United States was rooted in the study of urban settlements and communities[594] as well as the human ecology movement of the early twentieth century. *Ecology* is a term borrowed from biology that describes the interrelationships between living organisms and their environment, and social scientists use the term human ecologyto describe the interrelationship between human beings and the physical and cultural environments in which they live.[595] Pioneers in the human ecology movement saw cities as "superorganisms" that incorporated areas adapted to specific groups, including ethnic groups (e.g., "Little Italy," "Chinatown"), which were functional enclaves within a larger organized whole that possessed its own dynamics.

The idea of the community as a functional whole that directly determines the quality of life for its members was developed and explored around the beginning of the twentieth century by sociologists such as Emile Durkheim (1858–1917),[596] Ferdinand Toennies (1855–1936),[597] and Georg Simmel (1858–1918).[598] Durkheim believed that crime was a normal part of all societies and that law was a symbol of social solidarity, so an act was "criminal when it offends strong and defined states of the collective conscience."[599]

Some of the earliest sociologists to study American communities were **W. I. Thomas** and **Florian Znaniecki**. In *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, Thomas and Znaniecki described the problems Polish immigrants faced in the early 1900s when they left their homeland and moved to American cities.[600] The authors noted that

Europe and America, Thomas and Znaniecki described the problems Polish immigrants faced in the early 1900s when they left their homeland and moved to American cities.[600] The authors noted that crime rates rose among displaced people and hypothesized that the cause was the social disorganization that resulted from immigrants' inability to successfully transplant guiding norms and values from their home cultures into the new one (see **https://www.apa.org/topics/immigration/immigration-psychology.aspx)**. Learn more about social disorganization perspectives via **https://criminal-justice.iresearchnet.com/criminology/theories/social-disorganization-theory**. Learn more about social structure theories at **https://communitiesandplace.org.**

Some of the earliest sociological theories to receive widespread recognition can be found in the writings of **Robert Park** and **Ernest Burgess**. In the 1920s and 1930s at the University of Chicago, they developed what became known as social ecology, or the ecological school of criminology.[601] The social ecology movement, influenced by the work of biologists on the interactions of organisms with their environments, concerned itself with how the structure of society adapts to the quality of natural resources and to the existence of other human groups.[602] One writer stated that social ecology is "the attempt to link the structure and organization of any human community to interactions with its localized environment."[603] Because ecological models build on an organic analogy, it is easy to portray social disorganization as a disease or pathology.[604] Hence, social ecologists who studied crime developed a disease model built around the concept of social pathology, defined as "those human actions which run contrary to the ideals of residential stability, property ownership, sobriety, thrift, habituation to work, small business enterprise, sexual discretion, family solidarity, neighborliness, and discipline of will."[605] Over time, the concept of social pathology changed and came to represent the idea that some aspects of society are pathological, or "sick," and produce deviant behavior among groups and individuals who are exposed to such social conditions.

Social disorganization and social pathology may arise when a group is faced with "social change, uneven development of culture, maladaptiveness, disharmony, conflict, and lack of consensus."[606] Due to the rapid influx of immigrant populations at the beginning of the twentieth century, American cities were caught up in swift social change, and Park and Burgess saw in them an ideal focus for the study of social disorganization. They viewed cities as having five concentric zones, much like the circles on a target, each with unique characteristics and populations (see **Figure 7–2**): Zone I, or the "loop," contained retail businesses and light manufacturing; Zone II, also referred to as "zone in transition," surrounding the city center, was home to impoverished immigrant groups, and was characterized by deteriorating houses and factories and abandoned buildings; Zone III, also known as the "working-class" zone, contained the second group of immigrants who escaped the poverty conditions of

Zone III, also known as the "working-class" zone, contained the second group of immigrants who escaped the poverty conditions of Zone II. Zone IV was occupied by middle-class citizens with single-family homes; and Zone V, the suburbs, was called the "commuter zone." Park and Burgess noticed that residents of the inner zones tended to migrate to outer zones as their economic positions improved.

Check Your Understanding

Figure 7-2: Chicago's Concentric Zones

Source: Based on data from Robert E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess, and R. D. McKenzie, *The City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925), p. 55.

Clifford Shaw and **Henry McKay**, other early advocates of the ecological approach, applied the concentric zones to the study of juvenile delinquency, conducting empirical studies of Chicago juveniles' arrest rates in 1900–1906, 1917–1923, and 1927–1933 (years associated with high rates of neighborhood transition). Shaw and McKay found that rates of offending remained relatively constant over time within zones of transition and concluded that delinquency was caused by the nature of the environment in which immigrants lived rather than by characteristics of the immigrant groups themselves.[607] Shaw and McKay saw social disorganization as the inability of local communities to solve common problems and believed that the degree of disorganization in a community was largely predicated upon the extent of residential mobility and racial heterogeneity present in that community. As a result of their studies, they developed the idea of cultural transmission: Traditions of delinquency were transmitted to successive generations in the same zone in the same way that languages, roles, and attitudes were communicated.

delinquency were transmitted to successive generations in the same zone in the same way that languages, roles, and attitudes were communicated.

Because early ecological theories focused on selected geographic areas, their methodology came to be known as "area studies." Because 1920s Chicago served as the model for most such studies, they became collectively referred to as the Chicago School of Criminology. Although the applicability of these early studies to other cities or other time periods was questionable, the Chicago School had demonstrated the tendency for criminal activity to be associated with urban transitional zones, which were typified by social disorganization, turmoil, lower property values, poverty, and lack of privacy.

The greatest contribution the ecological school made to criminological literature can be found in its claim that society wields a major influence on human behavior.[608] Ecological theorists of the Chicago School used two sources of information: (1) population statistics and official crime and (2) ethnographic data. Population statistics (demographics), when combined with crime information, provided empirical material that gave scientific weight to ecological investigations; ethnographic information, gathered in the form of life stories (ethnographies), described the lives of city inhabitants. By comparing one set of data with the other—demographics with ethnographies—ecological investigators were able to show that life experiences varied from one location to another and that personal involvement in crime was strongly associated with place of residence. Learn more about the Chicago School of Criminology at **https://sociology.uchicago.edu/content/history-culture.**

Ecological approaches to crime causation have found a modern rebirth in the criminology of place (also called environmental criminology), which builds on the contributions of routine activities theory and situational crime prevention (which are discussed in **Chapters 3** and **10**). It emphasizes the importance of geographic location and architectural features in terms of prevalence of victimization. Such "hot spots" of crime, including neighborhoods, specific streets, and even individual houses and businesses, have been identified by recent writers. Lawrence W. Sherman, for example, and colleagues tell of a study that revealed that 3% of places (addresses and intersections) in Minneapolis produced 50% of all calls to the police. Crime, noted Sherman, although relatively rare in Minneapolis and similar urban areas, is geographically concentrated.[609] Later researchers, using the *pattern theory of crime diversity* have found that not only is crime concentrated in certain areas, but that "the spatial distribution of environmental cues and opportunities plays a central role in regulating crime diversity."[610] In other words pattern theory shows that specific types of crime are associated with certain geographic areas—and that it is the characteristics of those areas that contribute to crime's concentration.

Policing hot spots, also known variously as *place-based policing* and *place-based crime prevention*, is a concept that was popularized by George Mason University's David Weisburd, University of Maryland's John Eck, Harvard University professor Anthony Braga, and others.[611]

Check Your Understanding: Hot Spots of Crime

Select each of the rows below to learn more about hot spots of crime.

What are hot spots of crime?

Check Your Understanding: Hot Spots of Crime

Select each of the rows below to learn more about hot spots of crime.

What are hot spots of crime?

Reveal Answer ⌄

How does crime pattern theory explain hot spots of crime?

Reveal Answer ⌄

How can an understanding of hot spots be used to reduce crime?

Reveal Answer ⌄

If police focus their efforts on hot spots, won't criminals just move to other locations?

Reveal Answer ⌄

Place-based crime prevention has been shown to be a potentially effective crime-reduction technique. In a 2004 report, the National Research Council Committee to Review Research on Police Policy and Practices concluded that "[t]here has been increasing interest over the past two decades in police practices that target very specific

Place-based crime prevention has been shown to be a potentially effective crime-reduction technique. In a 2004 report, the National Research Council Committee to Review Research on Police Policy and Practices concluded that "[t]here has been increasing interest over the past two decades in police practices that target very specific types of crimes, criminals, and crime places. In particular, policing crime hot spots has become a common police strategy for reducing crime and disorder problems . . . . [A] strong body of evidence suggests that taking a focused geographic approach to crime problems can increase the effectiveness of policing."[612]

London's Metropolitan Police officers view displays from closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras around London in the Special Operations Room of their Central Communications Command. Defensible space can be defined in terms of barriers to crime commission and preventive surveillance opportunities. How might such features be enhanced in high-crime areas?
Oli Scarff/Getty Images

Reflecting the questions first addressed by Shaw and McKay, researcher **Rodney Stark** asked, "How is it that neighborhoods can remain the site of high crime and deviance rates despite a complete turnover in their populations? There must be something about places as such that sustains crime."[613] Stark developed a *theory of deviant neighborhoods* consisting of 30 propositions, including the following:[614]

- To the extent that neighborhoods are dense and poor, homes will be crowded

- To the extent that neighborhoods are dense and poor, homes will be crowded.
- Where homes are more crowded, there will be a greater tendency to congregate outside the home in places and circumstances that raise levels of temptation and offer opportunity to deviate.
- Where homes are more crowded, there will be lower levels of supervision of children.
- Reduced levels of child supervision will result in poor school achievement, with a consequent reduction in stakes in conformity and an increase in deviant behavior.
- Poor, dense neighborhoods tend to be mixed-use neighborhoods.
- Mixed use increases familiarity with and easy access to places offering the opportunity for deviance.

Putting Criminology to Work—Implementing Evidence-Based Policy

To make a difference in the real world, criminological theories must first be tested and evaluated. Once evidence has been developed that theory-based practices work, then programs based on them can be implemented to reduce or prevent crime, or to help make victims' lives better. One federal initiative, CrimeSolutions.Gov, strives to evaluate the effectiveness of theory-based practices, and then communicates its findings via the Web. Some of the most effective and promising programs are highlighted in boxes such as this one that appear throughout the text.

Program: Improved Street Lighting

Evidence Ratings For Outcomes: Promising

Profile

Interventions that focus on improving street lighting aim to prevent crime by

Interventions that focus on improving street lighting aim to prevent crime by modifying an environment and reducing opportunities for offenders to commit crimes. These interventions may occur in public or private settings, such as residential neighborhoods, parking lots, shopping malls, campuses, hospitals, or various other facilities. Installation and street light components vary by setting. For example, in a neighborhood or residential setting, improved street lighting may include trimming bushes so that lights are more visible, or replacing old or broken lamps with new light fixtures to achieve the street light's intended purpose. Through modifying and improving environmental measures in various settings, the overall goal of these interventions is crime prevention.

Relevant Theory: Situational Crime Prevention, Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Improving street lighting to prevent crime is grounded in the idea of situational crime prevention, which involves the associated concept of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED). Situational crime prevention (discussed earlier in **Chapter 3**) holds that crime is influenced by environmental conditions in interaction with resident and offender characteristics. Therefore, by improving street lighting, the offender is believed to perceive greater risks of apprehension. It is believed that modifying the nighttime visibility within urban areas should reduce opportunities for crime by increasing the perceived risk of detection.

Evidence-Based Review

These sources were used in the development of the practice profile:

Meta-Analysis 1

Brandon C. Welsh, and David P. Farrington, *Effects of Improved Street Lighting on Crime*. The Campbell Collaboration. https://www.campbellcollaboration.org/better-evidence/effectsof- improved-street-lighting-on-crime.html.

Source: Adapted from https://www.crimesolutions.gov/PracticeDetails.aspx?ID=37

Notes: Putting Criminology to Work features are based on information published online by the National Institute of Justice's (NIJ) Crime Solutions Web site. The program ratings shown are those provided by NIJ.

Central to the criminology of place is the broken windows theory, which holds that physical deterioration such as increases in unrepaired buildings leads to greater concerns for personal safety among area residents.[615] These concerns lead to further decreases in maintenance and repair; to increased delinquency, vandalism, and crime; and to even further deterioration in safety and the physical environment—all resulting in offenders from other neighborhoods being increasingly attracted by the area's perceived vulnerability. Physical disorder, left unchecked, leads to crime by driving residents indoors and sending a message to would-be offenders that a neighborhood is out of control.[616]

The broken windows perspective, first advanced in a 1982 article by **James Q. Wilson** and **George L. Kelling** titled "Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety,"[617] led to an increase in the use of "order maintenance policing" and a crackdown on quality-of-life offenses, such as panhandling, graffiti, littering, and prostitution, in some of our nation's cities. In 2000 in New York City, (then) Mayor Rudolph Giuliani announced a new police campaign using computer mapping to track crime and to target offenses such as jaywalking, public urination, panhandling, graffiti, public drinking, and prostitution.

Even within high-crime neighborhoods and neighborhoods characterized by urban decay, crimes tend to be concentrated at specific locations, such as street blocks or multiple-family dwellings, and some units within specific apartment buildings are more likely to be the site of criminal occurrences. The criminology of place employs the concept of defensible space. The concept was developed by architect **Oscar Newman** in 1972,[618] and means "the range of mechanisms—real and symbolic barriers, strongly defined areas of influence, and improved opportunities for surveillance—that combine to bring an environment under the control of its residents."[619] Newman's publication *Creating Defensible Space* can be accessed via **www.justicestudies.com/pubs/defensible-space.pdf.**

The criminology of place holds that location can be as predictive of criminal activity as the lifestyles of victimized individuals or the social features of victimized households. (*Place* has been defined by researchers as "a fixed physical environment that can be seen completely and simultaneously, at least on its surface, by one's naked eyes."[620]) Places can be criminogenic because they have certain routine activities associated with them or because they provide the characteristics that facilitate crime commission (see, **Chapter 10**).

Another concept associated with defensible space is the idea of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design(CPTED).[621] CPTED is based on the belief that offenders decide whether to commit a crime in a particular location after they evaluate the area's physical features. Architects who employ CPTED in their planning, design public areas that are always in plain view, and whose opportunities for criminal activity are limited by physical features such as walls and points of entrance or exit.

Sometimes it is the public or city governments that take the initiative in crime prevention using environmental design. Recently, for example, the Washington, D.C, Metropolitan Police Department was asked to appoint environmental design experts to a planning committee being created by the city to develop two new projects—the Anacostia River front and the Wharf.[622] City officials believed that embedding crime-prevention architects with developers in the planning team would help in the construction of safety-oriented developments.

Some crime-prevention programs are combining ideas derived from the criminology of place with spatial-mapping techniques to fight crime (the **Theory versus Reality** box provides information about crime-mapping techniques). Learn more about the National Institute of Justice's MAPS program via **https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/ articles/ mapping-and-analysis-public-safety** to learn more about crime mapping, and see **https://www.hunchlab.com** for insight into computer algorithms used in predictive policing.

Theory versus Reality

The Criminology of Place, Routine Activities, and Crime Mapping

Today's law enforcement agencies are using the criminology of place and routine activities theories (discussed in **Chapter 10**) to develop situational crime-prevention techniques (see **Chapter 3**) that combine technology with crime mapping. One implementation of this approach is the Mapping and Analysis Program (MAPS) of the National Institute of Justice. Crime mapping, used in conjunction with geographic information systems (GISs), makes effective use of law enforcement resources by helping police administrators direct patrols to places where they are most needed.

In the routine activities interpretation, crimes are seen as needing three ingredients: a likely offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a guardian capable of preventing the criminal act. Then comes the term *density paradox*: On the one hand, high population densities create a high potential for crime because people and property are crowded in small spaces, resulting in many likely offenders and suitable targets; on the other hand, surveillance is plentiful, so criminal acts in public spaces are likely to be observed by others (guardians). Crime can be reduced or prevented by making people less likely to offend (by increasing guilt and fostering development of the "inner policeman" who tames criminal impulses), by making targets less available (also called *situational crime prevention*), and by making guardians more numerous or effective. Putting the routine activities approach and situational crime prevention into a geographic context involves asking how each element is distributed in geographic space. Where are the likely offenders? (What is the geography of the youthful male population?) Where are the suitable targets? (What is the geography of convenience stores, malls, ATMs, poorly illuminated pedestrian areas?) Where are the guardians? (What is the potential for surveillance, both formal and informal, of targets or areas that may contain targets?)

The perspective that focuses on criminal spatial behavior develops a scenario in which the motivated (potential) criminal uses cues, or environmental signals, to assess victims or targets. Clusters and sequences of cues relating to the social and physical aspects of the environment are seen as a *template*, which the offender uses to evaluate victims or targets; tied to this process is the concept of *activity space*, the area where the offender customarily moves about that is familiar to him or her.

Activity spaces vary with demographics. Historically, younger persons

Activity spaces vary with demographics. Historically, younger persons tended to have more constricted activity spaces, not having resources to travel far, and women had more geographically limited activity areas than men because men worked farther from home and their jobs gave them greater mobility; both are less true today.

Analysts considering crime patterns from a theoretical perspective might ask some "filter" questions: How important is geography in explaining a pattern? Is the pattern random or not? If not, why not? Can routine activities theory or criminal spatial behavior theory help explain this pattern? Is this pattern normal or unusual for this area? If the pattern is an anomaly, why is this? What resources can be used to better understand the social and other environmental dynamics of the area of interest?

For a list of Web sites displaying interactive crime maps, see **https://www.crimemapping.com.** Situational crime prevention was discussed earlier in **Chapter 3**.

Discussion Questions

1. How does routine activities theory support the concepts involved in the spatial analysis of crime?

2. What is the density paradox? What implications does it have for crime prevention?

3. What "filter" questions are discussed in this box? Can you think of any others that might be asked?

Source: National Institute of Justice, "Mapping and Analysis for Public Safety (MAPS)," http://www.ojp.gov/nij/maps (accessed May 28, 2007); and Keith Harries, *Mapping Crime: Principles and Practice* (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 1999), http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/cmrc (accessed December 15, 2005).

Crime in the News

The Pros and Cons of "Broken Windows" Policing

JAMES Q. WILSON is credited with co-authoring one of the most influential policing theories of all time. His "broken windows" theory posits that crime develops from small things, such as shattered windows, spray-painted gang signs, and panhandling. These outward signs tell criminals that a community is ripe for the picking.

An abandoned house in a run-down neighborhood. What does broken windows theory say about places like this?
Carol Dembinsky / Dembinsky Photo Associates / Alamy Stock Photo

When the theory was first published in 1982, it broke with the orthodoxy of the time, which focused on giving would-be criminals economic incentives to become law-abiding citizens. Wilson, who viewed himself as politically independent, was heralded as a new conservative voice. Republican Mayor Rudy Giuliani of New York City endorsed Wilson's theory when he entered office in 1993.

Rather than just focusing on major crimes, New York City police started going after small crimes in a big way. Misdemeanor arrests increased 70% during the rest of the decade, and Giuliani faced complaints of police harassment. But New York City's crime rate dropped dramatically, much more than a corresponding drop in the nationwide rate. Violent crime in the city declined by more than 56%, compared with a 28% U.S. drop, and property crimes fell by about 65%, compared with 26% nationally.

Los Angeles, Chicago, and Boston also adopted aspects of broken windows, and the theory has led to hot-spot policing, which focuses patrols on areas with high crime. This technique is currently used in several U.S.

Los Angeles, Chicago, and Boston also adopted aspects of broken windows, and the theory has led to hot-spot policing, which focuses patrols on areas with high crime. This technique is currently used in several U.S. cities, from Oakland, California, to St. Louis, Missouri.

Similarly, a recent police program piloted in a Detroit neighborhood specifically referenced the theory. The city partnered with the Manhattan Institute, a conservative think-tank that brought in George L. Kelling, Wilson 's co-author on the original 1982 broken windows paper and an executive at the institute.

In the Detroit project, police officers spent extra time interacting with the community, and community members were encouraged to report suspicious activity. At the end of the 120-day pilot, the community noted 32% fewer home invasions in the area compared to the same time last year. At the time, Detroit police planned to extend the program to other Detroit neighborhoods.

Recently, however, some of the principles behind broken windows policing have been called into question. That's because a number of highly publicized police use-of-force incidents grew out of the heightened vigilance these kinds of programs require. In one example, a man was placed into a choke hold by NYPD officers and died as a result of selling cigarettes on a city street without a license. In another, a convicted felon who had been selling CDs outside of a convenience store in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, was shot and killed by police after he allegedly resisted a pat down search.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe the broken windows theory of policing?

2. What implications does the broken windows theory hold for crime-prevention policy? Do you know of any communities in which you'd like to see it applied?

3. Do you agree with recent criticisms of broken windows theory regarding its possible link to excessive use of force by the police? If so, how can the issue be addressed?

Sources: Brian Dickerson, "Broken Windows Theory of Community Policing Will Get Major Test in Detroit," *Detroit Free Press*, May 24, 2012,

Sources: Brian Dickerson, "Broken Windows Theory of Community Policing Will Get Major Test in Detroit," *Detroit Free Press*, May 24, 2012, http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2012205240458; Joan Petersilia, "Remembering James Q. Wilson," *The Crime Report*, March 18, 2012, http://www.thecrimereport.org/news/inside-criminal-justice/2012-03-remembering-james-q-wilson; and Ivana Hrynkiw, "Man Shot, Killed by Police Outside Baton Rouge Convenience Store," *Alabama News*, July 6, 2016, http://www.al.com/news/index.ssf/2016/07/man_shot_killed_by_police_outs.html.

Map

Crime Map of Chicago Neighborhoods With Economic Status

Source: Chicago Police Department, and City of Chicago Health and Human Services Division.

Collective Efficacy and Crime

Audio

Listen to the Audio

Listen to audio

Although order maintenance policies implemented by policy makers may have only limited efficiency in reducing crime, efforts to empower residents to exert positive social control within their own neighborhoods may be a workable strategy. The concept of collective

Collective Efficacy and Crime

Audio

Listen to the Audio

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Although order maintenance policies implemented by policy makers may have only limited efficiency in reducing crime, efforts to empower residents to exert positive social control within their own neighborhoods may be a workable strategy. The concept of collective efficacy grew out of the social disorganization literature and refers to the "collective ability of residents to produce social action to meet common goals and preserve shared values."[626] Studies show that social interaction between neighborhood residents holds the potential to create a strong sense of social cohesion and common interests. When people share common goals and trust each other, quality of life rises and feelings of empowerment emerge. In effect, research shows that grassroots efforts to increase levels of effective community functioning can work, with or without formal intervention from the police, policy makers, or other parties. One study in 2014 that examined both the impact of collective efficacy and social cohesion on crime found that they represented distinct processes but that decreases in either social cohesion or collective efficacy are associated with increases in homicide in the areas studied. [627] Researchers concluded that a community-based collective efficacy effort could be effective at preventing crime.

In what may seem like a contrary finding, Arizona State University criminologists discovered that youth are more likely to co-offend in neighborhoods with peers of their own race/ethnicity, that are less disadvantaged, and that have greater residential stability—all of which, say the researchers, "promote trust among neighbors." In other words "many of the same neighborhood characteristics that reduce crime lead to a greater proportion of co-offending."[628]

The second type of social structure theory discussed in this chapter is strain theory. *Strain* can be defined as the pressure that individuals feel to reach socially determined goals.[629] The classic statement of strain theory—which depicts delinquency as a form of adaptive problem-solving behavior committed in response to problems involving frustrating and undesirable social environments—was offered in 1938 by **Robert K. Merton**, who also refined the concept of anomie (a French word meaning "normlessness").

Anomie was popularized by Emile Durkheim in his 1897 book *Suicide*, in which he used the term to explain how a breakdown of predictable social conditions can lead to feelings of personal loss, dissolution, and lack of a sense of belonging.[630] Merton's use of the term *anomie* was somewhat different and meant a disjunction between socially approved means to success and legitimate goals.[631] Merton maintained that legitimate goals, such as wealth, status, and personal happiness, are generally portrayed as desirable for everyone, but the widely acceptable means to these goals, such as education, hard work, and financial savings, are not equally available. As a consequence, crime and deviance tend to arise as alternative means to success when individuals feel the strain of being pressed to succeed in socially approved ways but find that the tools necessary for such success are not available to them and that strain increases as the gulf between the goals and the means available to achieve them widens. Merton's emphasis on the felt strain resulting from a lack of fit between goals and means led to his approach being called *strain theory.*

Complicating the picture further, Merton maintained that not everyone accepts the legitimacy of socially approved goals. Merton diagrammed possible combinations of goals and means as shown in **Table 7–1**. The first row, labeled *conformity*, signifies acceptance of the goals that society holds as legitimate for everyone, with ready availability of the means approved for achieving those goals; the mode of adaptation associated with this combination of goals and means typifies most middle- and upper-class individuals.

Check Your Understanding

Table 7-1: Goals and Means Disjuncture

Innovation arises when an emphasis on approved goal achievement combines with a lack of opportunity to participate fully in socially acceptable means to success, which is experienced by many lower-class individuals who have been socialized to desire traditional success symbols (expensive cars, large homes, big bank accounts) but do not have ready access to approved means of acquiring them (educational opportunity); innovative behavioral responses, including crime, can be expected to develop when individuals find themselves deprived. Merton said that "poverty as such, and consequent limitation of opportunity, are not sufficient to induce a conspicuously high rate of criminal behavior. Even the often mentioned 'poverty in the midst of plenty' will not necessarily lead to this result."[632] It is when those who find themselves in poverty are pressured to achieve material success and acquire other associated symbols of status that innovation results.

The third row, *ritualism*, refers to the type of behavior arising when members of society participate in socially desirable means but show little interest in goal achievement. A ritualist may get a good education, work every day in an acceptable occupation, and appear to be leading a solid middle-class lifestyle, yet care little for the symbols of success, choosing to live an otherwise independent lifestyle.

Retreatism describes the behavior of those who reject both the socially approved goals and the means. They may become dropouts, drug abusers, or homeless persons or participate in alternative lifestyles, such as communal living; they are often socially and psychologically quite separate from the larger society around them.

Merton's last category, *rebellion*, describes the actions of a person who wishes to replace socially approved goals and means with some other system; political radicals, revolutionaries, and antiestablishment agitators fit into this category. Merton believed that conformity is the most common mode of adaptation prevalent in society and that retreatism is the least common.

Another version of Merton's anomie theory has been proposed by Steven F. Messner and Richard Rosenfeld, who suggested that inconsistencies in the American Dream are to be blamed for most criminal activity: "Our thesis is that the American Dream itself exerts pressures toward crime by encouraging an anomic cultural environment, an environment in which people are encouraged to adopt an 'anything goes' mentality in the pursuit of personal goals." [633]

It is often said that Americans are the richest people on earth and that even the poorest Americans are far richer than the average citizen of many Third World nations, but even if such an assertion is true, it means little to someone who is living in the United States and is poor when judged in terms of U.S. standards. Deprivation has an important psychological component and cannot be accurately assessed in absolute terms.

Relative deprivation refers to the economic and social gaps that exist between rich and poor who live in close proximity to one another. According to sociologists Judith Blau and Peter Blau, two proponents of the relative deprivation concept, people assess their position in life by way of comparison with things and people they already know.[634] According to the Blaus, relative deprivation creates feelings of anger, frustration, hostility, and social injustice on the part of those who experience it. According to distributive justice, which refers to people's perceptions of their rightful place in the reward structure of society, even wealthy and socially privileged individuals may feel slighted or shortchanged if they feel inadequately rewarded for their behavior or accomplishments. But the perception of the rightful distribution of rewards appears to be highly dependent upon cultural expectations; for example, even successful Americans sometimes feel they deserve more, whereas studies show that Japanese society has been able to accommodate rapid socioeconomic growth without generating a felt sense of economic injustice, even among its least successful members, and without experiencing a substantial increase in crime.[635]

Surveys provide evidence for distinguishing between two types of

Surveys provide evidence for distinguishing between two types of relative deprivation: personal and group.[636] Personal relative deprivation is characteristic of individuals who feel deprived compared with other people; group relative deprivation is a communal sense of injustice that is shared by members of the same group. People who experience personal deprivation are likely to feel socially isolated and personally stressed, and those who believe their entire social group is deprived relative to other groups are more prone to participate in social movements and may actively attempt to change the social system, making group relative deprivation a powerful force for social change.

General Strain Theory

Audio

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In 1992, strain theory was reformulated by **Robert Agnew** and others who molded it into a comprehensive perspective called general strain theory (GST).[637] GST sees law-breaking behavior as a coping mechanism enabling those who engage in it to deal with the socioemotional problems generated by negative social relations (**Figure 7–3**). In 2006, Agnew restated the six central propositions of GST, as shown in **Figure 7–4**.[638]

Agnew explained that the strains most likely to cause crime in Western societies include child abuse and neglect; negative secondary school experiences; abusive peer relations; chronic unemployment; marital problems; parental rejection; erratic, excessive, and or/harsh supervision or discipline; criminal victimization; homelessness; racial, ethnic, or gender discrimination; and failure to achieve selected goals. Factors that increase the likelihood of criminal coping include poor conventional coping skills and resources; availability of criminal skills and resources; low levels

of investment in conventional institutions. Agnew's strategies for reducing exposure to strains include eliminating strains conducive to crime, altering strains to make them less conducive to crime, removing individuals from exposure to strain, and equipping individuals with the traits and skills needed to avoid strains conducive to crime.

GST expands on traditional strain theory in several ways. First, it significantly widens the focus of strain theory to include all types of negative relations between an individual and others; second, GST maintains that strain is likely to have a cumulative effect on delinquency after reaching a certain threshold; third, general strain theory provides a more comprehensive account of the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional adaptations to strain than traditional strain approaches; and finally, GST more fully describes the wide variety of factors affecting the choice of delinquent adaptations to strain.

Agnew saw the crime-producing effects of strain as cumulative and concluded that whatever form it takes, "strain creates a predisposition for delinquency in those cases in which it is chronic or repetitive."[639] Predispositions may be manifested in the form of negative affective states, meaning emotions such as anger, fear, depression, and disappointment.

An analysis by Agnew of other strain theories found that all such theories share at least two central explanatory features.[640] Agnew said that strain theories focus (1) "explicitly on negative relationships with others, relationships in which the individual is not treated as he or she wants to be treated," and he argued that (2) "adolescents are pressured into delinquency by the negative affective states—most notably anger and related emotions—that often result from negative relationships."[641]

In 1994, Raymond Paternoster and Paul Mazerolle tested some of the assumptions underlying GST through an analysis of data from the National Youth Survey.[642] They found partial support for GST and discovered that negative relations with adults, feelings of dissatisfaction with friends and school life, and experiences of stressful events were positively related to delinquency, as was living

stressful events were positively related to delinquency, as was living in an unpleasant neighborhood (with social problems and physical deterioration). When conceived of more broadly as exposure to negative stimuli, general strain was found to be significantly related to delinquency.

Contrary to Agnew's hypothesis, however, Paternoster and Mazerolle found no evidence that the effects of strain were enhanced when they were experienced for longer periods of time or that they were diminished when adolescents classified the area of their life in which they experienced strain as "unimportant." Consistent with earlier findings,[643] Paternoster and Mazerolle found that feelings of general strain were positively related to later delinquency—regardless of the number of delinquent peers, moral beliefs, self-efficacy, and level of conventional social support—and that general strain leads to delinquency by weakening the conventional social bond and strengthening the unconventional bond with delinquent peers.

In a more recent test of GST, Lisa M. Broidy of the University of New Mexico examined the intervening role of negative emotions and legitimate coping strategies as they impact the relationship between strain and crime and found that strain can produce anger and other negative emotions and that different sources of strain tend to produce different emotions.[644] "Hence, although evidence of a relationship exists between strain and negative emotions, the nature of this relationship depends on the specific type of strain and negative emotions considered."[645] Strain-induced anger was more likely to lead to criminal outcomes among men than among women, even though members of both genders experienced anger equally under certain specific types of strained circumstances. Broidy also discovered that "negative emotional responses to strain other than anger are associated with a significant increase in legitimate coping and significant decrease in illegitimate/criminal outcomes."[646]

A 2002 study by Robert Agnew and associates further refined GST by explaining why some individuals are more likely than others to react to strain with delinquency.[647] They found that juveniles who measured high in negative emotionality and low in constraint were more likely to react to strain with delinquency and noted that the

"incorporation of such traits into GST represents an integration between strain theory and the rapidly growing research on behavioral genetics and crime."[648] Hence, it may be that certain biological factors make some individuals particularly susceptible to the effects of strain in their lives.

In 2010, Joan R. Hipp at the University of California, Irvine, reporting on a study of crime rates in 352 American metropolitan areas over a 30-year period, reinforced the notion of strain as a cause of crime.[649] Hipp, whose study focused on the effect of economic resources and racial/ethnic composition on the change in crime rates, found that economic inequality increases the amount of crime in cities, but that the distribution of inequality across the census tracts of a city has important interaction effects. In cities with high levels of inequality, Hipp discovered, higher levels of economic segregation actually lead to much higher levels of the types of crime that she studied (including aggravated assaults, robberies, burglaries, and motor vehicle thefts). By contrast, Hipp found, in cities with low levels of inequality, it is mixing of households in neighborhoods with varying levels of income that leads to higher levels of crime.

Rogues Gallery: Lil' Wayne

Audio

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Lil' Wayne was born in 1982 as Dwayne Carter Jr. in New Orleans, Louisiana. He was raised in one of the poorest neighborhoods of New Orleans and started rapping at age eight.He met the owners of Cash Money Records, Slim and Bryan Williams, and continued to contact them until they allowed him to spend time in the label's offices. He made his first record in 1993 with another rapper, BG, and got involved in selling crack. He survived accidentally shooting himself in the chest with his mother's gun, and later produced two more albums in 1997 and 1999 with the rising star rappers the Hot Boys. He married, and later divorced, his high school sweetheart and had a daughter.

Between 1999 and 2002, he produced three more albums to modest success. However, in 2004, he released *Tha Carter*, which was the beginning of a string of successful albums. In 2009, Lil' Wayne won a Grammy and has continued a successful music career. Despite all his professional success, his legal troubles have marred his record. He was arrested for drug charges in 2006 and 2008. Further, he was dropped by PepsiCo as the face of Mountain Dew after releasing a song in May 2013 with derogatory references to civil rights advocate Emmett Till.

Rogues Gallery: Aaron Hernandez

Audio

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Aaron Hernandez was born in Bristol, Connecticut, in 1989. He played sports in high school and earned All-State football honors in 2006. Unfortunately, his father died during his senior year of high school. He went on to play tight end for the University of Florida's football team and won multiple awards during his time there, including helping the team win the 2008 National Championship. Although he had obvious talent, the NFL was hesitant to sign him due to a flunked drug test and affiliations with gangs in his old neighborhood. In 2010 he was picked during the fourth round of the NFL Draft by the New England Patriots.

Despite his continued success, Hernandez found himself in the middle of a media storm when the body of his friend Odin Lloyd, who was the boyfriend of his fiancée's sister, was found a mile from his mansion in North Attleborough, Massachusetts. Hernandez destroyed his cell phone and surveillance tape, but police still found enough evidence to arrest him in 2013 for firearms and first-degree murder charges. The NFL and sponsors dropped him soon thereafter. Hernandez was convicted of the murder of Odin Loyd and committed suicide while in prison in 2017.