Criminological Theory and Social Policy

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SUMMARY

- Social disorganisation theory has traditionally emphasised community-based and local interventions as the best response to crime
- Strain theory affirms the importance of a national welfare system as an essential crime reduction measure
- Control theory can be interpreted as supporting the welfare state, but tends to emphasise family-centred and school-based interventions
- Routine activities theory insist that the problem of crime ought not be confused with provision of social welfare

Every theory of crime contains an argument about what should be done in response. While theories about the aetiology of crime do not always offer policy proposals as such, the theorised source of crime signals a preferred solution. A major distinction that applies, as we will see in this chapter, is the difference between individual and structural causes. Theories that identify social sources as the cause of crime tend to support social policy as a response, while theories built around psychological issues and individual choice do not necessarily lead in this direction. We will examine four theoretical traditions: two offering theoretical support for social policy, one that might make such a suggestion, and one suggesting that social policy has nothing to do with crime.

The theories to be considered in this discussion were all invented to explain crime in the United States. To what extent they can be meaningfully applied to British society will be discussed along the way. There are obvious and important differences between the UK and the USA. But as a number of criminologists have argued, the 'American Dream' is not peculiarly American. Ian Taylor (1997: 298) has written that post-war America represents a 'natural laboratory' for understanding the effects of market hegemony now underway in Europe.

The first part of the chapter reviews social disorganisation theory associated with the Chicago School and the 'New Chicagoans'. The second part takes up the strain/anomie tradition and recent innovations in social support theory and institutional anomie. The third part describes control theory and its policy

implications. The fourth part reviews the routine activities approach and the argument that social policy does not matter.

Social Disorganisation

A good place to starting looking for a theoretical explanation of the link between social policy and crime is in Chicago. Not that the Chicago School produced *the* explanation, but the concepts they proposed have been important to a number of subsequent explanations.

Zones of Delinquency

Social disorganisation theory is often referred to as 'the Chicago School' given its association with the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago. Founded in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Department became known for its theoretical and methodological innovations. The Chicago sociologists championed micro forms of sociological enquiry where the unit of analysis shifted from aspects of society to neighbourhoods, areas, and sectors within the city. Their commitment to 'theories of the middle range' allowed them to offer sociological analyses of numerous topics – gangs, delinquency, family, urban mobility, ethnic groups – important to criminology (Turner, 1988). Methodologically, they replaced the social survey with field research involving a combination of interviews, observation, and personal histories. And for their 'field', they looked no further than Chicago itself. By 1900, Chicago had become not only a leading railway hub and the site for expanding industries, but a major reception centre for waves of immigrants. Immigrants from Europe – Irish and German poor, peasants from southern Italy, Jews from Eastern Europe – poured in, along with African Americans from the Southern United States.

Observing patterns of city growth led Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (1969) to ask an important question about crime: Why did the same neighbourhoods remain 'delinquency areas' despite frequent turnover among residents? To find the answer, they turned to the work of their colleague, Ernest Burgess who imagined the 'struggle for space' in the city using concentric zones. Burgess began with the central commercial district, the 'Chicago Loop', then moved outward in wider rings delineated by land use and residential type. The core contained banks, corporate headquarters, insurance companies, and government offices. The second zone he called the 'zone in transition' because it contained a factory zone that encroached on the homes of the city's poorest residents. Gangs, prostitutes, and drug addicts peopled the zone in transition, along with immigrants and ethnic minorities. The third zone was the 'zone of workingmen's homes', and outside it, the zones of the more affluent middle class, the 'commuters' and residents of 'satellite cities'. The newest arrivals took up residence in the zone in transition, and as each immigrant group acquired social standing, migrated to the zone of workingmen's homes

and eventually to the commuter zone. Ethnic succession and related processes explained the 'pathological behaviour' of residents there.

Shaw and McKay (1969) mapped rates of delinquency and income for census tracts[1] within each zone. Their 'spot maps' revealed the areas of highest delinquency to be those adjacent to industry and commerce, those areas of lowest income status, and those areas with the highest concentration of European immigrants and Black Americans. Delinquency rates were highest within the zone in transition, Shaw and McKay reasoned, because relationships among the inhabitants had become too competitive and less cooperative, resulting in disequilibrium. Disequilibrium generated wide standards, from conventional behaviour to deviant, each of which offered opportunities for advancement, some legitimate, many illegitimate. This was consistent with Burgess's claim that disease, crime, disorder, vice, insanity, and suicide could be understood as 'rough indexes of social organisation'.

Shaw's sense of the source of delinquency led to community-based interventions as the solution. He initiated the Chicago Area Projects in 1932 to counteract the forces of social disorganisation and foster relationships important for informal social control. He established 22 neighbourhood centres in six areas. These centres mobilised community resources such as churches, schools, labour unions, industries, clubs and other groups addressing neighbourhood problems. They sponsored various programmes including camping, boxing, dramatics, handicrafts, printing, and club discussions (Snodgrass, 1976: 14). The Chicago Area Projects operated for more than twenty-five years, until Shaw's death in 1957. The projects inspired similar approaches in other cities and served as a prototype for the delinquency prevention and welfare programmes of the Kennedy–Johnson era. In that sense, Shaw established highly successful programmes.

Critics have argued that these community centres did little to alter the fundamental realities of Chicago politics and the economics of urban development responsible for the maintenance of slums (Snodgrass, 1976). Social disorganisation theory mistook the social fallout associated with capitalist production as 'natural' or 'spontaneous' processes in the life course of cities, the unfortunate by-product of organic processes of industrial development and urban sprawl. Shaw was not unaware of this. He realised how the presence of the community centres satisfied the consciences of philanthropists but did little about the system that allowed fortunes to be made from letting sub-standard housing. He had second thoughts about 'colluding with dishonest welfare organisations' and making friends of businessmen who 'knowingly misrepresent things because this makes a good story on the coast and helps to raise money' (Snodgrass, 1976: 15). He also worried about neighbourhood councils as a means of instilling community order. The techniques of informal social control they deployed resembled the coercive aspects of political control within authoritarian regimes (Snodgrass, 1976: 17).

[1]These are statistical areas with cities, designed by the Census Department, averaging about 4000 residents. Census tracts are meant to be small, stable areas reflecting neighbourhoods.

Smith (1988) observes that Chicago sociology expressed American liberalism. This belief regards the USA as the best expression of democratic society, a proper balance of individual liberty and the just community. Or, at least it would be, once a few wrinkles are ironed-out. The Chicago sociologists regarded the city as a problem in need of solving for the American democracy to function properly. Using social maps, they visualised how the spaces of the city were connected by social pathologies and reasoned that these pathologies could only be addressed neighbourhood interventions to cultivate the sense of community. In this way, they became 'market researchers of the welfare state', analysts with suggestions for improving its administration, but never questioning the overall governing apparatus (Smith, 1988: 18). (Chapter 4 discusses the application of the Chicago model to British cities.)

Collective Efficacy

By the 1950s, Chicago Sociology Department seemed antiquated and it surrendered premiership to rivals. But during the 1980s, several sociologists revived the Chicago tradition with an infusion of new concepts and techniques.

Robert J. Sampson has built his conception of 'collective efficacy' on the foundation of social disorganisation. From Sampson's perspective, crime results from a community's inability to realise common values. The causal sequence begins with poverty, family disruption, and high residential mobility which bring about anonymity, the lack of relationships among residents, and indifference to community organisation. Because of this indifference, neighbours fail to exercise control over common areas, such as parks and streets, so these are frequented by criminals. Young people also have considerable freedom to act beyond neighbourhood control because anonymity means their friends are unknown to adults even though they may live a short distance from home. This results in higher crime within the area, regardless of the people who reside there. In the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighbourhoods, Sampson and colleagues conducted a study of some 12,000 blocks in 196 neighbourhoods, combining interviews with government social statistics. They concluded that physical disorder and social disorder were associated with concentrated poverty and land use. Consistent with the idea of collective efficacy, there was less crime in neighbourhoods characterised by greater social cohesion and expectations concerning informal social control (Sampson and Raudenbush, 1999).

Sampson has argued that this work has implications for communities in British and European societies. He co-authored a study using information culled from British Crime Surveys conducted in 1982 and 1984. Sampson and Groves (1989) calculated crime rates and social indices for 238 localities across England and Wales. Three of the social indexes had been specified by Shaw and McKay as structural dimensions of social disorganisation: persistent poverty, ethnic diversity, and residential mobility. Sampson and Groves suggested two more: urbanisation and family disruption. They also proposed several 'intervening dimensions of

social disorganisation' based on the prevalence of social networks within communities. They decided that communities differ in the collective capacity of residents to influence (control) one another based on differences in their ability to control 'teenage peer groups,' such as street-corner congregating, 'local friendship networks,' or social ties among residents, and 'formal and voluntary organisations,' such as committees, clubs, and local institutions. They affirmed the 'power and generalisability' of social disorganisation theory, concluding that 'Shaw and McKay's model explains crime and delinquency rates in a culture other than the United States' (Sampson and Groves, 1989). No single work, Lowenkamp, Cullen and Pratt (2003: 352) have remarked, did more to reinvigorate social disorganisation theory in criminology than this article. Lowenkamp and associates replicated the Sampson and Groves analysis with data from the 1994 British Crime Survey; they conclude that the processes described represent an underlying empirical pattern that has persisted over time.

Sampson's policy suggestions have to do with changing communities; he emphasises the need for 'changing places, not people'. Reducing social disorganisation and building collective efficacy are long-term propositions. Small successes accumulate to turn neighbourhoods around and this would lead to lowering crime in cities generally. These include: targeting specific neighbourhood sites known for frequent criminal activity; abating the 'spiral of decay' by removing rubbish and scrubbing graffiti from buildings; sponsoring youth activities to increase interactions between youths and adults; reducing residential mobility through programmes enabling people to buy their own homes; scattering public housing[2] across various neighbourhoods rather than concentrating it in poor neighbourhoods; ramping up urban services, including police, fire, and public health services (especially aimed at reducing teenage pregnancy and child abuse); and promoting volunteerism and community organisations (Sampson, 1995).

The Truly Disadvantaged

In the 1990s, Sampson teamed up with William J. Wilson, another representative of the 'new' Chicago sociology, to propose a theory about the overlap of inequality, urban location, and African American populations. 'The basic thesis,' they wrote, 'is that macro-social patterns of residential inequality give rise to the social isolation of the truly disadvantaged, which in turn leads to structural barriers and cultural adaptations that undermine social organisation and hence the control of crime' (Sampson and Wilson, 1995: 53). This explanation reflects much of Wilson's work in Chicago on the changing economic fortunes of Black Americans and the creation of the Black middle class. While new arrivals to the city faced various forms of racism, in schools and neighbourhoods, the expanding post-war economy brought economic opportunities for

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[2]Housing built and operated by government agencies for low-income residents; multi-unit developments are colloquially referred to as 'the projects'.

Blacks that did not threaten Whites. This bifurcated the African American community; it allowed some Blacks to escape menial labour into skilled blue-collar trades and white-collar professions. The middle-class did not remain in the city. Those who could afford better houses, moved out to the suburbs, leaving behind a 'semi-permanent underclass' (Wilson, 1980; 1987).

Wilson referred to this underclass as 'the truly disadvantaged', individuals who experience long-term unemployment, who engage in street crime, and families in poverty and long-term welfare dependency (Wilson, 1987: 8). The same social and economic forces that allowed for the creation of the Black middle class now conspired against them. During the 1970s and 1980s, de-industrialisation and the loss of entry-level positions in factories meant that they could not pursue the same route to the suburbs the middle-class had found before them. The departure of the middle class accelerated a downward spiral, the loss of contact with middle-class values and aspirations, and a deepening culture of despair. The Black underclass lost their 'social buffer,' their access to middle-class role models, to children who helped socialise neighbours into middle-class life, and members of professions who had supplied community leadership. The truly disadvantaged have responded by acting in deviant ways that deepen their isolation; they do not cling to families, insist on orderly schools, pursue employment, or resist alcohol and drugs (Wilson, 2003).

Wilson has departed from the orthodox Chicago School emphasis on community-based interventions to the extent that he sees a vital role for the federal government in instigating urban development projects. Wilson gave his support to the Clinton Administration's efforts to create universal health care, a national child care system, and national education standards. More than once, President Clinton remarked that he had been inspired by *The Truly Disadvantaged* and referred to 'the famous African American sociologist William Julius Wilson' when asked about how Black Americans stood to gain from New Democrat economic policies (Steinberg, 1997: 32). To address the problem of the city poor, Wilson (1996) has recommended reviving the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Wilson's WPA would follow along the same lines as the one established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt during the depression era. The new WPA would operate job centres not only to provide training but also to offer services such as organising car pools to bring individuals to places of employment. Not only would the new WPA improve the quality of life in impoverished neighbourhoods, but the jobs would also provide a conduit to permanent jobs by affording the opportunity to develop the 'soft skills' of employability.

Critics argue that Wilson's understanding of truly disadvantaged resembles neo-conservative thinking about the 'underclass', a term he has used (Bagguley and Mann, 1992; Wacquant, 1997). Essentially, his discussion places too much emphasis on the culture of poor people living in city neighbourhoods and not enough on the structure of society at large that leads to their impoverishment. Wilson has conceded that 'underclass' does have a pejorative meaning, especially when read in the columns of journalists and neo-conservative commentators. The term ought to be rejected, he suggested, because it had

'become a code word for inner-city blacks', because it brought about a public denunciation of poor people living in the city, and because it lacked sufficient value as a guide to social scientific analysis. He resolved to substitute 'ghetto poor' for 'underclass'. At the same time, he maintained that 'simplistic either/or notions of culture versus structure have impeded the development of a broader theoretical context' from which to investigate the impact of economic changes on the urban poor (Wilson, 1991: 1–4).

Strain Theory

Strain theory offers the most direct explanation for why social policy should be utilised for crime reduction. The strain/anomie tradition insists that crime is not brought about by poverty so much as *inequality*. In an economic system that prevents participation by some individuals, it is relative (rather than absolute) deprivation that pressurises them into criminal activity.

Anomie and Opportunity

The key question for strain theory is how to account for crime despite rising affluence. The United States is, by a number of measures, a wealthy country and yet it also has one of the highest rates of violent crime. For Robert Merton, who wrote the initial statement in the 1930s, the answer could be found in the difference between culture and structure. His essay, 'Social Structure and Anomie', remains among the most-cited in criminology (Featherstone and Deflem, 2003: 471). Culture establishes the meaning of success; it specifies 'the goals', what things are worth pursuing, and the 'means,' the ways to go about obtaining them. Structure has to do with distribution of the means. In a well-ordered society, the goals and means are consonant. That is, society affords all of its members a reasonable expectation of achieving success during their lifetimes. But too many of those in American society experienced dissonance between the goals and means, Merton felt, because they had been led to desire a way of life social circumstances made it impossible to achieve.

'The cultural demands made on persons in this situation are incompatible,' Merton (1938: 679) wrote, 'On the one hand, they are asked to orient their conduct toward the prospect of accumulating wealth and on the other, they are largely denied effective opportunities to do so institutionally'. Living under conditions of strain requires adaptation by one of several strategies. 'Conformity', he suggested, was followed by all those who were reasonably comfortable with their position in society or at least confident of their ability to improve their position. They accept the cultural goals in the belief that they benefit from the means afforded by the prevailing structure. Members of the working class would be tempted to pursue another strategy, 'innovation'. Innovators accept the goals, but because the legitimate means are not available, pursue alternative means, which is to say illegal means, of obtaining them.

During the 1960s, strain theory was reformulated by Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin. Their 'opportunity theory' extended strain logic to the problem of adolescent crime and gang affiliation. Like Merton, they wrote about the overemphasis in American culture on material success and the consequences of structural barriers for individual achievement. 'Pressures toward the formation of delinquent subcultures', Cloward and Ohlin (1960: 54) said, 'originate in the marked disparities between culturally-induced aspirations among lower class youth and the possibility of achieving them by legitimate means'. But as Cloward and Ohlin pointed out, a young person who had decided to pursue an illegitimate route to success could only choose from those illegal activities available within the community. Whether to get involved in organised theft or burglary, the drug trade, or some other line of criminal work depended on the extent to which adults in the neighbourhood had already organised such enterprises. This aspect of their work has been referred to as the 'other side of strain'.

Opportunity theory informed the American experiment with social crime prevention during the 1960s. The solution to delinquency, Cloward and Ohlin argued, was a matter of expanding opportunities for young people. Make it possible for young people to succeed, by offering jobs and training for jobs, and they would turn their back on gangs, crime and drugs. The system needed fixing, not the youths. Their Mobilisation of Youth project, initiated in a poor neighbourhood within New York City, sought to increase employment opportunities, provide job-training and skill-development, and help minority youth overcome workplace discrimination. It became the model for numerous programmes carried out as part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. Essentially, opportunity theory became a guide not only to delinquency prevention but poverty prevention in general.

David Downes (1998) has argued that Merton's theory works quite well in Britain. Merton had put his finger on the key question of how to account for rising delinquency despite growing affluence and welfare support. In focusing on rising expectations in the context of consumerism, Merton had identified a component of Marx's theory of political economy (rather than Durkeim's concept of anomie as Merton framed it) and distilled a theory of deviance from it. Downes's research in London's East End during the 1960s led him to conclude that if non-skilled young men were to be denied the chance of contributing to and benefiting from technological society as it was being built, the price would be high. He feared that erosion of the welfare state initiated by the Thatcher government in 1979 would lead to American-style crime policies of mass imprisonment (Downes, 1998: 107–8).

Social Support

The emergence of social support theory in the 1980s rekindled strain theory. Francis Cullen (1983) distinguished two meanings of strain in Merton's

writing – individual (psychological) and societal (structural). Strain, experienced by individuals at the psychological level, would produce anger, frustration, and anxiety and lead to deviant behaviour as an expression of this frustration. But strain also represented a rational choice in the context of limited opportunities. The criminal, under conditions in American society, did not need to experience any special stress or pressure to become deviant. Deviance and crime occur when illegitimate routes to success become the 'technically most effective procedure'. Cullen avoided the word 'strain' as a characteristic of such theories and replaced it with 'structuring'.

Cullen's theory of crime centres on the concept of 'social support', an idea implicit in sociologies of crime going back to the Chicago criminologists. Cullen contends that people avoid crime to the extent that communities and neighbourhoods meet their material and psychological needs. 'An important key to solving the crime problem', Cullen (1994: 552) has stated, 'is the construction of a supportive social order'. If enough resources flow to areas of need, people will commit fewer crimes and there will be much less need for harsher measures of government crime control. At the same time, government should prevent crime by means of social policy rather than crime policy generally. Social justice expresses criminology's highest ambition. Or, as Cullen put it, 'good criminology' pursues the 'good society'. Progressive strategies should nurture a culture of supportive concern for others and discourage the values of individualism and competitiveness (Cullen, Wright and Chamlin, 1999: 198–203).

Social support theory is consistent with research in the USA about the impact of government benefits on crime. Hannon and DeFronzo (1998) examined welfare assistance across 406 metropolitan counties and found increases in welfare payments to be correlated with lower levels of crime. They conclude that welfare assistance mitigates what would otherwise be a strong relationship between disadvantage and crime rates. This finding is consistent with anomie/strain theory, they suggest, as welfare assistance appears to allow poor individuals to legally obtain culturally-defined goals, lessening the anger and frustration that would otherwise lead them to crime.

There is some disagreement among the proponents of social support theory about whether government can truly stand-in for families and communities when they fail to provide nurturance, shared values, aid and comfort. Government programmes offer a soulless alternative to the experience of solidarity within a community. Cullen's model proposes, however, that most people need all the support they can get from all sources. Social support should be delivered at the local level through early intervention and community-based programmes. It should be delivered at the national level through government assistance to persons in need and indirectly through federally-funded programmes. Cullen suggests that social support can also be delivered within the criminal justice system, by such means as prisoner rehabilitation and re-entry (Pratt and Godsey, 2002: 590–1).

Crime and the 'American Dream'

In 1994, Steven Messner and Richard Rosenfeld published a major restatement of Merton's work that has been called 'institutional anomie' theory. They attribute high-levels of criminal violence in American society to the 'American Dream' defined as a 'broad cultural ethos that entails a commitment to the goal of material success, to be pursued by everyone in society, under conditions of open, individual competition' (Messner and Rosenfeld, 1994). This cultural ethos generates strong pressure for acquiring wealth, but does not contain sufficient prohibitions about the means of achieving that fortune.

Messner and Rosenfeld, as Bernburg (2002) explains, depart from Merton in their portrayal of the structural sources of anomie within the cultural sensibilities of the capitalist market economy. The values engendered by market society, the pursuit of self-interest, accumulation of wealth, and individual competition, have become exaggerated relative to the values related to the family, education, and even politics. Messner and Rosenfeld point to the overwhelming influence of economic institutions in American society. Other institutions – family, school, and even politics – tend to be overwhelmed by the market. These other institutions would be instilling cultural beliefs about the importance of playing by the rules, that family is important, and so on. These institutions are important for 'socialising' members into accepted social standards. For Messner and Rosenfeld, the market not only shapes the cultural definition of success and the distribution of labour, but also limits the effectiveness of other social institutions in their ability to address the imbalance (Bernburg, 2002: 733).

Messner and Rosenfeld make several policy recommendations aimed at reducing the influence of money in American life. Pro-family policies, such as family leave for workers, job sharing, flexible work schedules and employer-organised child care would give parents more time to devote to their families. Severing the link between educational credentials and employment (by de-emphasising the high school diploma as the qualification for work) would allow students motivated to work to begin a job, and students interested in learning to pursue an education. They would lobby for creation of a national service corps to engage people in the ways that emphasize collective goals rather than individual material success. And, they advocate cultural transformation generally – American culture should be steered toward mutual support and collective obligations and away from individual rights, interests, rewards, and privileges (Messner and Rosenfeld, 2006).

While Messner and Rosenfeld entitled their work to reflect their critique of American society, they have extended this critique beyond its borders. The threat posed by the American Dream is not peculiarly American, because market hegemony is actually a planetary phenomenon. Drawing on Karl Polanyi's framework, Messner and Rosenfeld (2000: 13) stress the 'fundamental issue confronting all capitalist societies: the need to restrain the market and prevent the economy from dominating other institutional realms'. In *The Great Transformation* (1944), Polanyi offered an account of the progress of industrial

capitalism during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One process in this transformation involved the expansion of the market as the mechanism for centring economic activity. The other involved counter-moves to prevent the market from undermining social order altogether. This was necessary because market exchange is 'disembedded' from other social relationships. To allow the market to expand unchecked would prove disastrous because it would undermine the cultural and moral foundations of human existence.

Capitalist societies staved off the worst effects of the market by constructing welfare states, essentially a strategy for *re*-embedding (Messner and Rosenfeld, 2000). The difficult task confronting market societies is thus to 'nurture cultural orientations' that sustain market exchange, but at the same time, instil 'considerations of collective order and mutual obligation'. While markets promote the values of individual rights and liberties, it falls to government to supply counter-balancing political and social values.

Market dominance promotes high rates of crime through both structural and cultural processes. Messner and Rosenfeld suggest that crime rates in advanced industrial states vary with the extent and scope of welfare provisions. Globalisation, the 'confluence of social and cultural changes that loosen the constraints of geography on the actions of individuals and collectivities' threatens to elevate crime rates unless governments take steps to mitigate its impact (Messner and Rosenfeld, 2000: 18). Savolainen (2000) took a look at cross-national homicide rates to examine the welfare state effect. He surmised that homicide rates would differ by nation depending on the strength of the welfare state in mitigating the impact of economic inequality. Consistent with institutional anomie theory, he found economic inequality to be a strong predictor of national homicide rates in nations with under-developed welfare structures. He suggested that homicide may not be a function of inequality so much as the size of an economically marginalised population; nations most resistant to the effects of economic inequality are those with tiny or nonexistent underclass populations.

Control Theory

Control theory presents an unlikely explanation for the link between social policy and crime. It is frequently classified as rational choice theory, meaning that individual choice is more important to the explanation of crime than social conditions constraining that choice. But control theory can be read in different ways, leading W. Byron Groves and associates to argue that it should be regarded as a radical theory consistent with Marx's theory of political economy (Lynch and Groves, 1989; Groves and Sampson, 1987).

The Social Bond

Travis Hirschi decided that most criminological theories start with the wrong question. Rather than asking what is it that leads some people to break the

law, Hirschi invites criminologists to ask: Why is it that most people abide by the law? If inequality pressurised society in the way strain theory says it does, then the real mystery would be why *more* people are not involved in crime. His answer, in the form of social bond theory, has ranked as the most popular explanation of crime among American criminologists (Walsh and Ellis, 1999).

Most people, Hirschi (1969) reasons, have motivations other than fear of arrest and imprisonment for behaving themselves. They have made investments in society, 'stakes in conformity', that would be jeopardised by an adventure into lawbreaking. They are bonded to society to an extent sufficient to render them unwilling to break the rules. The social bond can be understood as the rewards that accrue from participation in conventional social activities; it is comprised of the relationships, ambitions, and moral beliefs that commit people to law-abiding behaviour Delinquents engage in anti-social behaviour and crime because their ties to conventional order have been weak or broken. He identified four elements of the social bond: attachment (sensitivity to the opinions of others), commitment (pursuit of conventional behaviour), involvement (time spent in conventional activities), and belief (accepting that people should obey the rules).

In other words, law-abiding behaviour must be *purchased*; it must have some payoff for individuals (Lynch and Groves, 1989). If this sort of reward system fails, crime can be suppressed only by coercive measures such as punishment and threat of punishment. To make conformity attractive, society must offer something to its members – something of use for meeting human and culturally-defined needs. The moral of the control story, then, is grasping the structures and processes by which these rewards are unequally distributed so that social bonds are not the same for everyone (Lynch and Groves, 1989: 79–80). It is easy, given this reading of control theory, to see how the social bond varies in proportion to social exclusion: the greater the experience of social exclusion, the weaker the social bond. This reading of social bond theory explains its popularity among self-described liberal criminologists in the USA who think of broken social bonds in terms of unfair economic opportunities and lack of educational opportunities (Walsh and Ellis, 1999).

'Eight Simple Rules'

Control theory has been classified as a conservative approach because of the tendency to read it alongside Hirschi's later work. *A General Theory of Crime*, co-authored with Michael Gottfredson (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 2002), sets out self-control as the explanation for criminal behaviour, and since its publication, interpreters have tended to project the Hirschi of self-control onto the Hirschi of social bond. In this way, 'control theory' becomes an unlikely place for social policy. Jock Young (1999) places Gottfredson's and Hirschi's approach on the 'right of the political spectrum' and suggests that they champion an individualist explanation of crime consistent with a criminal justice

response. Yet as Taylor (2001: 374) points out, Gottfredson and Hirschi clearly reject long-term imprisonment and aggressive policing as a primary response: 'Because offenders are oriented to the short-term, manipulation of the criminal justice system, the ancient and popular solution to the crime problem, should have little or no impact on their behaviour' (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 2002: 295). While *A General Theory of Crime* does not explicitly deal with issues of inequality, there is no theoretical bar to why programmes aimed at helping the poor and disadvantaged would not contribute positively to parents' ability to teach self-control.

Gottfredson and Hirschi (2002) explain that their self-control theory is a 'choice theory'; a theory that assumes rational decision-making on the part of the criminal. This leads them in the direction of situational crime prevention. Programmes or practises that reduce opportunities, or make it more difficult or complex to enjoy criminal pleasures, will be most effective. Increasing the cost of alcohol or prohibiting its availability in particular settings offers a low-cost method of crime control. Generally, crime policies should address specific crimes rather than attempt to deal with all crimes, or the most serious of crimes. For this reason, control theory counsels against placing greater authority for crime control with the federal government. Local authorities, particularly those responsible for schools and closest to the community where they can aid families in distress, should take the lead in crime prevention.

Gottfredson and Hirschi (2002: 298–301) propose 'eight simple rules' for crime reduction. Policymakers should not attempt to reduce crime by incapacitating adults, rehabilitating adults, promoting proactive policing, or increasing severity of criminal penalties. Rather, policymakers should support programmes providing alternatives to unsupervised activities of teenagers and providing early education and effective childcare. Policies are needed that promote and facilitate two-parent families and that increase the number of caregivers relative to the number of children.

Routine Activities

Like control theory, routine activities theory seems an unlikely entry in a conversation about social policy and crime. One of the primary advocates of this theory, Marcus Felson, declares that welfare provision has no impact on crime rates. Routine activities theory does, however, offer a sociological explanation for crime leading to the conclusion that criminal justice is not the solution.

The Chemistry for Crime

Routine activities theory arrives at its iconoclastic statements about the welfare state from an intriguing starting point. Rather than ask why some people commit crimes, routine activities theory asks why some people become crime

victims. Since the first victimisation surveys were carried out in the 1970s, criminologists have become aware that people differ in their risk of becoming victims of crime. Individuals who are young, unmarried, and who live in cities run a higher risk of being victimised. And, one of the groups in society with the highest risk of victimisation consists of those persons who have been victimised before. To explain these patterns, criminologists have looked at the lifestyles or 'routine activities' of persons on the assumption that how people act, and with whom they interact, places them at greater or lesser risk of being victimised.

Felson (2002) explains this 'chemistry for crime' with reference to convergence in time and space of three elements. In order for a crime to occur, there must be a willing offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian. The model does not seek to understand what makes an offender willing; it only assumes that a crime could not occur unless someone was willing, for whatever reason, to break the law. The term 'target' is preferred over victim because the victim might be completely absent from the scene – the owner of a television set is usually away when the burglar nicks it. Guardianship does not refer to uni-formed security or police but to anybody whose presence discourages the would-be criminal. The fact that 'someone is at home' inhibits burglary even though that somebody is not intentionally engaged in security. This line of reasoning leads to two initial conclusions. First, patterns of routine activities and lifestyles are assumed to create a criminal opportunity structure by enhancing contact between potential criminals and victims. Second, the subjective value of the victim as a 'target' and its level of accessibility related to 'guardianship' deter-mine the choice of a particular victim (Miethe and Meier, 1990: 245). Or, as Felson (1987: 914) phrases it: 'Although the fox finds each hare one by one, the fox population varies with the hare population on which it feeds'.

Cohen and Felson (1979) outlined the routine activities approach in 1979 in an article dealing with crime trends in the USA in the decades after the Second World War. Many theories of crime did not seem to fit. If poverty, unemploy-ment, and urbanisation explain crime rates, then crime should have decreased. But crime *increased*. They surmised that changes in the lifestyle of many Americans had made them more vulnerable to household crimes. More homes were left unguarded as women entered full-time work and more fami-lies could afford weeks away on holiday (by travelling on the newly-built 'interstate'). At the same time, the diffusion of transistors and plastics gener-ated new categories of portable goods that could be stolen. Property crime was an unintended effect of the dispersion of activities away from family and household settings. Felson contends that this reasoning still represents the best explanation for the rise in burglary in the USA and Western Europe during the 1960s and 1970s. The best predictor of annual burglary rates, he points out, is the weight of the smallest television set sold each year.

Much of the empirical study of crime that makes use of the routine activi-ties framework is conducted in the USA. But studies of developments in the European context have begun to appear. Tseloni and others (2004) examined

factors related to burglary in the UK, USA, and the Netherlands based on victimisation surveys conducted in these countries during the 1990s. They conclude that burglary of American households displayed more idiosyncratic patterns than European households, but that some cross-national patterns support the application of routine activities theory. Wittebrood and Nieuwbeerta (2000) carried out an innovative study in the Netherlands using information culled from life histories data rather than victimisation surveys. They affirmed the usefulness of the routine activities perspective in explaining repeat victimisation: individuals who have once been victimised suffer a higher risk of subsequent victimisation.

The Welfare State Fallacy?

Although Felson's theory has been taken as theoretical support for situational crime prevention, there is an argument for sociological intervention on a macro scale. When Felson talks about situational crime prevention, he has in mind 'natural social control' maintained through relationships among passers-by, neighbours, and family members (Felson, 1987: 912). He is decidedly unenthusiastic about the 'unnatural' social control carried out by police, courts and prisons.

Felson is also unenthusiastic about social policy as a means of crime prevention, going so far as to refer to the 'welfare state fallacy'. He is sceptical of the claim that the USA is a world-leader in crime rates because it refuses to deliver more than a minimalist welfare state. America certainly offers less in the way of welfare benefits than European welfare states, but this does not translate into higher crime. The welfare state neither causes crime nor reduces crime – 'crime variations in industrial nations have nothing to do with the welfare state' (Felson, 2002: 12). Felson points out that according to victimisation surveys, the USA does *not* have a higher crime rate than Europe. He cites the work of Van Kesteren, Mayhew, and Nieuwbeerta (2001), who coordinated victimisation surveys in 17 industrial countries, and found the USA to rank eleventh in overall victimisation. Countries with generous welfare benefits – Netherlands and Sweden – were found to have *higher* overall criminal victimisation than the USA (Van Kesteren, Mayhew, and Nieuwbeerta, 2001: 38).

As is always the case in comparative criminology, finding appropriate points of comparison is difficult. The weakest link in Felson's argument is that victimisation surveys provide better information about property crime than about violent crime. The Netherlands, for example, falls into the 'high' band of overall victimisation along with Australia, England and Wales, and Sweden. But much of this is a function of higher rates of petty crime, such as bicycle theft and car vandalism, which account for half of all reported victimisation (Van Kesteren, Mayhew and Nieuwbeerta, 2001). In other words, the Netherlands does have a high rate of crime when it comes to bicycle theft and the USA has a high rate of crime when it comes to murder. That said, the point Felson wants to make is that policy rhetoric about social welfare should not be confused with that of crime

reduction. One can believe the welfare state will bring about poverty reduction without believing that it will also bring about crime reduction.

Tham (1998) reports on an interesting 'natural experiment' to test the welfare effect on crime. He compared crime rates in the UK and Sweden during the 1980s, following the Conservative victory in the UK of 1979 and a victory for the Social Democrats in Sweden in 1982. The differing approaches to crime during these years should have, according to the logic of the welfare state, led to differences in crime. But in carrying out his analysis, Tham could not point to evidence showing that 'welfare-state policies actually might have diminished crime' in Sweden. Similarly, Bondeson (2005) observes that crime rates have increased in all the Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway) since the 1960s. Similar trends can be observed for crimes of theft and assault in the Scandinavian countries and in Austria, England and Wales, Germany, and the Netherlands. The welfare model, she proposes, has not lessened crime but has softened the criminal justice policies in the welfare states.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen how four questions about crime lead to different conclusions about the impact of social policy. Why do 'high crime' areas of cities persist despite turnover among residents? How is it that a wealthy society also has high rates of crime? Why do most people living in conditions of social inequality not turn to crime? How is it that some people are victimised by crime much more than others? At the policy end, this translates into emphasis on community-based and local programmes, affirmation of the welfare state, programmes targeting parents and schools, and efforts to redirect the social activities that comprise everyday life. Criminologists working within each of these frameworks agree that conventional methods of policing and prisons will be ineffective.

Questions for Discussion

1. *The UK government plans to redevelop blighted areas of East London in preparation for the 2012 Olympic Games. Will rebuilding this area achieve long-term poverty reduction?*

2. *Does pursuit of the American Dream explain crime in British society? Is the 'British Dream' slightly or significantly different?*

3. *Is it fair to say that police and prisons are short-term solutions to the problem of crime and that social policy presents a long-term solution?*

4. *Is it appropriate to justify social polices with reference to their (potential) crime reduction qualities?*

Further Reading

Robert Lilly, Francis Cullen, and Richard Ball (2006) *Criminological Theory: Context and Consequences* (4th edn). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Wayne Morrison (1995) *Theoretical Criminology: From Modernity to Post-Modernism*. London: Cavendish.

John Tierny (2006) *Criminology: Theory and Content* (3rd edn). Essex: Pearson.

Rene van Swaanigen (1997) *Critical Criminology: Visions from Europe.* London: Sage.