

Social Disorganization, Anomie, and Strain Theories

Introduction

Social disorganization and anomie (also referred to as strain) theories have evolved from different theoretical and research traditions. They are included in the same chapter, however, because they have a common theme. Both propose that social order, stability, and integration are conducive to conformity, while disorder and malintegration are conducive to crime and deviance. A social system (a society, community, or subsystem within a society) is described as socially organized and integrated if there is an internal consensus on its norms and values, a strong cohesion exists among its members, and social interaction proceeds in an orderly way. Conversely, the system is described as disorganized or anomic if there is a disruption in its social cohesion or integration, a breakdown in social control, or malalignment among its elements.

Both theories propose that the less there exists solidarity, cohesion, or integration within a group, community, or society, the higher will be the rate of crime and deviance. Each attempts to explain high rates of crime and delinquency in disadvantaged lower-class and ethnic groups. At one time or another, both theories have focused specifically on delinquent or criminal gangs and subcultures.

Social Disorganization and the Urban Ecology of Crime and Delinquency

Social disorganization theory was first developed in the studies of urban crime and delinquency by sociologists at the University of Chicago and the Institute for Juvenile Research in Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s (Shaw and McKay, 1942; 1969). Since then, the theory has most often been applied to urban crime and deviance, though the concept of social disorganization has also been applied to the conditions of

a family, a whole society, or some segment of society (Rose, 1954). The Chicago studies plotted out the residential location of those youths who had been referred to juvenile court from different areas of the city. These studies showed that the distribution of delinquents around the city fits a systematic pattern. The rates of delinquency in the lower-class neighborhoods were highest near the inner city and decreased outwardly toward the more affluent areas. The inner city neighborhoods maintained high rates of delinquency over decades, even though the racial and ethnic makeup of the population in those areas underwent substantial change. The same pattern of declining rates of delinquency as the distance from the inner city neighborhood increased was found within each racial or ethnic group (Shaw and McKay, 1942; 1969).

These findings were explained by reference to a theory of urban ecology that viewed the city as analogous to the natural ecological communities of plants and animals (Park et al., 1928). The residential, commercial, and industrial pattern of urban settlement was described as developing an ecological pattern of concentric zones that spread from the center toward the outermost edge of the city. Directly adjacent to the commercial and business core of the city was a "zone in transition," which was changing from residential to commercial. It was in this area that the highest rates of delinquency were found.

This transition zone was characterized by physical decay, poor housing, incomplete and broken families, high rates of illegitimate births, and an unstable, heterogeneous population. The residents were at the bottom end of the socioeconomic scale, with low income, education, and occupations. In addition to high rates of delinquency, this area had high official rates of adult crime, drug addiction, alcoholism, prostitution, and mental illness. All these forms of deviance and lawlessness were interpreted as the outcome of social disorganization within this urban area. The Chicago sociologists emphasized that residents in this area were not biologically or psychologically abnormal. Rather, their crime and deviance were simply the normal responses of normal people to abnormal social conditions. Under these conditions, criminal and delinquent traditions developed and were culturally transmitted from one generation to the next. Industrialization, urbanization, and other social changes in modern society were seen by the Chicago sociologists as causing social disorganization by undermining social control exercised through traditional social order and values.

Restatements and Research on Social Disorganization

Since the pioneering studies of Shaw and McKay, a great deal of research has been done on the ecology of urban crime and delinquency. Studies and research data on urban crime remain an important part of

criminological research. While some studies have been patterned closely after the social disorganization approach of the early Chicago studies, others only indirectly relate to it.¹ It is difficult to judge the extent to which the original Chicago research and subsequent research has verified social disorganization as an explanation of crime. A trend in the migration of both white and black middle-class residents, as well as industry and business, out of the large cities into suburban communities has resulted in even more deprivation, decay, and other conditions of social disorganization within the urban centers. This trend has left a population of the “truly disadvantaged” (Wilson, 1987) or an “under class” with high rates of unemployment, welfare support, illegitimate births, single-parent families, drug use and abuse, and violence. Research continues to find that arrests, convictions, incarcerations, and other measures of official rates of crime and delinquency are alarmingly high among the residents in these neighborhoods.

To what degree the relationship between inner-city residence and crime is the result of social disorganization remains uncertain. Often the research does not carefully measure social disorganization. The very fact that crime and deviance are high within an area is itself sometimes used, tautologically, as an empirical indicator that the area is socially disorganized (see Bursik’s 1988 review of this issue). Furthermore, even in those areas characterized as the most disorganized, only a minority of youths and even smaller minority of adults are involved in crime. There is also the question of how much concentration of official crime rates in these areas results from higher rates of criminal behavior among its residents or from race and class disparities in police practices (Warner and Pierce, 1993).

Moreover, exactly what physical, economic, population, or family conditions constitute social disorganization? Is it true that physical, economic, and population characteristics are objective indicators of disorganization, or does the term simply reflect a value judgment about lower-class lifestyle and living conditions? By the 1940s, the term “differential social organization” (Sutherland, 1947) had been introduced to emphasize that these urban neighborhoods may not be so much *dis*-organized as simply *organized* around different values and concerns. Edwin Sutherland’s (1947) education and part of his academic career were at the University of Chicago, and he acknowledged the influence of the Chicago sociologists (Sutherland, 1973). His theory of “differential association” complements differential social organization by explaining crime as behavior learned through an exposure to different conforming and criminal patterns (see Chapter 5 on social learning theory).

Social disorganization has received renewed theoretical attention through the work of Robert Bursik, Robert Sampson, and others who have reanalyzed the theory, related it to current theories, and addressed

some of the criticisms of this theory (Sampson, 1995). Bursik (1988; Bursik and Grasmick, 1993) points out that Shaw and McKay were not trying to propose that urban ecology, economic conditions of urban neighborhoods, and rapid social changes are the direct causes of crime and delinquency. Rather, he argues, they were proposing that social disorganization undermines or hinders informal social controls within the community and neighborhood, thus allowing high rates of crime to occur. Therefore, the absence or breakdown of social control is a key component behind the concept of social disorganization that, Bursik contends, ties it to modern social control theory (see Chapter 6). Bursik also links the assumptions of the ecological distribution of crime opportunities in routine activities theory to the social disorganization approach. Sampson and Groves (1989) have pointed to the same problem identified by Bursik: social disorganization theory does not propose that such factors as social class and the racial composition of a community are direct causes of crime and delinquency. Yet, these are the variables that have been used to measure social disorganization. Research has not directly measured the components of social disorganization itself. Therefore, Sampson and Groves (1989:775) concluded that, "while past researchers have examined Shaw and McKay's prediction concerning community change and extra-local influence on delinquency, no one has directly tested their theory of social disorganization."

Sampson and Groves (1989) proffered an empirical model of social disorganization that remedied this problem. Their model contains the usual measures of "external" factors affecting social disorganization, such as social class, residential mobility, and family disruption, but then goes beyond these variables to include the measures of three key components of the concept of social disorganization: community supervision of teenage gangs, informal friendship networks, and participation in formal organizations. Their data from British communities supported this model. They found that most of the external factors were related to social disorganization, as predicted. The links in the model were completed by showing that the measures of social disorganization were good predictors of rates of crime victimization. Though not very adequately, the model also explained the rates of criminal offenses.

More recent research has not followed the Sampson and Groves model of measuring social disorganization directly. Social disorganization continues to be measured indirectly by social conditions in different areas of the city. Warner and Pierce (1993), for instance, report strong relationships between rates of telephone calls to police (by victims of assaults, robbery, and burglary) and neighborhood poverty, racial heterogeneity, residential instability, family disruption, and high density of housing units as measures of social disorganization. Gottfredson and associates (1991) tested social disorganization theory

by correlating census-block level data on disrupted families, poverty, unemployment, income, and education with individual-level self-reports of interpersonal aggression, theft and vandalism, and drug use. The independent variables accounted for individuals' delinquency, but the relationships were not strong and varied by type of delinquency and gender. Moreover, the adolescents' social bonds and peer associations mediated the effects of social disorganization on delinquency.

Silver (2000) acknowledges the points made by Sampson and Groves and by Bursik about the need to measure social disorganization directly if the theory is to be properly tested. Nevertheless, since direct measures cannot be found in census data, he continues to use indirect indicators of neighborhood disorganization such as disadvantage (e.g., poverty and unemployment) and mobility (e.g., average length of residence). In a study in Chicago, he found that these neighborhood level measures do have an effect on violence among former patients released from a psychiatric institute, but not as much as individual level variables such as impulsivity and prior history of violence. Similarly, Wikstrom and Loeber (2000) found that delinquent involvement begun in the latter teenage years, but not early onset delinquency, is related to neighborhood disadvantage and instability. Those adolescents at high risk (because of poor parental supervision, differential peer association, delinquent attitudes, and impulsivity) were more likely to be delinquent regardless of neighborhood context. Jang and Johnson (2001) do try to measure social disorganization directly with perceptions of neighborhood disorder and test its relationship to adolescent substance use. Their research did find a significant relationship but also found that the individual's religiosity acts as a protective factor for youth in neighborhoods perceived as disordered. However, substance use was more strongly affected by social bonding variables and most strongly by social learning variables. Having substance-using peers and adhering to pro-use attitudes mediated much of the neighborhood effects and virtually all of the buffering effects of religiosity.

These findings echo those of the earlier research by Gottfredson et al. (1991) and lend support to the theoretical proposition of Bursik (1988; Bursik and Grasmick, 1993), Sampson (Sampson and Groves, 1989), and others that social disorganization has an effect on crime and deviance because it affects informal social control in the community. Also, given the measures in these studies, one is led to the conclusion that the informal social control affected by social disorganization is that which comes through variables and processes referred to in theories of social learning (peer associations and attitudes), social bonding (family supervision and religiosity), and self-control (impulsivity).

Classic Anomie/Strain Theories

Merton's Theory of Social Structure and Anomie

Anomie/strain theories² provide an explanation of the concentration of crime not only in the lower-class urban areas but also in lower-class and minority groups in general, as well as the overall high crime rate in American society. This theory leans heavily on the work of Emile Durkheim, one of the founders of sociology. Durkheim (1951 [1897]) used the term *anomie* to refer to a state of normlessness or lack of social regulation in modern society as one condition that promotes higher rates of suicide. Robert Merton (1938; 1957) applied this Durkheimian approach to the condition of modern industrial societies, especially in the United States. To Merton, an integrated society maintains a balance between social structure (approved social means) and culture (approved goals). Anomie is the form that societal malintegration takes when there is a dissociation between valued cultural ends and legitimate societal means to those ends.

Merton argued that American society evinces this means-ends disjuncture in two basic ways. First, the strong cultural emphasis on success goals in America is not matched by an equally strong emphasis on socially approved means. Everyone is socialized to aspire toward high achievement and success. Competitiveness and success are glorified by public authorities, taught in the schools, glamorized in the media, and encouraged by the values that are passed along from generation to generation. Worth is judged by material and monetary success. The American dream means that anyone can make it big.

Of course, this success is supposed to be achieved by an honest effort in legitimate educational, occupational, and economic endeavors. Societal norms regulate the approved ways of attaining this success, distinguishing them from illegitimate avenues to the same goal. However, Merton perceived American values to be more concerned with acquiring success, getting ahead, and getting the money at any cost, than with the right and proper way to do so. While other industrial societies may have the same problem, American society is especially prone to stress achievement of the ends over utilization of approved means. When success goals are over-emphasized, the norms governing their achievement become weakened, producing what Durkheim conceived of as anomie.

Americans, then, are more likely than members of more integrated societies to do whatever it takes to achieve success, even if it means breaking the law, in part because legitimate efforts to succeed are not as highly valued in American culture. Hence, we have higher crime rates than other societies.

Second, there is a discrepancy between means and ends perpetuated by the class system in America and, to a lesser degree, other industrialized societies. The success ethic permeates all levels of the class structure and is embodied in the educational system to which persons of all social classes are exposed. The American dream promotes the ideal that equal opportunity for success is available to all. In reality, however, disadvantaged minority groups and the lower class do not have equal access to such legitimate opportunities. They are socialized to hold high aspirations, yet they are relatively blocked off from the conventional educational and occupational opportunities needed to realize those ambitions. This anomic condition produces *strain* or pressure on these groups to take advantage of whatever effective means to income and success they can find, even if these means are illegitimate or illegal.

Although Merton (1938) presented his discussion of the forces that create anomie in American society at the macro-structural level, he also proposed that individual behavior is affected by the culture structure. He identified five “logically possible, alternative modes of adjustment or adaptation *by individuals*” to the societal condition of anomie (Merton 1938:676; emphasis in original).

The first, “conformity,” is the most common response: one simply accepts the state of affairs and continues to strive for success within the restricted conventional means available. The second type of adaptation, “innovation,” is the most common deviant response: one maintains commitment to success goals but takes advantage of illegitimate means to attain them. Most crime and delinquency, especially income-producing offenses, would fit into this adaptive mode. Another deviant mode, “rebellion,” rejects the system altogether, both means and ends, and replaces it with a new one, such as a violent overthrow of the system. Yet another, “retreatism,” refers to an escapist response: one becomes a societal dropout, giving up on both the goals and the effort to achieve them. Merton placed alcoholics, drug addicts, vagrants, and the severely mentally ill in this mode. Finally, there is “ritualism,” in which one gives up the struggle to get ahead and concentrates on retaining what little has been gained by adhering rigidly and zealously to the norms.

Innovation is the most frequently adapted non-conformist mode among members of the lower class. The high rate of crime in the lower class, therefore, is explained by its location in a society that subjects it to high levels of anomie-induced strain. This strain is produced by the disjuncture between society’s dream of equality and success for all and the actual inequality in the distribution of opportunities to realize that dream. This inequity is most severe for members of the lower class, the disadvantaged, and minority groups. Relatively deprived of legitimate means, while still imbued with the American dream, they respond by resorting to illegitimate means.

Merton's theory was almost immediately embraced as a quintessential sociological theory of crime. Early social disorganization theorists such as Shaw and McKay (1942) quickly adopted the basic anomie concept of the disparity between success goals and access to legitimate means.

[C]hildren and young people in all areas, both rich and poor, are exposed to the luxury values and success patterns of our culture. . . . Among children and young people residing in low-income areas, interests in acquiring material goods and enhancing personal status are developed which are often difficult to realize by legitimate means because of limited access to the necessary facilities and opportunities. (Shaw and McKay, 1942, reprinted in Williams and McShane, 1998:66)

By the 1950s, Merton's theory was widely accepted and applied in modified form specifically to subcultural delinquency.

Cohen: Status Deprivation and the Delinquent Subculture

Albert K. Cohen (1955) followed Merton by emphasizing the structural sources of strain that lead to deviant adaptations by the lower class. But Cohen applied it specifically to the delinquent subculture found among lower-class adolescent males. He recognized that the delinquent subculture has an effect on and plays a role in influencing individual lower-class boys to become involved in delinquent behavior. But he denied any interest in the explanation of variations in individual behavior or why the delinquent subculture was maintained over a period of time. Instead, he wanted to explain why it existed in the first place.

Cohen's version of anomie/strain theory is in basic agreement with Merton's theory, because both perceive blocked goals as producing deviance-inducing strain. However, rather than the inability to gain material success, in Cohen's view, it is the inability to gain status and acceptance in conventional society that produces the strain. Status in conventional society is achieved by meeting society's standards of dress, behavior, scholastic abilities, and so on. The most pervasive of these standards, according to Cohen, are those of the middle class. Adolescents are most likely to be confronted by the middle-class criteria of respectability and acceptance in the public schools. Middle-class expectations are imposed by teachers and administrators on students from all class backgrounds. Such standards as good manners, appropriate demeanor, non-aggressive attitudes and behavior, attention to grades, studying, and active participation in school activities are among the ways that students gain status and approval.

Middle-class adolescents, supported by middle-class parents, are best able to meet these standards. They achieve recognition and gain status by measuring up to these standards, not only in the eyes of adults

but to a large extent in the eyes of their peers. However, lower-class youths, especially boys, cannot always meet these standards. They do not have the verbal and social skills to measure up to the yardstick of middle-class values. As a result, their “status deprivation” produces “status frustration.”

According to Cohen, the delinquent subculture is a collective response to this frustration, and the nature of its delinquent activities results from a “reaction formation.” The criteria for acceptability found in this subculture can be met by lower-class boys, who gain status in delinquent gangs by adhering to “malicious” and “negativistic” values in opposition to conventional standards. If non-aggression is acceptable in the middle class, then a reputation for aggressive toughness is the way to gain status in the delinquent subculture. If polite classroom behavior and making good grades will gain greater standing in the eyes of the teachers, then classroom disruption and disdain for academic achievement will gain greater standing in the delinquent subculture.

Cohen argued that Merton’s image of deviants turning to illegitimate means because of the deprivation of legitimate means is too rationalistic to apply to the “non-utilitarian” delinquent subculture. For example, most of the property offenses committed by delinquent youths are really not intended to produce income or gain material success by illegal means. Rather, they are non-utilitarian responses to status frustration that also meet with the approval of delinquent peers.

Cloward and Ohlin: Differential Opportunity and Delinquent Subcultures

Shortly after Cohen’s theory was published, Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Cloward, 1959) proposed a “differential opportunity” theory of delinquency. Their theory drew from the anomie theory of Merton and Cohen’s subcultural theory on the one hand, and from Shaw and McKay’s social disorganization and Sutherland’s differential association theories on the other. Although the general propositions of their theory have subsequently been applied to a whole range of delinquent and criminal behavior, Cloward and Ohlin developed it specifically to account for types of, and participation in, delinquent subcultures.

In Cloward and Ohlin’s view, Merton’s anomie/strain theory incorrectly assumed that lower-class persons, who are denied access to legitimate opportunities, automatically have access to illegitimate opportunities. They interpreted Sutherland, as well as Shaw and McKay, as focusing on the cultural transmission of delinquent values in lower-class urban areas and implicitly demonstrating the importance of the availability of illegitimate opportunities. Their theory combines anomie, differential association, and social disorganization by proposing that

deviant adaptations are explained by location in both the legitimate and illegitimate opportunity structures.

Motivation and the aspiration to succeed by themselves do not account for either conforming or deviant behavior, argue Cloward and Ohlin. The individual must be in deviant or conforming “learning environments” that allow one to learn and perform the requisite skills and abilities. Just because legitimate opportunities are blocked does not necessarily mean that illegitimate opportunities are freely available. Some illegitimate roles may be available, while others may not be at all. Just as there is unequal access to role models and opportunities to fulfill conforming roles, there is unequal access to illegitimate roles and opportunities.

Among adolescent boys, it is clear that deprivation of legitimate means produces a strain toward delinquent activities, but what kind of delinquent patterns they will become involved in depends on what illegitimate opportunities are available to them in their community. Boys from racial and ethnic minorities, especially those in the lower-class neighborhoods of large urban centers, are most likely to be deprived of legitimate educational and occupational opportunities. Therefore, high rates of delinquency are to be expected among them. But the kind of subculture or gang delinquency they adopt depends on the nature of the illegitimate opportunities available to them. These opportunities are determined by the social organization of the neighborhoods or the areas of the city where they are raised.

While Cohen posited a single delinquent subculture, Cloward and Ohlin saw several subcultures. Though they recognized that delinquent gangs carry on a variety of illegal activities, they argued that these gangs develop more or less specialized delinquent subcultures, depending on the illegitimate opportunities in their neighborhoods.

The first major type of specialized delinquent subculture, “criminal,” is characterized by youth gangs organized primarily to commit income-producing offenses, such as theft, extortion, and fraud. Theirs is a more or less utilitarian choice of illegal means that corresponds with Merton’s innovation adaptation. Such gangs are found in lower-class ethnic neighborhoods organized around stable adult criminal patterns and values. Organized and successful criminals reside or operate openly in these neighborhoods, providing criminal role models and opportunities as alternatives to legitimate ones.

The second major type of delinquent subculture, “conflict,” is expressed in fighting gangs. Status in these groups is gained by being tough, violent, and able to fight. They are found in the socially disorganized lower-class neighborhoods with very few illegal opportunities to replace the legal opportunities that are denied them. There are few successful or emulated adult role models, either conventional or deviant. Youths become alienated from the adult world and view most of the

adults they encounter as “weak.” They are unable to develop the skills, either legitimate or illegal, to achieve economic success and see no way to gain conventional or criminal status. In frustration they turn to gangs in which the only status to be gained is by fearlessness and violence.

The third major type of delinquent subculture, “retreatist,” is primarily focused on the consumption of drugs and alcohol. Retreatist gang members have given up on both goals and means, whether conventional or illegal. Cloward and Ohlin did not specify the type of neighborhood in which retreatist gangs are found, but they described their members as “double failures.” Double failures not only perform poorly in school and have little or no occupational prospects, they are neither good crooks nor good fighters. They escape into a different world in which the only goal is the “kick” and being “cool.” While most sustain themselves by one type or another of a non-violent “hustle,” status and admiration can be gained only within the gang by getting high and maintaining a drug habit.

Miller: Focal Concerns of Lower-Class Culture

Walter B. Miller (1958a), following Cohen and Cloward and Ohlin, concentrated on the delinquency of lower-class male gangs (or, in Miller’s terms, “street corner groups”) in economically deprived neighborhoods. He also agreed with anomie/strain theorists that the commission of delinquent behavior is motivated by the attempt to gain desired ends. But rather than positing a distinct delinquent subculture(s) adapted to the availability of legitimate or illegitimate opportunities, Miller proposed that delinquent behavior is a youthful adaptation to a distinct lower-class culture. Delinquency is one way of achieving or gaining acceptance according to the expectations of this lower-class culture. Lower-class youth learn and act according to the central values or “focal concerns” of lower-class adults, but the delinquent adolescents express and carry out these values in an exaggerated way. These values are: *trouble* (revolving around getting away with law violations), *toughness* (showing physical power and fearlessness), *smartness* (ability to con or dupe others), *excitement* (seeking thrills, risk-taking, danger), *fatalism* (being lucky or unlucky), and *autonomy* (freedom from authority, independence). By demonstrating toughness, smartness, autonomy, and the other characteristics implied in the focal concerns, lower-class males achieve status and belonging in the street corner groups. These qualities can be demonstrated and the valued ends achieved by fighting and other forms of illegal and deviant behavior.³

Research on Classic Anomie/Strain Theories

Because Merton's theory of social structure and anomie offers explanations of both macro- and micro-level processes, empirical studies conducted on his theory and the theories of Cohen and Cloward and Ohlin have utilized both individuals and larger groups as units of analysis. The extant research on these classic anomie/strain theories has addressed a number of different questions.

Are Crime and Delinquency Concentrated in the Lower Class and Minority Groups?

In both theory and practice, anomie/strain theories emphasize the predominance of crime and delinquency among the lower-class and minority populations, the most deprived of legitimate opportunities. All varieties of this theory discussed so far have predicted an inverse relationship between social class and law-breaking, and by extension of the assumptions and logic of anomie, one is also led to expect higher rates of crime and delinquency in disadvantaged minority groups.

As we have already seen, early urban research based on official statistics found a disproportionate amount of crime and delinquency in the lower-class and minority groups. Studies of self-reported delinquent behavior that began in the 1950s, however, raised serious questions about the class distribution of delinquency (Nye, 1958; Akers, 1964). By the 1970s, nearly all of the self-reported delinquency studies, as well as the few self-report studies of adult crime, found little difference in the levels of delinquent behavior by socio-economic status (SES) (Tittle and Villemez, 1977). Studies using official measures of crime and delinquency continued to find more offenders in the lower class than in the middle and upper classes, but even in these studies the correlations were not high (Tittle et al., 1978). The effects of class and race were stronger in longitudinal studies of official arrest histories from delinquency to adult crime (Wolfgang et al., 1972; Wolfgang et al., 1987).

Some researchers have argued that, if self-report studies would utilize more effective measures of illegal behavior, then they too would find crime and delinquency to be related to both social class and race (Hindelang et al., 1979). They contend that self-report studies only measure the more trivial offenses and do not include high-frequency offenders, whereas official measures pick up the more serious, frequent, and chronic offenders. Their conclusion, then, is that there may be little difference by class and race in low-frequency, minor offenses, but there are considerable class and race differences in the most frequent and serious offenses. Some self-report studies that include high-frequency and serious offenses have found them most likely to occur in the lower

class, as is found in studies using official measures (Hindelang et al., 1980; Elliott and Ageton, 1980; Thornberry and Farnworth, 1982). Up to now, however, “overall . . . recent analyses concerning the strength of an SES/delinquency relationship, as revealed by officially recorded measures relative to self-report measures, show mixed results” (Tittle and Meier, 1990).

Other researchers have concluded that, while there is no relationship between class and delinquency or crime in general, there is a relationship under some conditions. Some argue that a correlation exists when social class is dichotomized and the most disadvantaged underclass is compared with every other class level. Others maintain that the relationship is stronger among blacks than whites and among males than females. It has also been suggested that the relationship will hold true for urban centers but not for suburban communities, and for lower-class youths in middle- or upper-class communities but not for those in predominantly lower-class neighborhoods. However, research evidence does not clearly support a class/crime relationship under these conditions. Research by Dunaway et al. (2000) on self-reported crime among urban adults uncovered little direct effect of social class on criminal behavior regardless of how class is measured.

It is possible that the relationship between class-related access to legitimate opportunities and the official crime rate is different for blacks and whites. LaFree et al. (1992), for example, found that the burglary, homicide, and robbery arrest rates in the United States since 1957 were related in the expected direction to indicators of economic well-being among white males but not among black males. The unemployed are expected to experience the greatest strain of blocked opportunities and are more likely to commit crime than the gainfully employed. There is mixed support for this hypothesis. It is also proposed that offenders who are apprehended and imprisoned are more likely to come from the ranks of the unemployed (Chiricos, 1991). However, there is little evidence that unemployment motivates people to commit criminal acts (Kleck and Chiricos, 2002). Moreover, crime is as likely to affect unemployment as vice versa (Thornberry and Christenson, 1984; Cantor and Land, 1985).

Self-report studies find class and race variations in criminal and delinquent behavior, but they are not as great as the class and race differences in officially arrested, convicted, and/or imprisoned populations. This may result in part from disparities in criminal justice decisions. But it may also result from a tendency for relatively small numbers of serious, chronic offenders who commit a large number of offenses, and who are the most likely to be caught up in the criminal justice system, to come from lower-class and minority groups. (See Chapter 9.)

Social Structural Correlates of Crime Rates

Correlating crime with social class as a test of anomie conforms to Messner's (1988) argument that Merton's anomie theory is a theory of social organization, not a theory of individuals' criminal motivations. Therefore, the proper test of the empirical validity of anomie theory is to determine the social structural correlates of rates of crime. Bernard (1987) also contends that anomie theory is a structural theory that makes no direct predictions about individual criminal behavior, and anomie theory cannot be verified or falsified by individual-level tests (see also Burton and Cullen, 1992; Bernard and Snipes, 1995). There have been a number of macro-level studies testing the effects on city, region, and state crime rates of such structural factors such as class, poverty, inequality, unemployment, family instability, and racial heterogeneity. Although there are inconsistent findings in these studies, some have found fairly strong effects of these structural variables on both property and violent crime rates. (For a review of these studies and a report of new research on structural correlates of crime that resolves some of the earlier inconsistencies, see Land et al., 1990.)

Much of this research is not presented as a test of anomie theory, and none of it provides a direct measure of anomie as malintegration of cultural goals and societal means. In this sense, no structural version of anomie theory has yet received substantial empirical support. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to infer anomie from conditions of inequality (and perhaps other structural variables). Thus, the findings on structural correlates of crime can be viewed as consistent with anomie theory. They are also consistent with social disorganization theory, because the variables included in the research are very similar to those measured at the local community or neighborhood level in research on social disorganization theory.

Gangs and Delinquent Subcultures

There can be little doubt that gang delinquency continues to be concentrated in the lower-class, black and Hispanic neighborhoods of Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, New York, and other large cities. Yet, there is considerable doubt as to how closely these urban gangs fit the theoretical specifications of Cohen and of Cloward and Ohlin. (See Schrag, 1962.) Lower-class and non-white gang boys perceive more limited legitimate and more available illegitimate opportunities than middle-class, non-gang white boys. But whether these perceptions precede or result from gang membership is not clear (Short and Strodtbeck, 1965). Moreover, neither gang members nor other delinquents sustain a distinct subculture that promotes values and norms directly contrary to conventional culture. They are more likely to agree in general with conventional values and to "neutralize" or excuse their behavior that violates

those values. Such excuses themselves come from the general culture and are conceptually linked to the concept of definitions in social learning (Sykes and Matza, 1957; Matza and Sykes, 1961). (See Chapter 5.)

As yet, researchers have been unable to verify Cloward and Ohlin's three major types of delinquent subcultures located in specific kinds of neighborhood opportunity structures. Recent research shows that there is some tendency for offense specialization by delinquent groups (Warr, 1996). However, this specialization does not conform closely to the types of subcultures identified in differential opportunity theory. Delinquent gangs can be very versatile, committing a wide range of violent, criminal, and drug offenses. Though some gangs and gang members are heavily involved in drug trafficking, there do not appear to be any "retreatist" gangs as described by Cloward and Ohlin, organized around the need for drugs. Drug use is high among all gangs, but then so is fighting and theft. (See Short and Strodtbeck, 1965; Spergel, 1964; see also Empey, 1967; Huff, 1990.)

School Dropout and Delinquency

According to anomie/strain theory, particularly Cohen's version (1955), the school is an important arena in which lower-class youths are confronted with the failure to live up to the conventional standards for status. It is there that they continually face the realities of their academic and social liabilities. The school experience, therefore, is often filled with failure and a strain toward delinquency. If this is true, then dropping out of school would reduce the strain and the motivation to commit illegal acts. Elliott and Voss (1974) found some support for this hypothesis by comparing officially detected crime (up to age 19) for high school graduates with that of youngsters who had dropped out of school. The school dropouts had fairly high rates of delinquency while in school, but they reduced their offenses considerably after dropping out. However, the dropouts still had higher rates than the school graduates. It is also unclear how much of the decline in their delinquency resulted from leaving a stressful school situation and how much stemmed from the tendency for law violations to decline after age 17 among all groups.

Thornberry et al. (1985) found that arrests among school dropouts increased the year after leaving school and remained higher than the arrest rate for high-school graduates through age 25. Controlling for social class and race does not seem to change the findings (Thornberry et al., 1985). A later study with a national sample of adolescents found that dropping out of school sometimes increases delinquent involvement and sometimes lowers it. The effects of dropping out of school depend on the reasons for doing so and other factors such as race, age, and gender. When these other variables are controlled, most of the rela-

tionships between dropping out of school and delinquent behavior become statistically non-significant (Jarjoura and Junger-Tas, 1993).

Perceived Discrepancy Between Aspirations and Expectations

The gap between the cultural ends and social means proposed by anomie theory at the structural level implies that individuals in anomie situations may perceive this discrepancy, thereby experiencing strain. At the social psychological level, strain can be directly measured by the difference between an individual's aspirations and expectations. Aspirations refer to what one hopes to achieve in life, economically, educationally, or occupationally (e.g., how much schooling one would like to complete). Expectations refer to what one believes is realistically possible to achieve (e.g., how much education one would expect to get). Anomie/strain theory would hypothesize that the greater the discrepancy between aspirations and expectations, the higher the probability of law violation.

There is not much empirical support for this hypothesis, however. The delinquent behavior of those youths who perceive a great discrepancy between their educational or occupational aspirations and their expectations does not differ much from the delinquency of those who perceive little or no gap between their aspirations and expectations. A bigger difference in delinquent behavior is found between those who have low aspirations and those who have high aspirations, regardless of the level of their expectations (Hirschi, 1969; Liska, 1971; Elliott et al., 1985; Burton and Cullen, 1992). Strain theory receives less empirical support than either social learning or social bonding when all three theories are directly compared (Akers and Cochran, 1985; McGee, 1992; Benda, 1994; Burton et al., 1994).

A number of researchers have questioned the manner in which the disjunction between aspirations and expectations has been measured. Farnworth and Leiber (1989) claim that these studies do not correctly measure strain because they concentrate on gauging the difference between *educational* aspirations and expectations and between *occupational* aspirations and expectations. They propose that a better indicator would be the "disjunction between economic goals [the desire to make lots of money] and educational expectations [the means to achieve the goal]" (Farnworth and Leiber, 1989:265). Their research found that the discrepancy between economic goals and educational expectations was a better predictor of delinquency than economic aspirations alone or the gap between the two. Contrary to their argument, however, the best predictor in the study was educational aspirations alone, without regard to expectations.

Agnew et al. (1996) argue that the disjunction between aspirations and expectations provides only an indirect measure of strain, since dis-

satisfaction with that gap is merely assumed. When strain is measured directly as dissatisfaction with one's monetary status, it is significantly, although modestly, related to both drug use and income-generating crime. In contrast, Wright et al. (2001) examine the effect of adolescents' economic resources on delinquent involvement and drug use and find a *positive* relationship between money obtained from jobs or allowance and both delinquency and drug use. Wright et al. (2001:241) reason that while their results refute strain theory's individual-level proposition that "access to money alleviates deprivation and thus reduces criminal behavior," their findings support a proposition drawn from the macro-structural version of the theory that possession of money only serves to fuel an appetite for more of the same, leading to deviant or criminal conduct.

Contemporary Anomie/Strain Theories

Despite anomie/strain theory's wide acceptance in the 1950s and 1960s, research on the theory, particularly that demonstrating only weak effects of the disjunction between aspirations and expectations, led some critics in the 1970s to reject the theory as a viable explanation of criminal behavior (see, for example, Kornhauser, 1978). However, Merton's theory saw a revival in the 1980s when theorists began to take a fresh look at the original theoretical statement and the manner in which the theory had been tested in the extant empirical literature (Messner, 1988; Agnew, 1985b). This revival of anomie/strain theory has taken two distinct paths. The first, known as institutional-anomie theory (Messner and Rosenfeld, 1994; 2001a), approaches Merton's anomie theory from a strictly macro-structural perspective and extends the analysis to a variety of institutions in the social structure. The second, known as general strain theory (Agnew, 1992), takes a social psychological approach and expands on the connection between sources of strain, strain-induced negative emotion, and individual criminal behavior.

Messner and Rosenfeld's Institutional-Anomie Theory

Steven Messner and Richard Rosenfeld (1994; 2001a) use Merton's theory of social structure and anomie as the framework upon which their institutional-anomie theory rests. Specifically, they utilize Merton's discussion of culture to articulate their vision of the "American dream," which, they argue, contains at least four value orientations conducive to criminal behavior. First, a strong *achievement orientation* creates a culture in which people are valued ultimately on the basis of what they have achieved or possess. Failure to achieve is equated with failure to contribute meaningfully to society, and "the cultural pres-

asures to achieve at any cost are thus very intense” (Messner and Rosenfeld, 2001a:62). Second, *individualism* encourages people to “make it on their own,” pitting individual against individual in a competitive rather than a cooperative stance. Third, a strong emphasis on *universalism* creates the normative expectation that all members of American society must desire and strive toward the same success goal. Finally, the “*fetishism*” of money designates the accumulation of monetary wealth as an end in itself, valued above even the possessions it can buy or the power it can wield. Money itself is the sole “metric of success” (Messner and Rosenfeld, 2001a:63). What makes the accumulation of money conducive to crime is its infinite nature. “Monetary success is inherently open-ended. It is always possible in principle to have more money. . . . The pressure to accumulate money is therefore relentless, which entices people to pursue their goals by any means necessary” (Messner and Rosenfeld, 2001a:63-64).

Although Messner and Rosenfeld borrow heavily from Merton’s depiction of American culture, they find Merton’s conception of social structure to be too narrowly focused on the class system.

The function of social structure, for Merton, is to distribute opportunities to achieve cultural goals. However, . . . [s]ocial structure also functions to place limits on certain cultural imperatives so that they do not dominate and ultimately destroy others. This is the specific role of social institutions. (Messner and Rosenfeld, 2001a:57)

Institutional-anomie theory thus extends Merton’s theory to consider the roles played by a variety of institutions. Messner and Rosenfeld focus in particular on the economic, political, family, and educational institutions. They recognize that the cultural values embodied in the American dream give preeminence to the economic institution. The dominance of the economy in this “institutional balance of power” results from three interrelated forces. First, the functions of non-economic institutions become “devalued.” For example, within the family, the homemaker or caregiver enjoys less social esteem than the breadwinner; within the educational institution, schools are often underfunded and educators underpaid. Second, non-economic institutions must “accommodate” the requirements of the economy. Family life often revolves around work schedules, schools tailor their curricula to the needs of business, and governments regularly accede to corporate interests. Finally, economic norms begin to “penetrate” non-economic institutions. Education is increasingly depicted as a commodity and students as consumers of knowledge, and schools, governments, and even families to some degree are pressured to adopt corporate models of operation and management.

Messner and Rosenfeld argue that economic dominance in the institutional balance of power weakens the social control functions of non-economic institutions. When combined with cultural values that “stimulate” criminal motivations, criminal behavior is simply a natural outcome of the social organization of American society. Because the economic institution does not strongly caution against the use of illegitimate but highly effective means to monetary success, it becomes even more necessary for non-economic institutions such as families and schools to step in and foster these beliefs and values. However, when these institutions are devalued, forced to accommodate, and penetrated by the economy, their capacity to exert normative control is diminished. These weakened non-economic institutions also lose their ability to impose external controls on behavior. Families forced to place work requirements above the needs of the family, or schools overcrowded from lack of funding, may be unable to provide adequate supervision and consistent discipline of children. Finally, the cultural imperative of “competitive individualism” encourages people to challenge and resist weak non-economic institutions. The universal expectation to compete and win requires that success be reached with a minimum of interference.

Anomic societies will inevitably find it difficult and costly to exert social control over the behavior of people who feel free to use whatever means prove most effective in reaching personal goals. Hence, the very sociocultural dynamics that make American institutions weak also enable and entitle Americans to defy institutional controls. If Americans are exceptionally resistant to control—and therefore exceptionally vulnerable to criminal temptations—the resistance occurs because they live in a society that enshrines the unfettered pursuit of individual material success above all other values. In the United States, anomie is considered a virtue. (Messner and Rosenfeld, 2001a:79)

In a restatement of institutional-anomie theory, Messner and Rosenfeld (2001b:155; emphasis in original) broaden their theoretical claims beyond American society asserting that “institutional imbalance *per se*, and not simply dominance of the economy, produces high rates of criminal activity.” Societies characterized by different forms of institutional dominance produce different forms of crime. Economically dominant societies produce “anomic” crimes, which involve material gain. Politically dominant societies produce a “moral cynicism” that diminishes personal responsibility for the well-being of others and invites corruption. Societies dominated by kinship or religion tend to develop an “extreme moral vigilance” that produces “crimes in defense of the moral order” such as vigilantism or hate crimes (Messner and Rosenfeld 2001b:155-156).

Research investigating the empirical validity of institutional-anomie theory is scarce. Chamlin and Cochran (1995:415) provide partial support for the hypothesis that “the effect of economic conditions on instrumental crime rates will depend on the vitality of non-economic institutions.” They found that the effect of poverty (as an indicator of economic inequality) on state rates of property crime is dependent in part on levels of church membership, divorce rates, and percentage of voters participating in elections (as indicators of strength of non-economic institutions). Messner and Rosenfeld (1997) hypothesize that crime rates should be lower when a society can buffer its members from market forces by providing for their social welfare, making them less dependent on the economy for their survival and diminishing economic dominance in the institutional balance of power. This social protection is also known as the “decommodification” of labor. Using a sample of 45 nations, they found that the quantity and quality of social welfare in a society is inversely related to the rate of homicide, even when controlling for economic inequality. Savolainen (2000) extended Messner and Rosenfeld’s (1997) analysis by examining the interaction effects of income inequality measures and decommodification on homicide rates in the same sample. His analysis failed to demonstrate the expected negative interaction effect predicted by institutional-anomie theory. However, in a supplemental sample that included several Eastern European nations with emerging market economies (i.e., less decommodified), he did ascertain that the effect of income inequality on homicide was lower in societies that provided greater protection of its members from the market. These studies examine only the effects of economic dominance on crime, but none makes a direct comparison between American society as the exemplar of this type of institutional imbalance and all other societies. No research has yet been published that investigates the effects of other forms of institutional imbalance on other types of crime.

While American crime rates were generally higher than the rates in other societies from the 1930s through the 1980s, since then American crime rates have declined while those in many other societies have remained stable or increased. Today, the property crime rates in the United States are similar to or lower than the rates in other societies around the world. These trends run counter to the assumption in both the earlier and later versions of anomie theory that anomic conditions have been and remain much more acute in the United States than anywhere else. If anomie is a strong macro-level predictor of crime, then the changes in crime rates would indicate a reduction in anomie in American society and/or an increase in anomie in other societies. There has been no research that directly measures different levels of anomie across societies or changes in anomie in the same society.

Agnew's General Strain Theory of Crime and Delinquency

In contrast to the macro-structural approach to the revision of anomie/strain theory taken by institutional-anomie theory, Robert Agnew (1985b; 1992) approaches the revision from a micro-level, social psychological perspective. His approach is primarily to broaden the concept of strain beyond that produced by the discrepancy between aspirations and expectations, to encompass several sources of stress or strain. According to Agnew's theory, crime and delinquency are an adaptation to stress, whatever the source of that stress. He identifies three major types of deviance-producing strain: the failure to achieve an individual's goals, the removal of positive or desired stimuli from the individual, and the confrontation of the individual with negative stimuli.

Failure to Achieve Positively Valued Goals. Included within this are three subtypes. First is the traditional concept of strain as the disjuncture between aspirations and expectations. Agnew expands this slightly to include not only ideal or future goals but more immediate goals. He also includes failure based not only on blocked opportunities but also on individual inadequacies in abilities and skills. Second is the gap between expectations and actual achievements, which leads to anger, resentment, and disappointment. The third subtype results from a discrepancy between what one views as a fair or just outcome and the actual outcome. In this subtype, the positive consequences of an activity or relationship are not perceived as comparable to the amount of effort put into it and are viewed as unfair when compared to others' efforts.

Removal of Positively Valued Stimuli. This source of strain refers primarily to the individual's experience with the stressful life events that can befall adolescents, such as the loss of something or someone of great worth. The loss of a girlfriend or boyfriend, the death or illness of a friend or family member, suspension from school, or changing schools can all produce anomic feelings.

Confrontation with Negative Stimuli. This type refers to another set of stressful life events that involve the individual's confrontation with negative actions by others. An adolescent may have been exposed to child abuse, victimization, adverse school experiences, and other "noxious stimuli." Since adolescents cannot legally escape from family and school, legitimate ways to avoid stress from parents or teachers are blocked. This motivates the individual to react in a deviant way.

Deviant actions may be taken to deal with stress by getting around it, seeking vengeance against the perceived source of the strain, or retreating into drug use. Deviance is most likely to occur when the response to strain is *anger*. Anger results when one blames the system or others, rather than oneself, for the adverse experiences (see also Bernard, 1990).

As in previous strain theories, Agnew's general strain theory views crime and delinquency as only one of several possible adaptations to strain. Whether a conforming or deviant mode is adopted depends on a number of internal and external constraints on the individual. These constraints, such as peer associations, beliefs, attributions of causes, self-control, and self-efficacy, affect the individual's predisposition to select a delinquent response to strain.

Agnew's theory represents a significant advancement beyond traditional strain theory. He has given more viability to strain theory, which should better facilitate its purpose to explain crime and delinquency than earlier anomie/strain theories. Its focus remains primarily on negative pressures toward deviance, which, Agnew claims, clearly distinguishes it from social bonding and social learning theories. Moreover, since the various strains are experienced by individuals in any class or race, there is no need for strain theory to be tied only to class or race differences in delinquent behavior. Since strain is not confined only to the disjunctures between means and ends, a number of other measures beyond the discrepancy between aspirations and expectations can now be used. In specifying the types of strain (especially the second and third) and outlining factors that influence each adaptation, Agnew moves strain theory closer to social bonding and social learning theories, thereby incorporating a number of explanatory variables from those theories.

General strain theory has recently attracted a great deal of attention in the empirical literature. A number of studies have demonstrated a direct link between various measures of strain and delinquency (Agnew and White, 1992; Paternoster and Mazerolle, 1994; Hoffman and Miller, 1998; Hoffman and Cerbone, 1999; Mazerolle et al., 2000; Piquero and Sealock, 2000), but not all sources of strain have been significantly related to delinquency or the intention to deviate (Mazerolle, 1998; Mazerolle and Piquero, 1998; Broidy, 2001, Agnew et al., 2002). In a recent modification of general strain theory, Agnew (2001) more clearly specifies that the types of strain most likely to lead to criminal or delinquent coping are strains that are seen as unjust, are high in magnitude, emanate from situations in which social control is undermined, and pressure the individual into criminal or delinquent associations. Agnew recommends measuring types of strain that meet these criteria, including, but not limited to, parental rejection, negative school experiences, abusive peers, and criminal victimization.

Many sources of strain measured in previous research, as well as those recommended by Agnew for future research, may also be interpreted as variables measuring concepts from other theories, especially social learning and social bonding theories. Agnew (1995b) contends that while many theories share similar or even identical variables predictive of delinquency, they can be distinguished by their "motivational

processes.” In general strain theory, strain leads to delinquency because negative emotions, especially anger, intervene between the experience of strain and criminal coping. The role of anger in general strain theory has received relatively little attention in the empirical literature, but the scant research has provided little support for anger as an intervening mechanism between strain and delinquency. Those studies that have examined this variable have generally found that some (though not all) types of strain produce anger (Brezina, 1996; Mazerolle and Piquero, 1998; Broidy, 2001), but the impact of anger on delinquency is questionable. Broidy (2001) found anger and other negative emotions to be related to general crime among college students, but others have found such a relationship to be relatively weak and limited only to violent or aggressive acts (Mazerolle and Piquero, 1998; Piquero and Sealock, 2000). Mazerolle et al. (2000) demonstrated no direct link at all between anger and violent delinquency, drug use, or school deviance. Despite general strain theory’s hypothesis that strain produces delinquency only when anger is high, Mazerolle and Piquero (1998) produced no evidence that anger mediated the effect of strain on the intention to deviate, and Mazerolle et al. (2000) actually found that strain mediated the effect of anger, and not the reverse, on violent delinquency. These results must be viewed with some caution, however, since the anger variables in these studies measure “trait” anger, a general disposition to be chronically angry, rather than “state” anger, a situation-specific measure of negative emotion more consistent with general strain theory’s predictions (Spielberger et al., 1983).

Broidy and Agnew (1997) point out that the processes in general strain theory may be different for males and females. They hypothesize that perceptions of “strainful” situations, types of emotional responses (anger versus depression or anxiety, for example), and availability of legitimate and illegitimate coping mechanisms may all vary by gender. Few studies have examined the role of gender in general strain theory. Thus far, no test of the theory has observed any gender differences in levels of strain or anger. Both males and females experience equal levels of strain and are equally angry in response to strain. Neither Hoffman and Su (1997) nor Mazerolle (1998) found gender differences in the predictive power of strain variables on various forms of delinquency or drug use. However, neither study included measures of negative emotion or legitimate coping strategies, both thought to be crucial to explaining gender differences in crime within the context of general strain theory. Broidy (2001), however, found that although males and females had similar levels of strain and anger, women were more likely than men to respond to strain with other emotions such as depression, insecurity, or resentment rather than anger, and were more able than men to utilize strategies such as downplaying the importance of the

strain, avoidance, or talking to others rather than crime to cope with strain and negative emotions.

Most problematic for general strain theory is its specification that other theoretical variables “condition” or moderate the effects of strain on delinquency. Although a few studies have demonstrated that strain is more likely to result in delinquency when exposure to delinquent peers is high and social bonds are weak (Mazerolle et al., 2000; Mazerolle and Maahs, 2000), many studies have failed to demonstrate the sort of conditioning effects predicted by the theory (Paternoster and Mazerolle, 1994; Hoffman and Miller, 1998; Mazerolle and Piquero, 1998; Hoffman and Cerbone, 1999). Agnew et al. (2002:60) investigated the ability of a composite personality trait, negative emotionality/constraint, to condition the strain-delinquency relationship. They found that adolescents who are “high in negative emotionality and low in constraint are much more likely than others to react to strain with delinquency,” but the conditioning effect is still weak. While general strain theory fares better empirically than the more limited strain theories of the past, the articulation between general strain and other theoretical explanations needs clarification, and better measures of key concepts must be included in empirical assessments of the theory.

Community Projects Based on Theories of Social Disorganization, Anomie, and Delinquent Subcultures

The ultimate policy implication of any structural theory is that basic social changes need to be fostered to remove the criminogenic features of economic, political, and social institutions of society. The clear implication of anomie theory, for instance, is to promote the integration of cultural goals and socially approved means, and the redistribution of opportunities in the class system. Short of this kind of broad-scale social transformation, however, there are many ameliorative, control, and preventive policies that can be linked to social disorganization, anomie, and subcultural theories. The most prominent are community or neighborhood organization, working with delinquent gangs, enhancement of economic opportunities, and training programs. The classic models of such programs were instituted in large American cities in the 1930s (Chicago Area Projects), 1950s (Boston’s Mid-City Project), and 1960s (New York’s Mobilization for Youth). Although they all met with difficulties and limited success (usually for reasons that had little to do with the theory), they have inspired similar job, youth opportunity, and gang programs up to the present time.

The Chicago Area Projects. The Chicago sociologists, Shaw and McKay, were directly concerned with using social disorganization theory and research for the control and prevention of crime and delinquency. In the 1930s, they developed the first large-scale urban delinquency prevention program, known as the Chicago Area Projects (CAP), in several of the lower-class, high-delinquency neighborhoods of Chicago. One major objective was to mobilize local informal social organization and social control among the law-abiding residents. If properly done, such local organization could counteract the effects of social disorganization and work against criminal values and norms, to which Shaw and McKay believed many subscribed in the high crime areas of the city. Another related objective was to overcome the influence of delinquent peers and criminal adults in the neighborhoods by providing more opportunities for association with conventional adults and peers. Efforts were also directed toward improved sanitation, traffic control, and physical restoration of dilapidated private and public properties. Neighborhood organization was attempted through formation of local groups and clubs run by pro-social adults in the community. These conventional adults were engaged to establish and run recreational programs, summer camps, athletic teams, and other groups and activities. They were to cooperate with the police, the juvenile court, churches, social work agencies, lodges, political organizations, and other community groups to work directly with neighborhood youths. Delinquent gangs were identified and “detached” social workers were assigned to make contact with them on the streets and try to involve them in alternative, non-delinquent behavior (Kobrin, 1959; Schlossman and Sedlak, 1983; Finestone, 1976; see also Lundman, 1993).

Long-term assessments after 25 years (Kobrin, 1959), 30 years (Finestone, 1976), and 50 years (Schlossman and Sedlak, 1983; Schlossman et al., 1984) indicated that CAP met with mixed success. Capable and willing lower-class adults committed to conventional values were located and enlisted even in areas that were deemed the most disorganized with the highest rates of crime and delinquency. Various parts of the overall plan were successfully implemented in many neighborhood areas. But there was a good deal of variation from neighborhood to neighborhood in how well organized the programs were and how much support and cooperation they received from the residents. Professional social workers in the areas often were critical of the amateur volunteerism that characterized CAP. Some community leaders and residents at the time argued that the organized intervention with delinquent youth and gangs served only to encourage delinquency and undermine the authority of the schools, churches, and parents.

Though delinquency rates were in fact reduced in some neighborhoods with strong CAP committees (Finestone, 1976), it is difficult to

show that the area projects were the main reason for the reduction, and some areas showed no decline or even an increase in delinquency over the years. Schlossman and his associates rated six CAP areas from low to high in terms of how much delinquency would be expected in each area, based on its demographic and economic characteristics. They found that two of these areas had experienced higher official rates of delinquency than expected, but in four of the areas the delinquency rates were lower than expected. These findings provide some evidence for success. But the measures of neighborhood organization and delinquency were not good, and differences in delinquency rate among the neighborhoods could not be tied directly to the activities and organizations of the CAP programs (Schlossman et al., 1984).

Bursik and Grasmick (1995) have proposed a newer formulation of social disorganization that they believe will provide better guidelines for anti-crime actions in the community. They focus on differences in neighborhood capacity to control the deviant behavior of its residents. The level of control is a function of how cohesively organized the neighborhood is through its social networks of friends, family, and voluntary organizations, its population characteristics, and its level of economic well-being. These private and local levels of control are linked to political, social, and economic forces and the “public level of systemic control” exercised by the law and justice system. Linking different levels of social control may improve crime control in the local community, but some policies could make things worse. For instance, while a state-level imprisonment policy that removes large numbers of offenders from the local neighborhoods reduces the crime threat there, it also may undermine community cohesiveness and reduce effectiveness of informal social control (Rose and Clear, 1998).

The Boston Mid-City Project. The Mid-City Project was based explicitly on Miller’s (1958b; 1962) lower-class culture theory but incorporated some central features of the Chicago Area Project. It was conceived as an all-out, coordinated community effort to combat delinquency and illicit activities among street-corner gangs in the central city. The project had three facets: (1) direct social work services to families with delinquent children or families experiencing other kinds of problems that placed their children at risk of delinquency; (2) a community neighborhood program; and (3) a detached worker (graduate students in sociology, anthropology, and social work) program with juvenile gangs. Of these, only the detached worker program was actually put into operation. The project was never completed primarily because of the conflict over goals, ideologies, and strategies among the various community agencies that were enlisted in the project.

There was considerable hostility directed toward the detached workers from members of the community who thought that it was not right

to pay so much special attention to delinquent gangs. In spite of this opposition, the detached workers identified and reached a fairly sizable number of gangs and street-corner groups. They provided conventional role models and personal persuasion in an effort to move gang activities away from violence and delinquency. They were able to get the gang members involved in athletic and sports activities, regular clubs, fundraising, and volunteer community service. They made arrangements for trips, reserved local gyms, located ball fields, and secured participation in sports leagues.

Were they successful in reducing gang-related or individual delinquent behavior in the community? Because conflicts among community agencies disrupted the project in midstream, and because it was not fully implemented, it is difficult to tell. But data collected by the project staff themselves showed little reduction of deviant and law-violating behavior among the gang members on the street. The number of appearances in court by gang members actually increased during the time of the project. Also, there was no difference when the contacted gangs were compared to a group of corner boys who were not included in the new clubs and affiliations established by the detached workers. Actually, having a detached worker may have become something of a status symbol among the boys. An unintended consequence of the program, then, may have been to make the gangs more cohesive and more inclined to carry out delinquent activities in order to gain the attention of a detached worker (Miller, 1958b; 1962; Lundman, 1993).

Mobilization for Youth. The policy guidelines provided by anomie theory are clear. If blocked legitimate opportunities motivate persons to achieve through criminal activity, then that activity can be countered by the changes to society that offer greater access to legitimate opportunities for those groups that have been relatively deprived of that access. The expansion of opportunities in the society as a whole can come about through promotion of economic prosperity, creation of new jobs, and lowering the unemployment rate through trade, economic, and tax policies. The individual's ability to take advantage of legitimate opportunities and perception that such opportunities realistically are available can be enhanced through educational and job-training programs. If delinquent gangs form in the city because of unequal opportunity and the availability of delinquent subcultures and opportunities, then the objective should be to provide legitimate opportunities and to counter the influence of delinquent subcultures.

This was the theoretical rationale, derived specifically from Cloward and Ohlin's differential opportunity theory, for the Mobilization for Youth project in New York's lower east side in the early 1960s. The project was organized to increase the ability of lower-class youths to gain access to legitimate means of success through job opportunities, edu-

cation, and skill training. In addition, just as in the CAP and Mid-City projects, detached workers were hired to interact directly with youth on the street. Again the goal was to redirect gang members away from delinquent activities and values and toward participation in conventional activities, sports, and community service.

As with the earlier community projects, Mobilization for Youth faced political opposition and conflict among community agencies. There also was a growing gap between what the theory called for and what was actually put into practice. The program ignored the key part of Cloward and Ohlin's theory that linked three different types of delinquent subcultures to different types of neighborhoods. Also, as in previous programs, there may have been some gangs attempting to show they were more seriously delinquent than others in order to get a detached worker assigned to them.

Mobilization for Youth did provide something of a prototype for community action programs funded by the federal anti-poverty initiatives of the later 1960s, such as the Job Corps and Office of Economic Opportunity, as well as for local equal-opportunity and job-training programs for school dropouts and lower-class youths. But its success in preventing delinquency could not be adequately judged because opposition and problems resulted in its early termination. Neither it nor similar programs that followed were able to achieve the ambitious goals of changing the social structure of communities, modifying the behavior of delinquent gangs, and preventing delinquency (Hackler, 1966; Arnold, 1970; Short, 1975; Siegel and Senna, 1991; Bynum and Thompson, 1992).

Policy Implications of Contemporary Anomie/Strain Theories

Unlike the recommendations arising from earlier anomie/strain theories, Messner and Rosenfeld (2001a) emphasize that enhancing legitimate opportunities for all is likely to backfire because it simply fuels the desire for greater monetary wealth and ultimately increases the pressure to succeed at any cost. They recommend instead the strengthening of non-economic institutions in the American social structure to create a balance among its institutions. This restoration of the institutional balance of power can be accomplished by (1) implementing pro-family economic policies such as family leave, "flex time," and on-site child care facilities at the place of employment; (2) loosening the strong ties between academic performance and future economic prospects, so that even those who cannot achieve in school can count on economic survival; (3) limiting the costs of crime control through the use of intermediate sanctions in the community; and (4) creating broader social

and civic participation through national service programs such as AmeriCorps. These policy recommendations, however, may also be derived from social bonding theory, which, like institutional-anomie theory, recognizes the regulatory forces inherent in family, religion, and educational settings.

Agnew (1995c) has identified some prevention programs that are consistent with general strain theory but that also draw heavily from learning and bonding theories. "The most promising programs focus on the family and involve parent management training and functional family therapy" (Agnew, 1995c:48). But they also include in-school, peer, and individual interventions. Agnew advocates family and school interventions to (1) reduce the adversity of the youth's social environment and train parents in parenting skills for better supervision and discipline of their children, including more consistent and effective use of rewards and punishment; (2) provide social skills training for children and youth to reduce the individual's tendency to do or say things that provoke negative reactions from others; (3) increase social support for youth through counseling, mediation, and advocacy programs; (4) increase the adolescent's ability to cope with negative stimuli in a non-delinquent way through training in anger control, problem-solving, social skills, and stress management.

Summary

Anomie/strain and social disorganization theories hypothesize that social order, stability, and integration are conducive to conformity, whereas disorder and malintegration are conducive to crime and deviance. Anomie is the form that societal malintegration takes when there is a dissociation between valued cultural ends and legitimate societal means to those ends.

The more disorganized or anomic the group, community, or society, the higher the rate of crime and deviance. Merton proposed that anomie characterizes American society in general and is especially high in the lower classes because they are more blocked off from legitimate opportunities. High levels of anomie and social disorganization in lower-class and disadvantaged ethnic groups, therefore, are hypothesized to be the cause of the high rates of crime and delinquency in these groups. At the individual level, the strain produced by discrepancies between the educational and occupational goals toward which one aspires and the achievements actually expected are hypothesized to increase the chances that one will engage in criminal or delinquent behavior. Research provides some support for these hypotheses in regard to class and race, but the relationships are usually not strong. Other structural variables are more strongly related to crime rates. Self-perceived aspi-

rations/expectations discrepancy seems to be only weakly related to delinquency.

Cohen, and Cloward and Ohlin, modified Merton's theory to apply anomie to lower-class delinquent gangs. Miller theorized that the delinquency of street corner groups expresses the focal concerns of lower-class culture. Research shows clearly that gang delinquency continues to be concentrated in the lower-class and minority neighborhoods of large cities. But research has not verified that urban gangs fit very well into the theoretical specifications of Cohen, Cloward and Ohlin, and other subcultural versions of anomie theory. Social disorganization and anomie theory have been applied in community programs to enhance neighborhood social organization and legitimate opportunities for youth. Due in part to political opposition, these programs have been hampered in implementation and effectiveness.

Messner and Rosenfeld suggest that the high crime rate in American society can be explained by a distinctively American emphasis on monetary success and an institutional imbalance of power in which the economy dominates the social structure. There has not been enough research done as yet to assess the theory's empirical validity, but a variety of ways to strengthen non-economic institutions through social welfare programs are recommended. Agnew has proposed a modification of anomie/strain theory, primarily by broadening the concept of strain to encompass several sources of strain, failure to achieve goals, removal of positive or desired stimuli from the individual, and exposure to negative stimuli and by including negative emotions as the mechanism by which some types of strain lead to delinquency. Research offers some support for general strain theory, but the process by which strain operates through anger and variables derived from other theories to influence delinquency has not been demonstrated. Agnew recommends applications of general strain theory in family and school interventions that resemble those based on social learning and social bonding theories.

Notes

1. See the studies in Lander (1954), Shaw and McKay (1969), Voss and Petersen (1971), Wilson (1987), and Simcha-Fagan and Schwartz (1986). For reviews of theoretical issues and research on social disorganization that address and offer solutions to some of the problems in earlier theory, see Bursik (1988), Sampson and Groves (1989), and Warner and Pierce (1993).
2. The terms *anomie* and *strain* are often used interchangeably when referring to Merton's theory and subsequent theories influenced by his

perspective. However, some theorists (Messner, 1988; see also Cullen, 1983) distinguish “strain theory,” which refers to a micro-level process in which goal frustration leads to individual criminal behavior, from “anomie theory,” referring to a weakening of society’s ability, at the macro-level, to regulate the behavior of its members. Messner and Rosenfeld (2001a:45) observe, however, that macro-level explanations, including Merton’s, routinely refer to individual behavior, and thus a “hybrid” approach is most useful; hence, they recommend “anomie/strain” as the most appropriate label for theories emanating from Merton’s theoretical framework.

3. Others have used the concept of subculture as a specific explanation of violence. Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1982) relate the violence of lower-class, young, and disproportionately black males to a subculture of violence. Others have attempted to explain the high rates of homicide in the South by referring to a southern regional subculture of violence. Research casts doubt on the subculture of violence thesis of both the regional and class types (Erlanger, 1974; 1976).

