

# Theoretical Perspectives on Race and Crime

## SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

- What Is Theory?
- Biological Theories on Race and Crime
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### What Is Theory?

According to Bohm (2001), “A **theory** is an explanation” (p. 1). Some theory can be found in practically everything we do. When it comes to explaining crime, just about everyone has an opinion. All of these insights, however, might not qualify as *scientific* theory. Curran and Renzetti (2001) stated that a scientific theory is “a set of interconnected statements or propositions that explain how two or more events or factors are related to one another” (p. 2). Furthermore, scientific theories are usually logically sound and empirically testable. They also help us “expand our knowledge of the world around us and suggest systematic solutions to problems we repeatedly confront” (p. 2).

Many of the theories reviewed in this chapter fit some of the criteria posed by Curran and Renzetti, whereas others do not—but in our view, they all provide useful insights into race and crime. This section provides a brief introduction to theories that have been applied to racial/ethnic groups and their involvement in crime. For example, we review biological approaches that look to physical features or genetic inheritance to explain

crime. We also review sociological theories that have their foundations in the American social structure, social processes, or culture. We begin with a review of biological theories and how they have been applied to explain crime committed by racial/ethnic groups.

## Biological Theories on Race and Crime

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The linking of biology and crime has its roots in Europe and dates back to the 1840s when Spanish physician Soler made reference to the concept of the born criminal (Reid, 1957). Europe was also where phrenology, the study of the external shape of the head, was first popularized (Vold, Bernard, & Snipes, 1998). Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* (1859) and *Descent of Man* (1871) were also influential in this era. Once the ideas became accepted, **Cesare Lombroso**, a doctor in the Italian Army in the 19th century and the so-called father of criminology, began studying army personnel from the southern portions of Italy and wrote of them being inferior and having a host of negative characteristics. Continuing this theme, Lombroso (1876/1911) made the importance of race in explaining crime clear in his first major work, *The Criminal Man*. Specifically, he attributed some crime to ethnicity and also referred specifically to Africans, Orientals, and American Indians as being especially criminal. His works were widely hailed and were soon translated into English. By the time Lombroso's works were translated into English, the notion of biological determinism had already taken hold on American shores.

Although biological notions were vigorously challenged here and abroad, such ideas dominated the late 19th- and early 20th-century literature and gave rise to the racist eugenics movement. However, as noted in Section I, with increasing immigration to the United States, these ideas were also applied to the unwelcome new arrivals. Noting the overrepresentation of African Americans and some immigrants in the crime statistics, observers continued to look to racial and ethnic diversity to explain these differences (see Hooton, 1939). Further, with the development and acceptance of intelligent tests, another linkage was developed: intelligence and crime (Gould, 1996). Much of the early literature suggested that criminals were of low intelligence or feebleminded. This line of thinking was based on the early work of Richard Dugdale's 19th-century Jukes study, which chronicled the genealogy of a family that had experienced generations of immorality and criminality. Before long, the connection between **IQ**, race, and crime was being made. However, because of a critical review of numerous studies on IQ and crime by Edwin Sutherland (1931), as well as Simon Tulchin's (1939) classic *Intelligence and Crime*, intelligence-based theories disappeared from the criminological literature until the 1970s. In 1977, two prominent criminologists conducted a review of the literature on intelligence and crime and noted that "there can be no doubt that IQ is related to delinquency within race categories" (Hirschi & Hindelang, 1977, p. 575). From their research, they concluded that students with low intelligence had difficulty in school and, as a result, were more likely to engage in delinquency—ergo, given that Blacks have traditionally scored lower on IQ tests, they are likely to commit more crimes (see, more recently, Herrnstein & Murray, 1994).

Numerous shortcomings have been noted with the intelligence, race, and crime approach, however. First, there still remain questions as to what IQ tests really measure. There have always been questions of cultural and class biases with IQ tests. An additional concern relates to this question: If a lack of intelligence is associated with crime, then what

explains the fact that persons with high IQs commit white-collar and political crime (Lanier & Henry, 1998)? Finally, there is also some uncertainty about whether differences in IQ are genetic or related to one's environment (Onwudiwe & Lynch, 2000; Vold et al., 1998).

Today, biological approaches take into account both biological factors and environmental considerations. Because of this integration of biological and environmental factors, theorists now refer to this approach as *biosocial criminology*. It is noteworthy that within the biosocial approach some of the current biosocial-oriented theorists either directly or indirectly point to a race and crime linkage (Wright, 2009). Opponents of the biosocial approach have countered with an array of sociological perspectives.

## 🚩 Sociological Theories on Race and Crime

Sociological explanations for crime in general have existed for nearly two centuries. Beginning with the early work of the cartographic school, led by Adolphe Quetelet, who is believed to have produced the first scientific work on crime (see Quetelet, 1833/1984), this approach looked to sociological factors to explain criminality (i.e., age, social class, poverty, education level, etc.). Several decades after the publication of Quetelet's (1833/1984) work, as noted earlier, biological notions related to crime were being espoused across Europe and in America. Numerous American scholars, however, challenged the biological approach using sociological analyses of crime problems.

In the late 1890s, Philadelphia officials sought out **W. E. B. Du Bois** (see Photo 3.1) to conduct a study of the city's notorious Seventh Ward. To better understand the state of Blacks in the city, Du Bois (1899/1996) conducted a comprehensive review of the ward, outlining the conditions in the area and also pointing to several possible explanations for crime among African Americans. Du Bois felt that the mass migration from the South to the North produced problems of adjustment for African Americans, who were previously familiar only with southern life.

Du Bois' ideas were in line with the concept of social disorganization, which we will discuss later. Like Quetelet earlier, to explain criminality in the Seventh Ward, Du Bois pointed to issues related to age, unemployment, and poverty. Du Bois, however, added the sociological variable of discrimination, noting that Blacks were arrested for less cause than Whites, served longer sentences for similar crimes, and were subject to employment discrimination (Gabbidon, 2007; Taylor Greene & Gabbidon, 2000).



▲ Photo 3.1 W. E. B. Du Bois

## 🚩 Social Disorganization

Northern cities, such as Chicago, were experiencing the same social problems as Philadelphia as a result of population booms caused by the mass immigration of racial

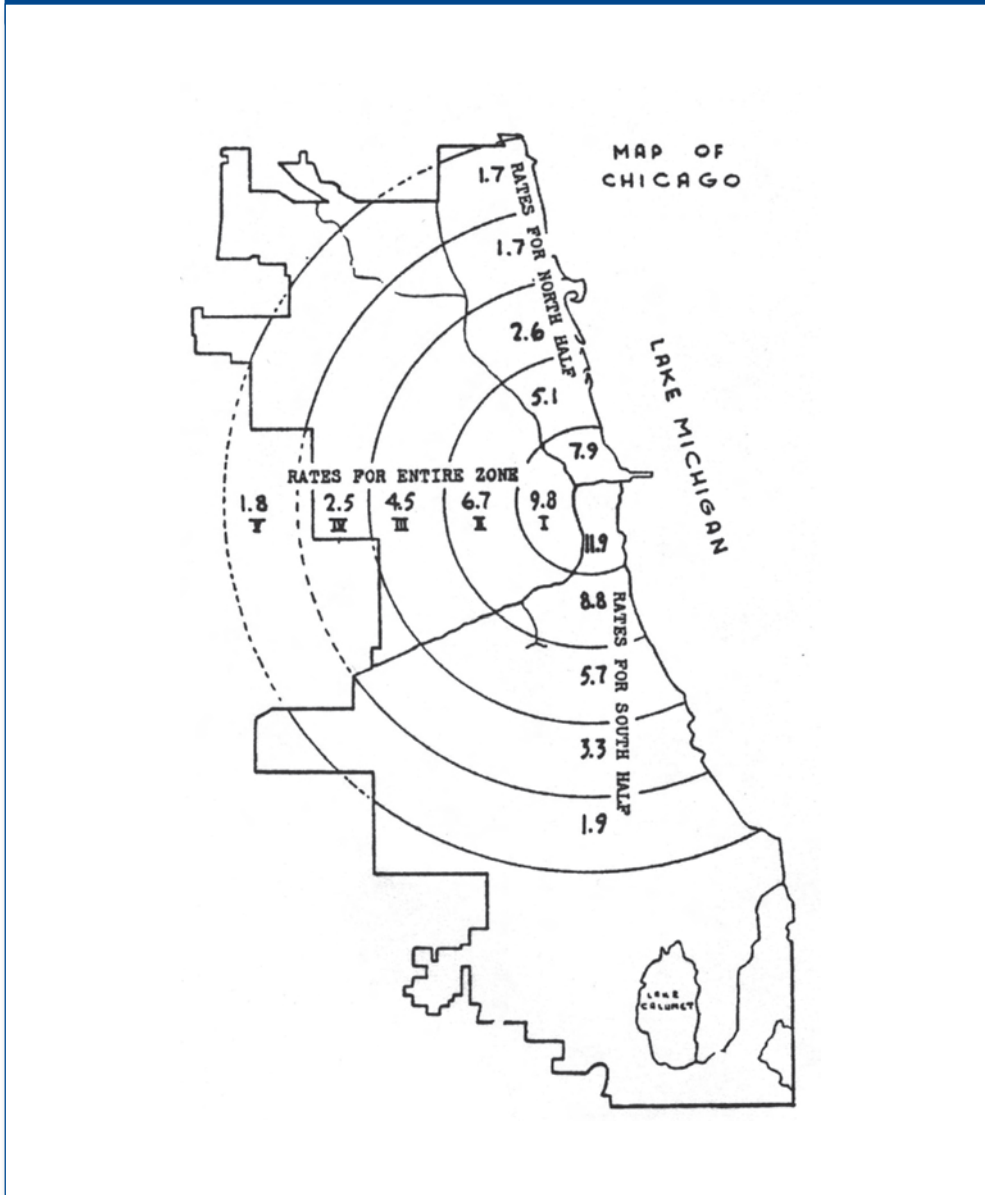
and ethnic groups outlined in Section I. With unparalleled philanthropic support from numerous foundations (Blumer, 1984), by the 1920s, the University of Chicago had put together a formidable cadre of scholars to investigate the social ills plaguing the city. Together, these scholars combined their ideas to formulate what is now known as the Chicago School.

The leaders of the school were Robert Park and Ernest Burgess. They viewed the city as an environment that functioned much like other ecological environments: It was formed based on the principles of invasion, dominance, and succession. In short, one group moves in and battles the previous group until they dominate the area, after which, to continue the cycle, it is likely that another group will invade the area and pursue dominance. This ecological approach was believed to explain the conflict that occurred in emerging cities across the United States. Moreover, it was Burgess (1925) who had earlier conducted a study that produced the notion that a town or city tends to “expand radially from its central business district—on the map” (p. 5). From this, he and Park produced their now famous map of Chicago (see Figure 3.1). The map divided the city into several concentric circles or “zones,” as described by Park and Burgess. Of the numerous zones, Zone 2 is of the most significance to the theory. This area was referred to as “the zone in transition” or “the slums,” (p.148), which, according to the theory, is where most of the crime should take place. As predicted by the theory, the farther one moves away from this zone, the more crime decreases (Shaw & McKay, 1942/1969).

In the tradition of Quetelet’s (1833/1984) work, two University of Chicago researchers, Clifford Shaw and Henry D. McKay, tested the theory by examining juvenile delinquency. To do so, they made use of 20 different types of maps that charted different characteristics of Chicago’s residents and delinquent youth. For example, there were maps that outlined neighborhood characteristics such as population fluctuations, percentage of families on welfare, monthly rents, percent foreign-born and Negro, and the distribution of male delinquents (Shaw & McKay, 1942/1969). Their results were striking. As postulated by the theory, over several decades and with several changes in ethnic groups, Zone 2 had the most delinquency. Describing this dramatic finding, Shaw and McKay (1942/1969) wrote the following:

The proportions of Germans, Irish, English-Scotch, and Scandinavians in the foreign-born population in 8 inner-city areas underwent, between 1884 and 1930, a decided decline (90.1 to 12.2 per cent); while the proportion of Italians, Poles, and Slavs increased . . . the 8 areas maintained, throughout these decades, approximately the same rates of delinquents relative to other areas. (pp. 150–151)

In the end, the scholars concluded that the crime in these areas was caused by social disorganization. Social disorganization refers to areas characterized by the following conditions: (a) fluctuating populations, (b) significant numbers of families on welfare, (c) families renting, (d) several ethnic groups in one area, (e) high truancy rates, (f) high infant mortality rates, (g) high levels of unemployment, (h) large numbers of condemned buildings, and (i) a higher percentage of foreign-born and Negro heads of families (Sampson & Groves, 1989; Shaw & McKay, 1942/1969).

**Figure 3.1** Zone Map of Male Delinquents in Chicago 1925-1933

### Contemporary Social Disorganization Theory

Since these early articles, scholars have continued to explore the viability of social disorganization to explain crime, particularly in urban areas. Sampson (1987) found a connection between Black male joblessness, economic deprivation, and violent crime.

This connection was an indirect one mediated by family disruption (i.e., female-headed households). Building on this research and the important research of William Julius Wilson (1987), Sampson and Wilson (1995) posited a theory targeted at explaining race and crime with structural and cultural constructs:

[Our] basic thesis is that macro social patterns of residential inequality give rise to the social isolation and ecological concentration of the truly disadvantaged, which in turn leads to structural barriers and cultural adaptations that undermine social organization and hence the control of crime. This thesis is grounded in what is actually an old idea in criminology that has been overlooked in the race and crime debate—the importance of communities. (p. 38)

The theory, which is referred to as the racial invariance thesis, draws heavily on two of W. Wilson's (1987) concepts from *The Truly Disadvantaged*. The first, concentration effects, speaks to the fact that Whites and Blacks live in considerably different areas. In his research, Wilson found that many African Americans live in areas where there are significant concentrations of poverty. Once neighborhoods reach this point, working-class and middle-class African Americans abandon these areas.

This removes important “**social buffers**” (role models) who show neighborhood kids that there are successful people who go to work, day in and day out. When all the social buffers have abandoned a community, Wilson (1987) suggested that the remaining individuals are in a state of *social isolation*, which he defined as “the lack of contact or of sustained interaction with individuals and institutions that represent mainstream society” (p. 60). The notion of social isolation adds the cultural component to the theory. By not being exposed to mainstream individuals and institutions, socially isolated people tend to develop their own norms within these isolated areas. In a series of articles, Lauren Krivo and Ruth Peterson of Ohio State University tested some of the ideas of Wilson (1987) and Sampson and Wilson (1995) and found considerable support for them (see Krivo & Peterson, 1996, 2000; Peterson & Krivo, 1993, 2005). Returning to the perspective, Sampson and Bean (2006) called for a revision of the theory to account for concentrated immigration and culture, both of which have profound implications for communities. Notably, scholars have also successfully applied the theory to nonurban areas and with populations such as Native Americans (Bachman, 1991; Lanier & Huff-Corzine, 2006) and Latinos (Martinez, 2003; Lee & Martinez, 2002; Velez, 2006).

## Mass Incarceration and Social Disorganization

In the late 1990s, Todd Clear and Dina Rose articulated an expansion of **social disorganization** theory. Contrary to the punitive approach being heralded at the time, Rose and Clear (1998) posited that the overuse of prison sentences, or what has been referred to as mass incarceration, actually exasperated social disorganization in the most depressed communities. According to their thesis, this happens for three reasons. First, mass incarceration removes large numbers of laborers from the communities, which impacts on the socioeconomic nature of the communities. Second, because mass incarceration results in people leaving for prison and then being released from prisons, it increases the mobility in certain communities. Finally, mass incarceration increases the heterogeneity



of communities because offenders who spend time in correctional institutions learn new antisocial behaviors that they bring back to their communities (for a recent articulation of the perspective, see Clear, 2007; see also Western, 2006). Using data from Florida, they found considerable support for their theory (Clear, Rose, & Ryder, 2001; Clear, Rose, Waring, & Scully, 2003).

## 🚩 Collective Efficacy

More than a decade ago, Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997) sought to determine why urban communities differ in their levels of crime. From their research, they concluded that crime was related to the amount of collective efficacy found in a particular community. They defined *collective efficacy* as “social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on the behalf of the common good” (p. 918). In short, in the communities where residents do not retreat behind their locked doors and actively look out for one another, there is a diminished likelihood that they will have many of the ills found in similar urban areas. Since their work, other scholars have found some support for collective efficacy among African Americans (Simons, Gordon Simons, Burt, Brody, & Cutrona, 2005) and Native Americans (Abril, 2007). Other research has suggested that the impact of collective efficacy is not as significant in communities as are more official strategies such as community policing (Xu, Fiedler, & Flaming, 2005).

All in all, there has been considerable support for social disorganization theory. There have, however, been several persistent criticisms of the theory. The most often cited weakness of the social disorganization perspective is the so-called ecological fallacy. This refers to the fact that the perspective is usually tested at the aggregate level, but researchers still use the data to make assertions about individuals. The theory also does not explain how certain groups, such as Asian and Jewish communities, maintained low levels of crime and delinquency even though they lived in areas that might be categorized as socially disorganized (Lanier & Henry, 1998). Moreover, although there were high levels of delinquency in the study areas, the theory does not explain why, in general, most juveniles in these areas do not become delinquent.

## 🚩 Strain/Anomie Theory

The 1938 publication of Robert K. Merton’s (see Photo 3.2) “Social Structure and Anomie” produced what is likely one of the most cited theories in criminology: strain or anomie theory (Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 2001). The theory was influenced by the classic work of Emile Durkheim, who first made use of the word *anomie* in a criminological sense. According to Akers (2000), “Durkheim (1951[1897]) used the term



▲ Photo 3.2 Robert K. Merton

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” (p. 143). Merton’s (1938) work showed that in every society, there are “culturally defined goals, purposes, and interest” (p. 672). He also suggested that there are generally “acceptable modes of achieving these goals” (p. 673). Turning to American society, Merton recognized that “the extreme emphasis upon the accumulation of wealth as a symbol of success in our own society mitigates against the completely effective control of the institutionally regulated modes of acquiring a fortune” (p. 675). In short, in pursuit of the “American Dream,” some people turn to alternative means to secure this cultural goal. When applying the theory to race and crime, Merton recognized the special case of African Americans:

Certain elements of the Negro population have assimilated the dominant caste’s values of pecuniary success and advancement, but they also recognize that social ascent is at present restricted to their own caste almost exclusively. The pressures upon the Negro which would otherwise derive from the structural inconsistencies we have noticed are hence not identical to those upon lower class Whites. (p. 680)

Merton (1938) understood that the strain experienced by African Americans was unlike any other in American society. Basically, no matter how much they sought to achieve the American Dream, they could never legitimately reach the status of Whites, so they maintained lower aspirations and were resigned to achieving a lower level of success and advancement. Such a situation likely contributed to a strain that resulted in some African Americans turning to crime.

Cernkovich, Giordano, and Rudolph (2000) tested whether African Americans still subscribed to the American Dream and whether this was related to their involvement in criminal behavior. Making use of longitudinal data involving African Americans and Whites from private households and an institutional sample (both from Toledo, Ohio), the authors found the following:

African Americans maintain a very strong commitment to the American dream. Blacks report higher levels of commitment to economic success goals than do their White counterparts and indicate that they are prepared to work harder and sacrifice more to realize them. Even though the young Black adults in our study report low incomes and are more likely to be unemployed than are Whites, they continue to maintain a very strong commitment to the American dream. (Cernkovich et al., 2000, pp. 158–159)

Their study, which also partially tested social control theory, found support for **strain theory**, but only in the case of Whites. That is, many of the variables used to test strain theory “were significant correlates of crime among . . . Whites in our sample but not among African Americans” (Cernkovich et al., 2000, p. 161), a finding that the authors could not explain; curiously, the authors implied that the African American participants might not have been forthright with their answers—something that likely applied to all participants.

McCluskey (2002) also applied strain theory to Latinos. Using survey data from Denver and Rochester, she sought to determine whether strain theory was applicable to



all ethnic groups. However, even when she took into account various aspects of Latino culture (e.g., family involvement, acculturation, and religiousness), her results indicated that “the adequacy of traditional strain theory in explaining Latino delinquency is relatively weak” (McCluskey, 2002, p. 198). Because strain was not applicable to all ethnic groups, she suggested that the creation of culturally specific models might be necessary.

Most of the criticisms of strain theory have been leveled at Merton’s original formulation of the theory. Bohm (2001), for example, noted that anomie theories have a middle-class bias: They presume that lower class individuals commit crimes in an effort to reach middle-class status. As was seen by some of the research reviewed, this is not always the case. Another persistent criticism is that the theories do not explain white-collar and government crimes. Given that people at this level have already achieved middle-class status, why, then, do they engage in crime? Even in its various incarnations, the theory is generally silent on this issue. Because of the shortcomings of strain/anomie theory, Agnew (1992) developed a revised version of the theory.

## General Strain Theory

Robert Agnew (1992) renewed interest in strain theory by expanding Merton’s original formulation. He incorporated the premise that the removal (or loss) of positive stimuli or the introduction of negative stimuli into an environment can cause a strain such that, as with blocked opportunities, the removal or loss of positive stimuli from an individual can result in criminal behavior. As for the removal of positively valued stimuli, Agnew (1992) specifically pointed to the following conditions: “loss of a boyfriend/girlfriend, the death of or serious illness of a friend, moving to a new school district, the divorce/separation of one’s parents, suspension from school, and the presence of a variety of adverse conditions at work” (p. 57). Turning to the presentation of negative stimuli, Agnew pointed to the following: child abuse and neglect, criminal victimization, physical punishment, negative relations with parents, negative relations with peers, adverse or negative school experience, stressful life events, verbal threats and insults, physical pain, unpleasant odors, disgusting scenes, noise, heat, air, pollution, personal space violations, and high density.

Building on these ideas, Jang and Johnson (2003) used the National Survey of Black Americans (comprising a sample of 2,107 African American adults) to test whether Agnew’s theory held true for African Americans. In addition to testing core tenets of Agnew’s work, they sought to determine whether African American religiosity, an area where research has consistently shown more commitment by African Americans than by other ethnic groups, has any impact in helping them cope when strain occurs. In contrast to the earlier research of Cernkovich et al. (2000), these authors found support for Agnew’s modified version of strain theory, noting the following regarding the role of religiosity:

We find that individuals who are religiously committed are less likely than those who are not to engage in deviant coping in reaction to personal problems because their religiosity buffers the effects of negative emotions on deviance as well as directly and indirectly (via outerdirected emotions) affects their coping strategies. (Jang & Johnson, 2003, p. 98)

Studies by Simons, Chen, Stewart, and Brody (2003), Eitle and Turner (2003), and Rocque (2008) also found some support for **general strain theory**. In the Simons et al. (2003) research study, the authors found that experiencing discrimination was a significant predictor of delinquency. Eitle and Turner's (2003) work revealed that disparities in crime commission were largely attributable to African Americans' increased exposure to stressors. Most recently, Jang and Johnson (2005) found additional support for their earlier research on the benefit of religiosity when coping with strain (see also Jang & Lyons, 2006).

### The Code of the Street

A recent subcultural theory approach that has some connections to several of the approaches previously reviewed is the "code of the street" (Anderson, 1994, 1999). Based on his research in Philadelphia, Elijah Anderson, an urban ethnographer, published a highly acclaimed article, "The Code of the Street," which focused on interpersonal violence in an impoverished Philadelphia neighborhood and how residents in the area adopted the **code of the streets** to survive. Anderson (1994) believed that, "at the heart of the code is the issue of respect—loosely defined as being treated 'right,' or granted deference one deserves" (p. 82). In such an environment, something that has little meaning to one person might be interpreted as dissing by someone else and result in a confrontation that could lead to violence. Being able to defend oneself is also an important part of the code. Within such depressed neighborhoods, Anderson suggested that there are "decent" and "street" families. Decent families "tend to accept mainstream values more fully and attempt to instill them in their children" (pp. 82–83). Such families are also strict and teach their children to respect authority and act in a moral way. In addition, they are not seriously tied to the code.

In contrast, Anderson (1994) described "street families," who loosely supervise their children and in many cases are unable to cope with them. Unlike the decent families, "They believe in the code and judge themselves and others according to its values" (p. 83). Subsequently, their lives "are marked by disorganization" (p. 83). In such families, children learn early on that they must fend for themselves. This produces a cycle in which they also become vested in the code and take to the streets to prove their "manhood," which involves securing pretty women, being able to defend themselves, and being able to support themselves by any means necessary.

In recent years, there has been some support found for Anderson's ideas when focusing on Blacks (Baumer, Horney, Felson, & Lauritsen, 2003; Brezina, Agnew, Cullen, & Wright, 2004; Chilton, 2004; Stewart & Simons, 2006, 2010; Stewart, Simons, & Conger, 2002), Hispanics (Lopez, Roosa, Tein, & Dinh, 2004), and more recently, young Black women (Brunson & Stewart, 2006; Jones, 2010). Other recent studies have also noted the role of rap music in the perpetuation of the code of the streets (Kubrin, 2005). In contrast to these positive findings, Stewart, Schreck, and Simons (2006) recently found limited support for the perspective. In line with the theory, they postulated that those who adhered to the code of the streets would reduce one's likelihood of being victimized. However, their research revealed the opposite: Adherents to the code of the streets reported *higher* levels of victimization (see also McGee, 1999; McGee, Barber, Joseph, Dudley, & Howell, 2005; Stewart, Schreck, & Brunson, 2008).

Besides the need for nationwide replications of the theory, there have been other concerns expressed about the viability of Anderson's ideas. Commenting on one of the life histories presented in Anderson's work, J. Miller (2001) wrote that, based on the way Anderson described the person's prison experience, it could be that the prison, not the streets, is the more powerful contributor to the development of the code of the streets. Wacquant (2002) provided a more expansive critique of Anderson's work, pointing to the "loose and over expansive definition of the code of the streets" (p. 1491). Another point of concern for Wacquant was that "there is considerable confusion as to the origins and vectors of the code of the streets" (p. 1491). In general, a common shortcoming of subcultural theories is that they ignore criminality in the middle and upper classes (Hagan, 2002). An additional criticism of subcultural theories is that, in most instances, they speak only to male criminality (Lilly et al., 2001).

One of the most popular theories used to explain racial differences in offending is **conflict theory**. Our discussion of that theory is presented next.

## Conflict Theory

Conflict theory likely represents the most popular theoretical framework used to explain race and crime. The theory, which has seeds in many of those previously discussed, has some of its origins in Germany. Specifically, the works of German scholars Karl Marx, George Simmel, and Max Weber have been credited with providing the impetus for the theory. According to Lilly et al. (2001), "Theories that focus attention on struggles between individuals and/or groups in terms of power differentials fall into the general category of *conflict theory*" (p. 126; italics original). In short, when applying conflict theory to race and crime, one would look to whether the enforcement of laws and the distribution of punishment are done in a discriminatory manner. Although social class and gender also would be important to investigate, the way in which the White power structure administers justice would be of central concern to conflict theorists.

An early observer of race and crime, W. E. B. Du Bois studied under Weber and produced one of the earliest works to incorporate a conflict analysis (Gabbidon, 1999, 2007; Taylor Greene & Gabbidon, 2000). In 1901, Du Bois published an article on the convict-lease system that spoke to the conflict perspective and traced the history of the system. Immediately after the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, states began leasing convicts out to private landowners, who no longer had the free labor of African American slaves. Du Bois wrote about how states strategically enacted "Black codes" to snare Blacks into the criminal justice system so they could be returned to the labor force, which helped maintain the power and privileged status of southern plantation owners. Du Bois (1901/2002) also rebutted the biological theorists of his day by noting that crime among Blacks was not normal and was a symptom of the dire social conditions they encountered.

By this time, as reviewed earlier, Du Bois had already made significant statements on crime, pointing to discrimination, segregation, lynching, and the attitudes of the courts as explanations for African American criminality (Gabbidon, 2007; Taylor Greene & Gabbidon, 2000). Other prominent scholars found considerable support for Du Bois' ideas (Myrdal, 1944; Sellin, 1928, 1935; Work, 1900, 1913). In each case, the authors wrote of the discrimination and economic conditions that were contributing to African American involvement in the criminal justice system—matters that directly speak to conflict theory.

Hawkins (1987) further expanded the conflict model by examining it in terms of race, crime, and punishment. He emphasized the need to consider race discrimination in conflict theory. According to Hawkins, other considerations usually lacking in conflict theory at that time included victim characteristics, region, and accounting for race-appropriate behaviors. Whereas the first two characteristics are self-explanatory, for the latter, Hawkins noted that anomalies found in some studies do not take into account behaviors that are generally committed by one race, which, when committed by another, result in a punishment that seems out of line.

Finally, Hawkins (1987) also suggested that too often conflict theorists do not consider the power threat approach of Blalock (1967). The approach, which some have called a “power threat version of conflict theory” (Ellis & Walsh, 2000, pp. 384–385), argues that once a majority population sees a minority group encroaching on spheres traditionally reserved for majority group members, they respond in a number of ways, including additional social control (Hawkins, 1987). This usually comes in the form of increased investments in police forces. According to past and recent scholarship, there is support for the power threat thesis (see D’Alessio, Eitle, & Stolzenberg, 2005; Jackson, 1989; King, 2007; Sharp, 2006).

Along with Hawkins’ (1987) concern about the oversimplification of the theory, a few other shortcomings have been noted with conflict theory. Bohm (2001) noted that the perspective does not take into account individual differences. That is, not all people who are oppressed or discriminated against will respond the same way. Also, some have suggested that, in some of its forms, the theory is not testable. A perspective related to conflict theory that has been applied to race and crime is the **colonial model**.

## The Colonial Model

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The colonial model has its foundations in the work of psychiatrist and activist Frantz Fanon (Tatum, 1994). Although Fanon used the model to examine the relations between Blacks and Whites in colonial settings, Blauner (1969) and Staples (1975), leaning heavily on intellectuals of the Black power movement such as Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, were among the first to substantively apply the theory to crime. Applying the perspective to the conditions of African Americans, Blauner (1969) provided the following definition of *colonialism*:

Colonialism traditionally refers to the establishment of domination over a geographically external political unit, most of them inhabited by people of a different race and culture, where this domination is political and economic, and the colony exists subordinated and dependent on the mother country. Typically the colonizers exploit the land, the raw materials, the labor, and other resources of the colonized nation; in addition a formal recognition is given to the difference in power, autonomy, and political status, and various agencies are set up to maintain this subordination. (p. 395)

Blauner (1972) also generally applied the model to Native Americans. In the work *Gringo Justice*, Mirande (1987) reviewed the historical treatment of Mexican Americans

by the criminal justice system and formulated a theory of “gringo justice,” integrating the colonial model and conflict theory. Although African Americans were not colonized in the sense that Native Americans or Mexican Americans were, according to Tatum (1994), internal colonialism, which is “when foreign control of a state or territory is eliminated and the control and exploitation of subordinate groups passes to the dominant group within the newly created society” (p. 41), produces many of the same characteristics as the more traditional colonization process. Such characteristics include “a caste system based in racism, cultural imposition, cultural disintegration and recreation and members of the colonized being governed by representatives of the dominant power” (p. 41). Such characteristics within a society leave the colonized with feelings of alienation, which result in either crime and delinquency or the desire to assimilate or protest.

All articulations of the theory note the important role that agents of the criminal justice system (or “internal military agents,” as they are called by Staples, 1975) play in maintaining order in a colonial society. In the words of Blauner (1969),

The police are the most crucial institution maintaining the colonized status of Black Americans. . . . Police are key agents in the power equation as well as the drama of dehumanization. In the final analysis they do the dirty work for the larger system by restricting the striking back of Black rebels to skirmishes inside the ghetto, thus deflecting energies and attacks from the communities and institutions of the larger power structure. (pp. 404–405)

R. Austin (1983) was one of the first to empirically test the theory. Using violence rates before and after the decolonization of the Caribbean island of St. Vincent, he sought to determine whether crime rates declined following the removal of British colonial rule. Although he did find that crime rates declined after the end of colonial rule, this did not hold true when he examined data related to murder and manslaughter. Here, Austin noted that the increasing availability of guns might have played a role in this finding.

Nearly a decade ago, Tatum (2000) provided one of the more comprehensive tests of the theory. She formulated several propositions related to the model, including the connections among race, class, and oppression; how race and class are associated with the availability of social support; and issues related to alienation. Relying on survey data from African American, Mexican American, and White juniors and seniors at two high schools in a major southwestern urban area, she found limited support for the model.

The colonial model has applicability for racial groups who have been subjected to colonization (most notably Native Americans, African Americans, and Mexican Americans). There have been mixed results when the theory has been tested, and there need to be more direct tests of it. Tatum (1994) also noted several additional concerns with regard to the theory. First, as reflected in other structural models, she noted that two people can be exposed to the same oppression yet respond differently; in such instances, the model does not account for the different adaptations. Second, as with conflict theory, the model is difficult to test. Another weakness of the model is that it does not adequately address class issues.

Criminologist Agozino (2003) also considered colonialism in his groundbreaking work *Counter-Colonial Criminology: A Critique of Imperialist Reason*. In the work, he argued that “criminology is concentrated in former colonizing countries, and virtually absent in the former colonized countries, because criminology is a social science that served colonialism more directly than many other social sciences” (p. 1). More specifically, Agozino focused on the following:

How imperialism used criminological knowledge and how it can be seen as a criminological project—imprisonment with or without walls, a widening of the net of incarceration, and how the close kinship between the two fields of knowledge and power, criminology and imperialism, served both. (p. 6)

Agozino (2003) also highlighted that the discipline of criminology originated “at the height of European colonialism” (p. 6). As a product of these origins, he noted that “criminology is dominated by scholars in former colonial centres of authority,” which has led to what he considers “theoretical underdevelopment through the concealment of the bloody legacy of colonialist criminology” (p. 6). Although on the surface his ideas might seem controversial, it is clear that Agozino’s work provides a critical new direction for race and crime theorists.

In general, however, the impact of colonialism on countries around the globe has been neglected too long by criminologists. Notably, scholars have begun to revisit the role of colonialism in crime and justice (see Bosworth & Flavin, 2007; Gabbidon, 2010; Saleh-Hanna, 2008).

## Summary

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- Theories represent an explanation. Nearly all facets of society operate based on some underlying theoretical premise. Criminological theories try to help researchers explain current or predict future offending.
- For more than 100 years scholars have linked race and crime and sought to create theoretical explanations for racial disparities in offending. The theories have run the gamut from biological to sociological.
- Cesare Lombroso was one of the first theorists to connect biology, race/ethnicity, and crime in his work, *The Criminal Man*.
- In the beginning, scholars turned to the biology of African Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans to answer the question of why some groups commit more crimes than others. However, over the years, this has changed. The decline in popularity of the biological approach gave rise to the sociological approach. Beginning with scholars such as Du Bois, the sociological approach continues to be a mainstay of those interested in studying race and crime.
- Among the most popular theories used to contextualize race and crime is social disorganization. Theorists believe that the findings from the pioneering research of Shaw and Mckay and more recent researchers such as Robert Sampson reveals that urban crime is a product of place not of person. That is, where you live plays more of a role in your criminality than who you are (race/ethnicity).



- Strain and general strain theory both speak to the challenges faced by minorities in American society as well as in their personal lives. The original strain theory centered on the economic challenges faced by minorities, whereas general strain theory discusses the many societal stressors that can contribute to offending among all racial and ethnic groups.
- With the development of Anderson's code of the street, subcultural theory researchers now have a better understanding of how residents navigate inner-city communities. Respect is at the core of the code.
- Conflict theory represents one of the more popular theoretical frameworks when studying race and crime. According to the theory, the power differential in society between Whites and racial and ethnic minorities is considered critical to understanding why minorities are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. In addition, scholars are beginning to reexamine the role of colonization in race, crime, and justice.
- When one reviews the plethora of theories on criminal behavior, it seems safe to say that, although the research methodologies have become more sophisticated, many of the same ideas presented about race and crime 100 years ago remain popular today.

### KEY TERMS

Cesare Lombroso	conflict theory	social disorganization
code of the streets	general strain theory	strain theory
collective efficacy	IQ	theory
colonial model	Social buffers	W. E. B. Du Bois

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the characteristics of theory as outlined by Curren and Renzetti.
2. Explain how IQ has been linked to the race and crime discourse.
3. Compare and contrast how strain theory and general strain theory differ in their explanations of racial differences in offending.
4. Do you think racism contributes to offending among racial and ethnic minorities? If so, explain the relationship.
5. Explain how two versions of social disorganization explain offending in communities.

### WEB RESOURCES

*IQ Test:* <http://www.iqtest.com/>

## READING

This article examines whether the rising number of Latinos in America are emerging as the new “threat.” It draws on minority group threat theory, which argues that when the number of racial/ethnic minorities increases in society the majority population becomes threatened and takes action to stem the progress. Action on the part of the majority population typically comes in the form of more social control measures such as new laws and increased police enforcement. In this article, the authors take advantage of the diversity of the Miami-Dade area to determine whether minority group threat theory can be applied to the fear of Latinos and Blacks.

### ***Are Hispanics the New “Threat”?***

#### *Minority Group Threat and Fear of Crime in Miami-Dade County*

David Eitle and John Taylor

#### **Introduction**

Public opinion surveys have consistently revealed that crime is one of the top concerns for Americans. This concern over crime and its consequences has spawned a plethora of research inquiries, including a substantial body of research that has investigated the determinants of the emotional component of our concern over crime, the “fear of crime.” Despite the voluminous nature of this research, it can be argued that past inquiries have generated more questions than answers (Garofalo, 1981), particularly when attempting to determine the antecedents of fear of crime. Yet there is growing evidence that fear of crime, regardless of its determinants, is associated with an array of adverse consequences, including a fractured sense of community, restricted behavior, anxiety, distress, and distrust of others, and overall

reduction in the quality of life that people experience (Box et al., 1988; Garofalo, 1981; Skogan, 1986). What makes fear of crime such a compelling issue for many social scientists is that such fear appears to be only loosely associated with actual risk of being a victim of crime (Ferraro, 1996). There is not consistent evidence supporting an association between prior criminal victimization and fear of crime (Rountree, 1998).

While the processes that generate fear of crime are clearly complex, one factor that plays a salient role in understanding anxiety about crime is race and ethnicity. There are (at least) two dimensions of interest that have emerged from this research perspective: (a) the perceived criminal threat posed by Blacks and/or other ethnic minority groups for individuals and (b) differences in the fear of crime experienced by white individuals vs. Blacks and other

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ethnic minorities. With regards to the first dimension, Chiricos, McEntire, and Gertz suggest that “the typification of crime as a Black male threat has reached iconic proportions” (2001, p. 322). While somewhat limited in nature, research examining an association between the racial composition of place and fear of crime has been largely supportive of a link, with respondents reporting greater fear of crime when residing in places with relatively higher proportions of Black residents (e.g., Liska et al., 1982; Taylor and Covington, 1993) or when respondents perceive that they reside in communities with relatively high proportions of Black residents (Chiricos et al., 1997). With regards to the second dimension, several studies have found that nonwhite respondents are more fearful of crime than white respondents (e.g., Chiricos et al., 1997; Houts and Kassab, 1997; Thompson et al., 1992). Additionally, there exists some evidence that the associations between various risk factors and fear of crime are moderated by race (Chiricos et al., 1997).

While such studies represent an important foundation for making sense out of the entangled interrelationship between race and fear of crime, there are additional questions that have yet to be broached. Two interrelated questions that this paper seeks to examine concern the role of Latinos/Hispanics,<sup>1</sup> both as respondents and as a “threatening” group. Few studies have examined both micro and macro-level influences on Hispanic respondent’s fear of crime, and only one published study to date has examined the potential role of the relative size of the Latino population as a measure of minority crime threat (Chiricos et al., 2001). There are, however, a number of compelling reasons for expanding our scope of inquiry into the fear of crime by including Latinos/Hispanics, both as individuals who experience fear and as a potential threatening group. First, recent Census results (Grieco

and Cassidy, 2001) demonstrate that Hispanics/Latinos now outnumber Blacks in the United States. Indeed, non-Hispanic whites will constitute only 50% of the population by 2050 (Frey, 1999) and the Census Bureau predicts that Latinos will eventually surpass non-Hispanic whites in population (United States Bureau of the Census, 1999). Furthermore, public opinion polls suggest that non-Hispanic whites perceive Hispanic immigration as a major social problem, and their concerns include the fear of immigrant crime (Cooper, 2000; Lane and Meeker, 2000, 2003). Finally, Peterson and Krivo (2005), among others, have noted that Latino/Hispanic groups have been relatively neglected in criminological research. Given these persuasive reasons, the present study is organized to address the following two questions:

1. What is the role of racial and ethnic composition at the neighborhood level in shaping fear of crime? Is the relative size of the Latino population related to fear of crime?
2. What is the role of respondent race and ethnicity in shaping fear of crime? What (if any) are the important intersections between the race/ethnicity of the respondent and the racial/ethnic composition of the neighborhood that produce variation in fear of crime?

Using both 2000 Census and survey data from respondents in Miami-Dade County, we extend prior research by considering the role of Hispanic ethnicity, both as a potential threatening group and as a potential moderating socio-demographic characteristic that conditions associations between both community and individual level predictors of fear of crime.

<sup>1</sup>In previous work, many scholars have used the terms *Latino/a* and *Hispanic* interchangeably. While we will also employ this method, we do distinguish Cuban-American from non-Cuban Hispanic respondents in our analyses.

## Background

One major issue that has been the subject of debate among scholars concerns how the fear of crime is conceptualized and measured. Indeed, a number of scholars have suggested that a major source of the inconsistency of findings regarding the predictors of fear of crime is due to the failure to consider its multidimensional nature (Ferraro, 1995; Ferraro and LaGrange, 1987; Rountree, 1998; Ward and Stafford, 1983). One notion that has gained momentum is the idea that there exist two important dimensions: the cognitive component, which captures the respondent's evaluation of one's safety or the risk of criminal victimization; and the emotional dimension, which captures the respondent's actual fear of being victimized. There is considerable evidence that perceived risk mediates the relationship between several antecedents and fear of crime (Chiricos et al., 1997; Ferraro, 1995; Liska et al., 1982; Rountree, 1998; but see also Rader, 2004) and that perceived risk and fear may have different predictors (Ferraro, 1995; LaGrange and Ferraro, 1989; LaGrange et al., 1992; Rountree and Land, 1996). Gender and age characteristics in particular have demonstrated different patterns of association with perceived risk and fear, with females and the elderly reporting greater fear, but similar levels of perceived risk than their counterparts (e.g., Ferraro and LaGrange, 1987; Rountree and Land, 1996).

Research examining the predictors of fear of crime has generally explored the issue at either the individual or the community/structural level, with only a few recent studies simultaneously examining predictors of individual-level variation in fear of crime at *both* the micro- and macro-level (e.g., Rountree, 1998; Rountree and Land, 1996; Wilcox et al., 2003). Of the research that has examined community (or larger jurisdictions) antecedents of fear of crime, most studies have been predicated on the insights of

one of two structural explanations: racial threat theory or social disorganization theory.

### Minority Group Threat Theory and Fear of Crime

The central theoretical basis for examining whether neighborhood racial composition is a determinant of individual fear of crime is racial or minority group threat theory. This thesis traditionally has been employed to explain how dominant groups use state apparatuses, including the criminal law, to control subordinate groups who threaten their interests (Blalock, 1967). This hypothesis asserts that social control measures directed against Blacks intensify as the Black population grows larger in size. Several studies, inspired by the minority group threat thesis, have found that the relative size of the Black population is predictive of the mobilization of punitive and law enforcement responses, including such factors as police use of deadly force (Chamlin, 1989), police force size (Jacobs, 1979; Jackson and Carroll, 1981; Greenberg et al., 1985), arrest rates (Brown and Warner, 1992; Liska and Chamlin, 1984), incarceration rates (Myers, 1990; Tittle and Curran, 1988), and executions (Phillips, 1986). Other scholars have used the racial threat thesis to explain informal punitive actions including lynchings (Corzine et al., 1983), hate crimes (Green et al., 1998), and interracial killings (Jacobs and Wood, 1999).

While the racial (or minority) threat thesis has been conceptualized as multidimensional (Eitle et al., 2003), one conceptualization emphasizes the *criminal threat* of Blacks and other minorities in understanding the actions of the state against minorities (Liska and Chamlin, 1984). One core proposition of the racial threat thesis then is that "aggregate measures of punitiveness will vary with aggregate measures of racial composition because the presence of Blacks creates a fear of crime that helps to mobilize punitive resources" (Chiricos et al., 2001, p. 323). Thus, at the individual

level, the racial threat thesis implies a positive relationship between perceived risk and proximity to racial/ethnic minorities (Chiricos et al., 2001).

Of the studies that have examined the association between the relative size of the minority population and fear of crime/perceived risk of victimization, most have found support for the minority threat thesis (Liska et al., 1982; Covington and Taylor, 1991; Taylor and Covington, 1993; Thompson et al., 1992; Ward et al., 1986). The relative size of the minority population varies with the fear of crime reported by respondents. Further, three other studies have found support for a relationship between *perceived* racial composition and fear of crime (Chiricos et al., 2001; Moeller, 1989; Skogan, 1995). While the measurement of fear of crime has been the subject of considerable discussion and debate (Dubow et al., 1979; Ferraro, 1995; Ferraro and LaGrange, 1987; Gabriel and Creve, 2003; Rountree, 1998; Rountree and Land, 1996), the research that has explored the relationship between racial composition and either emotional-based measures capturing fear of crime (Moeller, 1989; Skogan, 1995; Thompson et al., 1992) or indicators of safety or victimization risk (Chiricos et al., 2001; Covington and Taylor, 1991; Liska et al., 1982; Taylor and Covington, 1993; Ward et al., 1986) have revealed that both indicators of perceived risk of crime are associated with the relative size of the minority population.

Few studies in this vein, however, have considered the potential fear producing effects of the relative size of the Latino population. In fact, most prior studies examining the role of racial and ethnic composition in understanding fear of crime have either failed to include Hispanics as a potential threatening group or have combined Blacks with Hispanics as a pan-ethnic measure of minority group threat. While there is some evidence that whites view all minority groups as threatening (e.g., Stein et al., 1998), there are compelling reasons for distinguishing between Blacks and Hispanics as separate

threatening groups. First, some evidence exists that whites are less hostile towards Hispanics than Blacks (Link and Oldendick, 1996). If whites see Hispanics with less hostility, it is possible that whites would also perceive Hispanics as less of a threat. Second, we have very little insight into whether Hispanics perceive Blacks as a threatening group—almost all prior research has examined the threat of Blacks to whites’ political and economic power. Third, prior research has examined only Blacks as the threatening group because African Americans have tended to be the largest minority population in urban centers. Has the nature of the threat changed, however, with Hispanics now surpassing Blacks in number in the United States and in many metro areas? In particular, the question of whether Hispanics are seen as a distinct threat relative to Blacks may be particularly salient in cities where Hispanics constitute a large minority, or even a majority, of residents.

Despite these reasons, we are aware of only one study that has examined the possible effects of the Hispanic population, and that study examined the respondent’s *perception* of the size of the Hispanic population, not a measure of the actual size of the Hispanic population (Chiricos et al., 2001). Further, that study also examined perceived risk of criminal victimization, rather than fear of crime (the focus of the present study). Hence, no published study has examined the role of the relative size of the Hispanic population, independent of the percentage of Black residents, either objectively or perceived, on respondent fear of crime.

## Social Disorganization Theory and Fear of Crime

While racial threat theory has been proffered by a number of studies as a macro-level explanation for understanding fear of crime, arguably the most often utilized theoretical framework for explaining fear of crime/perceived risk is social disorganization theory (Shaw and McKay, 1942). While there are a couple of variants on

the original model (see Markowitz et al., 2001), social disorganization theory emphasizes the role that urbanization, industrialization, and (traditionally) immigration plays in producing neighborhoods that are unable to come together to collectively solve their problems, including crime. Population instability, concentrated disadvantage, and racial heterogeneity serve to reduce neighborhood cohesion, which provides the context (i.e., the socially disorganized community) for the problems of disorder, incivilities, crime, and fear of crime to emerge. There is also some evidence that the core structural aspects of social disorganization produce a feedback loop with fear of crime—population instability and heterogeneity produce more fear of crime, which in turn produces greater population turnover and greater subsequent heterogeneity (Liska and Bellair, 1995; Markowitz et al., 2001). There is also considerable evidence that social disorganization variables are strong predictors of fear of crime (Lewis and Maxfield, 1980; Lewis and Salem, 1986; Markowitz et al., 2001; McGarrell et al., 1997; Skogan, 1990; Taylor and Hale, 1986), even stronger than indicators of crime itself (Rountree, 1998, p. 342; see also Taylor and Hale, 1986). Clearly a comprehensive examination of the contextual determinants of fear of crime should incorporate structural indicators of both racial threat and social disorganization theory.

### Individual Level Explanations for Fear of Crime

At the individual level, there are two predominant models that have been advanced to explain variation in fear of crime. The first, the victimization model, posits a relatively direct basis for experiencing fear of crime: people who have been victimized by crime, either directly or vicariously, experience higher levels of fear as a result of their victimization. While most of the research has supported the victimization model (Bursik and Grasmick, 1993; Taylor, 1995; Skogan, 1990), there are some

scholars who argue that the strength of the association between victimization and fear of crime may be weaker than expected (Liska et al., 1988; McGarrell et al., 1997).

The second model, the vulnerability hypothesis, is a bit more nuanced. This model proposes that personal characteristics are a contributory factor in people's fear of crime. Some people such as females and the elderly see themselves to be physically vulnerable to attack and thus (perceive) that they are unable to resist an attack on them or their property. Others, such as the impoverished, perceive themselves as being socially vulnerable. They are unable to take the necessary actions to reduce their likelihood of victimization because of a lack of resources. Both theses have garnered empirical support. There is a large body of evidence demonstrating that gender, income, and age are predictive of fear of crime (Baldassare, 1986; Braungart et al., 1980; Cook et al., 1978; Clarke and Lewis, 1982; Fattah and Sacco, 1989; Ferraro, 1995; Hill et al., 1985; Pain, 2000; Rountree, 1998; Warr, 1984; Whitley and Prince, 2005; Will and McGrath, 1995; but see also Ferraro and LaGrange, 1987; Rountree and Land, 1996). The results, however, have been far from unequivocal, leading scholars to begin exploring the conditions and factors that may mediate or moderate the associations between these predictors and fear of crime.

One important variable that may predict vulnerability is the race/ethnicity of the respondent. While some evidence exists that Black respondents experience greater levels of fear of crime than whites (Braungart et al., 1980; Covington and Taylor, 1991; Garolfalo, 1977; Parker et al., 1993; Skogan and Maxfield, 1981), few studies have examined the association between Hispanics and fear of crime. In one study, Parker et al. (1993) examined differences in fear of crime among a sample of 2235 Black and Hispanic New York City respondents. They found that Hispanics reported higher levels of fear of crime than Blacks. There are also reasons to expect that Hispanics would experience



higher levels of fear of crime than either whites or Blacks. Walker et al. (2007, p. 115) report that a 2001 Bureau of Justice Statistics report found that Hispanics were less likely to initiate contact with the police than either whites or Blacks (see also Skogan, 2005; Walker, 1997). Indeed, Davis and Erez (1998) found that immigrants were less willing to report crimes to the police because of a number of factors: language barriers, cultural beliefs (e.g., reporting a rape brings shame to the family), and ignorance and apprehension of the American criminal justice system, including fears based on their (or others in their neighborhoods) immigration status (Walker et al., 2007). Further, Menjivar and Bejarano (2004) found that some Hispanic immigrants may be particularly fearful of retaliation if they contact the police. To the extent that Hispanic immigrants are more hesitant or unwilling to call the police (relative to whites and Blacks), the perceived lack of police protection may exacerbate fears of crime and victimization.

While most studies have employed explanations of variability in fear of crime based largely on whether the focus of the inquiry was on contextual or individual factors, some recent studies that have examined both micro- and macro-level influences on fear of crime have employed a different theoretical framework. Rountree (1998) posited that multilevel explorations of the factors associated with fear of crime can be derived from a general opportunity or routine activities framework (Felson, 1998; see also Miethe and Meier, 1990). Rountree argued that a combination of personal experiences (e.g., prior criminal victimization) and characteristics (being female and/or elderly), lifestyle differences, and cues derived from their social environment (crime rates, social disorganization cues, lack of social integration) generate differential levels of fear of crime. In this regard, fear of crime is theorized to be a relatively rational response to the threat of/or vulnerability to crime. Moreover, Rountree has suggested prior characterizations in which some individuals exhibit “irrational” fear of crime are amiss, because scholars have

failed to consider lifestyle and contextual factors simultaneously with individual characteristics, like gender or age. While Rountree does not explicitly incorporate a racial threat argument into her work, she does find that the racial composition of the community conditions the association between gender and fear of crime, finding that the gender “effect does not hold in non-White communities where the vulnerability to violent victimization of young men appears particularly heightened” (1998, p. 365). However, Rountree did not specifically differentiate between Blacks and Hispanics in her analyses of community racial composition’s role as a moderating variable.

Of the limited number of studies that have examined both micro and macro-level predictors of fear of crime/risk perceptions simultaneously (e.g., Rountree, 1998; Rountree and Land, 1996; Wilcox et al., 2003), one study is particularly salient to our present inquiry. Chiricos et al. (2001) is the only study we are aware of that differentiated between Blacks and Hispanics, both as a threatening group and as threatened respondents. They found that both Hispanic and white respondents believed that they were more at risk of crime victimization (not fear of crime) when they lived in neighborhoods with relatively large numbers of Blacks or Hispanics. That study, however, included only one contextual indicator, the city crime rate, and investigated the respondent’s *perception* of the percentage of Blacks and Hispanics in a neighborhood. Hence, no published study has examined the role of objective measures of the Black and Hispanic composition of neighborhoods, in the context of other neighborhood factors (including social disorganization-based measures), as determinants of the fear of crime.

## Date and Methods

### Research Site

For a number of reasons, Miami-Dade County represents a provocative location for testing the

core hypotheses of this research. First, Miami-Dade County is very large; it is larger than 16 states and the District of Columbia, and is the largest metropolitan area in the Southeastern United States. Second, it is as ethnically diverse a population as can be found in urban America, particularly with regards to a burgeoning Hispanic population. Approximately 45% of Dade County residents were foreign born during the 1990s (Fernandez et al., 1999) and up to 51.4% by 2000, giving Miami-Dade County the highest percentage of foreign born residents of any major U.S. city and the highest in the world, according to the United Nations Development Program (2004). According to the 2000 Census, over 57% of the population in Miami-Dade County is Hispanic, yet there were few Hispanics (approximately 5.3% of the population) residing in the county as late as 1960. Clearly, Miami has undergone, and continues to undergo, a radical transformation in terms of its racial and ethnic composition. Like other metropolitan areas undergoing such dynamic changes, Miami-Dade County suffers from a number of social problems, including being ranked as the 2nd most dangerous metropolitan area in the United States, according to official crime reports (Morgan, 2006).

A recent public opinion survey sponsored by the Knight Foundation (Princeton Survey Research Associates, 2002) included questions regarding fear of crime, social trust (distrust), and race relations in Miami-Dade County. While the researchers reported that the majority of respondents reported feeling *very* or *somewhat* safe from crime in their homes and neighborhoods, only 33% reported feeling secure when they were downtown at night. Overall, African Americans reported the lowest levels of feeling safe in their home/neighborhoods, followed by Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites. Furthermore, 64% of respondents reported social distrust—that you cannot be too careful in dealing with people, with African Americans reporting the highest levels of distrust. According to the

Knight Foundation report, this level of distrust is considerably higher than the national average (44%) in like studies. Finally, approximately 6 out of 10 respondents reported that the tension between different racial and ethnic groups was a problem in the community. Overall, this report reaffirms the attractiveness of Miami-Dade County as a research setting to examine the role of ethnicity and race in explaining fear of crime in a racially and ethnically diverse urban area.

There are other factors that also make Miami-Dade County somewhat unique as a multiethnic metropolitan area. Martinez et al. (2004) suggested that the stark differences in their findings linking structural conditions, including ethnicity and immigration, and drug violence across the cities of Miami and San Diego were largely due to the differential experiences of Cubans in Miami compared to Mexicans in San Diego. They argued that Cubans (in Miami) have been advantaged relative to Mexicans (in cities such as San Diego) because of the differences in resources that the initial Cuban immigrants possessed, the differences in federal government assistance for Cuban immigrants, and the resulting social capital differences derived from such advantages (Martinez et al., 2004, p. 153). Indeed, there is some evidence that second generation Cuban Americans compare favorably to the average American in income levels (Boswell, 2002, p. 21). On the other hand, Cubans who reside in Miami have been found to be of lower socioeconomic status than Cubans who reside elsewhere in the United States, primarily due to the limited resources of first generation immigrants (Boswell, 2002). Further, Cuban Americans represent only half of the Hispanics living in the greater Miami area, with large communities of Central and South American immigrants also residing in the County. Overall, the distinctiveness of Miami-Dade County must be considered when considering how the findings of the present study would apply to other multiethnic cities.

## Data

The purpose of the larger study, from which the present study was derived, was to identify a representative sample of physically disabled Miami-Dade County community residents, and a comparison sample of non-disabled study participants who were matched on age, gender, ethnicity, and area of residence. We use data collected in the first of two waves (initially consisting of 1986 individuals, of whom 900 were self-identified or identified by someone who resided with the respondent as disabled). In order to identify a random sample of the disabled, stratified equally by four racial/ethnic groups (Cuban, other Hispanic, African American, and non-Hispanic whites), a complex sampling design was employed. Further details of the sampling design are described comprehensively elsewhere (Turner et al., 2006). The interview success rate was 82%, and 1467 respondents provided complete answers to all of the questions measuring the variables of interest for the current study and are included in the present analyses. Since the research design was not structured to draw a random sample of Miami-Dade County residents, the results gleaned from our ensuing analyses should be regarded as exploratory in nature.

## Measures

*Fear of crime.* Fear of crime is a 10 item scale ( $\alpha = .97$ ) based on the work of Ferraro and LaGrange (1987). As mentioned previously, this measure captures the emotional component of being a potential crime victim. Examples of these items include “How afraid are you of being physically attacked?” and “How afraid are you of being conned or cheated out of your money?” The response categories for these questions were “very afraid”, “moderately afraid”, “mildly afraid”, and “not at all afraid”. Responses were coded such that higher values indicate a greater fear of crime. Because of evidence of

heteroskedasticity, we transformed this measure by taking its natural log.

## Individual Level Variables

We consider both individual and contextual level predictors of the dependent variable in this study. Sociodemographic characteristics in the analyses include age, gender (female = 1), socioeconomic status, and race/ethnicity. Ethnicity is based on respondents’ self-report and includes four categories: White, non-Hispanic, Black, Cuban Americans, and Other Hispanics. Socioeconomic status is estimated using a composite score based on household income level, occupational category (Hollingshead, 1965), and educational attainment. Scores on the three status dimensions were standardized, summed, and divided by the number of status dimensions for which data were available.

In addition to the sociodemographic characteristics, we include other characteristics and experiences that have been found to be salient predictors of fear of crime. Twelve items assessing level of physical impairment measured daily activity limitations. All respondents were asked how much difficulty, if any, they had doing tasks ranging from “turning faucets on and off” and “lifting ten pounds” to more strenuous activities such as “lifting heavy objects” or “running.” Physical limitations may be associated with perceived vulnerability. Prior criminal victimization is also considered; our measure captures the respondent’s experience with four different criminal events: rape, assault, robbery, and physical attacks, with scores ranging from 0 to 4 on this measure. We also include a measure of vicarious victimization, which assessed whether or not the respondent witnessed one or more of four different criminal events. These events include robbery, rape, homicide, and physical attacks. Three hundred and thirty eight respondents (43%) reported that they had witnessed one or more of these events. Prior research has found that both direct and vicarious victimization may be

predictive of fear of crime (Mesch, 2000). Further, vicarious victimization may be a proxy for the perception a respondent has regarding the amount of serious crime in their neighborhood.

We also include reports of crime as a measure. This captures information that the respondent has received about violent events that he or she did not witness, namely hearing about a rape, murder, or non-lethal shooting of someone the respondent knew. This three item measure sums the number of affirmative responses, ranging from 0–3. As is the case with vicarious victimization, we suggest that reports of crime may be a proxy for the respondent's perception about the amount of serious crime in their community.

### Contextual Level Variables

At the neighborhood (measured at the Census tract) level, the following contextual variables are considered: racial composition, a disadvantage index, comprised of three measures (poverty rate, unemployment rate, and percent of female headed households), and residential stability. Two measures of racial composition are considered—percentage of black and percentage of Hispanic residents. Consistent with racial threat theory, we expect that the greater the percentage of black and/or Hispanic residents in a neighborhood, the greater the fear of crime. This relationship may be conditioned though by the race of the respondent. The other contextual measures have each been employed in past studies as antecedents of a community's degree of social (dis)organization. We consider three interrelated variables to capture neighborhood disadvantage. The poverty rate is calculated as the percentage of households below the poverty rate. The unemployment rate is calculated as the percentage of unemployed men and women, divided by the total civilian workforce (100 times). The measure percent female-headed households is calculated by dividing the number of female-headed households by the total number of

households in the neighborhood. A principal components analysis revealed that these three measures produce high factor loadings, suggesting redundancy. Thus, z-score transformations of each of the three measures are summed to form an overall disadvantage index (see also Land et al., 1990). Finally, residential stability is defined as the percentage of residents who have lived in their current household for 5 years or longer. Residential instability has been a core factor in the development of socially disorganized communities.

However, to include vicarious experiences and getting reports about crime from others, we find that some differences do emerge, and in the directions one would expect. Relative to all other groups, African Americans do report having the most vicarious victimization experiences and receiving the most reports about crime from others. While Blacks may report the greatest exposure to crime, they still were found to have significantly lower levels of fear of crime compared to both of the Hispanic groups. Additionally, the average number of reports of crime experienced by non-Hispanic whites is higher than Cuban Americans, which again, is somewhat at odds with the fact that whites have significantly lower levels of fear of crime than Cuban Americans.

While there may be some discordance between the individual level factors and mean levels of fear of crime among the different groups, such differences may be due to the differences in the neighborhoods in which the respondents reside. The last four rows of Table 3.1 present the neighborhood level factors included in the analysis. The most important distinction to take note of is likely the differences in the percentage of Blacks that live in the respondent's respective neighborhoods. While Black respondents report living in neighborhoods that are almost half African American, the other groups live in communities that have relatively few Black residents. This is not surprising given the level of Black isolation in major American cities, but it is an important

**Table 3.1** Descriptive Statistics for Variables Used in Analysis ( $N = 1467$ ; 166 Census tracts)

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Dependent variable				
Fear of crime (original metric)	9.66	10.59	0	30
Fear of crime (natural log)	1.68	1.30	0	3.43
Demographic characteristics				
Socioeconomic status	.04	.99	-2.72	2.70
Age	55.25	17.23	18	93
Gender (female = 1)	.52		0	1
Marital status (married = 1)	.50		0	1
Physical limitations	7.85	10.02	0	40
Unemployed	.50		0	1
Race/ethnicity				
Cuban American	.27		0	1
African American	.27		0	1
Other Hispanics	.25		0	1
White Non-Hispanics	.21		0	1
Victimization/exposure				
Personal victimization	.23	.51	0	4
Vicarious victimization	.43	.88	0	4
Reports of crime	.46	.76	0	3
Neighborhood factors				
% African American	20.77	28.25	0	96.65
% Hispanic	52.32	27.47	1.34	95.25
Residential stability	50.11	12.38	4.99	74.17
Disadvantage index	-.27	3.04	-4.60	9.40

**Table 3.2** Descriptive Statistics for Select Variables by Race/Ethnicity (*N* = 1467)

Variable	Whites ( <i>n</i> = 304)	Blacks ( <i>n</i> = 402)	Cubans ( <i>n</i> = 391)	Other Hispanics ( <i>n</i> = 370)	Scheffé or Adjusted Wald Test <sup>a</sup>
Dependent variable					
Fear of crime (natural log)	1.28 (1.13)	1.51 (1.27)	2.08 (1.29)	1.77 (1.34)	WC;WO;CO;CB;OB
Demographic factors					
Socioeconomic status	.65 (.85)	-.16(.89)	-.20 (1.02)	-.003	WB;WC;WO;CO
Age	60.19 (17.07)	56.51 (16.05)	57.09 (16.98)	47.88 (16.60)	WO;CO;WB;OB
Gender	48%	55%	52%	51%	WB
Marital status	55%	42%	55%	51%	WB;OB;CB
Physical limitations	7.96 (9.57)	10.32 (11.26)	7.55 (9.79)	5.39 (8.48)	WO;CO;WB;CB;OB
Unemployed	48%	58%	55%	38%	WO;WB;CO;CB
Victimization/exposure					
Personal victimization	.24 (.53)	.22 (.53)	.21 (.46)	.26 (.54)	
Vicarious victimization	.41 (.89)	.68 (1.09)	.26 (.66)	.37 (.77)	WB;CB;OB
Reports of crime	.48 (.72)	.75 (.93)	.24 (.52)	.37 (.70)	WC;WB;CB;OB
Neighborhood factors	( <i>n</i> = 96)	( <i>n</i> = 54)	( <i>n</i> = 94)	( <i>n</i> = 98)	
% African American	12.28 (19.23)	46.37 (30.98)	15.34 (25.38)	16.15 (23.48)	WB;CB;OB
% Hispanic	51.75 (23.95)	31.67 (21.45)	61.57 (27.05)	59.58 (25.85)	WB;CB;OB
Residential stability	49.05 (12.74)	53.76 (10.91)	51.46 (12.37)	48.96 (13.34)	
Disadvantage index	-1.22 (2.44)	1.52 (3.46)	-.61 (2.80)	-.42 (2.86)	WB;CB;OB

**NOTE:** Standard deviations in parentheses.

a. Significant differences in means or proportions are indicated by the following abbreviations: WO (Whites vs. Other Hispanics); WB (Whites vs. Blacks); WC (Whites vs. Cuban Americans); BC (Blacks vs. Cuban Americans); BO (Blacks vs. Other Hispanics); and CO (Cuban Americans vs. Other Hispanics).

contrast to consider when interpreting the results of the upcoming multivariate analyses. It is also important to note that the other three groups report residing (on average) in communities that are ethnically diverse, with Hispanics representing a majority of residents

for whites, Cuban Americans, and other Hispanics alike. Thus, the data presented document high levels of Black segregation and high levels of Hispanic integration with their peers. Finally, the neighborhoods that white respondents reside in are the least disadvantaged,



with African Americans residing in communities that have significantly greater disadvantages than any of the other groups.

In order to address the simultaneous contributions of individual and neighborhood factors in explaining variation in fear of crime, we turn our attention to the multivariate models. Of the demographic characteristics presented in the baseline model, a relatively expected pattern of associations is found. Socioeconomic status is inversely associated with fear of crime, while gender (being female) and experiencing physical limitations both are associated with greater fear of crime. Somewhat unanticipated is the finding that being married is associated with greater fear of crime, although this may reflect concern for family members as victims (indirectly or directly) of crime. Age was not found to be a significant predictor of the dependent variable, further contributing to the controversy regarding whether or not age is positively associated with fear of crime. Finally, being unemployed was found to be a consistent predictor of lower fear of crime. While this may be somewhat surprising, the association between unemployment and physical limitations (.44) suggests that this finding may be an artifact of the large percentage of physically limited people in the sample, especially when one considers that employment status fails to reach statistical significance in any of the regression models that exclude the physically disabled.

Once we include ethnicity and race into the equation, we find that as expected, being a minority (versus White non-Hispanic) is a significant predictor of the dependent variable. Indeed, the effect of socioeconomic status appears to be mediated entirely through the ethnicity or race of the respondent. The magnitude of the other coefficients is not greatly altered by the introduction of ethnicity/race into the model. Likewise, the inclusion of each of the victimization/exposure measures also contributes to the explanatory power of the model. Having a personal experience with

crime, witnessing crimes, or even getting reports about crimes from others are each significantly associated with fear of crime, in the expected direction. Moreover, previous victimization accounts for much of the Black/White disparity in fear of crime.

Consistent with expectations, residential stability reduces the level of fear reported. The measure of community disadvantage is not found to be a significant predictor of the dependent variable. When we consider each of the minority group threat indicators, we discover that percent African American actually serves to reduce fear of crime, contrary to the predictions of traditional racial threat theory. Consistent with our core hypothesis however, we find that living in neighborhoods with a greater percentage of Hispanic residents appears to translate into greater fear of crime for its respondents. The estimates presented include both measures of racial composition. These results suggest that some of the effect of percent African American is mediated by the inclusion of percent Hispanics, to the point that percent African American is no longer statistically significant, but regression diagnostics suggest that there is redundancy in the two measures. This is not surprising given the great degree of segregation in this city, where only Blacks are exposed to communities with a large number of Black residents, while the other groups are exposed to varying degrees of Hispanic residents. Because of the severe racial isolation of Blacks in Miami, it is likely that few white non-Hispanics and Hispanics live in communities in which Blacks would reach the proportions where their presence would be translated into a “threat.” Likewise, the very low percentage of African Americans residing in ethnically diverse neighborhoods is shown here to be a protective factor for fear of crime.

Overall, the results demonstrate that both individual and neighborhood factors contribute to explaining variation in fear of crime. It is also obvious that of the factors considered, the individual factors have greater explanatory

power than the contextual level factors, which reinforces the previously reported finding that approximately 7.6% of the variation in the dependent variable could be explained by contextual factors.

In order to further clarify the importance of ethnicity and race in understanding variation in fear of crime, we have included analyses in which separate models are estimated for each of the four ethnic/racial groups. We also have included the results of tests of the equality of regression coefficients across the subgroup models (Paternoster et al., 1998). While there are a number of compelling contrasts, one fascinating difference can be found in examining the importance of personal victimizations as a predictor of crime. Personal victimization is only a significant predictor of fear of crime among white non-Hispanics and other Hispanics, and the effect (for both Whites and non-Cuban Hispanics) is significantly different from the coefficient estimated in the Blacks-only model. Conjecturally, it may be that the expectations of being a victim in Black America are such that the actual victimization experience does not have a significant effect on the level of fear of crime experienced by Black respondents. Reports of crime differ in the magnitude of the effect on fear of crime. Such reports have a greater influence on White non-Hispanics and African Americans than Hispanic respondents.

Of the neighborhood factors, only one coefficient reaches statistical significance—percent Hispanic residents for the white, non-Hispanics and Cuban-American sub-samples, respectively. However, the test of equality of coefficients fails to reach statistical significance, meaning that the magnitude of the coefficient for two groups is not significantly different than the other group's coefficients. While it may be somewhat surprising to find that percent Hispanic is positively associated with fear of crime among Cuban Americans, a couple of caveats need be considered. First, the contextual measure, percent Hispanic residents, is a blunt measure that does

not distinguish between Cuban Americans and other Hispanic groups. It is possible that Cuban Americans report higher levels of fear of crime in these communities, not because they reside with a high percentage of other Cuban Americans, but rather they reside with a high percentage of other Hispanic groups, whom the respondents may fear. Second, an inspection of the *Rs* across models reveals that the amount of variation accounted for in the non-Hispanic white equation is much greater than in the African American and Cuban-American models (and to a lesser extent the non-Cuban Hispanics). This suggests that the risk and protective factors considered here, including percentage Hispanic, are of greater salience for predicting of fear of crime for whites in Miami than other groups. Third, this finding is consistent with the results of Rountree's (1998) study in which they found that the perceived percentage of Hispanic residents predicted fear of crime among Hispanic residents. This provocative finding merits future attention, where research can explore whether fear of violent crime is associated with the percentage of Hispanic residents generally, or whether such fear is specific to Hispanic residents from different backgrounds than the respondent.

We also estimated models that included each of the racial composition measures separately (not reported), and found that percent African American is inversely related to fear of crime in the Whites-only sample (although the coefficient was not found to be significantly different from the other subgroup coefficients). Largely, these results both reinforce and clarify the findings reported using the overall sample.

In addition to the analyses reported, we also consider the possibility that predictors of the fear of specific crimes may have differential effects, consistent with recent research (e.g., Ferraro, 1995; Rountree, 1998). We re-ran the models, substituting the dependent variable with two, more specific measures (decomposed from the overall measure): violent

crimes and property crimes (results available upon request from authors). Contrary to some of the recent studies, we failed to uncover significant differences in the associations between the predictors for the violent versus property fear of crime measure.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Twenty-first century urban America is experiencing a dramatic transformation in its racial and ethnic composition. With Hispanics already outnumbering African Americans in the United States, an answer to the question of whether non-Hispanic Whites will perceive of Hispanics as the ‘threatening’ population is clearly emerging. There is considerable evidence that White Americans are fearful of the largely Hispanic immigration to the United States and there is additional evidence that whites perceive of immigrants as a criminal threat. This analysis extends prior research by asking whether ethnicity matters in explaining variation in fear of crime in Miami where Hispanics comprise the majority of residents.

The results of our study provide qualified support for our core hypotheses. First, ethnic background is clearly an important determinant of individual variation in fear of crime, even after controlling for several different factors, including socio-demographic factors, experiences and exposure to crime, and psychosocial resources. While this finding is consistent with other research suggesting minorities experience greater levels of fear of crime than non-Hispanic whites, there is an obvious need for further inquiry into the sources of this difference, beyond such factors as victimization and exposure differences. Second, we find that consistent with our expectations, the relative size of the Hispanic population in a neighborhood is a significant contextual predictor of fear of crime, supporting the hypothesis derived from minority group threat theory. We did fail

to find, however, that the relative size of the Black population was a significant positive predictor of fear of crime. Indeed, we found evidence that for white non-Hispanics, percent African American was inversely associated with fear of crime. We suggest that this peculiar finding is due to the extreme segregation of Blacks in Miami-Dade County. The lack of racial heterogeneity in the typical Miami neighborhood, coupled with the extensive ethnic heterogeneity of many neighborhoods, appears instrumental in explaining these findings. The index of dissimilarity, a commonly used measure of segregation, is calculated as 69 (out of 100), according to 2000 Census data, indicating that Blacks are highly segregated in Miami-Dade County. According to one study, Miami ranked 89th out of the 100 largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas in the United States in terms of Black-white integration (Quinn and Pawasarat, 2003). In short, Blacks are not seen as threatening because they are isolated from non-Hispanic whites and Hispanics alike, whereas non-Hispanic whites in Miami-Dade are likely to live in neighborhoods with some ethnic diversity. To the extent that Miami-Dade represents ethnically diverse metro areas where the Hispanic population is the largest minority group, Hispanics do appear to be the “new” threatening population, especially for non-Hispanic whites. Our findings reinforce the importance of decomposing racial threat measures into African American and (at the least) Hispanic populations in cities that have sizable populations of both. In separate analyses (not reported), we found that an oft-used measure of racial threat, percent minority residents, *failed* to reach statistical significance in the estimated model. Such a blunt measure of threatening groups may be obsolete, given the dynamic changes in the racial and ethnic composition of many American cities.

While we believe our findings are provocative, there are important caveats that warrant emphasis. First, the sampling strategy of the overarching research project was designed to identify a stratified random sample of

disabled persons, and then match them with non-disabled neighbors in close proximity. Hence, the sample is skewed towards people with disabilities and may not be representative of the general population in Miami-Dade County. In fact, the median age of our sample is approximately 55 years of age, significantly older than the median age in the county (36 years of age). We did employ two approaches to minimize such concerns: a) we included a measure of physical limitation to statistically control for the influence of disability in the models estimated; and b) we ran additional analyses in which those identified as disabled were dropped from the analysis. The results of those analyses suggest that the pattern of findings revealed in the reported analyses is largely replicated by the non-disabled subgroup analysis. Nonetheless, the reader should consider this limitation when assessing the results of our analysis. Our study is best viewed as exploratory in nature.

Second, we were unable to provide official crime rate data at the census tract level, primarily because of the number of different law enforcement jurisdictions that exist in Miami-Dade County, including two large urban police departments. We do include, however, two measures that are arguably more salient predictors of one's perception of the neighborhood crime rate—vicarious victimization and reports of crime—that most prior studies of fear of crime have not incorporated. We suggest that future research should strive to include race and ethnic-specific crime rates to more accurately gauge the extent to which the fear of ethnic minorities is driven by aggregate crime rates.

If Miami is a social laboratory as many have described it, then our research suggests that the trend towards increasing ethnic diversity in many urban American centers will be accompanied by fear, distrust, and anguish by white non-Hispanics. While we did not explicitly test the merits of an alternative thesis to the

minority group threat thesis explored in this paper, our results do suggest that the contact hypothesis of Allport (1954) and others may not extend into the realm of fear of racial and ethnic minorities. Contrary to the core notion of the contact hypothesis, that large populations of out-groups leads to interracial (and interethnic) contact, which ultimately produces less hostility and competition among diverse groups, our findings suggest that white fear of crime is greater in communities with a greater number of out-group (i.e., Hispanic) members. While speculative, one reason our finding may be contrary to the contact hypothesis is the obvious language and cultural barriers that may obfuscate efforts to achieve inter-group contact in Miami. According to the most recent Census, almost 60% of Miami-Dade County residents spoke Spanish as their first language, indicating a potential barrier to improving inter-group relations between Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites. Clearly, further research is needed to develop a more comprehensive understanding of what factors contribute to fear of crime among residents in ethnically heterogeneous neighborhoods, including such factors as bilingualism. But if our findings have merit, they reiterate the challenge of integrating urban dwellers in a rapidly changing world.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why, in your opinion, does race play a role in the “fear of crime” concept?
2. Did the location in which the authors conducted this survey possibly affect their results? Why or why not?
3. What criminological theory discussed in this article best explains peoples’ varying levels with respect to fear of crime? Explain.



## READING

Felson, Deane, and Armstrong tackle the question of what type of theory is best suited to explain racial differences in offending. The authors make use of the heavily used National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (AddHealth) dataset to determine if there are racial differences in offending by offense. They attempt to determine whether a specific type of theory is necessary to understand racial differences in offending. So for example, if Blacks are only more likely than other groups to commit violent offenses, then maybe researchers should be constructing a theory of violent offending—not using a more general theory of offending to explain racial disparities that only exist for violent offenses.

### ***Do Theories of Crime or Violence Explain Race Differences in Delinquency?***

Richard B. Felson, Glenn Deane, and David P. Armstrong

#### **Introduction**

Arrest data and data from victimization surveys suggest that African Americans have higher crime rates than White Americans (e.g., Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1995; Hawkins et al., 2000; see Sampson and Lauritsen, 1994). While race differences can ultimately be attributed to racism and the historic oppression of African Americans (e.g., Hawkins, 1995; McCord, 1997; Sampson and Wilson, 1995), the more proximate causal process is unclear. In fact, we argue that it is not even clear what racial patterns in offending require explanation.

In this research, we use data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (hereafter AddHealth) to examine racial patterns in violence and delinquency (Udry, 1998). We attempt to determine whether Blacks and Whites differ in their tendency to engage in

violence or in their tendency to engage in serious delinquency, violent or not. AddHealth is particularly useful for examining racial patterns because it is based on a large national sample, it over-samples African Americans, and it uses a method that yields higher frequencies of self-reported delinquency (Harris et al., 2003). As a result, this research is more likely than past research to reveal the extent to which race effects are mediated and moderated by other demographic variables.

We use a method of theory testing that focuses on establishing the dependent variable rather than the introduction of mediating variables (although we do that as well). We argue that it is theoretically important to determine whether there are race differences in violent offenses or any type of serious offenses. If race is associated with violence but not other types of crimes, then one must look to theories of

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violence, not crime, for an explanation. On the other hand, if race is associated with all types of crime, or serious crime, then theories of crime and norm violation are likely to provide the explanation. Our goal, therefore, is to examine what group of theories is likely to explain race differences.

Our methods also differ from the methods used in earlier studies. First, we rely upon a statistical method that yields a true measure of specialization and that allows us to determine exactly what types of offenses vary by race (Deane et al., 2005). This method is well-suited to the analysis of criminal behavior, since most offenders commit a variety of offenses, and offenses cannot easily be rank ordered. The versatility of many offenders, however, does not preclude the possibility that predictors might be different for different types of criminal behaviors (Nagin and Paternoster, 1993; Horney et al., 1995).

## Discriminant Prediction

Some theories attempt to explain why people engage in deviance, while others attempt to explain why they engage in aggression. The task is complicated by the fact that deviance and aggression are overlapping domains; some aggressive behavior violates norms (and is therefore deviant behavior) and some deviant behavior involves intentional harm-doing (or aggression). For example, spanking children involves violence but not deviance, the use of illegal drugs involves deviance but not aggression, and violent crime involves both deviance and aggression (see Felson et al., 1994). The pattern of offending is therefore important in determining what type of theory is most useful for explaining the behavior. If an offender engages in violence but not other deviant behavior then a theory of aggression is necessary to understand the behavior. If an offender engages in criminal behavior generally, then a theory of deviance is needed to understand the behavior.

Stinchcombe (1968) emphasizes the importance of proper conceptualization of the dependent variable in his classic work on theory construction. He uses delinquency as an example, pointing out that different kinds of action that concern the police may turn out to have different causes:

Natural variables that create administrative problems are not the same variables that have a unique set of causes. Sometimes applied researchers formulate this by saying that a natural variable “has multiple causes.” From the scientific point of view, this means that the applied researcher is trying to explain the wrong thing. (p. 41)

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) provide the most well-known example of using offense patterns as evidence for theoretical claims (see also Felson, 2002). They argue that the tendency of offenders to engage in a variety of criminal offenses (as well as other impulsive behavior) supports their theory of self-control and argues against theories of aggression to explain violent crime. Another example is Zimring and Hawkins’s (1997) analyses and discussion of evidence showing that homicide rates but not other crime are relatively high in the United States. Their work suggests that crime theories are not useful for explaining this international pattern. Finally, Felson (1996) reviews evidence showing that children exposed to media violence engage in antisocial behavior generally, not just violent behavior, casting doubt on the idea that the children are modeling the violence they observed.

We argue that scholars interested in race differences may be trying to explain the wrong phenomenon. Criminological theories attempt to explain race differences in criminal behavior (or deviance) while research often examines race differences in violence (e.g., Sampson and Wilson, 1995; McNulty and Bellair, 2003a).

This strategy is not problematic if violent behavior is viewed as an indicator of crime or serious crime. However, if there are race differences in violence but not other serious crime, a theory of violence is required.

We believe that an understanding of race differences in offense patterns is necessary before theoretical progress on this important issue is possible. It is important to establish what facts require explanation, before attempting to explain them. In statistical language, it is necessary to determine the appropriate dependent variable before examining potential mediating variables. Moreover, since different theories imply different racial patterns, such an analysis provides a test of those theoretical explanations. This method of theory testing might be called “discriminant prediction” (see Felson, 2002). A theoretical explanation is *not* supported if: (1) race is only related to certain types of criminal offending when the theory predicts it should be related to all offending; or (2) race is related to all types of offending when the theory predicts it should be related to only some types of offending. More generally, a theory is not supported if evidence fails to confirm its predictions that either (1)  $X$  affects all  $Y$ s or (2)  $X$  affects  $Y_1$ , but not  $Y_2$  or  $Y_n$ . The difference between discriminant prediction and discriminant validity is that the former refers to the validity of a theory while the latter refers to the validity of measurement.

This research described below uses this method to test theories of crime and theories of aggression as explanations for race differences. Crime theories (e.g., strain, control, and social disorganization theories) predict that African Americans are more likely to commit a variety of offenses, not specialize in a particular type of crime. They would not have much difficulty explaining why race differences are stronger for more serious offenses than minor offenses, but they would have trouble explaining differences in violent offenses alone. On the other hand, theories of violence (i.e., the frustration-aggression approach; the subculture of violence thesis and the code of the streets) can explain race differences

in violence, but they cannot explain race differences in general offending.

Note, however, that these theories of crime and violence are all middle-range theories. General theories of human behavior that emphasize incentives and costs (i.e., social learning theory and the rational choice perspective) could conceivably explain any offense patterns. In addition, the routine activity approach can accommodate different offense patterns, if opportunities for deviance and aggression are different. However, it would be necessary for these theories to suggest a theoretical mechanism to account for the offense patterns observed.

We first describe the empirical literature on race and offense patterns and consider the role of social-demographic factors as mediators and moderators of race effects. We then examine race differences in specific offenses in order to determine whether there are race differences in all offending, serious offending, or violent offending. Finally, in the discussion, we consider the implications of the research literature for specific theories of crime and aggression.

## Prior Research on Race and Offense Patterns

Prior research suggests that race differences in offending vary depending on the type of offense. Thus, the Uniform Crime Statistics reveals stronger race differences in arrests for violent crime than property crime or drug abuse violations (see Zimring and Hawkins, 1997). Further, both arrest data and data from the National Crime Victimization Survey show stronger race differences in offending for robbery than assault, and for aggravated assault compared to simple assault (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997). In federal prisons, black inmates have higher rates of violence than white inmates but lower rates of drug violations (Harer and Steffensmeier, 1996). On the other hand, self-report data obtained from 12 year olds participating in the 1997 National

Longitudinal Survey of Youth reveal that non-whites have higher rates of property crime, lower rates of drug use, and similar rates of assault (Hawkins et al., 2000).

It may be that the race patterns observed in the UCR reflect the seriousness of the offense rather than the presence of violence. While violent crime is generally perceived as more serious than property crime (Rossi et al., 1974), violence and seriousness are conceptually distinct. Thus, property crimes vary in their seriousness, as reflected in the different penalties for grand larceny, petty larceny, burglary, and shoplifting. Drug violations also vary in their seriousness: we punish offenders more severely for selling drugs than using drugs and we evaluate it more severely (Rossi et al., 1974). Finally, injurious violence is considered more serious than violence in which the offender causes no injury and armed violence is considered more serious than violence in which the offender is unarmed.

An analysis of UCR tables supports the idea that race differences are stronger for serious offenses. The correlation between percentage black offenders and the seriousness of 29 crime categories, using a ranking based on Federal sentencing recommendations, is .36 ( $p = .025$ ; one-tailed test). However, it is impossible to disentangle the effects of violence and seriousness in the UCR data, i.e., to determine whether race differences are stronger for violent offenses or serious offenses, or both.

Hindelang et al. (1981) provide some evidence that addresses this issue in their analyses of self-reported delinquency among adolescents in Seattle in 1978. Their analyses of black/white ratios for different offenses provided mixed evidence: Blacks were more likely than Whites to engage in violence and some more serious forms of theft, but not most property or drug crimes. However, they did not control for socioeconomic status and other demographic characteristics associated with race. Thus, it is not clear from their data whether race has net effects.

In general, the literature is unclear about whether Blacks are more likely than Whites to commit serious crimes or violent crimes. To address this issue it is necessary to examine race differences in serious and minor violent crime and serious and minor non-violent crime. In addition, our method allows us to examine specialization by controlling for any race differences in the general tendency to offend. The traditional method in which specific offenses are examined separately confounds the tendency to commit particular offenses with the tendency to offend generally.

## The Role of Other Demographic Factors

Race effects are to some extent mediated by other social-demographic factors. Black youth are more likely than white youth to be raised in single parent impoverished families, and to live in impoverished, urban neighborhoods. All of these are well-known risk factors for delinquency. However, research on the net effects of race, controlling for these variables, is somewhat limited. One problem with UCR data and victimization surveys is that they have limited information on the demographic characteristics of offenders. Surveys of youth based on self-reports have much more extensive information on offenders, but these studies find that violence and crime are either unrelated or only weakly related to race and other demographic factors (e.g., Elliot, 1994; Markowitz and Felson, 1998; Bridges and Weis, 1989; Farrington et al., 2003; McLeod et al., 1994; Paschall et al., 1996). For example, McNulty and Bellair (2003a) find a small relationship between race and involvement in fights at, or on the way, to school. The relationship is no longer statistically significant in their longitudinal analysis when demographic variables, a lagged measure of fighting, and other measures are controlled. In a longitudinal analysis of AddHealth data, McNulty and Bellair (2003b) found that neighborhood

disadvantage and other variables mediated effects of race on change in serious violence over a two-year period. Note, however, that the inclusion of lagged variables limits the size of race effects (see also Kaufman, 2005).

It may be that most self-report surveys tap less serious forms of violence and crime, since more serious offenses are relatively rare. As indicated above, the effects of race and other social-demographic variables are probably stronger for serious offenses (Elliot and Ageton, 1980; Loftin, 1991; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1995). One approach to this problem is to survey high-risk populations. For example, Farrington et al. (2003) over-sample delinquent boys in the Pittsburgh Youth Study. They find a race difference in self-reported violence, with controls for other demographic factors, although that difference is much smaller than the race difference in the level of violence reported to the police.

Rowe et al. (1994) argue, and provide evidence, that the effects of race and other demographic factors are additive. Others have reported a variety of statistical interactions (e.g., McLeod et al., 1994; Deater-Deckard et al., 1998; Paschall et al., 1996). The theoretical basis for predicting statistical interactions, however, is weak. Perhaps multiple disadvantages are most likely to lead to crime when they occur in combination. In other words, adolescents who are exposed to one risk factor—and thus have a predisposition to commit crime—are particularly likely to offend if they are exposed to some other risk factor. For example, one might expect that black adolescents from impoverished families or neighborhoods are particularly likely to experience discrimination. Paschall et al. (1996) found support for the multiple disadvantage interaction pattern based on their study of young adults in a largely urban county. Race was more strongly related to violence for respondents of lower economic status. On the other hand, Farrington et al. (2003) found an interaction in the opposite direction: socioeconomic status was more highly related to violence for whites than blacks. Statistical interactions

between race and socioeconomic status have also been examined in aggregate level research on homicide rates. These studies tend to show that economic deprivation has stronger effects on homicide rates for whites than for blacks, but the evidence is mixed, and at least one study reports a statistical interaction in the opposite direction (e.g., Loftin, 1991; Ousey, 1999; Messner and Sampson, 1991; Lafree and Drass, 1996; Harer and Steffensmeier, 1992).

It is not clear whether to expect statistical interactions between race and residence in urban or disadvantaged neighborhoods. A neighborhood's social disorganization might have similar effects regardless of the characteristics of its residents. However, Wilson's (1987) thesis about the de-industrialization of northern cities implies that the increase in crime in African American communities is largely an urban phenomenon (see also Short, 1997). Anderson's discussion of the code of the streets focuses on black youth living in impoverished, urban neighborhoods where the threat of violence is strongest. His argument suggests that African American youth who experience the greatest threat of violence should have the highest violence rates. He therefore implies statistical interactions between race and urban residence, and between race and neighborhood disadvantage. However, there is no strong theoretical reason to expect that race effects are stronger in disadvantaged or urban neighborhoods.

Nor is it clear whether to expect statistical interactions between race and gender. Elliot (1994) found no gender differences in race effects using self-reports of serious violence from the National Youth Survey. Hindelang et al. (1981), using victimization data from the National Crime Survey, also found additive effects of race and gender on assault but stronger race effects for males on robbery offending. Hindelang et al. (1981) study of the Seattle data found stronger race differences in violence among girls than boys. In addition, research on spousal violence shows that



black women are more likely than black men to kill their spouse, while the reverse is true for whites (Daly and Wilson, 1988).

Finally, it is not clear whether one should expect a statistical interaction between race and age. A strain perspective (e.g., Agnew, 1987; Messner and Rosenfeld, 1994) might imply that race differences should be stronger for older adolescents than younger adolescents since economic and other opportunities are likely to be more salient.

## Methodology

We first describe the data and measurement, and then provide an extended discussion of our incident-based approach to data analysis. The extended discussion is necessary because of the novelty of this method.

### The AddHealth study

AddHealth is a large longitudinal data set based on a nationally representative sample of adolescents in Grades 7 to 12 (Harris et al., 2003). The data are useful in examining race effects for several reasons. First, previous survey research typically relies on more local, and less representative samples. The use of a national sample allows us to determine to what extent race differences are an urban phenomenon. Second, because the sample is so large, research can examine more serious, but less frequent offenses. Using incident-based analyses that allow us to examine the commission of specific offenses, we can determine exactly what offenses vary by race. Third,

AddHealth's use of computers for eliciting more sensitive information yields higher frequencies of self-reported crime than the usual methods (Turner et al., 1998). Underreporting may be a problem in examining race differences using survey research.<sup>2</sup> Fourth, unlike most youth surveys examining race, AddHealth surveys girls as well as boys. This feature enables us to examine whether race effects are conditioned by gender. Fifth, AddHealth provides independent information on ethnic background and race, enabling us to disentangle their effects. Past research has typically ignored violent crime among Latino groups, a large and growing segment of the population (Martinez and Lee, 1999). Finally, the sample includes a large number of African Americans (including a special sample of middle-class blacks). This sampling method provides more reliable estimates of race effects and increases our power to detect interactions.

AddHealth is a complex survey sample that includes regional stratification, a cluster sample design using schools as primary sampling units (PSUs), and over-samples of special populations. Our analyses are based on the in-home sample that includes the core ( $N = 12,105$ ) and several special samples. One of the special samples includes 1038 Black adolescents from well-educated families, i.e., at least one parent has a college degree. The special samples combined with the core sample (which includes 2400 Blacks) yield a combined sample (after listwise deletion) of 15,430.<sup>3</sup>

All students who completed an in-school questionnaire, plus those who did not complete a questionnaire but who were listed on a school roster, were eligible for selection into the study

<sup>2</sup>Evidence suggests that African Americans are less likely than whites to self-report violent or serious crime (Bridges and Weis, 1989; Hindelang et al., 1981). Perhaps some black respondents fear that reporting criminal behavior will encourage stereotyping and prejudice.

<sup>3</sup>We account for AddHealth's complex survey design in our statistical analyses via a strategy similar to that recommended by Korn and Graubard (1991). Stratification and special sample weights are accounted for by including the variables (e.g., region, race, education, etc.) used in defining these aspects of the survey design in the right hand side of the regression equation (see Korn and Graubard's "E analyses"), while AddHealth's cluster design is explicitly accounted for in the GEE methodology we employ (described in the Section 5.3).

sample. The respondents attended 144 schools in 80 school districts.<sup>4</sup> Students and their parents (usually mothers) were interviewed at home between April and December, 1995.

### Measurement

We examine the prevalence of nine types of criminal behaviors: armed violence; unarmed violence; group violence; seriously injuring someone; armed robbery; selling drugs; using drugs; serious property crime; and minor property crime (see Appendix A). Our selection is motivated by our interest in distinguishing violent crimes from other crimes and serious crimes from minor crimes. We recognize that there is some ambiguity about which offenses are more serious than others. We consider

alternative classifications and examine their effects in the results section.

We used multiple items when they were available (five of our nine categories). We code the behavior as 1 if the respondent gave an affirmative response on any of the items. Note that the items for armed violence and drug use are based on life-time incidence while the other items are based on the last twelve months. While items that are not time-bound result in higher prevalence rates, it is unlikely that they affect the relative size of our coefficients. It is possible that behavior categories based on single items have more measurement error than those categories based on multiple items, but we shall see that some of the strongest effects are observed for the single item categories. The distributions of the categories are shown in Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3** Distributions of Criminal Offenses

Criminal Behavior	Number of Respondents Reporting Behavior <sup>a</sup>	Response Percentage <sup>b</sup>	Incidence Percentage <sup>c</sup>
Armed violence	923.73	6.00	2.82
Unarmed violence	6307.52	40.87	19.21
Group violence	3099.90	20.09	9.44
Cause serious injury	2863.16	18.56	8.72
Armed robbery	611.32	3.96	1.86
Sell drugs	1160.14	7.52	3.53
Use drugs	4729.42	30.65	14.40
Serious property crime	2299.92	14.91	7.00
Minor property crime	5581.31	36.17	17.00
No criminal offense	5256.58	34.07	16.01
	$n^* = 32,835$		100.00

a. Fractional counts result from application of sample weights.

b. Response percentages based on number of respondents ( $n = 15,430$ ).

c. Incidence percentages based on number of respondents reporting behavior ( $n^* = 32,835$ ).

<sup>4</sup>Some districts included high schools and their feeder middle schools.

AddHealth allows respondents to choose multiple racial identifications, but also asks respondents “if you had to choose only one race, what race would you choose?” We used responses to this question to code race. Ethnicity is measured separately from race since Latinos and Blacks are not mutually exclusive groups. In addition, it is important to distinguish between different Latino groups (see Martinez and Lee, 1999). For example, Martinez (1996) finds that Latinos have a lower homicide rate than Anglos in Miami but a higher rate in El Paso, reflecting substantial differences in homicide rates between Cuban and Mexican Americans. Accordingly, we code respondents as Mexican/Mexican American, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Central American, Other Hispanic, or Non-Hispanic.

Other demographic predictors are age, gender, and place of residence. Place of residence is a dichotomy reflecting whether the adolescent is an urban resident or not. We use Add Health’s constructed variable which is based on the 1990 census definition of urban area except that it does not include places outside urbanized areas of 2500 or more people. Information on whether or not the respondent is living in a single-parent (either female- or male-headed) family is obtained from the parents’ questionnaire. We use two measures of socioeconomic status: parents’ education and whether the family was on public assistance. Both measures were derived from the parents’ questionnaire. Parents’ education is based on the *highest* educational attainment of a parent. Our use of the public assistance indicator is consistent with evidence that criminal violence may be more an effect of poverty than a linear function of socioeconomic status (Brownfield, 1986). Such an argument is implied in the notion of concentration effects (Wilson, 1987).

Our final explanatory variable is a neighborhood concentrated disadvantage index. AddHealth provides selected contextual measures from the 1990 Census for the tract group in which respondents’ reside. Following Sampson et al. (1997), we create a standardized component

measure of neighborhood concentrated disadvantage based on the proportion in the tract who are younger than age eighteen, receiving public assistance, unemployed, living in poverty, African American, and living in female-headed households. Some scholars might question the inclusion of the age and race components in this measure. However, in alternative analyses (not presented), we omitted the age and race components and achieved similar results.

## Discussion

This research suggests that black adolescents are more likely than white adolescents to engage in violent crime but not property or drug crime. In fact, blacks are *less* likely to use illegal drugs, when demographic variables are controlled. For African American youth: crime is not the problem.

Some of our evidence is consistent with evidence from earlier studies, but we control for social demographic variables and use a large, nationally representative, sample. Most importantly, we show for the first time that race differences in violence among youth are not due to race differences in the tendency to commit more serious crime. Effects are no stronger for serious delinquency than for minor delinquency, i.e., they are no stronger for selling drugs than for using drugs, for injurious violence than for other violence, or for serious property crime than for minor property crime.

Race differences in violence are mediated to some extent by demographic factors. Controls for family structure, urban residence, and socioeconomic status reduce the size of race effects on violent crime. In other words, black adolescents are more likely to engage in violent crime than white adolescents because they are more likely to reside in urban areas, their parents are more likely to be poor and uneducated, and their families are more likely to be headed by a single parent. However, demographic variables only partially explained why black adolescents are more likely than white adolescents to engage

in violent crime. The race difference in violence that remains when demographic factors are controlled is substantial.

The race difference in armed violence is particularly strong. A black adolescent is more than twice as likely to commit violence with a weapon than a white adolescent, controlling for demographic variables. Unfortunately, we cannot determine with our item whether this difference involves firearms or other weapons. While the literature focuses on firearms (e.g., Blumstein, 1995), an examination of assault data from the National Crime Victimization Survey (not presented) shows that, during an assault, black offenders are more likely than white offenders to use other weapons as well as firearms.<sup>5</sup>

We do not find evidence that race combines with other forms of disadvantage to produce particularly high rates of violent crime. The results are not consistent with the idea that youth who are predisposed to engage in crime because they experience one risk factor are particularly likely to offend if they experience some other risk factor. Our analysis of statistical interactions is more consistent with the argument that race effects on violence are stronger for adolescents who would otherwise be at lower risk of violence: girls and adolescents from educated and intact families. This pattern is consistent with much, but not all, of the prior research cited earlier.

It is interesting to note that socioeconomic status, like race, is associated with violence but not other crime. Adolescents from lower status families are more likely to engage in most forms of violent crime but they are no more likely to engage in drug or property crime. In fact, adolescents with educated parents are *more* likely to engage in drug-related and minor property offenses. In addition, adolescents whose parents receive public assistance

are particularly likely to engage in armed violence. Thus, poverty *and* race are most strongly related to armed violence.

We also examined crime patterns for Hispanic adolescents, a neglected topic in the literature. The extensive race/ethnicity questions and the large sample size of AddHealth allowed us to examine delinquency among a variety of Hispanic groups, and disentangle race from ethnic effects. This has not been done before. The results show that most Hispanic groups have similar crime rates as Anglos, suggesting that violence is not associated with machismo Hispanic culture. Puerto Ricans are a notable exception: they are more likely to commit a variety of crimes than Anglos. Their rates of unarmed violence and armed robbery are particularly high, suggesting some violence specialization.<sup>6</sup> However, the pattern is not as clear as it is for African Americans, as they are also more likely to commit minor property offenses. At any rate, our results suggest that it is important to distinguish different Hispanic groups when studying crime and delinquency. Unfortunately, most crime surveys group all Hispanics into the same category.

Measurement error is always an important issue in research that relies on self-reports. The evidence cited earlier suggests that computer assisted method used in AddHealth yields higher rates of reporting of deviant behavior than self-administered questionnaires. In addition, the race differences we observe have been observed with arrest and victimization data, although those studies lack adequate controls and do not disentangle effects on violence from effects on serious crime. Finally, it is difficult to imagine how measurement error could account for either the violence differential or the statistical interactions. It seems unlikely, for example, that African Americans over-report violent

<sup>5</sup>The analyses are based on 16,672 assaults from a pooled sample (1993-1998).

<sup>6</sup>We also examined statistical interactions between Puerto Rican background and the other demographic variables. None were statistically significant.

behavior but not other criminal behavior, and that this bias is particularly strong for girls and adolescents from intact or middle-class families. However, it may be that, because of measurement error, this survey is not sensitive enough to detect differences in non-violent crime but that these differences are not as strong as race differences in violence.

Our study is also limited by the fact that it is based on a school sample. Serious delinquents are under-sampled because some of them have dropped out of school. In addition, Blacks and Hispanics are more likely to drop out of school than non-Hispanic Whites (Hauser et al., 2000). Note, however, that race differences in violence are just as strong at younger ages before adolescents are likely to leave school. Another potential limitation is our reliance on a self-report survey. Minor forms of delinquency are likely to have a stronger influence on results from self-report surveys than serious forms of delinquency because they are much more frequent. It is not clear how these sampling biases would affect our results. Perhaps we would have found some race differences in serious non-violent delinquency if the category focused on the most serious property and drug offenses. It would still be necessary to explain why the race difference in violence is so much greater.

### Implications for Specific Theories

Our main goal in this research was to describe racial patterns of adolescent offending and to determine whether theories of crime or violence could explain them. Our results suggest that neither strain theory nor control theories, nor the social disorganization approach can explain the *net* effects of race that we observed since they imply race differences in a variety of offenses, not just violent offenses (e.g., Agnew, 1987; Hirschi, 1969; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Sampson and Wilson, 1995). Strain, control, and

social disorganization could have indirect effects, however. For example, it may be that a subculture of violence develops in a social disorganized neighborhood. But then one must explain why only attitudes toward violence are affected. Should not a subculture of delinquency or an “oppositional culture” also develop in these neighborhoods and lead to more criminal behavior generally (e.g., Rose and McClain, 1998)? Note also that our results say nothing about the general validity of these theories. For example, control theories may very well explain individual differences or the effects of growing up in single-parent families or social disorganized neighborhoods. Our purpose was only to examine whether crime or violence theories can explain the race differences in offending that remain when other demographic variables are controlled.

Our results point to theoretical explanations that focus on violence. For example, frustration-aggression theories could possibly explain race differences in violence but then one must interpret most violence by African Americans as displaced aggression, since most of it is directed at other blacks. Studies of violent disputes, however, suggest that offenders typically target their adversaries, not innocent third parties (Luckenbill, 1977; Tedeschi and Felson, 1994). In addition, frustration-aggression approaches cannot easily account for our finding that race differences in armed robbery—generally recognized as instrumental violence—are just as strong as race differences in assault. Finally, prior research suggests that blacks are no more likely than whites to engage in verbal aggression (e.g., Steadman and Felson, 1984; Atkin et al., 2002; Harris, 1992). A frustration-aggression argument implies that blacks should be more likely to engage in all types of expressive aggression, not just its relatively rare physical manifestation. In general, frustration-aggression approaches are not supported by the test of discriminant predictions.

The contagion process implied in Anderson’s (1999) “code of the streets” might help explain

race differences in violence. Structural or historical factors may have led to high crime rates in African American communities, providing a starting mechanism. For example, the association between race and poverty, urban residence, and single parent households may have led initially to group differences in violence and other crime. Violence may then have spread in these communities because of residential segregation and because violence is more contagious than other crime. The contagiousness is due to an “adversary effect:” the threat of violence leads adversaries to use violence to protect themselves and to retaliate when attacked. A competitive or adversarial process, implied in Anderson’s code of the streets, produces more contagion than peer support or sub-cultural beliefs do alone. Adversary effects also lead to an arms race and therefore help explain the strong race differences in armed violence.

The fact that we did not find evidence that race effects are stronger in urban areas might be viewed as contrary to the idea of adversary effects implied in Anderson’s approach. Note, however, that our measure of urban residence is based on population density not location in an “inner city” or residential segregation. Future research should examine whether violence is particularly likely to spread in segregated African American communities.

A competitive contagion process, however, cannot explain strong race differences in committing robbery or sexual assault, race differences in the use of physical punishment by parents, or race differences in violence observed in colleges and prisons (e.g., Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997; Gil, 1970; Volkwein et al., 1995; Harer and Steffensmeier, 1996). These patterns imply some degree of internalization of norms and attitudes conducive to violence among African Americans. They imply a type of contagion produced by differential association or a subculture of violence (e.g., Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1967). While research on race differences in attitudes toward violence yields mixed results, attitudes regarding

violence are complex and contingent on circumstances, and measuring them is difficult (see, e.g., Blumenthal et al., 1972; Rossi et al., 1974; Erlanger, 1974; Luckenbill and Doyle, 1989; Markowitz and Felson, 1998; Wolfgang et al., 1985; Cao et al., 1997).

More general theories of human behavior—social learning and rational choice—can explain race differences, but they must posit some process that produces differences in violence alone. In fact, the contagion and sub-cultural arguments just described are based on rational choice and social learning perspectives. Our point is that it is necessary to examine variation in the social learning of violence, not crime. Finally, the routine activities approach (e.g., Felson, 1994) could account for differences in effects on violent and non-violent crime if the opportunities to commit these crimes vary by race. Violent crime is different from other crimes in that it requires personal contact between offender and victim and poses a greater risk of reprisal for potential guardians who intervene. Perhaps, Black communities are more likely than White communities to bring potential offenders and victims into contact in places where potential guardians are afraid to intervene. On the other hand, the evidence showing race differences in violence in prisons and universities is difficult for the routine activities theory to explain.

With the exception of poverty, violent crime may be the most important issue in the study of race in American society. Yet, perhaps because of the sensitivity of this issue, the research literature is limited. Our research suggests that there are race differences in violence, not crime generally, net of other social-demographic factors, and that we need to consider theories of violence rather than theories of crime in order to understand these patterns. Blacks and Whites in American society differ in their use of physical forms of aggression, not in their tendency to break rules or in their intention to do harm. We have not yet found the house, but we think we know what street it is on.



## Appendix A

*Armed Violence (1 item):* “Have you ever used a weapon in a fight?”

*Unarmed Violence (2 items):* “In the past 12 months, how often did you get into a serious physical fight?”

“During the past 12 months, how often did you get into a physical fight?”

*Group Violence (1 item):* “In the past 12 months, how often did you take in a fight where a group of your friends was against another group?”

*Cause Serious Injury (1 item):* “In the past 12 months, how often did you hurt someone badly enough to need bandages or care from a doctor or nurse?”

*Armed Robbery (1 item):* “In the past 12 months, how often did you use or threaten to use a weapon to get something from someone?”

*Sell Drugs (1 item):* “In the past 12 months, how often did you sell marijuana or other drugs?”

*Use Drugs (4 items):* “During your life, how many times have you used cocaine?”

“How old were you when you tried marijuana for the first time? If you never tried marijuana, enter ‘0.’”

“How old were you when you tried inhalants, such as glue or solvents, for the first time? If you never tried inhalants such as these, enter ‘0.’”

“How old were you when you first tried any other type of drug, such as LSD, PCP, ecstasy, mushrooms, speed, ice, heroin, or pills without a doctor’s prescription? If you never tried any other type of illegal drug, enter ‘0.’”

*Serious Property Crime (3 items):* “In the past 12 months, how often did you go into a house or building to steal something?”

“In the past 12 months, how often did you steal something worth more than \$50?”

“In the past 12 months, how often did you drive a car without its owner’s permission?”

*Minor Property Crime (4 items):* “In the past 12 months, how often did you paint graffiti or signs on someone else’s property or in a public place?”

“In the past 12 months, how often did you deliberately damage property that did not belong to you?”

“In the past 12 months, how often did you take something from a store without paying for it?”

“In the past 12 months, how often did you steal something worth less than \$50?”

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. According to the authors, what type of theoretical explanations best explain race differences in offending when controlling for other demographic variables, such as gender and race?
2. Discuss how the limitations of this study could possibly affect the conclusions reached by the authors?
3. Do you think that the authors make a convincing argument for the need to distinguish between different Hispanic groups when studying crime and delinquency? If so, how can this obscure the results of previous studies conducted examining this relationship?



## READING

In the early 1990s, building on Robert Merton’s classic strain theory, Robert Agnew proposed his general strain theory—or the notion that there are more than economic strains that matter in influencing criminal offending. He suggested offending occurs because of the failure to achieve positively valued outcomes, the removal of positively valued outcomes, and the introduction of negative or noxious stimuli. By the early 2000s Agnew had refined his theory and included racial discrimination as a potential stressor that contributes to offending among African Americans. In this article, Kaufman and his collaborators (including Agnew) flesh out exactly how general strain theory can be used to better understand racial differences in criminal offending.

### ***A General Strain Theory of Racial Differences in Criminal Offending***

Joanne M. Kaufman, Cesar J. Rebellon, Sherod Thaxton, and Robert Agnew

**SOURCE:** Kaufman, J. M., Rebellon, C. J., Thaxton, S., & Agnew, R. (2008). A general strain theory of racial differences in criminal offending. *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 41(3), 421–437. Reprinted with permission of the authors.

Since the publication of Agnew's (1992) foundational paper on General Strain Theory (GST), GST has garnered much empirical support (see Agnew, 2006 for review). Scholars have further built on Agnew's foundation by applying GST's insights to several key correlates of crime including age, sex, community, school and the family (e.g., see Agnew, 2006, for review). Although a few recent empirical pieces have highlighted how greater exposure to certain types of serious strains may aid in explaining racial differences in criminal offending (Eitle & Turner, 2003; Kaufman, 2005; Simons, Chen, Stewart, & Brody, 2003), researchers have yet to fully extend GST to examine these differences.

While race is a social construct (Duster, 2003; Hawkins, 1996), scholars have long recognised its impact in various areas including poverty (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2007), discrimination (Feagin, 1991), mental health (Massey, 2004; Willie, Kramer, & Brown, 1974), educational attainment (Epps, 1995), family structure (Cherlin, 1992) and interpersonal victimisation (US Department of Justice, 2006). Criminologists, however, have constructed relatively little theory to explain racial differences in crime, and the major theories that address this topic are at the macro level. Although some recent researchers have explored contextual and multilevel models to empirically explain racial differences in offending (McNulty & Bellair, 2003a, 2003b; Sampson, Morenoff, & Raudenbush, 2005), these models have been driven by macro theorising with consideration of social capital and social control oriented processes at the individual level. We believe that individual level motivational processes contribute to a fuller explanation of the race–crime relationship and require explicit theorising.

In this article, we first assess racial differences in offending in the United States by reviewing the primary criminological data sources. Although our focus is on the United States, we believe that these ideas have implications for group differences in other contexts with

racially diverse and indigenous populations, such as Australia and New Zealand. Because existing literature concerning racial differences in offending in the United States focuses almost exclusively on African Americans, we similarly limit our own focus. Second, we briefly discuss prior accounts of the race–crime relationship and how GST complements these theories. Third, we argue that African Americans experience more and qualitatively different types of strain than Whites, particularly those types of strain most conducive to crime, and that African Americans are more likely to cope with strain through crime.

### Are There Racial Differences in Offending?

Three primary data sources in the US provide information on race and crime: arrest, victimisation and self-report data. African Americans have been disproportionately represented among arrestees in the US criminal justice system since the mid-19th century (Du Bois, 1899, 1904; Hawkins, 1995). Comprising close to 13% of the US population in 2006, African Americans accounted for 28% of all offence arrests and 39.3% of violent crime arrests, including 50.9% of homicide arrests and 56.3% of robbery arrests (US Department of Justice, 2007). Though discrimination may account for a portion of African American arrest statistics (see Walker, Spohn, & DeLone, 2000), criminologists generally argue that racial differences in arrests cannot be explained solely by discrimination (e.g., Hawkins, Laub, & Lauritsen, 1998; Hindelang, 1978; Sampson & Lauritsen, 1997).

The most recent National Crime Victimization Survey data indicate that victims perceived 25.3% of single offenders and 33.9% of offenders in multiple offender victimisations to be African American (US Department of Justice, 2006). Similar to arrest statistics, the percentage varied depending upon the crime, with

offenders perceived as black in 47.7% of the robberies and 22% of the assaults (US Department of Justice, 2006). Although victims of crime may be incorrect in the assessment of race due to the stressful circumstances of the incident and the common stereotypes of offenders as people of colour, victimisation data parallel arrest data with African Americans being disproportionately represented as offenders.

While early self-report surveys did not reveal a significant relationship between race and crime (e.g., Elliott & Voss, 1974; Williams & Gold, 1972), more recent self-report studies demonstrate that African American and Hispanic youths are disproportionately prone to engage in serious violence (Kelley, Huizinga, Thornberry, & Loeber, 1997; Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). Given these three key data sources, criminologists should not ignore the evidence of racial differences in offending in the United States, particularly for crimes of interpersonal violence (Hawkins et al., 1998). There is also evidence of a similar relationship of disproportionate offending and victimisation among Black and indigenous populations in many advanced democracies such as Canada, New Zealand and Australia (Broadhurst, 1997; Doone, 2000; Tonry, 1997). This recognition does not negate the existence of discrimination at all levels of the criminal justice system, but it does support the utility of exploring theoretical explanations for racial disparities in offending.

### How Have Prior Theories Explained Racial Differences?

Prior attempts to explain racial differences in offending have been primarily at the macro level and typically involve variants of either social disorganisation theory or subcultural violence theories. Social disorganisation research focuses on how structural barriers (e.g., poverty, residential mobility, single-parent households) impede social networks and the social control of

crime, suggesting that African Americans engage in more crime than Whites because they are more likely to live in neighbourhoods with those characteristics (Sampson & Wilson, 1995). Recent researchers have expanded on this theory to consider contextual and multi-level processes whereby structural community measures and individual-level measures (demographic, social capital, social control) affect levels of individual violence (McNulty & Bellair, 2003a, 2003b; Sampson, Morenoff, & Raudenbush, 2005). While social disorganisation theory and the recent multi-level modelling strategies account for a significant portion of the racial differences in offending, they do not offer a complete explanation.

According to subcultural violence theories (e.g., Anderson, 1999; Wolfgang & Ferracuti, 1967), many urban Americans have embraced a system of values conducive to violence under certain circumstances, particularly overt challenges to individuals' reputations. Thus, the race-crime relationship stems from African Americans' disproportionate exposure to beliefs and values that condone violence in the pursuit of status maintenance. The evidence concerning subcultural theories is mixed (e.g., Cao, Adams, & Jensen, 1997; Felson, Liska, South, & McNulty, 1994). Recent researchers have considered how the structure of communities (from social disorganisation theory) may impact neighbourhood cultural processes that influence violence (see Anderson, 1999; Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003).

While we recognise the merits of the above theoretical research traditions, two factors may render them incomplete explanations of racial differences in offending. First, social disorganisation theory (and multi-level variants) does not provide adequate discussion of those motivational processes that may increase crime. Following Agnew (1999), we believe that complete explanations of crime in general, and of the race-crime relationship in particular, require a treatment of both those forces that serve to control *and* promote crime. Second, dominant explanations of racial differences in offending



have only begun to link macro-level considerations to the individual level of analysis and have focused primarily on social control processes (e.g., McNulty & Bellair, 2003a, 2003b; Sampson et al., 2005). We believe, however, that the full influence of community-level variables can be best understood by explicitly examining their effects on multiple aspects of the lives of a community's individual residents (see Kaufman, 2005). Below, we discuss the ways in which GST may be able to address the above issues.

## Can GST Help Explain Racial Differences in Offending?

### General Strain Theory

GST is most clearly distinguished from competing crime theories by its assertion that negative experiences and relationships motivate and promote criminal behaviour. While control theorists would argue that African Americans are more prone to engage in violent crime because their bond to society is weaker than Whites (e.g., Hirschi, 1969), learning theorists would argue that African Americans are disproportionately prone to form positive relationships with violent peers (e.g., Akers, 1998). A GST explanation of racial differences in offending instead implies that African Americans experience disproportionate strain in the social environment and/or have fewer resources for coping with strain in conventional ways.

Agnew (1992) argues that crime may result from a broad range of strains: those resulting from an actual or anticipated (1) failure to achieve positively valued outcomes, (2) removal of positively valued outcomes and (3) imposition of negative or noxious stimuli. Agnew contends that each of these strains may result in negative emotions that trigger criminal behaviour aimed at lowering or eliminating strain. Strain, however, does not inevitably result in crime. Rather, the impact of strain is conditioned by a number of

variables, including whether the strain is attributed to others, the extent of an individual's legitimate coping resources, the level of conventional social support and an individual's predisposition toward crime. Specifically, Agnew argues that individuals who attribute their strain to others are more likely to experience anger and react with crime. Likewise, those who possess significant cognitive, emotional and social coping resources may be better able to cope with strain in a noncriminal manner. Agnew further argues that individuals who are restrained by a high degree of social control (see Hirschi, 1969) or who do not associate with delinquent peers (see Akers, 1998) will be less prone to cope with strain through crime.

While preliminary tests indicate that many of the types of strain listed by Agnew are related to crime, more recent empirical tests highlight the fact that strain and anger have a strong impact on violence (see Agnew, 2006; Mazerolle & Piquero, 1997; Mazerolle, Burton, Cullen, Evans, & Payne, 2000). Given the promise of recent empirical research concerning GST, we believe GST merits investigation as an account of racial differences in offending.

### Do African Americans Experience More/Different Strains?

Two major ways in which GST would explain higher levels of violence among African Americans is by arguing that African Americans experience more and qualitatively different types of strains than Whites, particularly those types of strain most conducive to crime. Agnew (2001) recently clarified GST by pointing out that strains are most conducive to crime when they are perceived as unjust (e.g., discrimination), seen as high in magnitude (e.g., excessive discipline, criminal victimisation), associated with low social control (e.g., erratic parental supervision of children) and create incentive or pressure to engage in criminal coping (e.g., work in the secondary labour market). We thus

focus on areas of strains that reflect those four characteristics and are relevant to the study of race and crime: economic strain, family strain, educational strain, criminal victimisation, discrimination and community strain.

### Economic Strain

African Americans are more likely than Whites to be poor, unemployed and employed in jobs in the secondary labour market (Conley, 2001; DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2007; Gittleman & Wolff, 2004; Sullivan, 1989; US Department of Labor, 2008). While the relationship between economic strain and crime is complex (see Cernkovich, Giordano, & Rudolph, 2000; Tittle & Meier, 1990), some evidence suggests that severe poverty and chronic unemployment contribute to crime (Colvin, 2000; Massey, 1990). The same is true of work in the secondary labour market, with such work being characterised by low pay, few benefits, unsteady employment and poor working conditions, including low autonomy, high demands and coercive forms of control (Bausman & Goe, 2004; Colvin, 2000; Crutchfield, 1989). The greater economic strain experienced by African Americans may increase the likelihood of striking out at others or engaging in income-generating crime like robbery, the crime with the highest levels of disproportionate offending by African Americans (US Department of Justice, 2006, 2007).

It is important to note, however, that economic strain may be more likely to lead to crime in some conditions than others. Drawing on Agnew (1999), economic strain may be most conducive to crime when individuals are surrounded by advantaged others who are visible and perceived as similar. This is more likely under certain conditions, such as when high levels of inequality exist between and within neighbourhoods, and when economic returns to education vary greatly across individuals and groups (see Agnew, 1999, p. 135).

Economic strain is more likely to be seen as unjust under such conditions and is therefore more likely to generate crime.

In addition, a GST account of racial differences in offending suggests that criminologists follow the lead of family researchers, who employ more sophisticated measures of economic strain than do most criminologists. In particular, while most criminological research measures economic strain using one- or two-item scales tapping primarily a family's overall income at one time point, family researchers employ more precise and dynamic measures of economic hardship including per capita family income, debt-to-asset ratio, demotion and job changes over the course of a given period (see Agnew, 2001; Conley, 1999; Oliver & Shapiro, 1995). Such measures may more precisely gauge those economic hardships most associated with dissatisfaction.

### Family Strain

Though the family context is generally associated with control theories, GST has much to say about the family's impact on crime. Many types of parental strain (e.g., residence in high-poverty communities, economic hardship, work in the secondary labour market, divorce) increase the likelihood of poor parenting practices, such as harsh and inconsistent discipline (Agnew et al., 2000; Patterson & Forgatch, 1990; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992). These parenting practices, in turn, contribute to strain in children. Such strain leads directly to juvenile crime, or indirectly leads to crime by weakening the bonds between parents and children (Agnew et al., 2000; McLoyd, 1990; Patterson, 1982).

There is some evidence that African American parents display lower levels of warmth and use more inconsistent discipline with their children than White families (Pinderhughes, Nix, Foster, & Jones, 2001).

However, once researchers control for the neighbourhood context (levels of poverty, residential stability, public services, social networks and levels of danger), these racial differences in parenting practices disappear (Pinderhughes et al., 2001). This research demonstrates that what many researchers have assumed to be racial differences between family practices are really neighbourhood context differences. Since African Americans are much more likely to live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Sampson & Wilson, 1995), they are differentially exposed to various strains that may produce poorer parenting styles. While the extended family networks of many African American families may ameliorate some of these problems, these networks may also impede these families climbing out of poverty and leaving bad neighbourhoods (Cherlin, 1992). Thus, a GST explanation of racial differences in offending suggests that African American parents experience disproportionate strain that may impact their parenting. Such strained parents are likely to increase the probability of children experiencing various forms of strain, thus increasing the chances of delinquency.

## Educational Strain

The educational context is another key area for examining African Americans' greater exposure to strain and qualitatively distinct types of strain. In the US schooling system, African Americans may experience a variety of problems including poor grades, unfair discipline, negative relations with teachers and interpersonal problems with other students. In mixed race schools, race may serve as a characteristic that determines whether an individual will be placed in a high or low educational track independent of the individual's academic ability (Irvine & York, 1993). Numerous scholars suggest that low tracks often provide qualitatively

inferior curricula to students of disadvantaged or minority backgrounds (Epps, 1995; Oakes, 1985). If African American students perceive that their placement in lower tracks is unjust, that experience itself will likely serve as a strain (Agnew, 2001). Further, the often poorer quality education in those lower tracks mixed with teachers' lower expectations may additionally strain these students. Some teachers expect African American and lower class students to perform worse academically (Cooper & Moore, 1995), and teachers of a different race are significantly more likely than African American teachers to rate African American students as exhibiting problem behaviours (Zimmerman, Khoury, Vega, Gil, & Warheit, 1995). These teacher expectations likely impact interactions with African American students and contribute to further negative relations with both teachers and peers that may increase in magnitude over time.

African Americans are also more likely than Whites to attend racially segregated schools, especially in central cities and rural areas (Bankston III & Caldas, 1996; Kozol, 1991). Ample research demonstrates that schools with a large percentage of minority students have lower levels of achievement (Bankston III & Caldas, 1996), fewer resources for academics and therefore fewer quality teachers (Anyon, 1997; Kozol, 1991). In fact, Whites in primarily minority schools also do worse than their counterparts in majority White schools (Bankston III & Caldas, 1996). Thus, African Americans appear to experience more educational strain than their White counterparts and different types of educational strain that Whites never have the misfortune to experience. While these higher levels of educational strain are partly due to lower socioeconomic status, the experiences of educational strain and bad schools further engender the continuation of lower socioeconomic status among African Americans including work in the secondary labour market and the other economic strains outlined above.

## Criminal Victimization

In addition to economic, family and educational strains, African Americans are more likely than Whites to experience noxious stimuli like criminal victimisation. African Americans are victimised at a rate 37.3% higher than Whites for violent crimes (US Department of Justice, 2006) and account for 49.5% of murder and non-negligent manslaughter victims (US Department of Justice, 2007). In particular, African American youths between the ages of 12–19 are among the most vulnerable to serious violent crime (e.g., murder, rape, robbery etc.) with a victimisation rate 48% higher than White youth aged 12–19 (US Department of Justice, 2006), and 58% of African American murder victims are below the age of 30 (US Department of Justice, 2007). African American households are burglarised at a rate 22.4% higher than White households (US Department of Justice, 2006). These high levels of African American victimisation occur in both the nation's inner cities and in suburbia (Logan & Stults, 1999). Moreover, aside from experiencing more personal victimisation than Whites, African Americans are also more likely to experience vicarious strain via the victimisation of close friends and relatives. Youths who witness violence, particularly violence perpetrated against their friends or family, are at higher risk of victimising others (Attar, Guerra, & Tolan, 1994).

Since victimisation is among the most serious type of negative experience, it is highly likely to induce strain (Agnew, 2001; Brezina, 1998). It is also one of the types of strain most likely to engender a desire for retaliation and revenge, which offenders commonly report as the leading reasons for their own acts of violence (Agnew, 1990; Dawkins, 1997). While other research supports the strong association between victimisation and crime (e.g., Esbensen & Huizinga, 1991; Lauritsen, Sampson, & Laub, 1991), GST suggests that high rates of victimisation among African Americans can explain a portion of their disproportionate representation among violent

offenders. Eitle and Turner (2003) and Kaufman (2005), using regional and national self-report data (respectively), provide evidence in support of this argument.

## Discrimination

In addition to experiencing quantitatively more strain than Whites, African Americans may experience qualitatively unique forms of strain. While 36% of Whites reported experiencing at least one discriminatory event in their lifetime, 70% of African Americans reported such an experience (Forman, Williams, & Jackson, 1997). However, African Americans are not only more likely to experience discrimination, but are likely to experience it across a wide variety of situations including walking down the street, buying a house or car, seeking a job, eating at a restaurant, attending university and navigating many other everyday situations (Ayres & Siegelman, 1995; Farrell & Jones, 1988; Feagin, 1991; Forman et al., 1997; Kirschenman & Neckerman, 1991; Yinger, 1995). Often, these forms of discriminatory behaviour begin with children as young as age 3 (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 1996) and persist long after achieving middle-class status (Feagin, 1991). Agnew (2001) suggests that prejudice and discrimination may be among those strains most conducive to crime-provoking negative emotions, and research has linked aggregate discrimination at the macro level to homicide rates (Messner, 1989) and racial segregation to high rates of Black-on-Black crime (Messner & South, 1986; Shihadeh & Flynn, 1996). At the micro level, Simons et al. (2003) found that experiences of discrimination are positively associated with delinquency among African American youth.

African Americans also experience discrimination on the part of police officers and other law enforcement officials who are charged with protecting the social order (Miller, 1996). Parker, Onyekwulufe, and Murty (1995) found that African Americans living in high crime neighbourhoods in large cities have frequent contact

with police but also have less favourable impressions of the police. African American college students often believe that police officers arbitrarily and disproportionately stop them on campus (Anderson, 1990). In addition, African Americans are more likely to be arrested if the victim of a given crime is White and case evidence is weak (Petersilia, 1983). Even African American children of prominent middle-class doctors and lawyers are disproportionately subject to police detention or arrest, net of delinquent behaviour (Miller, 1996). Further, African Americans are shot and killed by police much more frequently than Whites (Walker, Spohn, & DeLone, 2000).

### Community Strain

Aside from their greater probability of experiencing strain at the individual level, African Americans are disproportionately prone to live in urban neighbourhoods characterised by high concentrations of economic disadvantage and high rates of violence (e.g., Krivo & Peterson, 1996; Massey, 1990; Shihadeh & Flynn, 1996). At present, the social disorganisation perspective dominates explanations of the relationships among urbanisation, concentrated economic disadvantage and community crime rates (e.g., Sampson & Wilson, 1995). However, recent empirical research suggests that indicators of social disorganisation (low participation in informal organisations and weak social network structures) do not explain the entire relationship between urbanisation and community crime rates (Veysey & Messner, 1999). GST may therefore offer several important insights that can supplement social disorganisation theory to better explain racial differences in offending at the macro level.

For example, GST suggests that urbanisation and concentrated disadvantage may be associated with a number of strains above and beyond those that result from economic strain at the individual level of analysis, such as strain

resulting from the interaction of individuals who may already be angry as a result of their own personal economic and social situations. When two individuals already have a 'short fuse' as a result of individual-level strains, Agnew (1999) suggests that their interaction is likely to serve as a further strain for both parties, thereby amplifying the probability that even the slightest conflict will escalate. Luckenbill (1977), in fact, suggests that violence is often not the result of one motivated perpetrator's behaviour so much as it is the result of a motivated perpetrator interacting with a determined 'victim' whose resistance yields an escalation of conflict. To the degree that strain is responsible for the escalation of such conflict, GST predicts that African Americans, who are disproportionately prone to live in areas of concentrated disadvantage, will be disproportionately prone to engage in interpersonal violence.

In addition, GST suggests that concentrated populations of African Americans may evoke greater discriminatory treatment than do individual African Americans. Such treatment, particularly when attributed to specific others who act with intent, increases collective strain. Massey (1990) suggests that this may occur for African Americans more than for other ethnic groups in a self-fulfilling cycle of prejudice. Specifically, while Whites may benefit economically from discriminatory residential segregation, the resulting concentrations of African American poverty may serve to reinforce White beliefs about racial pathology among minority groups, in turn promoting further prejudice and discrimination (Massey, 1990). Moreover, research suggests that income inequality is associated with violent crime, particularly when the inequality is linked to race (e.g., Blau & Blau, 1982). GST provides a coherent framework in which these findings can be integrated, and suggests that future research test the degree to which negative emotions mediate the association between urban inequality and violent crime at the macro level.



Though less work has examined the effects of discriminatory community strain on African Americans in nonurban contexts, GST suggests that they too may experience disproportionate strain at the community level. In particular, African Americans may feel unwelcome in certain suburban neighbourhoods or may experience overt discrimination that prevents them from moving into certain neighbourhoods (Massey & Denton, 1988). Those African Americans who are able to move to the suburbs still experience higher levels of residential segregation than other ethnic groups (Massey & Denton, 1988). Researchers have yet to examine directly the implications of such findings for crime among suburban African Americans. Thus, in addition to supplementing a social disorganisation account of the race–crime relationship in inner cities, GST suggests avenues of research concerning race and crime in other geographic regions.

### Are There Racial Differences in Reactions to Strain?

While the above discussion delineated the manner in which African Americans may experience disproportionate amounts of strain in the social environment, GST makes further predictions concerning racial differences in offending. GST argues that African Americans are more likely to react to a given strain with crime than Whites because they are more likely to experience such strain as stressful or upsetting and are more likely to view it as unjust.

Currently, only limited research examines emotional experience and expression among African Americans. To cite one example, Armstead, Lawler, Gorden, Cross, and Gibbons (1989) measured the blood pressure, anger experience and anger expression of African American college students after viewing videos

showing anger-provoking nonracist situations, racist situations involving African Americans and neutral situations. Although respondents reported significant anger experience for both the nonracist anger-provoking situation and the racist situation, respondents' blood pressure increased significantly only after viewing the portrayals of racism.

Research also suggests that African Americans experience a greater sense of overall alienation than do other racial/ethnic groups in the United States even when they experience personal economic success (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996; Cose, 1993). Bobo and Hutchings (1996), in fact, find that African Americans' alienation *increases* as their socioeconomic status increases and that African Americans feel more threatened than other racial/ethnic groups by interracial competition for socioeconomic resources. While increases in socioeconomic status are likely to protect Whites from many negative experiences, African Americans often do not see those benefits, such that well-off African Americans still experience discrimination and are at higher risk of victimisation than comparable Whites (Feagin, 1991; Logan & Stults, 1999). Such experiences and the resultant negative emotions may be exacerbated when young African Americans perceive a given instance of deprivation to be based on discriminatory, prejudiced or otherwise unjust circumstances (Brown, 1998). In sum, limited research suggests that African Americans, perhaps by virtue of their traditional marginalisation, experience more *subjective* strain than members of other groups when confronted with the same objective stimuli, and may be more likely to react with anger.

### Cognitive Attributions

Agnew (1992) suggests that the link between strain and crime depends, in part, on how an individual chooses to interpret strain. If a young male loses a job and believes the loss to



be the just result of his own behaviour, such strain may not contribute to a criminal response. However, if he believes the lost job to be the unjust result of racial discrimination, he may become more motivated to cheat a system or society that he perceives to be inequitable. In addition, an individual's cognitive attributions may direct the valence of general emotional arousal such that the same generalised arousal could produce either anger or amusement, depending on the behaviour of a subject's peers (Schachter & Singer, 1962). Similarly, Bernard (1990) suggests that the unique position of disadvantaged inner city African Americans promotes arousal that they will likely attribute to aggressive anger (also see Anderson, 1999). Thus, GST predicts that African Americans, more often than Whites, attribute failures and negative life experiences to unjust situational factors.

### Coping Resources and Social Support

Agnew (1992) also claims that social support and coping resources, such as problem-solving skills, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, condition the impact of strain on crime. According to GST, criminal behaviour results from a high ratio of strain to coping resources, rather than from strain alone. While African Americans report higher levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy than their White peers (Tashakkori & Thompson, 1991), the disadvantaged status of many African Americans may provide them with fewer resources for coping with strain in legitimate ways. For example, research suggests that parents of low socioeconomic status are less likely to promote self-directed problem-solving ability in their children (see Gecas, 1979), and that individuals of low education and income are less likely to possess good stress management skills (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Thus, while African American youth are strengthened by higher

levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy, they may be hindered by insufficient problem-solving and stress management skills.

In addition to experiencing fewer personal resources for handling strain, African Americans may experience less social support in their families. For example, though 58% of African American youths lived in two-parent homes in 1970, a mere 38% lived in two-parent homes by 1990 (O'Hare, Pollard, Mann, & Kent, 1991). While African Americans have traditionally relied on extended families for social support to a greater degree than Whites (Cherlin, 1992), even those networks have been strained by the changing economic conditions in many cities in the United States from the 1970s onward that have produced pockets of concentrated, disadvantaged African Americans with little access to jobs and services and with higher rates of female-headed households (Massey, 1990; Wilson, 1978, 1987). To the degree that urban African American youth grow up in single-parent families (see Sampson, 1987) or lack extended family in the inner city (see Wilson, 1987), they may experience diminished social support networks with which to handle strain via non-criminal means.

### Beliefs and Values Conducive to Crime

GST suggests that strain is most likely to promote crime/violence among groups that hold values conducive to crime and violence, such as those embodied in the 'code of the street' (Anderson, 1999). Likewise, GST suggests that strain at the macro level may account for the origin of these values. Several researchers, for example, argue that many African American males find it difficult to achieve a masculine identity through legitimate channels. This is especially true of males in poor, inner-city communities where decent work is exceedingly scarce. As a consequence, such males may

attempt to achieve a masculine identity through illegitimate channels, like aggression (Anderson, 1999; Sampson & Wilson, 1995; Staples, 1982; Wilson, 1996). Following Agnew (1992), we suggest that strain is particularly conducive to crime among individuals who value physical toughness and associate with others who reinforce such values.

## Conclusions

Racial differences in offending have been widely documented but seldom explained. While most explanations focus on social control processes at the macro level (e.g., Sampson & Wilson, 1995) and have begun to link the macro and micro contexts (e.g., Sampson et al., 2005), empirical research has yet to find that such theories account for the entire race–crime relationship. GST, however, suggests an additional and complementary explanation that highlights the importance of emotional and motivational social psychological processes. GST argues that African Americans experience more and qualitatively unique types of strain than Whites, thus engendering more negative emotions. Further, it suggests that African Americans are especially prone to cope with those emotions through crime under certain conditions.

In particular, we argue that African Americans may experience a variety of disproportionate economic strains, but that only certain of these strains are likely to be associated with crime. We suggest that economic strain may impede consistent and effective parenting, and that family problems not only decrease social control but also increase juvenile strain. In addition, we suggest that African Americans are more likely than Whites to have negative educational experiences, experience criminal victimisation, experience discrimination and suffer from community strain. Finally,

we propose that African Americans may not only experience greater objective strain than Whites, but also react to the same objective strain with greater negative emotion. In particular, we point to conditions (low social support, inadequate problem-solving skills) under which African Americans might be disproportionately prone to cope with strain via criminal behaviour. We argue that GST has much to say about racial differences in offending and fills an important theoretical gap in the current literature. Finally, each of these contributions can guide future empirical research concerning racial differences in offending.

While this article offers important theoretical insight into explaining racial differences in offending, our focus has been limited to African American and White comparisons in the US context (similar to most literature on race and crime in the United States). Other scholars, however, have considered some of these issues for other races and ethnicity in the US context (see Kaufman, 2005; McNulty & Bellair, 2003a, 2003b), and this is an important area for future theoretical development and empirical research. There is also good reason to believe that many of these insights may be extended to racial differences in offending in other countries. Researchers have noted that some minority groups, especially Black and indigenous peoples, are overrepresented as crime victims and offenders in the criminal justice systems of many advanced democracies including Canada, England, France, the Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand (Broadhurst, 1997; Doone, 2000; Tonry, 1997). In particular, these issues are likely relevant for studies of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia and the Maori of New Zealand. Future research should explore extending the application of strain to racial differences in offending in other countries and contexts with a sensitivity toward important historical, cultural, and governmental differences.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. According to the authors, what factors are considered critical in general strain theory that are not discussed in previous criminological theories, such as social disorganization theory?
2. Based on the arguments made by the authors, do you believe that general strain theory provides the best explanation for racial differences in offending? Why or why not?
3. Agnew (1992) argued that strain causes a person to feel negative emotions, which in turn can result in that person turning to crime in order to alleviate the strain. Taking into account the general strain theory framework, what type of programs could be put in place to reduce strain and negative emotions or to both reduce or prevent offending?





## READING

In this article, Unnever and his colleagues revisit the classic research of Travis Hirschi. In doing so, they uncover findings that tell another story than the one told in *Causes of Delinquency* (1969). The authors suggest that Hirschi overlooked important findings related to race. In fact, they found that perceived discrimination was a predictor of delinquency. Going further, the authors argue that racial animus has long been present in the criminological literature as a potential correlate of crime. However, early minority theorists such as W. E. B. Du Bois who spoke of such connections received little attention from criminological theorists then or now. Nonetheless, the authors provide an argument for the discipline to consider the role of racial discrimination in offending among African Americans.

### ***Racial Discrimination and Hirschi's Criminological Classic***

*A Chapter in the Sociology of Knowledge*

James D. Unnever, Francis T. Cullen, Scott A. Mathers,  
Timothy E. McClure, and Marisa C. Allison

Not long ago, we were rummaging around in the Richmond Youth Project data set—kindly supplied by Travis Hirschi—that was used as the basis of Hirschi's (1969) criminological classic, *Causes of Delinquency*. We approached this adventure with no clear agenda, but we were aware that these data contained extensive measures of the “lived reality” of African Americans, including perceived racial discrimination. Because we were familiar with recent theory and research suggesting that these perceptions comprised a criminogenic risk factor, we wondered whether this also was true empirically for African American youths in the Richmond Youth Project data. Much like archaeologists digging into the past, we thus embarked on an expedition exploring this site of historic theoretical development in criminology.

Here we tell the story of what we discovered. This tale is framed within the sociology of knowledge. As Cole (1975) notes, science was once understood as an enterprise in which knowledge was produced in a steady march toward the unraveling of objective truth. Kuhn's (1962) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* challenged this view of steady scientific progress, arguing instead that science is marked by a succession of paradigms that rule until their collapse and replacement. Whether Kuhn's theory accurately describes the development of science, let alone the development of social sciences, such as criminology, is open to dispute (see, e.g., Lakatos & Musgrave, 1970). Regardless, his challenge to the traditional perspective opened up a floodgate of interest in documenting how the growth of knowledge is affected not only by the internal

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dynamics of a field's ideas but also by the social organization of a discipline and by the intersection of biography with the prevailing social context (Cole, 1975; see, e.g., Gouldner, 1970; Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 2006). In the end, a field's development is not ineluctable but socially constructed by the choices that scholars make. Topics are studied and advanced or are ignored and languish on the research vine; turning points are made or not made (see, e.g., Cullen, 2005; Laub, 2004).

Our story, then, is about a criminological road that was not taken—a turning point that might have been but, because it did not occur, impoverished our understanding of crime. There are four parts to this chapter in the sociology of knowledge. First, we revisit *Causes of Delinquency*. Using the Richmond Youth Project data, and by closely reproducing Hirschi's original analysis (albeit with multivariate techniques), we show that perceived racial discrimination is a robust predictor of delinquency. Based on more recent studies using rigorous research designs, we suggest that this finding is not idiosyncratic or due to the cross-sectional nature of Hirschi's data. It is a real effect that was not identified.

Second, this finding leads us to probe why Hirschi did not discover this relationship in his data. Importantly—and we want to be very clear on this point—we argue that unlike theorists whose racial bias shaped their science (Bruinius, 2006; Gould, 1981), Hirschi's blind spot with regard to discrimination was *not* tied to any racial animus. In fact, in *Causes of Delinquency*, he considered the possibility that racial discrimination might be criminogenic. However, this analysis, and his selection of some survey items from the Richmond Youth Project but not others, was guided by his effort to falsify Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) version of strain theory and to show the empirical vitality of his social bond theory. This narrow theoretical agenda thus limited the content of his analysis and made further probing of his data ostensibly theoretically irrelevant.

Third, we contend that Hirschi's omission was consequential for criminology. It is speculative, of course, to contemplate “what might have been” had Hirschi trumpeted in 1969 the finding that perceived racial discrimination places African American youth at risk for engaging in crime. Still, the late 1960s and early 1970s comprised a social context in which this message might well have fallen on receptive ears and inspired an important research agenda. Further, had Hirschi given this finding focused attention—as opposed to arguing that the causes of crime are general and not race specific—others would likely have paid attention. Over the past four decades, Hirschi has exerted a remarkable influence on criminological thinking and in defining research questions. During this period, he has been one of the most cited scholars in criminology (Cohn & Farrington, 2007; Cohn, Farrington, & Wright, 1998; Laub, 2002). His theoretical ideas are a staple of crime theory texts (see, e.g., Akers & Sellers, 2004; Cao, 2003; Lilly et al., 2006) and have generated a wealth of empirical investigations (Gottfredson, 2006; Kempf, 1993; Kubrin, Stucky, & Krohn, 2009; Pratt & Cullen, 2000). In recent years, Hirschi's self-control theory—a perspective introduced in 1990 with Michael Gottfredson—has earned much attention (Gottfredson, 2006; Pratt & Cullen, 2000; see also Taylor, 2001). But the ascendancy of this version of control theory has not undermined the continued vitality of social bond theory, which Hirschi set forth in 1969 in *Causes of Delinquency* (see, e.g., Sampson & Laub, 1993). Indeed, this book's enduring influence has earned it the status of a criminological classic.

Fourth and perhaps most important, we note that beyond Hirschi and “what might have been,” criminologists collectively ignored the possible criminogenic effects of racial discrimination until very recently. Hirschi was hardly alone in his limited interest in racial discrimination as a cause of delinquency; a generation of criminologists shares this stunning oversight. Indeed, despite residing in a discipline that

investigates the impact of race in other areas and whose professional ideology is progressive if not “politically correct,” criminologists—including those who reanalyzed the Richmond Youth Project data—strangely ignored this topic in the decades following the publication of *Causes of Delinquency*. As Agnew (2006a, p. 74) observes, although “discrimination based on race . . . is quite common in the United States,” scholars have “not devoted much attention to the effects of discrimination on individual offending.” In the discussion section, we return to this problem, commenting on how interest in the impact of racial discrimination on offending was likely deflected by strategic approaches to theory testing and by the social composition of the field of criminology that led to the “lived reality” of African Americans being ignored. The broader point, of course, is that the impact of perceived racial discrimination should receive more systematic investigation in the time ahead.

In short, there are factors that shape how individual scholars develop, test, and modify criminological theory—factors that often remain unknown to authors and their contemporaries. Within a sociology of knowledge framework, we thus undertake to illuminate the trajectory of one strand of theoretical development that, within control theory and criminology more generally, was knifed off and remained latent until recently. Toward this end, in the pages immediately below and as a prelude to presenting a reanalysis of Hirschi's data set, we first revisit his efforts to falsify strain theory and assess how this shaped his conclusions on racial discrimination. We then review how we were drawn to this project and how recent developments in criminology have guided our efforts.

## Revisiting Causes of Delinquency

### Attacking Strain Theory

A second line of inquiry, however, was more compelling. Hirschi (1969, pp. 172–173) showed

that high aspirations were invariably related to lower levels of delinquency and, notably, that low aspirations were a source of misconduct. This finding was contrary to strain theory's prediction that delinquency would occur only when high aspirations or success goals were present (albeit when they were blocked). Hirschi suggested that aspirations were a source of commitment that tied youngsters to the conventional order. Their presence prevented crime, whereas their absence fostered crime.

### Examining Racial Discrimination

It was within this theoretical context that Hirschi subsequently addressed the issue of the potential effects of racial discrimination. In *Delinquency and Opportunity*, Cloward and Ohlin (1960, p. 113) argued that delinquency was more likely when youths experienced “unjust deprivation.” A process of alienation would set in because “unjust deprivation can play a significant role in the withdrawal of attributions of legitimacy from official norms” (p. 117). Minority youths were particularly likely to develop unjust sentiments because they suffer “from discrimination” (p. 118). Indeed, “an increase in the visibility of external barriers to the advancement of Negroes heightens their sense of discrimination and justified withdrawal of attributions of legitimacy from conventional rules of conduct” (p. 121). Thus, those who blamed the system, rather than themselves, for their failure were more likely to respond criminally.

In this context, Hirschi was interested not in racial discrimination per se but rather in falsifying the causal claims that Cloward and Ohlin, as the chief representatives of strain theory, made about racial discrimination. Equipped with this constrained theoretical prism, *he did not search the Richmond Youth Project for all measures of discrimination and conduct a systematic assessment of the issue.*

Recall that the Richmond Youth Project data were collected in the mid-1960s, a period of tumultuous and contentious racial relations

in the USA. The research team for this study—of which Hirschi was a part—was not blind to the volatile nature of race relations in the 1960s. Indeed, they included nearly the same number of questions related to race relations as they devoted to measuring parenting. In fact, they assigned an entire section, Part III, to race relations, which was titled “Human Relations.” These survey items make the Richmond data set a rich source for examining whether perceived racial discrimination is related to adolescent offending.

Regardless, in his efforts to falsify strain theory, Hirschi (1969, p. 184) limited his analysis to test Cloward and Ohlin’s thesis linking delinquency to unjust deprivation/blame the system. His strategy was to start by measuring whether African American youths perceived racial discrimination as an external barrier. They were asked, “Do you think that any of the following things will keep you from getting the kind of job you want to have eventually?” Racial discrimination was one option that could be answered “yes, maybe, or no.” The youths also were asked about other potential obstacles to their success, which included “am not smart enough.” Again, the responses were “yes, maybe, or no.” Hirschi reasoned that if strain theory was correct, the highest rates of delinquency would be found among those who answered “yes” to racial discrimination and “no” to the item “am not smart enough.” That is, the “Negro boy convinced of his own competence and convinced that racial discrimination will prevent him from attaining his goals is, according to this [strain] hypothesis, a prime candidate for delinquency” (1969, p. 184). When the cross-tabulated responses to these questions were examined (1969, p. 184, Table 69), Hirschi concluded that “the general thrust of this test is not, however, in a direction favorable to the Cloward-Ohlin hypothesis” (p. 184). This was another nail in the strain theory coffin.

It is noteworthy that Hirschi did not deny that African American youths experienced racial bias. He noted, for example, that the

racial gap in delinquency was higher for official statistics than for self-reports. Among other conditions, this was due in part to the fact that police “patrol more heavily in Negro areas” and are prone to overestimate the extent to which African Americans commit crimes (1969, pp. 78-79). Still, although acknowledging that there are reasons for the differential official processing of youths by race, Hirschi (1969, p. 79) asserted that “there is no reason to believe that the causes of crime among Negroes are different from those among whites.”

In short, for Hirschi, the causes of crime are *general* and not *race-specific*. Hirschi thus presented data showing that the racial gap in delinquency between African Americans and whites was substantially explained when controls were introduced for “academic achievement” (1969, p. 80). “It follows,” Hirschi boldly continued, “*that we need not study Negro boys to determine the causes of their delinquency*” (1969, p. 80, emphasis added). In reaching this firm conclusion, he sought to foreclose any investigations that examined how experience with racial injustice—a factor fundamental in the lives of African Americans—might be implicated in the criminality of black youths.

### Digging Into the Past: An Expedition in Criminological Archaeology

Our reanalysis of Hirschi’s data was due to serendipity and context. Initially, one of us secured the data set from Professor Hirschi for use in a graduate seminar. There was no intent to illuminate Hirschi’s “omission” or to write this article. Once the data were in our hands, however, we were sensitized—apparently unlike previous researchers over the years—to recognize “ignored survey items” because of our ongoing scholarly interest in deep racial divisions in perceived injustice. As we began to dig into the data further, we were influenced by a small and recent literature that had taken up the issue of the potential criminogenic effects of racial discrimination. This scholarly context—partly theoretical, partly

empirical—guided our subsequent archaeology of the data from the Richmond Youth Project.

### Revitalizing Strain Theory

Asserting that strain is not a risk factor and that all causes of crime are general as did Hirschi diverts attention away from the racial experiences of youths. As we have argued, however, applying a strain theory paradigm to race and delinquency inevitably shines a light on the issue of racial discrimination. Indeed, in his efforts to revitalize the strain tradition through his general strain theory (GST), Agnew (2006b) has called for research to investigate whether racial discrimination is a noxious stimulus that pressures African Americans to offend. He observes that “discrimination based on ascribed characteristics” is among the “strains that are seldom examined in the literature” (p. 103). In fact, Agnew considers racial discrimination as a strain that is *highly* likely to cause crime because: it (1) is high in magnitude, (2) is perceived as unjust, (3) is associated with low control, and (4) creates pressure to engage in criminal coping.

Notably, GST does not ignore the importance of social bonds. GST posits that those with weak social bonds will be particularly susceptible to cope with strain through offending. In this context, GST would hypothesize that African American adolescents who have experienced racial discrimination and have weak social bonds are the ones most at risk for engaging in delinquency. As Agnew (2006a, p. 100) argues, those low in social bonds are more likely to offend because they “have little to lose” if detected breaking the law and are less likely to have relationships with others who “will teach them coping skills or provide them with social support.” We explore this possibility in the current study.

### Recent Research

As we initiated our exploration of the Richmond Youth Project data set, we wished to learn if it contained a “hidden treasure”—evidence that

perceived racial discrimination was criminogenic—that Hirschi or subsequent scholars might have uncovered. If so, then in and of itself, this fact is important historically to the field of criminology. Still, as was true with Hirschi's original study reported in *Causes of Delinquency*, we knew that the Richmond data had limitations. Thus, our reanalysis could be questioned for limited generalizability (the Project was conducted in one location in the 1960s) and for being based on cross-sectional data. Accordingly, we believed that faith in our findings would be enhanced if it could be shown that they converge with existing research—that is, if it could be demonstrated that the relationships we report generalize across time, places, and methodologies. This appears to be the case.

Based on an analysis of a longitudinal data set consisting of African American families residing in Georgia and Iowa, researchers have marshaled compelling evidence that perceived racial discrimination predicts higher rates of offending among African American youths (Brody et al, 2006; Gibbons, Gerrard, Cleveland, Wills, & Brody, 2004; Simons, Chen, Stewart, & Brody, 2003; Simons et al., 2006; Stewart, Schreck, & Simons, 2006a, 2006b). Scholars have reproduced these findings using other longitudinal data sets (see, e.g., McCord & Ensminger, 2003), lending credence to the conclusion that perceived racial discrimination is a cause and not a consequence of offending. Further, over the past 30 years, other disciplines have documented the potential deleterious effects of racial discrimination on African Americans over a wide range of outcomes, including diminished mental health, stress, high blood pressure, cognitive processing, substance abuse, depression, and hypertension (for reviews of this literature, see Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003).

In sum, this body of research suggests that the connection between perceived racial discrimination and misconduct was an empirical fact waiting to be uncovered and studied in detail.



As we suggest, Hirschi's *Causes of Delinquency* offered an important missed opportunity to inspire interest in this issue. This claim rests on the assumption that this empirical finding showing the criminogenic effects of perceived racial discrimination was, in fact, latent within his data and could have been discovered. We turn to this matter shortly.

## Research Strategy

We first explore whether personal experiences with racial discrimination—a negative relationship and unjust form of a noxious stimuli—are related to African American offending (Agnew, 2006a, 2006b). We find that African American youths are more likely to offend if they perceive that they have been treated badly because of their race. To assess the robustness of this association, we test whether perceived racial discrimination predicts delinquency after controlling for the different dimensions of control theory. In conducting this investigation, we try to show fidelity to Hirschi's original analysis. Thus, rather than construct a single, overarching scale of each social bond (as is common practice today), we include a variety of measures of commitment, involvement, attachment, and belief in our analyses. In *Causes of Delinquency*, Hirschi (1969) probed the impact of social bonds through numerous measures that he cross-tabulated (one or two at a time) with delinquency. In our study, we have incorporated those variables that were most central to his analysis. This has resulted in a detailed roster of measures, but this approach has the advantage of remaining faithful to Hirschi's investigation. Consistent with GST, we also examine whether the effects of perceived racial discrimination varies by the strength of a youth's social bonds. Further, because the Richmond Youth Project contains alternative measures of perceived discrimination, we reproduce our main analysis with four other dimensions of discrimination. Of particular relevance, we investigate whether African American youths who believed that they

attended a racially hostile school were more likely to commit delinquency.

## Methods

### Sample

The Richmond Youth Project is a cross-sectional self-report survey of 4075 high school students residing in the Richmond, California area that was conducted in 1965. A complete description of the survey, the methodology used to collect the data, and the codebook can be found in *Causes of Delinquency* (Hirschi, 1969). As is standard in the research literature on this topic, we analyze only the African Americans students. Those who reported that they were not African American were omitted from our analyses. There were 1440 African American adolescents included in the survey. In contrast to Hirschi's (1969) sample that was limited to boys, our analysis includes females as well.

## Discussion: A Chapter in the Sociology of Knowledge

### A Criminological Blind Spot

Hirschi (1969) should be credited for using the Richmond Youth Project data to address Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) claim that delinquency is fostered by the unjust deprivation stemming from racial discrimination. In rejecting this proposition, however, he failed to probe fully whether the different dimensions of racial discrimination might be criminogenic. If he had—as our analysis reveals—he would likely have found that perceived discrimination placed African American youths at risk for crime. Although the effect of perceived discrimination in the data is not huge, it nonetheless rivals, if not surpasses, the influence of other measures of social bonds



(and of delinquent peers). Accordingly, Hirschi might have championed not only his social bond perspective as a general theory but also the importance of considering a challenge unique to minority youths: experiences with racial animus.

Again, this missed opportunity is understandable in that Hirschi did not place the discrimination items on the survey and was using the available data for selective theoretical purposes. In fact, in a more recent replication of his earlier study (conducted in Fayetteville, Arkansas), Hirschi and his team of researchers did not retain the discrimination items included in the Richmond Youth Project on the updated survey instrument. Regardless, it is consequential that Hirschi did not mine his data set more fully, for he might well have sensitized a generation of criminologists to the deleterious effects of perceived racial discrimination. Hirschi, however, is not alone in this oversight. Over the years, a number of scholars have reanalyzed the Richmond Youth Project data without calling attention to the finding on discrimination we discovered (see, e.g., Costello & Vowell, 1999; Matsueda, 1982; Matsueda & Heimer, 1987).

But there is an even larger conundrum to this chapter in the sociology of knowledge: why this blind spot regarding the criminogenic effects of perceived racial discrimination extended to virtually all criminologists and thus far beyond Hirschi and the single data set of the Richmond Youth Project. This omission is all the more puzzling when one considers the voluminous literature examining racial bias in arrest, sentencing, imprisonment, and crime policy (see, e.g., Gabbidon, 2007; Kennedy, 1997; Mauer, 1999; Miller, 1996; Mitchell, 2005; Tonry, 1995). Further, with regard to crime causation, macro-level researchers have explored how racial inequality, whose effects are often attributed to feelings of unjust deprivation (Blau & Blau, 1982), is a source of crime rates across communities (Pratt & Cullen, 2005). Although limited, scholars have even examined how social

bonds affect delinquency for African Americans and whites (for a summary, see Felson, Deane, & Armstrong, 2008; Gabbidon, 2007). Nonetheless, with the exception of Simon et al.'s recent research agenda and those by a few other scholars, individual-level studies conducted by criminologists have rarely included measures of perceived racial discrimination in their multivariate models—an omission that has occurred across decades marked by the civil rights movement and unprecedented discourse about race in the halls of academia.

Three factors likely contributed to the reluctance of scholars to explore whether racial discrimination is a criminogenic risk factor for African Americans. First, following Hirschi's approach, criminologists set about the task of testing existing individual-level theories against one another. However, as general theories, the main criminological perspectives, especially control and differential association/social learning theories, did not accord race a central causal role (see Gabbidon, 2007). Experiences unique to African Americans thus received little theoretical attention. In self-report study after self-report study, race therefore reverted to a background factor, a variable "controlled" for in multivariate analyses.

It is noteworthy that both control theories and differential association/social learning theories trace their origins to the Chicago School of criminology, in particular to the "mixed model" of Shaw and McKay (see Finestone, 1976; Kornhauser, 1978). In this paradigm, establishing a general theory in which the causes of crime traversed ethnic and racial groups was politically progressive. The challenge was to show that no ethnic or racial group's biology or culture was inherently criminogenic. By demonstrating empirically that crime is linked to community organization, not to specific groups of people, Shaw and McKay could argue that crime's causes were general, social, and changeable (e.g., through the Chicago Area Project).

Further, theories that might have called attention to racial discrimination—those

authored by conflict or radical criminologists—focused more on the discriminatory application of law (Piquero & Brame, 2008). When considering crime causation, they were more interested in calling attention to the crimes of the powerful (e.g., corporate criminals) or offered causal propositions that did not detail the mechanisms (e.g., perceived discrimination) through which structures of inequality moved individuals (e.g., African Americans) to break the law.

Second, there was the very practical matter that testing theories at the individual-level had increasingly become a matter of secondary analyses of large cross-sectional and longitudinal data sets. At the macro-level, measures of racial inequality are readily available; by contrast, most extant secondary data sets that use self-report data to test theories do not contain systematic measures of racial discrimination. It is difficult to study the effects of racial discrimination when researchers failed to consider it worthy enough to include in the surveys they design.

Third, it is likely that the relatively small number of African American scholars in the discipline shaped the field's theorizing. With only few exceptions (e.g., Anderson, 1999; Wilson, 1987), these scholars' contributions have remained at the edge of criminology (Gabbidon, 2007; Greene & Gabbidon, 2000). By contrast, the extensive infusion of women into criminology has led not only to the study of gender but also to the formulation of gender-specific theories of crime (e.g., Chesney-Lind, 1989; see also Miller & Mullins, 2006).

Again, it is not that white criminologists are insensitive to racial inequalities. But, although speculative on our part, it would appear that they tend to approach the study of race as an "outsider" rather than as an "insider" (Merton, 1972). As outsiders, they are concerned about race, yet they inadvertently tend to see its consequences from a "white," albeit a politically liberal, perspective. Thus, for these researchers, the focus is largely on white oppression of African

Americans, especially through discriminatory practices in the criminal justice system. However, because they are not insiders—that is, they are not African American—they do not naturally focus on the "lived reality" of what it is like to be African American in this society (for a contrast, see Anderson, 1999). A fundamental fact African Americans continue to face is that, during the course of a day, their race may become salient and they may experience racial animus. Only a field dominated by white scholars could leave the potential consequences of this lived reality unstudied for so many years.

### Racial Animus as a Continuing Lived Reality

Writing in his classic *The Philadelphia Negro*, originally published in 1899, W. E. B. Du Bois (1973) focused on the "contact of the races." Although reluctant to attribute most African American crime to racial animus, Du Bois felt that it was a factor that clearly could "encourage" black criminality (Greene & Gabbidon, 2000, pp. 28–29). Du Bois (1973, p. 351) thus cautioned that the "connection of crime and prejudice is . . . subtle and dangerous; it is the atmosphere of rebellion and discontent that unrewarded merit and reasonable but unsatisfied ambition make." Du Bois observed that prejudice creates a "social environment of excuse, listless despair, careless indulgence and lack of inspiration to work [that] is the growing force that turns black boys and girls into gamblers, prostitutes and rascals" (p. 351). He then concluded:

How long can a city say to a part of its citizens, "It is useless to work; it is fruitless to deserve well of men; education will gain you nothing but disappointment and humiliation?" How long can a city teach its black children that the road to success is to have a white face? How long can a city do this and escape the inevitable penalty? (1973, p. 351)

It is remarkable that, with only a limited number of exceptions, criminologists have ignored the possibility—identified by Du Bois—that African Americans' experiences with racial bias may have criminogenic effects (Agnew, 2006a). This neglect is “remarkable” because of the continuing salience of racial animus in the USA. To be sure, advances in civil rights have diminished the most visible forms of legal and socially approved forms of racial mistreatment legitimated in the Jim Crow era. Still, researchers have documented the continued existence of racism (see, e.g., Feagin, 2000; Feagin & O'Brien, 2003). Particularly prevalent is a new form of “racial resentment”—sometimes called “symbolic racism”—in which whites express anger toward African Americans for receiving preferential treatment and failing to “help themselves” in a supposedly color-blind society (see, e.g., Bobo, 1997; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Sears & Henry, 2003). Similarly, Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith (1997, p. 16) identify “laissez-fair racism,” which “involves the persistent negative stereotyping of African Americans, a tendency to blame blacks themselves for the black-white gap in socioeconomic standing, and resistance to meaningful policy efforts to ameliorate U.S. racist social conditions and institutions.”

It may be hyperbole to claim, as does Hacker (1995 [book cover]), that the USA remains “two nations, black and white, separate, hostile, unequal.” Even so, despite sharing many common values, African Americans and whites diverge in their evaluation of the American experience. As Sniderman and Piazza (1993) show, whites generally do not often think about race. “They neither suffer from the problem of racial inequality, nor see themselves responsible for it” (1993, p. 154). For many African Americans, however, race is part of their “lived experience”—an inescapable social fact that looms over their everyday lives (Feagin & Sikes, 1994, p. 15). For example, there is ample evidence that perceptions of discrimination among African Americans are widespread (Bell, 1992; Cose, 1993; McCall, 1994). A 2006 survey reveals that many African

American youths (aged 18–29) report experiencing different forms of discrimination, including being unfairly stopped by the police (51%), being denied a job that they were qualified for (28%), being physically threatened or attacked because of their race (26%), “people acting as if they are afraid of you” (21%), and “people acting as if they think you are not smart” (14%). About two-thirds of the sample (65%) felt that racial discrimination was a “big problem facing black men today” (The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2007, see also Unnever, 2008). Research also shows that compared to whites, African Americans of all ages are more likely to see the criminal justice system as unjust (Buckler, Unnever, & Cullen, 2007; Hagan & Albonetti, 1982; Hagan, Shedd, & Payne, 2005; Henderson, Cullen, Cao, Browning & Kopache, 1997; Johnson, 2008; Unnever, 2008).

More broadly, whereas whites generally trumpet America as an equitable society, African Americans do not share this view. Most whites believe that “blacks no longer face barriers to achieving economic parity with whites,” viewing “limits to equality a matter of the American past” (Kluegel & Smith, 1986, p. 200). Or, as Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, and Krysan (1997, p. 275) note in their assessment of perspectives on the “causes of black disadvantage,” African Americans “emphasize continuing discrimination; whites stress low motivation on the part of blacks.” Not surprisingly, whites are far less likely to support government programs aimed at advancing equal opportunity. In fact, with regard to such policies, Kinder and Sanders (1996, p. 27) conclude that “differences between blacks and whites are extraordinary”—that this is a “divide without peer” (see also Tuch, Sigelman, & Martin, 1997).

Scholars are free to debate the extent to which this version of the American dilemma is accurate. Regardless, the belief among many African Americans that they face racial resentments and inequality is a social reality—a lived reality—that is potentially consequential. Indeed, as our study has revealed, it appears that perceived racial discrimination is implicated in the delinquency of African American

adolescents. As a result, it is a potential risk factor for crime that should be systematically explored in future research.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What type of impact, if any, do you think the time in which the data were collected and analyzed by Hirschi had on his decision not to further explore the effect of race on crime?
2. How do the findings of this article encourage or discourage criminologists to further explore the affect that racial discrimination has on crime?
3. Discuss how the results of this study highlight the notion that a key aspect of any science, including criminology, should include the replication of findings in order to ensure the validity of a finding?

