Private, parochial and public social orders: The problem of crime and incivility in urban communities

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the nature of social control in urban neighborhoods by recasting the central polarities of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, community and society. The analysis is both theoretically and empirically eclectic, but it is committed to an institutional approach, what Ralph Turner (1980), in referring to Morris Janowitz's recent work, has called the "Forgotten paradigm" of American sociology. The explication more finely differentiates among types of social order, their corresponding forms of social control, and as well their interdependence and mutual limits. The approach is diametrically opposed to more evolutionary grand theories, which simply see community being "eroded," "eroded," or "afflicted" by the modern social order. Rather, the different forms of social order and social control are seen to mutually coexist, and given varying conditions, can be dynamically constructed.

I will first distinguish among the three levels or types of social order - the private, the parochial, and the public. I will then apply these to a grounded analysis of the nature of crime and incivility within urban communities.1

1 The analysis draws from and is "grounded in" research recently completed at the Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research at Northwestern University, "The Reactions to Crime Project." This was a five-year, multi-methodological study of both individual and collective reactions to crime in four urban neighborhoods in each of three cities - Philadelphia, Chicago, and San Francisco. The data come from both neighborhood and city-wide surveys, and from year-long fieldwork and participant observation in each of the 12 neighborhoods. (See Skogan, et al., 1983.)

Finally I will explore the mutually interacting and limiting mechanisms of social control specific to each of these three social orders.

The Institutional Approach to Social Order and Social Control

Social control, in its original and most generic meaning, is concerned with the capacity for "self-regulation" by social groups (Janowitz, 1978), and its institutional analysis stresses both normative and structural components. The normative component includes the standards and values for assessing appropriate and deviant behavior, while the structural component includes the patterns of distribution of resources within a social group that may be utilized to sanction the behavior of its members. This generic conception of social control is at odds with the more narrow, specific use of the concept to refer to coercion or force.

The generic conception is analytically more powerful for it allows one to distinguish among different forms of social control, of which coercion is only one, and also to account for historical and structural variations in the forms of social control. By emphasizing "self-regulation," social control becomes an inherent part of the structure and the process of social groups, rather than the episodic actions engaged in by singular institutions (Erikson, 1966). Simply put, to the degree that social order exists, social control exists.

The institutional approach to social control remains untested to either a refined cultural or a deterministic structural perspective. Neither sentiments and beliefs nor resources of power and property are given equal priority. As Stinchcombe (1968) has observed, an institutional approach requires that one search at the point of correlation between values and power, for order and control emerge from the intersection of both cultural constraints and material conditions.

PRIVATE, PAROCHIAL, AND PUBLIC SOCIAL ORDERS

Three different social orders - the private, the parochial, and the public - are easily distinguished as qualitatively distinct, ideal types. Operationally, one may pursue the question of whether or not each can be treated as a variable, assessing the degree of "privateness," "parochialism," or "publicness" of specific social phenomena. A focus upon these three, and especially the parochial, is particularly useful in organizing data that bear on the problem of social control in contemporary urban communities. In differentiating among these three orders I will isolate three dimensions: the substance and form of their basic social bond, their institutional locus, and their characteristic spatial and physical domain.

Basic Social Bond

Differences in the basic social bonds among these three social orders owe much to the discussion of Edward Shils (1975) in his seminal work, "Primordial,
duties is more evenly balanced, as a calculus of "limited liability" produces a more balanced sense of mutual obligation and distributive justice. However, within the public order, the ratio of duties to rights is skewed more in the direction of public rights over public duty. Whether phrased in the calculus of the "tragedy of the commons" or the "free rider problem" of the logic of collective action (Olson, 1971), duties to the public collective and one’s fellow citizens have waxed in proportion to one’s civil rights within the state. This latter shift is a direct outgrowth of the extension of citizenship as Marshall (1950) notes, from civil to economic rights, and the related rise of the welfare state (Janowitz, 1978). While one is increasingly entitled to enjoy the expanded rights of a civil society, obligations to others and the collective are increasingly limited and defined as voluntary. This asymmetry is associated with the increasingly economic and pecuniary nature of the exchange of civil rights and duties (exchange of taxes for governmental services). This is balanced somewhat in the link of the individual to the state, but increasingly balanced in the dyadic links among fellow citizens. Where the private order relies upon the exchange of sentiment, the parochial order upon the exchange of voluntary labor, the public order is increasingly defined in terms of the cost/benefit ratio of a cash nexus where personal profit in social exchanges between citizens results from rights (benefits) being greater than duties (costs).

Institutional Locus

Following the conception of institutions as the correlation of power and values we can more readily locate and define the institutions of the private, parochial, and public social orders. The private order of friends is found in both informal and more formal primary groups where the values of sentiment, social support, and esteem are the essential resources of the social order and the basis of social control. The giving or withholding of these values in varying frequencies of face-to-face interaction establish the varying power arrangements within groups. These can be empirically observed in case studies of primary groups such as Whitley’s Street Corner Society (1955), sociometric and survey studies of interpersonal friendship networks (Hunter, 1983; Fischer, 1982). The institutions of kinship similarly operate within the private social order. As functions increasingly move out of the family and into the social support function looms ever more central (Lasch, 1977). The power arrangements of gender and age, rooted in traditional authority, serve to structure this private order, but they are decreasing in significance as more egalitarian mutual ties of sociocentric support become the basis of power and exchange.

The parochial social order is based on the local interpersonal networks and interlocking of local institutions that serve the diurnal and sustenance needs of the residential community. The "parochial" social order is not necessarily a primordial type, especially in dimension of contemporary urban neighborhoods (Stolle, 1972). Secondly, I incorporate both kin and within my discussion of the "parochial" social order.
The problem of crime and inequality in urban communities

The reduction of local community status, or reputation, and power (Burke, 1961). Power arrangements within a community are to be found in the interlocking of local institutional leaders... Each social order is characterized by its own peculiar social relations of dominance and subordinance, and these relations are reflected in the structure of social inequality. The problem of crime and inequality in urban communities is caused by the failure of the social order to function as a cohesive whole.

The Spatial Domain

Each of the three social orders is associated with a characteristic spatial distribution and physical locus. Much social theory assumes away the spatial aspect of social phenomena, or treats it as a ubiquitous and unvarying condition. Either way, it is too seldom directly incorporated into social theories as an explicit set of variables as cause or consequence. I suggest that an adequate understanding of these three social orders, their processes of social control, and their mutual interdependence requires an explicit consideration of their characteristic spatial domains.

The spatial structure of the private social order is defined by two extremes of the market economy, the metropolitan area, the household, and the metropolitan-wide network of personal relations that link these private nodes. As Fischer (1977) and Weisman and Leighton (1979) have found in their recent research, the physical distribution of friendship is seldom constrained to physical proximity, in the neighborhood, but is widely distributed throughout the metropolitan field. To focus solely upon the household, the dwelling, or similar micro-level physical units is to miss this important more expansive spatial characteristic of the private social order. The metropolitan-wide spatial network of the private order is especially important for the mutual interaction between the private and the public orders. It is this characteristic that often brings these two social orders into contact, and raises problems for their different mechanisms of social control.

To focus upon the household alternatively highlights the point of contact between the private and the parochial social orders. As people move outside of their dwellings they are most immediately entering the physical domain of the parochial social order. However, whether or not they are entering a parochial social order depends upon the strength of that social order, and the operation of its mechanisms of social control. By definition, the parochial social order is necessarily based upon the physical proximity of neighbors, co-habitants of a common area sharing a common fate. These parochial social orders are well documented in the classic case studies of Gans (1962) Urban Villagers, and Suttles (1968) 'segmental' Social Order of the Slum. In both, the dense networks of personal knowledge and trust, held together in interlocking local institutions, result in spatial and social boundaries that can be used to define insiders who are mutually accountable to one another, while outsiders are held to have more limited rights within the community. Because it moves out of the household, the parochial social order is often defined as but another variant of the public order and against the private social order. However, this parochial order is qualitatively distinct from the public order. It is not a world of citizen strangers, and rarely the operations of formal agents of social control observed or central to its operations. The parochial social order leaves unresolved the problems of public order in a civil society.

The spatial domain of the public order is not simply a residual of places left over after extracting the private order of households, and the parochial order of neighborhoods; neither is it, to go to the other extreme, ubiquitous, everywhere within the legal territorial boundaries of a given government or state. The spatial domain of the public order is characterized at the points of intersection and interpenetration of these other social orders. It is found prevously at those locations where people are most likely to be interacting solely as citizens. That is not to say that the intermediates are not sometimes operating simultaneously within other social orders, for the public order is often the point where...
individuals from different social orders meet, where social worlds collide. Public places—the streets, the sidewalks—are public domains that often link privatel and parochial worlds (Jacobs, 1961; Lofland, 1973, 1983). Public places such as nodes, areas, and paths—downtowns, parks and subways (Lynch, 1960)—to the degree that they “belong” to no one, are not parts of private and parochial orders, therefore belong equally to everyone. Their use then is considered the legitimate right of all as citizens of the state. This is the spatial domain of the public order, and as with private and parochial orders, it is difficult to delineate without mutual reference to the others. We will now explore the nature of various acts of vandalism. If a high proportion of police activity is geared to such disruptions of the social order it is in part for two reasons: 1) these acts are much more frequent than “serious crimes” no matter what the “serious crime rate” may be; and 2) these are the disruptions of the social order that are of sufficient concern and visibility to local residents to prompt them to call the police for service. Findings such as these suggested a slightly different question than previous research; namely, “What is it that people fear?” In both field interviews and surveys, the answer became clear; though people express a general fear of “serious” criminal victimization, when asked when and where they are most fearful, the answer came in terms of those ubiquitous signs in the environment that suggested a more pervasive loss of social order. . . . what I have called “symbols of incivility” (Hunter, 1978). It is these numerous “petty assaults” against the social order that produce an “urban illsue” (Wilson, 1975) which is then translated into “fear.” Most often, these assaults on the public order are “street anonymous” (graffiti, vandalism) or perpetrated by strangers.

Table 1 presents survey data from four neighborhoods of Chicago that exemplify this distinction between crime and incivility. To the left of each vertical line are residents’ responses about their concern for particular “serious crimes,” and to the right their concerns about various “symbols of incivility.” Fully as much concern is expressed about these symbols of incivility as about the more serious crimes. It is apparent, therefore, that the rising fear and concern about crime is experientially rooted in a more pervasive experience than the more narrow question of serious crime and police practices. Once again, Biderman (1967) has summarized it best: “We have found that attitudes of citizens regarding crime are less affected by their past victimization than by their ideas about what is going on in their community—fears about a weakening of social controls on which they feel their safety and the broader fabric of social life is ultimately dependent.”
at social control are likely to emerge not simply within a given social order, but as well from one or both of the remaining social orders. When family violence spills into the streets, or rival ethnic street gangs from nearby neighborhoods clash, then the public agents of social control, the police, are likely to be called on to restore order. There is a built-in asymmetry in this process that is related to the increasing expansion of the state (Marshall 1964; Meyer and Hannan 1979; Janowitz, 1978); namely, that the institutions of public social control, specifically the police and the criminal justice system, have both claimed and increasingly become defined as the final or "ultimate" source of social control. This asymmetry is the joint outcome of state expansion of the rights of citizenship to demand increasing protection of person and property from violence, and in Weber's terms, the state's claim to the monopoly of that violence. However, given the bureaucratic organization of state structures with their emphasis upon efficiency, and given increasing fiscal constraints faced by state structures at all levels but especially by municipal governments (Clark, 1984; O'Connor, 1973), the police are increasingly limited in their capacity to satisfy the increasing demands for their services. The potential for a crisis of legitimacy has prompted a search for alternative solutions to the problem of social control by shifting the focus to other social orders, one of the results of which is what may be labeled "the rediscovery of community" (Hunter, 1979; Hunter and Riger, 1985). The parochial and private social orders are "enlightened," and often nourished with state resources, in an attempt to counteract the prevailing sense of disorder on the streets of urban neighborhoods.

Although the breakdown of the private order of the family is often mentioned by both social analysts and local residents as the cause of urban disorder, two qualifications have to be noted. The first is that crimes of passion (murder, assault, and rape) occur precisely within the private social order where affect is highest, and few people propose a public or parochial solution to this problem. Second, the major perpetrators of some of the serious crimes and most of the "incivilities" are teenagers. However, this does not necessarily imply a break-down of the family, for adolescence is traditionally the age at which one's interests, activities, and interactions move outside of the nuclear family into the wider community (Erickson, 1968). The failure to deal adequately with adolescents therefore reflects more of a break in the link between parochial and private social orders than a break down of the private social order itself. It is the interlocking institutions of the local community that have generally provided for social control of teenagers . . . the schools, churches, YMCAs, athletic leagues, and the like (Zald, 1970).

Many of the activities of the parochial order that support these local institutions, as we have seen, rely upon the voluntary contribution and labor of one's fellow neighbors. However, such voluntary activity is difficult to elicit and maintain in the face of increasing expectation that the state should provide many of these services. Rising social disorder in urban communities would therefore appear to be more the result of a disarticulation with the parochial order than a failure of the state to provide social control in the public order. Yet, because of state expansion there is a greater expectation on the part of citizens for state actions for social control, a social control the state is inadequately equipped to provide because of its own formal constraints.

The solution to the dilemma is not for the state to engage in direct social control, that is, to attempt to increase its efficiency in catching criminals; but rather, for the state to increasingly support stronger social orders what will engage in social control activities in conjunction with the state and the private order. This is the solution that is, in fact, emerging in many urban areas throughout the nation. For example, local community organizations in urban neighborhoods are often explicitly concerned in their activities about social control and "doing something" about crime. When asked what they are doing the typical responses include: cleaning up garbage and litter in the streets, getting rid of eyewash and abandoned buildings, developing youth centers, and sponsoring more direct programs such as Block Watch, Operation I.D., or Whistlestop (Podolefsky and DuBow, 1979). In short, the definition of social disorder and proposed solutions again focus on the parochial and public orders and their institutional interlinkage to deal with the ubiquitous symbols of incivility.

The ultimate success of a variety of local crime control programs appears to depend upon whether or not they are embedded in ongoing community organizations. As federal agencies in conjunction with local police departments attempt to establish such programs as citizen patrols, Block Watch, and Whistlestop, the continued success of these programs requires the structure of a larger community organization to provide for voluntary recruitment and sustained participation. People join local community organizations as "quasigovernment"; that is, they pay taxes or dues to a democratic territorial collective, offer labor and services, and, in turn, expect the organization to provide for a multifaceted set of concerns and interests both internally in organizing the activities of one's neighbors, and externally in relationship with outside actors and agencies (Tsuk, 1977; Davidson, 1979). Such organizations most often include or interlock with other local institutions such as schools, churches, and local businesses. As a structural embodiment of the parochial social order, the social control activities of such organizations are precisely those that the police require to more effectively perform their function of social control in the public areas. The parochial order can operate most effectively in the realm of surveillance, a limited form of mutual assistance that the police are inadequately staffed to perform and a function that feeds into the police authority to exercise coercion and their responsibility to face danger. In short, the parochial and the public social orders are functionally different, each is limited, and yet they are mutually interdependent upon one another. One should note also that local organizations and parochial institutions are also mutually interdependent with a number of state agents other than the police in maintaining the parochial and the public order.