THE ROLE OF ATTENUATED CULTURE IN SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION THEORY*

BARBARA D. WARNER
Eastern Kentucky University

Current criminological research rooted in social disorganization theory has primarily focused on structural disorganization and has largely ignored the role of cultural disorganization. This paper develops the theoretical role of cultural disorganization in the contemporary social disorganization model, integrating aspects of both the systemic model and a cultural attenuation model. This model is empirically examined using structural equation modeling. Survey data from residents in 66 neighborhoods in a Southern state provide the primary data. In part, the findings show that concentrated disadvantage and the level of social ties affect cultural strength, which in turn significantly affects informal social control. These findings demonstrate the relevance of weakened culture in explaining informal social control and call for further theoretical expansion of social disorganization models to include cultural disorganization.

KEYWORDS: Cultural disorganization, attenuated culture, informal social control, communities.

Drawing on Kasarda and Janowitz’s (1974) systemic model of community attachment, current community-level crime research has focused primarily on the structural aspects of communities, such as neighborhood friendship and kinship networks, and organization or associational ties that increase informal social control. Although this model has been important in revitalizing research in social disorganization theory by defining social organization in terms of “the regulatory capacity of a neighborhood that is imbedded in the structure of that community’s affiliational, interactional and communication ties among the residents” (Bursik, 1999:86), it has left undeveloped the role that culture may play in achieving this regulatory capacity. In part, this has been due to the lack of theoretical clarity.

* This project was supported, in part, by Grant 1999-JJ-CX-0052 awarded by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, and the Eastern Kentucky University’s Department of Criminal Justice and Police Studies’ Program of Distinction Research Fellowship. Points of view in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. The author would like to thank Bob Bursik, Steve Messner, Paul Bellair, Fred Markowitz, and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on earlier versions of this paper.
in Shaw and McKay's discussion of culture as well as the conflicting theoretical assumptions of cultural deviance and social control models (Bursik, 1988, 1993; Kornhauser, 1978). Nonetheless, recent ethnographic studies of inner-city neighborhoods have once again highlighted the potential role that culture may play in explaining community crime rates, and there are increasing calls for the re-introduction of culture into contemporary community-level crime models (Krivo and Peterson, 1996; Markowitz et al., 2001; Sampson and Wilson, 1995; Warner, 1999; Warner and Wilcox Rountree, 1997, 2000).

There are currently two theoretical approaches to the role of culture in a community-level model. The first approach is a cultural heterogeneity, or subcultural approach, which was part of the original Shaw and McKay (1969) model. This approach focuses on the role of subcultural or "delinquency" values on crime rates. Shaw and McKay (1969) suggested that in poor, residentially mobile, ethnically mixed neighborhoods, divergent value systems arise that compete for residents' allegiance. While children in middle-class neighborhoods are insulated from value systems that favor law violation and therefore are more easily socialized into conventional values and behaviors, children in lower class communities face conflicting value systems—some of which suggest that criminal acts bring success and prestige. Shaw and McKay (1969) base these ideas primarily on the concentration of delinquency in certain neighborhoods. They suggest that in neighborhoods with high adult crime and delinquency rates, "boys living in these areas are in contact not only with individuals who engage in proscribed activity but also with groups which sanction such behavior and exert pressure upon their members to conform to group standards" (p. 174).

More recently, work on the urban underclass, such as Wilson's (1987, 1996) and Anderson's (1990, 1994, 1999), has led several sociologists and criminologists to argue that neighborhoods characterized by concentrations of poverty and social isolation may develop values or norms counter to those of the larger society (see, e.g., Krivo and Peterson, 1996; Massey and Denton, 1993; Sampson and Wilson, 1995; Warner and Pierce, 1993; Warner and Wilcox Rountree, 1997). This has led to the suggestion that subcultural values, particularly ones related to an "underclass" culture, or a subculture of violence, may be an important aspect to add to contemporary community-level crime models, as either directly affecting crime rates or indirectly affecting them through their weakening of informal social control (Anderson, 1990, 1999; Fischer, 1995; Pattillo, 1998; Sampson and Wilson, 1995).

The second approach is a cultural attenuation, or cultural disorganization, approach most strongly articulated in the work of Kornhauser (1978)
(see, e.g., Brownfield, 1996; Elliot et al., 1996; Sampson and Jeglum-Bartusch, 1998). Drawing particularly on the work of Jaeger and Selznick (1964), Suttles (1968), and Liebow (1967), Kornhauser (1978) argues that the cultural source of community-level crime rates is not in competing value systems that motivate residents toward criminal offending, but rather in the variable strength of conventional values and their consequential ability to provide informal social control. Kornhauser (1978) argues that the strength of the normative culture varies across communities, and that weakened or attenuated culture cannot provide effective social control. This approach to culture places the role of values more centrally within a social control model, emphasizing the role of a weakened normative or conventional culture on informal social control.

It is this second approach that provides the basis for the current paper. Based on Kornhauser's (1978) and others' discussions of attenuated culture, this paper provides, and empirically tests, an expanded version of the contemporary model of social disorganization theory that includes elements of both cultural and structural disorganization. Such a model enhances the theoretical richness and the potential explanatory power of a social disorganization model.

CULTURAL ATTENUATION

The concept of social disorganization has always included aspects of both culture and structure. Although Shaw and McKay's (1969) original formulation of social disorganization theory addressed culture primarily in terms of "delinquency" values as motivators for criminal behavior, Kornhauser's (1978) formulation focuses on weakened conventional values and their effect on informal social control. Kornhauser (1978) argues that the belief in the moral validity of the values embodied by community institutions such as the church, school, family, and other community organizations does not vary, only the strength with which those values are held varies (Kornhauser, 1978:30). Indeed, it is weakened or attenuated values that, in part, define social disorganization. For example, although Kornhauser (1978:120) first defines social disorganization as "the inability to realize common values," she continues by stating that "a more analytical definition of social disorganization...[is] the attenuation of cultural values: their lack of relevance to the self or to a specified collectivity. The attenuation of cultural values is indicated by their distortion, their selective disuse, or their withering away." Cultural attenuation occurs when societal values cannot be realized and, hence, fall into disuse. "They are not rejected...but they are disused" (Kornhauser, 1978:77). Their disuse makes unclear the extent to which conventional values are held within the community.
and subsequently weakens the strength of the culture to provide social control.

In current social disorganization models, "the inability to realize common values" has come to be defined solely in terms of the inability to prevent crime, or the inability to realize the value of living free of predatory crime. A much richer interpretation of Kornhauser's ideas of attenuated values, however, would suggest that it is the inability of community residents to realize many of society's common values that weakens informal social control. When community social structure limits the extent to which residents are able to live out conventional values within the community, those values are not reinforced in the community through their visible presence. A culture is strong when similar values are not only widely shared by community members, but are also visibly present in everyday life, and regularly articulated in social relationships, such as when parents or neighbors tell children it is important to stay in school or to not engage in sexually promiscuous behavior. The diminished physical embodiment of these values, such as waiting to be married to have children, staying in school, being honest in all transactions, maintaining a marriage in the face of adversity, etc., weakens the perception of widespread conventional values. When culture is attenuated, it cannot provide the basis for effective community social control (Kornhauser, 1978:78).

The strength of the culture within neighborhoods is affected by structural arrangements, particularly concentrated disadvantage and residential mobility, that affect the ability of residents to live out and thereby reinforce within their communities many of society's common values. When community structural conditions do not allow conventional values espoused by community institutions to be lived out and visible in the community, residents become uncertain of the extent to which neighbors share conventional values (a weak culture) and, thus, lack a clear sense of support for demanding behavior in line with those values. As Sampson et al. (1997:919) note, "one is unlikely to intervene in a neighborhood context in which the rules are unclear."

The main structural factors that affect cultural disorganization are the same as those that affect structural disorganization, most generally, concentrated disadvantage and residential mobility. The level of concentrated disadvantage in communities affects the extent to which conventional values are relevant to, and present in, the everyday lives of residents, and therefore the extent to which they are a visible part of the community. For example, although honesty may be held as an important value, it may be difficult to be completely honest if it means losing public housing, medical coverage, or subsistence payments that barely provide for the needs of
one's family. Similarly, although waiting to be married before having children may be seen as the appropriate thing to do, it may become less feasible when most of the men in the community are unemployed and unable to support a family. Residential mobility leads to a continual breakdown of relationships and the need for constant renewal of understanding of shared values.

Several other scholars have also discussed the importance of weakened or attenuated culture. In *Crime and the American Dream*, Messner and Rosenfeld (1994) note the relevance of a weak prosocial culture. They argue that American economic institutions are so powerful that economic values outweigh values emerging from other institutions such as the family and schools. This imbalance among institutions and the values they promulgate creates “weak normative environments,” or anomie. “A primary task for noneconomic institutions such as the family and schools is to inculcate beliefs, values, and commitments other than those of the marketplace. But as these noneconomic institutions are relatively devalued and forced to accommodate to economic considerations, as they are penetrated by economic standards, they are less able to fulfill their distinctive socialization function successfully” (p. 86). It is this aspect of weakened noneconomic culture, or cultural imbalance, they argue that uniquely affects the American crime problem.

Although Messner and Rosenfeld address the problem of weakened (or imbalanced) “pro-social” culture at the national level, Wilson (1996) addresses the issue of cultural attenuation at the neighborhood level. He argues that structural changes in inner-city neighborhoods such as the disappearance of manufacturing jobs, and out-migration of middle-class minorities, have led to poor minority neighborhoods being socially isolated from middle-class resources, value reinforcements, and role models. Wilson (1996:67) suggests that although most residents in these neighborhoods accept the moral validity of middle-class values, they may be less able to live out those values due to the constraints imposed by pervasive poverty. To the extent that fewer residents in impoverished neighborhoods act out conventional values, the less these values are reinforced through observance of others’ behaviors, and the weaker they become.

Some ethnographic descriptions of disadvantaged neighborhoods also note the impact of structural change in inner-city neighborhoods on culture and its consequential effect on crime. Although these explanations of crime tend to be rooted in cultural deviance theories, they also provide interpretations relevant to an attenuated culture perspective. For example, Anderson (1999) states that due to structural changes, “the trust and perceptions of decency that once prevailed in the community are increasingly absent” (p. 145, emphasis added). Although Anderson (1999) argues that “decent” values have become replaced by “street” values, it may be
equally likely that structural disadvantage only increases affectations and street styles inconsistent with “decent” values rather than any genuine commitment to “street” values. For example, Anderson points out that decent kids must often take on the styles of the street even though they do not agree with these values. “There is so little support for decency on the streets that they have to mimic the street kids in order to get by” (Anderson, 1999:104). Hence, it can be argued that concentrated disadvantage diminishes the opportunities for behavior in line with conventional values, thereby weakening culture and inhibiting informal social control.

Once informal social control is diminished, residents and others in the community are free to engage in normal drives for what Ferrell and Sanders (1995) refer to as erotic excitement, cheap fun, or participatory pleasure. The pursuit of these, then, are often the impetus of criminal behavior (see, for example, Ferrell and Sanders, 1995; Jacobs and Wright, 1999; Tunnell, 2000). In this sense, one need not argue that criminal values provide the motivation for crime, only that a weakened culture loosens the constraints against normal drives that may sometimes lead to criminal behavior.

Warner and Wilcox Rountree (2000) attempt to explicitly examine this cultural attenuation thesis within a social disorganization perspective, but they are unable to directly measure either the pervasiveness of normative values or the strength of those values as demonstrated by their perceived presence in the community. Instead, they examine “ghetto-related” behaviors, such as young single motherhood and youth idleness, as proxies for attenuated culture and examine their direct effect on violent crime rates rather than their effect on informal social control. They argue that “mainstream values are pervasive, yet are sometimes unable to be manifested through conventional behaviors in some areas due to structural constraints. In communities where the failure to enact conventional values is common and easily observable to residents, the community level demand for conventional behaviors is diminished, thereby reducing the willingness to intervene in opposing this behavior or even more serious behaviors, and consequently decreasing the level of informal social control of crime” (p. 46). Their examination of the role of attenuated culture, although important as a preliminary test of the thesis, has two weaknesses. It does not examine the impact of attenuated culture directly on measures of informal social control and it relies on census measures—young single motherhood and youth idleness—that provide only a limited examination of weakened culture.
INTEGRATING CULTURAL ATTENUATION INTO THE SYSTEMIC MODEL

The rebirth of social disorganization theory as the systemic model in the 1980s closely followed Kornhauser’s (1978) explanation of social disorganization as a social control model, but focused solely on the structural aspects of social disorganization. The research emanating from this model has been important in revitalizing social disorganization theory, and examinations of the cultural aspects of social disorganization should not discount, but rather build on, the structural aspects that have been developed over the past two decades.

The systemic model of social disorganization has focused on structural predictors of informal social control. Viewing community “as a complex system of friendship and kinship networks and formal and informal associational ties rooted in family life and ongoing socialization processes” (Kasarda and Janowitz, 1974:329), it has primarily examined the role of social ties within communities as the mechanism that mediates between neighborhood structural characteristics and informal social control (see, for example, Bellair, 1997; Bursik, 1999; Sampson and Groves, 1989; Warner and Wilcox Rountree, 1997). One weakness of this model has been that it has not addressed the mechanisms through which social ties facilitate informal social control (Bursik, 1999; Morenoff et al., 2001). The proposed integrated model addresses this issue.

A model that combines aspects of both cultural and structural social disorganization would argue that disadvantage and residential mobility make it difficult for communities to provide informal social control because of attenuated culture, brought about in part by weak social ties within the community. Social ties provide one potential avenue through which widely held conventional values can be articulated, shared, and displayed. When social ties are weak, one avenue for realizing shared values and strengthening culture is narrowed, which in turn erodes the basis of community control.

THE PRESENT STUDY

In this study, I expand the current social disorganization model by presenting a community-level social control model that incorporates both structural and cultural elements. The basic theoretical statements of this model are as follows: Conventional values are pervasive across communities. Nonetheless, community structural conditions, particularly those associated with concentrated disadvantage, decrease the extent to which residents perceive neighbors to hold conventional values. This is due to
both limited social ties through which conventional values can be articulated and verbally reinforced and diminished opportunities for those values to be lived out and reinforced through their physical presence within the community. Neighborhood culture is attenuated to the extent that residents do not perceive their neighbors to hold conventional values (definitional statement only). Attenuated culture inhibits informal social control.

The propositions deduced and to be tested from these theoretical statements are the following:

1) Community structural conditions, particularly those associated with concentrated disadvantage and residential mobility, decrease the level of social ties within the neighborhood (as per the current systemic model).

2) Decreased social ties decrease the extent to which residents perceive neighbors to hold conventional values (weakened culture).

3) Disadvantage also directly decreases the extent to which residents perceive neighbors to hold conventional values.

4) The weaker the culture, i.e., the more residents do not perceive neighbors to hold conventional values, the lower the level of informal social control.

There are only two aspects of this model that are not directly tested here. First is the suggestion that the effect of concentrated disadvantage on weakened culture that is not accounted for by social ties is due to the inability of residents to live out those values within the community and thereby reinforce those values through their physical presence. Although this is a potentially interesting aspect of this model, the current research is clearly preliminary and focuses specifically on the effect of social ties on cultural strength. Any unmediated effects of disadvantage on weakened culture must be examined in future research. The second is the definitional statement (which is assumed to be true by definition) that neighborhoods in which residents do not perceive their neighbors to hold conventional values exhibit weakened culture.

SAMPLE AND DATA SOURCES

To test hypotheses based on the above propositions, I use survey data collected from 66 neighborhoods in the two largest cities of a southern state. Each of these cities has populations of over one-quarter million (260,512 and 256,231, respectively) (U.S. Census, 2000). The survey data are supplemented with neighborhood-level data from the 1990 U.S. Census.¹ The study uses census-defined block groups as the units of analysis

¹ I use 1990 census data for these models because many of the 2000 census data
because they are relatively small, homogenous areas appropriate for the examination of community dynamics. At the same time, block groups are large enough to provide some of the standard census data necessary for this type of study.

The survey data used here are part of a National Institute of Justice-funded study examining informal social control in high drug use neighborhoods. Consequently, the sampling plan for the block groups was developed to assure a sufficient number of high drug use neighborhoods as well as an adequate distribution of predominantly white, predominantly minority, and predominantly racially mixed neighborhoods. To achieve these goals, census block groups were first placed into one of three strata: high drug use, adjacent to high drug use, and nonadjacent to high drug use. Using data from a previous study that interviewed crack and injection drug users, block groups in the two study cities were identified where a high number of drug users were known to live. These high drug use block groups comprised the first strata. Because neighborhoods adjacent to these known high drug use neighborhoods were believed to potentially also have drug activity, these adjacent neighborhoods were also oversampled. Therefore, all adjacent, non-high drug use block groups were identified and comprised the second strata. Finally, all remaining census block groups comprised the third strata.

Once these three strata were established, census data for each of the block groups was obtained and block groups with fewer than 100 households were deleted. Block groups were then each subdivided into three further strata—predominantly (greater than 67%) white, predominantly black, and predominantly mixed. Approximately one-third of the sampled blocks from the adjacent and nonadjacent block groups were chosen from each of these substrata to assure an adequate representation of white, nonwhite, and racially mixed neighborhoods. All of the block groups in the high drug use neighborhoods were included in the sample.

Once neighborhoods were sampled, the “street guide” section of city directories was used to create a sampling frame of all addresses in the neighborhoods. Residences were then sampled using systematic random sampling. Residences with telephone numbers were interviewed over the phone, whereas residences without telephones were interviewed with face-to-face surveys. Residences found to have nonworking telephone numbers were later entered into the sampling pool for face-to-face surveys.

are not currently available and it would be inappropriate to measure some neighborhood characteristics with 1990 data and others with 2000 data. Nonetheless, the 2000 measures that are currently available correlate quite highly with the 1990 data, suggesting little change in these neighborhoods. For example, the correlations between 1990 and 2000 census data for percent African-American is .94 and for percent home-owners is .95.
Approximately 75% of the completed surveys were conducted over the telephone and 25% were conducted in person.

Survey data were collected from one household member 18 years of age or older, currently residing at the sampled address, and included information on neighboring behavior, neighborhood attitudes and values, neighborhood disorder, frequency of crime, and respondent demographics. Surveys lasted approximately 20 minutes and were collected between February and August 2000. Respondents were paid $15 for their participation.

Two of the original 68 neighborhoods were eventually dropped from the study. The first neighborhood was a downtown neighborhood comprising mostly medical buildings and hospitals. There were only 17 respondents in this neighborhood. The second neighborhood was composed of three high rise buildings within a retirement community. The response rate for this neighborhood was very low (34%), mostly because residents could not hear well enough or were not healthy enough to do 20-minute surveys. The average number of respondents in the remaining 66 neighborhoods was 35, and the overall cooperation rate was 60%.2

MEASURES OF VARIABLES

The main exogenous variables used in this study represent neighborhood structural conditions generally thought to be related to levels of social disorganization. Following current research in this area, I examined several structural characteristics of neighborhoods based on census data. The variables included were the percent below poverty, percent African-American, percent with education levels less than a high school degree, percent female-headed households with children under the age of 18, the percent homeowners, and the percent of residents who lived in the same house five years earlier (residential stability). These neighborhood variables were factor analyzed to determine whether there were one or more underlying factors that could be used to describe these variables. The factor analysis (varimax rotation) produced two factors with eigenvalues greater than one. Together these two factors account for 81.15% of the variance in these items. Substantively, these factors represent concentrated disadvantage and stability. The variables that loaded on the concentrated

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2. The cooperation rate is based on the percent of eligible respondents contacted. Cases of unknown eligibility (busy signals, disconnects, no answers) and ineligibility (no longer living at that address) were excluded from this calculation as defined by The American Association for Public Opinion Research (1998). For telephone interviews, attempts with no answers were tried at least 20 times and some were tried as many as 30 times. Disconnects were treated as temporary and retried after two weeks. For face-to-face interviews, interviewers made up to five attempts to find someone at home.
disadvantage factor and their factor loadings are the percent below poverty (.82), percent of female-headed households with children (.77), percent African-American (.85), and the percent with less than a high school degree (.79). Both residential stability (.94) and percent homeowners (.83) loaded on the stability factor. Regression-based factor scores were created for each of these measures based on this analysis. Reliability coefficients for the disadvantage and mobility indices are .82 and .77, respectively.

The mediating variables in this model are social ties and cultural strength. Social ties are measured by summing responses to the following two questions: “How many of your relatives live in your neighborhood, not including those in your household?” and “Not including people in your household, how many of your neighbors do you consider to be friends?” There were a few extreme values for both of these variables, so each was truncated before summing. Variables were truncated at values that included 99% of the respondents (the truncated values were 20 and 50, respectively).

Cultural strength can be viewed as the extent to which normative values are visibly and audibly alive in a community. A culture is strong when its residents consistently make statements and behave in line with the culture. That is, although culture refers to the content of beliefs and values, cultural strength refers to the extent to which those values are believed to be alive within the community. Cultural strength is measured here by the extent to which residents perceive their neighbors to strongly agree with conventional values. Although I also measure respondents’ own values (see conventional values below), it is the perception of others’ values within the neighborhood that actually identifies the social context in which people act, and therefore it is this perception that is central to this theory. The survey assesses the strength of the normative culture in terms of seven conventional values. Specifically, respondents were asked, “Based on what you see and hear in your neighborhood, how strongly do you feel your neighbors would agree or disagree with the following statements?” (1) It is important to get a good education. (2) It is important to be honest. (3) Family members should make sacrifices in their personal life for the good of the family. (4) It is wrong to drink alcohol to the point of getting drunk. (5) Selling drugs is always wrong. (6) Children should always respect their elders. (7) It is wrong for young women to get pregnant before they are married. These items are representative of normative values taught in schools and churches. Respondents could strongly agree (1), somewhat agree (2), somewhat disagree (3), or strongly disagree (4).

This measure treats cultural strength as a quality of the neighborhood distinct from the average level of conventional values held by the individual respondents. By measuring respondents' perceptions of neighbors' values, neighborhood respondents act as observers of their neighborhood,
and thereby provide a measure consistent with the neighborhood focus of the study.\footnote{The approach taken here is consistent with the measurement of other neighborhood characteristics such as neighborhood cohesion and informal social control used in most contemporary neighborhood-level studies. That is, neighborhood respondents are treated as informants of the likelihood of neighbors intervening or of how well neighbors get along (see, for example, Morenoff et al., 2001; Sampson, 1997; Sampson et al., 1997).}

Although this model suggests that the strength of the culture varies across communities, it assumes that the majority of residents agree with conventional values. Thus, the seven same value questions are asked of the individual respondents and are the basis for the measure of conventional values. That is, respondents were also asked how strongly they personally agreed or disagreed with the same seven value items mentioned above. The frequency distributions for these values appear in Table 1.

The dependent variable, informal social control, is measured by the likelihood of residents intervening in inappropriate neighborhood behavior. Specifically it was measured with questions concerning the likelihood of someone in the neighborhood intervening in the following six behaviors: children spray painting graffiti on a local building, children showing disrespect to an adult in the neighborhood, someone being beaten up in front of your house, someone breaking into your house, someone trying to sell drugs to a neighborhood child, and someone trying to sell drugs to an adult in plain sight. These items follow previous work on informal social control that has examined the same or similar behaviors (see, for example, Elliott et al., 1996; Sampson, 1997; Sampson et al., 1997). The percent of respondents who stated that it was “very likely” that someone from the neighborhood would do something to stop each behavior was calculated, and those percentages were then averaged across the six items, providing the average percentage of respondents in each neighborhood perceiving it is very likely that neighbors would intervene across six behaviors.

ANALYSIS

The purpose of the analysis is to examine the extent to which an integrated cultural and structural model of social disorganization is supported by the data. Because values play a central role in this analysis, I begin with a presentation of the frequency distributions for the value items used in the analysis. Table 1 displays the levels of agreement and disagreement for both respondents' stated values and perceptions of neighbors' values. As is apparent in this table, the average level of stated agreement with these values is quite high. Indeed, there is very little variance on two items: “It is important to get a good education” and “It is important to be honest.”
Table 1. Frequency Distributions of Levels of Agreement with Value Items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>%Strongly Agree</th>
<th>%Agree</th>
<th>%Disagree</th>
<th>%Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Respondents' articulated levels of agreement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. It is important to get a good education.</td>
<td>97.6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>.1</td>
<td>.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. It is important to be honest.</td>
<td>97.2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>.0</td>
<td>.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Family members should make sacrifices in their personal life for the good of the family.</td>
<td>81.4</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. It is wrong to drink alcohol to the point of getting drunk.</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Selling drugs is always wrong.</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Children should always respect their elders.</td>
<td>87.7</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. It is wrong for young women to get pregnant before they are married.</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Respondents' perceptions of neighbors' levels of agreement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. It is important to get a good education.</td>
<td>78.2</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. It is important to be honest.</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Family members should make sacrifices in their personal life for the good of the family.</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. It is wrong to drink alcohol to the point of getting drunk.</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Selling drugs is always wrong.</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Children should always respect their elders.</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. It is wrong for young women to get pregnant before they are married.</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ninety-seven percent of the respondents strongly agreed with each of these items. This lends some support to the idea that there is broad consensus on at least some conventional values. It is also apparent from this table that, on average, respondents perceive neighbors to be considerably less likely to agree with these values.

Because the first two items have very limited variance, they are excluded from further analysis. The remaining five items were used to create the cultural strength and conventional values measures. For the conventional values measure, the percentage of respondents strongly agreeing with each of these items was calculated for each neighborhood. These percentages were then averaged across all five items in each neighborhood to obtain an average percent of residents strongly agreeing with conventional
values. Reliability for this scale was adequate, with alpha = .76. Similarly, responses regarding the extent to which neighbors were perceived as endorsing these values were used to created the cultural strength measure in the same manner. The reliability for the scale was also adequate (alpha = .86).

The analysis next turns to testing the causal model. The model is tested using structural equation models. I begin by examining the hypothesis that social ties affect cultural strength. Although the model suggests that social ties increase cultural strength, one could also argue that the perception of conventional values (cultural strength) increases the likelihood of social ties. In order to be certain that the hypothesized direction of causality is correct, I examine a reciprocal model allowing social ties to affect cultural strength and cultural strength to affect social ties.

To examine such a model, it is necessary to identify instrumental variables for social ties and cultural strength. Instrumental variables affect one of these outcomes directly, but not the other. Because residential stability has been shown to be highly and consistently related to the level of social ties, and because the effect of stability on cultural strength should be predominantly through the level of social ties, I use stability as the instrument for social ties. As an instrument for cultural strength, I use the average level of conventional values articulated by respondents. Although cultural strength should be strongly affected by the actual level of values articulated by residents in the community, there is no reason to believe that these articulated values should be related to social ties except through their perception (i.e., cultural strength).

The model is analyzed using LISREL 8.3 and is based on the covariance
matrix. The standardized maximum likelihood estimates for this model are presented in Figure 1. These results show that, as hypothesized, stability significantly increases social ties, which in turn significantly increase cultural strength. Disadvantage and respondent’s level of conventional values significantly affect cultural strength as hypothesized, and cultural strength does not significantly affect social ties \((t = -1.60)\). Most importantly, then, these findings suggest that the nature of the relationship between social ties and cultural strength is recursive, and in the hypothesized direction.

I next turn to an examination of the full theoretical model. The model I examine is a recursive model and is shown in Figure 2. Findings from this model are presented in Table 2. The first thing to note about this model (model 1, Table 2) is that it does not fit the data well \((\chi^2 = 65.06; \text{df} = 6; p < .00; \text{RMSEA} = .31)\).\(^4\) The large chi-square suggests that the model should be relaxed in terms of allowing one or more additional paths to be estimated. An examination of the standardized residuals and modification indices suggests that a better fitting model would include direct paths from both disadvantage and social ties to informal social control. This suggests that cultural strength may not fully mediate the effects of disadvantage or social ties on informal social control. Further, the RMSEA, which represents a different class of fit indices, is also larger than the general rule of thumb of .08 (Browne and Cudek, 1993). Because the RMSEA “includes a penalty function for lack of parsimony” (Jaccard and Wan, 1996:87), I also remove the nonsignificant path from disadvantage to social ties. This

---

4. The chi-square statistic is a measure of goodness of fit of the model. It tests the null hypothesis that the proposed model was generated by the data; hence, the smaller the chi-square statistic (the larger the probability associated with the chi-square), the better the fit of the model to the data (see, e.g., Jaccard and Wan, 1996; Pedhazur, 1982). The chi-square for this model is significant, suggesting that the model is not a good fit for the data. Further, Browne and Cudek (1993) suggest that the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) should be under .08 for an adequate fitting model.
Table 2. Maximum Likelihood Estimates for the Full Model\(^ab\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1(^b)</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2(^c)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Ties</td>
<td>Cultural Strength</td>
<td>Social Ties</td>
<td>Cultural Strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>1.31 (26)</td>
<td>0.54**</td>
<td>1.31 (26)</td>
<td>0.54**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantage</td>
<td>-0.09 (26)</td>
<td>-0.04 (01)</td>
<td>-0.03 (01)</td>
<td>-34**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Ties</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.29**</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conventional</td>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.92 (.11)</td>
<td>0.68**</td>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Estimates are maximum likelihood estimates produced by LISREL 8.3. Unstandardized structural estimates (and error variances) are presented in column 1, and standardized estimates are presented in column 2.

\(^b\) Goodness of Fit measures for model 1: Chi-square = 65.06 (68 df, p = .00); GFI = .82; RMSEA = .31.

\(^c\) Goodness of Fit measures for model 2: Chi-square = 5.65 (4 df, p = .23); GFI = .97; RMSEA = .075.

\(^p < .05; ^**p < .01\)

The model fits the data considerably better ($\chi^2 = 15.34; df = 5; p < .01; \text{RMSEA} = .16$); however, it still does not fit the data well. (Results for this model not shown.) Again, examination of the modification indices suggests that a path be included from stability to informal social control. This suggests that social ties may not fully mediate the effects of stability on informal social control. The results from the model with this final modification are presented in model 2 in Table 2. This model provides a good fit for the data ($\chi^2 = 5.65 (df = 4); p = .23; \text{RMSEA} = .075$). Standardized residuals were also examined for this model, and there were none greater than 2.

The results show mixed support for the hypothesized model. First, the results show that the percentage of respondents in each neighborhood strongly agreeing with conventional values is positively and significantly related to the extent to which respondents perceive their neighbors to embrace conventional values. This provides evidence of convergent validity for the measure of cultural strength. That is, the higher the proportion of respondents in each neighborhood agreeing with conventional values, the more likely respondents are to perceive their neighbors as agreeing with conventional values. Second, consistent with the proposed model are the positive significant effect of stability on social ties and the significant negative effect of disadvantage on cultural strength.

In terms of the effects of the endogenous variables, social ties are found to significantly increase cultural strength, as hypothesized, but they also maintain a significant direct effect on informal social control. Further, cultural strength is found to have a significant and positive effect on informal
Table 3. Maximum Likelihood Estimates for a Model Including Drug Arrest Rates\textsuperscript{a,b}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Social Ties</th>
<th>Cultural Strength</th>
<th>Informal Social Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>.54***</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.26)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantage</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social ties</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.00)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventional Values</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.62**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrest rate</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.24*</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.00)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Strength</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.08)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{a} Estimates are maximum likelihood estimates produced by LISREL 8.3. Unstandardized structural estimates (and error variances) are presented in column 1, and standardized estimates are presented in column 2.

\textsuperscript{b} Chi-square = 2.71 (5 df, \(p = .74\)); GFI = .99; RMSEA = .0.

\* \(p < .05\); \** \(p < .01\).

Social control. However, in contrast to the hypothesized model, disadvantage and stability are found to have direct significant effects on informal social control not mediated by either social ties or cultural strength.

Next, I turn to preliminary analyses of some modified models. Because the sampling procedures oversampled high drug activity neighborhoods, I include a control variable for drug activity to determine whether the previous results are due to the level of drug activity in some of these neighborhoods. Drug activity may play a particularly important role in weakening culture and in decreasing informal social control as it may increase levels of fear of reprisal for intervening. Aware that the actual level of drug activity within neighborhoods is notoriously difficult to assess, I examine drug arrest rates for a preliminary examination of this issue. Drug arrest rates were calculated by dividing the number of drug arrests in 1999 (geocoded to the neighborhood level) by the 2000 U.S. Census neighborhood population counts and multiplying by 1000. The results from the model controlling for drug arrest rates are presented in Table 3. The model fits the data quite well (\(\chi^2 = 2.71\) (5 df, \(p = .74\)); GFI = .99; RMSEA = .0). The results show that drug activity significantly decreases cultural strength.
and reduces the effect of disadvantage on cultural strength to nonsignifi-
cance. However, drug arrest rates are not found to directly affect informal
social control or to substantially change the general findings from the pre-
vious model.

Finally, I examine a model that recognizes that the aggregated survey
measures used here may have compositional as well as contextual aspects.
In order to explicitly examine the causal relationships hypothesized in this
model, the analyses in this paper have used structural equation models
rather than multilevel models. Nonetheless, I am aware that the aggre-
gated survey measures used here are open to criticism because they do not
control for the characteristics of the individuals residing in those commu-
nities (compositional effects). That is, differences in these measures across
communities can be argued to be due to differences in the composition of
those neighborhoods and/or actual neighborhood-level effects. Although
this criticism is true of all neighborhood-level studies that use aggregated
measures and do not use multilevel models, it seems particularly impor-
tant in the context of this model to make some assessment of the extent to
which the central variable in this model, cultural strength, is indeed mea-
suring a neighborhood-level characteristic. Although an analysis of vari-
ance shows that the amount of variance between neighborhoods is
significantly greater than the amount of variance within neighborhoods (F
= 2.65, \( p = .000 \)), this does not address the issue of whether this between
neighborhood variance is due to neighborhoods being composed of
residents with different characteristics. The aggregated perceptions of
neighbors’ values examined previously may, in part, be due to neighbor-
hoods being composed of residents with different characteristics, such as
age, race, gender, and respondents’ own values.

I provide a preliminary examination of this issue by analyzing residuals
from an individual-level model controlling for prominent demographics
and respondents’ own values. Specifically, I regress the individual-level
perceptions of neighborhood values on the respondent’s age, gender
(male), race (white), and own articulated values (conventional values scale
score) to get an individual predicted score for cultural strength, given
these individual characteristics. The residuals, or differences between
these predicted scores and the observed scores, were then saved and
aggregated to the neighborhood level. (Silver and Dowley, 2000, use this
same method in comparing values across nations.) The residuals represent
the amount of perceived neighborhood values that are not accounted for
by these individual-level characteristics. I then replace both the cultural

---

5. Items are scored such that high scores reflect stronger agreement with conven-
tional values.
Table 4. Maximum Likelihood Estimates for a Model Examining a Composition Adjusted Measure of Cultural Strength.\textsuperscript{a,b}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Social Ties</th>
<th></th>
<th>Cultural Strength</th>
<th></th>
<th>Informal Social Control</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.31**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.25)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantage</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.43**</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.46**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.02)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social ties</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.00)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.05)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{a} Estimates are maximum likelihood estimates produced by LISREL 8.3. Unstandardized structural estimates (and error variances) are presented in column 1, and standardized estimates are presented in column 2.

\textsuperscript{b} Chi-square = 10.32 (2 df, \(p = .00\)); GFI = .94; RMSEA = .24.

* \(p < .05\); **\(p < .01\).

The role of attenuated culture and the conventional values measures (which are controlled for in the residuals) with this residual measure of cultural strength in the model. Results from this analysis are in Table 4.

Findings from this analysis show very little difference from the model using the original measure (Table 2, model 2). Social ties significantly increase cultural strength and cultural strength continues to significantly increase informal social control, although the level of significance drops from .01 to .05. Although this model does not fit the data well, examination of standardized residuals suggests that this is due to possible feedback loops from both informal social control and cultural strength to the stability factor. However, the stability measure used here is based on data collected previous to the measures of informal social control and cultural strength and hence could not be affected by them. Nonetheless, these findings suggest that the findings for cultural strength, presented previously, are relatively robust, but future research should more carefully address both individual-level and neighborhood-level effects and the possibility of other reciprocal paths.

**DISCUSSION**

Social disorganization theory has been critical in developing an understanding of the importance of informal social control in preventing crime.
Several studies have now confirmed the effects of neighbors' willingness to intervene in controlling crime rates (Elliott et al., 1996; Morenoff et al., 2001; Sampson, 1997; Sampson et al., 1997). Yet, we have only partial understanding of why some neighborhoods are better able to portray a likelihood of intervening than others. This study enriches our understanding of community variance in rates of informal social control by demonstrating the importance of both its structural and cultural foundations.

Descriptive data presented in this study demonstrate that the majority of neighborhood residents agree or strongly agree with the conventional values examined here, even though many of these neighborhoods have very high levels of poverty and drug use. Nonetheless, residents in disadvantaged communities tend to underestimate neighbors' conventional values, consequently weakening informal social control. Although residents may indeed be similar, in poor communities, they might not believe themselves to be similar. This seems particularly relevant in public housing projects where the residents make assumptions about the type of people who live here. Like one of Furstenberg’s (1993:238) respondents, who stated, “You can live in the projects, but you ain’t got to be like the project,” some of our respondents also responded to the values questions with statements like, “Honey, you’re in the projects!” Such statements suggest certain assumptions or perceptions about the values of people who live in public housing. Preliminary findings from a model that included drug arrests suggest that the level of drug activity within neighborhoods largely accounts for the effect of disadvantage on cultural strength. This suggests that drug activity may be an important basis on which residents assess the level of conventional values in their community.

The findings from this study also suggest that social ties are important in strengthening informal social control, in part, because they provide a mechanism through which shared conventional values can be recognized. Hence, neighborhoods that are able to foster strong social ties, regardless of the level of disadvantage, are better able to increase cultural strength. Further, consistent with the systemic model, social ties are found to also have a significant direct effect on informal social control. Regardless of the level of cultural strength in the neighborhood, neighborhoods in which there are few social ties are less likely to perceive neighbors as willing to intervene.

The recent resurgence of interest in the role of culture in crime and crime control is likely to develop a new chapter in community-level explanations of crime. The current study has focused on cultural strength and has supported the hypothesis that informal social control is more likely to occur when culture is strong. Nonetheless, disadvantage continues to have a strong direct effect on informal social control. Other aspects of culture
besides values should be explored to help explain why informal social control is lower in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage. For example, "softer" concepts of culture (Hannerz, 1969) define culture in terms of skills, habits, or modes of behavior that are distinctive among certain groups (Hannerz, 1969; Swidler, 1986; Wilson, 1996). Much of the current ethnographic literature on "oppositional culture" seems to focus on the presence of certain behaviors, such as out-of-wedlock births, boisterousness, toughness, blatant sexuality, and drug activity. Such behaviors, in and of themselves, may be cultural adaptations that have consequences for informal social control and consequently crime rates.

Among the most important cultural adaptations to the realities of ghetto life may be those emanating from the profound lack of faith in the police to help victims, to control crime, or to dispense justice (Anderson, 1994). This lack of faith in the police leads to behaviors that portray one's ability to defend one's self and one's family, as well as an inclination to "see, but don't see" when things go awry (Anderson, 1999). When behaviors and styles that say "Don't mess with me," become common in neighborhoods, residents may simply be too fearful to get involved.

Although this study has only scratched the surface of our understanding of the various ways in which culture may be relevant to social control, it highlights the importance that perceived values have for social control and raises several new questions. For example, what effect do perceptions of nonconventional values have on informal social control? The current study only examined a limited number of conventional values and did not examine specific nonconventional values, such as the appropriateness of the use of violence. Might perceptions of acceptance of such values also be important in determining informal social control? Further, what behavioral adaptations to concentrated disadvantage affect a community's level of informal social control? To what extent is the presence of such behaviors due to weakened conventional values?

Finally, there are several limitations to the current study. First, although I examine reciprocal effects between social ties and cultural strength, I do not examine a fully nonrecursive model. It may be important for future research to examine reciprocal paths between informal social control and perceived values, for example. Second, the theoretical focus of this study is on explaining variations in informal social control and has, consequently, not included crime rates. Future research should examine the effects of culture on both informal social control and crime. Additionally, as a macrolevel model, this study does not examine the impact of both individual- and neighborhood-level effects on important variables such as the perception of values and the perceived likelihood of intervening in inappropriate behavior. Multilevel models that control for individual-level
effects and examine interactions between individual- and neighborhood-level effects are also among the important next steps.

CONCLUSION

Social disorganization theory has provided important tools for building stronger communities, yet its success has been limited by its neglect of cultural issues. Building stronger communities will require not only strengthening the structural arrangements therein, but also strengthening the culture. Strengthening culture requires creating opportunities for residents of all neighborhoods to live out conventional values such that those values are visible and alive within the community. When conventional values become invisible, one foundation upon which informal social control can be built disappears.

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THE ROLE OF ATTENUATED CULTURE


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Furstenberg, Frank F., Jr.

Hannerz, Ulf

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Jacobs, Bruce A. and Richard Wright

Jaecker, Gertrude and Philip Selznick

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Barbara D. Warner is Associate Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice and Police Studies at Eastern Kentucky University. Her research addresses the effects of community characteristics on crime and crime control and has appeared in the American Sociological Review, Social Problems, Justice Quarterly, Criminology, Sociological Focus, and Sociology of Crime, Law and Deviance. Her current research focuses on culture and crime, and how community characteristics are related to different models of justice.