Introduction to an Assigned Reading


Who Is He?

Rob Sampson is currently a professor of Sociology at Harvard University, previously holding positions at the University of Chicago and the University of Illinois. He received a Ph.D. in criminal justice from SUNY-Albany. He started out researching structural and ecological correlates of victimization using NCVS data, often constructing synthetic neighborhoods, 1 moved on to study in more detail the impacts of social ties and cohesiveness 2 and to update the systemic model of crime. 3 He has been a leading authority on collective efficacy (CE) 4 and its application to a wide range of outcomes including crime, offending, and other aspects of wellbeing. He also has been a leading scholar in life course criminology. 5 He, along with Steve Raudenbush and Tony Earls are the leading scholarly lights behind the PHDCN (Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods), which is the Large Hadron Collider of criminology. This book pulls together his thinking about CE and how it links to crime and related well being matters.

What Is He Doing?

CE has been hugely influential in a whole variety of disciplines including public health, several areas of psychology, and more. You want to be clear what this concept means and how it is operationalized. You want to be clear about how the idea is similar to but also different from related ideas like informal social control 6 and/or social disorganization. 7

CE is an ecological counterpart to the individual-level idea of personal efficacy in psychology developed by famous social learning researcher Albert Bandura. 8 There are some interesting and important differences between

collective efficacy as conceptualized and operationalized by Sampson and personal efficacy as conceptualized and operationalized by Bandura. If anyone is looking for an interesting paper to write.....

The level of analysis concerns how urban neighborhood qualities influence the lives of individuals and communities.

**Where Does This Fit In?**

The two books that you have read so far this semester, Garland, and Messner and Rosenfeld, both address macrolevel culture, macrolevel structure, and the complex ways they intertwine, condition each other, and depend on each other both federal properties and for their consequences.

So here comes another macrolevel work.

Is the spatial scale of the geographic unit similar or different to what we seen before?

Is this work considering both structure and culture; or only one?

If it is considering both structure and culture how do they connect up in the conceptual mapping of this model?

**What theorists is he reacting to?**

You also can frame what Sampson is doing here as a pushback against a stream of literature in urban sociology and elsewhere about “virtual community,” “community liberated” 9 and “the world is flat,” arguments about how broad scale technological changes and accompanying structural reorganization make local community irrelevant. Of course our last 10 years with the iPhone have made this even a more intense set of issues.

He wants to show you all the ways that **local** – physically local, as in physically close or nearby – community matters.

The research takes place in the deindustrialized, post 1970, indeed mostly post 2000 landscape of US urban neighborhoods. In a sense, he is providing additional illustrations of Wilson’s deindustrialization thesis. 10

He is tackling very challenging questions.

1. What neighborhood features beyond demographic structure affect crime, offending, and victimization?
2. HOW and at what level do these features work?
   a. What are the community level dynamics?
   b. What are the individual level dynamics?
3. If community characteristics are affecting what are in essence individual level outcomes, like victimization or homicide, how is the community “getting into” individuals?
4. To state the above question differently,
5. What is happening at higher levels of spatial organization and how does this tie in?
6. Probably too hard for us to talk about now, so we are skipping that chapter for the nonce: How much of a problem is nonrandom selection of people into and out of neighborhoods? 11

Very challenging indeed.

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11 If you want to know more about my views on this see my selection chapter in Community Criminology (2014). New York: New York University Press.