Takeaway thoughts on:


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User note
This “takeaway” has a ton of references. Please do not freak out. You do not need to worry about that this semester unless there are some basic terms you are confused about

Think of this as a dual purpose document.

- It will clue to you in to what you should be thinking about in the Sampson book as you prepare for the first exam; and
- In the future, it will provide you to a roadmap to consult later as you grow your way more deeply into community criminology and seek better grounding on issues.

Two parts
Let me separate my takeaway comments on the Sampson volume into two parts: what you absolutely need to be thinking about for the midterm exam, and the broader applicability of this work. All of the references you find here are just for future reference; do not go dig those out now unless you have questions about some of the key terms in bold.

For the exam this semester

#1

You want to have a clear idea of how collective efficacy (CE) is both conceptualized and operationalized.

On the conceptual side: what are the sub-domains, the threads, within this concept? The measurement flip side is: how are these threads assessed and how do the relevant indicators behave? This is a measurement question of content validity (Taylor, 1994: 147-148) and internal consistency (reliability) over items (Taylor, 1994: 132-134).

On the conceptual side: what does this concept mean? The measurement flip side is: how does he establish the construct validity (Taylor, 1994: 148-152) of the CE indicator?

If the outcome of interest is either acts of delinquent behavior in public settings (outside) taking place in the focal neighborhood, or acts of criminal behavior in public settings (outside) taking place in the focal neighborhood, then a case can be made that the key thread in CE is willingness to intervene (Hackler, Ho, & Urquhart-Ross, 1974). This is the substantive, core thread in the new term CE (C. E. Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003; Taylor, 2002).
How well does Sampson make the case that CE is something distinct from related concepts?

Part of establishing construct validity, the meaning of the indicators, is establishing discriminant validity (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955) (Taylor, 2015: 210-214): showing that these indicators are operationally distinct from other indicators of closely related constructs. There are a number of closely related constructs capturing social dynamics relevant to crime and reactions to crime in neighborhoods (Taylor, 2002). What is distinct about what Sampson offers with CE compared to earlier related terms in this area? These terms might include informal social control (S. Greenberg & Rohe, 1986; S. W. Greenberg, Williams, & Rohe, 1982), local social ties (Taylor, Gottfredson, & Brower, 1984b), social networks (Wellman & Leighton, 1979), sense of community (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Perkins, Florin, Rich, Wandersman, & Chavis, 1990), attachment to place (Gerson, Steuve, & Fischer, 1977; Shumaker & Taylor, 1983; Taylor, Gottfredson, & Brower, 1984a, 1985), territorial cognitions related to local control or responsibility (Taylor, 1988), political participation (M. Crenson, 1983; M. A. Crenson, 1978), or social disorganization (R. J. Bursik, Jr., 1988; Maccoby, Johnson, & Church, 1958; Taylor, 2000), and so on.

On the conceptual side: what is the spatial or geographic or organizational scale at which this operates? Stated differently: it is a property of what? This is a meta-theory question. On the measurement side: how does he establish this? This is, in part, a question of consistency (reliability) over raters (Taylor, 1994: 137-138).

On the conceptual side: what are the range of impacts that CE can affect? This is a question about the scope conditions of the theory. On the measurement side: how does he make a case empirically for this scope?

Given how you have answered the above, in light of the information Sampson has presented, you need to have an opinion about CE: is this something both new and interesting? Yes or no? How do you defend your opinion? Sampson himself and others would argue yes. You want to have a sense of why he is saying that.

You want to have a clear idea of what Sampson calls the family of neighborhood effects, specifically as they relate to crime, victimization, and exposure to violence. He has summarized...
some of his earlier thoughts about this elsewhere (Robert J. Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-
Rowley, 2002). You can find my thoughts about this elsewhere (Taylor, 2015: 225-244).

#7

Sampson talks about cultural mechanisms situated in neighborhood context. I will not hold you
responsible for his evidence or arguments about disorder, a.k.a. incivilities, in part because I
disagree with some of the points that made here, but I would like you to pay some attention to
another important idea, moral and legal cynicism. This is an important idea not only for
understanding communities and crime but also for understanding the interface between criminal
justice agencies and citizens in the communities they serve. One of the huge problems in
community criminology to date is that the impacts of local justice agents’ actions, a framework
some call community justice (Clear, 2007), have been overlooked (Taylor, 2015: 38-65). This
topic, also called legal socialization, is also proving important in developmental criminology
(Kaiser & Reisig, 2017).

#8

You want to think about the key dynamics in a multilevel context; see figure 3.1 on page number
63. In Sampson’s mind, how is the boat model being put together?

#9

Pay attention to extra-local or supra-neighborhood effects. Pay close attention to the work he has
done with Graif and see if you can wrap you head around the idea of spatial heterogeneity. In
particular, see if you can understand Figure 10.3, p. 255. You folks in environmental
criminology really really want to understand this. There are analytic tools called geographically
weighted regression (Fotheringham, Brunsdon, & Charlton, 2002). The basic idea is that the
impact of the predictor on the outcome varies spatially.

# 10

You want to be sure you understand these figures/tables:

Figure 1.6 p. 20
Figure 3.1 p. 63
Figure 5.1, p. 105
Figure 5.2, p. 106
Figure 5.4, p. 110
Figure 5.5, p. 114
Figure 7.1, p. 161
Figure 7.2, p. 165
Figure 7.5, p. 175
Figure 10.1, p. 241
Has Sampson proved that his theory is better than competing theories? I would really really like to see a head-to-head test of CE versus some other model with different neighborhood cultural social dynamics included, whatever that other intervening construct might be. We are not yet sure that CE, informative as it is, is demonstrably better than other neighborhood-based informal social control models using alternate intervening (mediating) social dynamics.

One of the challenges in theory testing is learning whether one theory is better supported by the evidence than another. Ideally, theory tests pit one theory against another, and whichever way the empirical evidence comes out supports one theory over another. This is called a strong inference design (Platt, 1964).

One of the problems with this work is that there is no comparing of collective efficacy theory relative to a competing theory. As Akers and Sellers (2012: 168) note “a number of studies have explored processes derived from other criminological theories as the intervening mechanism” between community structure and community crime outcomes. Some are closely related, like Bursik & Grasmick’s (1993) basic systemic model of crime. Some are quite different, like the ecological version of general strain theory (Agnew, 1999). The problem is, lacking a head to head test of different theories with the same data set and same setting, we do not know which one is “better.” As you think about what “better” means consider:

- Fit of model to data
- Scope of outcomes
- Parsimony
- Utility

See Sampson’s comments about theory on 382.

Things to think about for later
After the semester is done, and you seek to grow your way more deeply into this topic for whatever reason, here are some additional things to think about.

#12

Kubrin and colleagues (2009: 92) treat CE as basically a new variation of social disorganization theory. You need to decide: is this an extension/modification of social disorganization theory? Or something totally different? Or just a restatement looking through the opposite end of the key construct? Look closely at Bursik (1988) as you consider.
IMHO: I am not sure we yet understand the relationship between the updated social disorganization model (Robert. J. Sampson & Groves, 1989), CE, and the basic systemic model of crime (R. J. J. Bursik & Grasmick, 1993). Wilcox (2018: 175-188) discusses these relationships, but I am not sure that she provides a definitive answer either about how the different frames relate conceptually, or about model testing of one frame versus another.

#13

The term “collective efficacy” is a sociological translation of a psychological concept “personal efficacy” (PE) invented by famous psychologist Albert Bandura (1997). Self-efficacy is about a person believing he/she can accomplish something. 1 “People's beliefs about their efficacy can be developed by four main sources of influence. The most effective way of creating a strong sense of efficacy is through mastery experiences. Successes build a robust belief in one's personal efficacy. Failures undermine it.” 2

There four sources: 3

- Mastery – you have experiences where you have mastered what you want to accomplish. Think of a football coach teaching a team a new play. They start out running through it very slowly, literally walking the play. Then they start practicing it at higher speeds. Then they practice it with opposing players creating additional challenges. Imagine the same thing at an individual level. Playing a piano piece, starting slowly, working just on the fingering and the correct notes. Then speeding up and keeping tempo. Then adding dynamics, and so on.
- Modeling – seeing similarly situated others succeed at the task in question. This convinces you it is do-able for you. This is basic social learning.
- Persuasion – others may boost your perceived ability to accomplish the task by persuading you that you have the chops needed. If the persuasion boosts perceived self-efficacy, you may try hard enough so you succeed.
- Physiological Factors – How do you interpret your physiological reactions as you attempt mastery? Are your reactions an indicator that you are up for the challenge? Or do they indicate that you are totally stressed out and just cannot succeed?

So some questions:

a) In what ways does CE “miss the boat” and leave out key parts of PE, parts that are sociologically relevant to neighborhoods? If you look closely at Bandura's (1997)

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1 Former colleague E. Scott Geller has a great Tedx talk that touches on personal efficacy as it relates to self motivation technique. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sxpKhIbr0E
2 https://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/Bandura/BanEncy.html
3 These points are adapted from these two web sites: https://study.com/academy/lesson/self-efficacy-definition-theory-quiz.html#transcriptHeader ; https://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/Bandura/BanEncy.html
definition of PE, and sought to translate all of the threads in that concept into a neighborhood analog, what would your measurement look like? Does CE MISS key parts of PE? Are there key parts of PE that should not be translated to the neighborhood level?

b) If you were to translate PE ideas into a neighborhood learning program rather than a set of assessment instruments, in order to promote collective efficacy, how would that work?

I think there are some interesting conceptual papers, and or agent based simulation modeling topics here for those who are interested in thinking harder about the connections between PE and CE. Just sayin…..

#14

Is CE more or less advanced than other treatments of neighborhood-based informal social control dynamics relevant to crime and delinquency?

Read Bursik & Grasmick’s (1993) Neighborhoods and Crime, look closely at their basic systemic model of crime. This conceptualizes informal social control using three different orders (private, parochial, and public); these are to some extent spatially organized and build on Hunter’s (1985; 2003) work. You should compare that closely with Sampson's use of collective efficacy. How is B&G’s tripartite division of local social dynamics similar to or different from Sampson’s CE? If different, how could we figure out if this mattered (cf. Taylor (1997))? Can you make a case that B&G’s conceptualization is more advanced? Or are the two models instead just trying to do different things?

#15

The concept of disadvantage conflates SES and race. Some see this as un-helpful (Massey, 1998). Where do you come down on this?

#16

Is Sampson’s definition of neighborhood effects overly broad across different geographic units of analysis? (See p. 358 and comment about “multiple units of analysis”.) Is it so broad that it forces out contributions from political science and political economy for understanding how things got this way? Before you answer, read Rothstein (Rothstein, 2017). He provides extensive documentation of government-sponsored legal and economic practices that deepened racial segregation in America’s cities.
Broader impact of the work

In some ways the book is a testament to the ongoing power, consequences, and tyranny of spatial inequality. Spatial differentiation is important in all kinds of ways. To follow up, take our crime mapping and geography of crime courses.

Pulling the lens even further back, Sampson is speaking to several different audiences in this work. Clearly one audience is community criminologists, another group is urban sociologists generally concerned with a range of neighborhood dynamics and neighborhood impacts, and another group is demographers seeking to sort out and track demographic changes at the neighborhood and individual levels. The book summarizes a vast array of research spanning over 20 years and has already had a major impact on all of these areas of investigation. The figure below reports citations to the book, which are at least 390 as of this date, by discipline in which the journals appear. This citation pattern would seem to define “wide ranging impact.”

Some personal reflections

You are not responsible for committing my personal reflections to memory. I am just sharing here.

#17

This book culminates two decades of extraordinary research on a related set of topics carried out by Sampson, his colleagues (Raudenbush, Earles among others), and his former graduate students (Morenoff, Sharkey, Graif, St. Jean among others). It is as hard to close out an area of research with a major statement like this as it is to get started in an area of research. So many many props on this astounding achievement. The concerns expressed below is minor in comparison to my respect for what he has accomplished. And that is:
“Collective efficacy has become the dominant community-level paradigm in criminology” according to Wilcox (2018: 176).

If you pay close attention to the structure of his argument -- again, see figure 3.1 and his caveat on page 62 – the focus really is on how neighborhoods affect individuals and how neighborhoods affect other neighborhoods. But beyond that, he recognizes that things are happening at a "higher" level of analysis (extralocal, supracommunity). Despite that recognition, and the great demonstration of that point with Graif’s work, he also admits that his tools cannot get at that. So he will talk about extra local dynamics and actually show pictures of them but when it comes to estimating what the processes are behind these, we just come up short. He does talk about neighborhoods as nodes in a network of nearby neighbors, but IMHO I am not sure this creates much insight although it is a nice analogy. In short, how do we figure out what the extra-neighborhood, sub-city or sub-regional processes are?

Sampson (2006) has continued to refine his theory, and offer alternate conceptualizations (Wilcox et al., 2018: 187-189). Although that reformulation includes effects of nearby neighbors, it does not appear to me that he has clarified the relevant processes.

Turning from beyond the neighborhood to within the neighborhood: does the CE model represent methodological holism (macro-input \(\rightarrow\) macro-output) or methodological individualism (macro-input \(\rightarrow\) micro-input \(\rightarrow\) micro-output \(\rightarrow\) macro-output)? Stated differently, is it important to figure out how (process) neighborhoods affect individuals?

References


