

Crime, Law, and Deviance

A section of the American Sociological Association

Newsletter

Winter 2006

Crime, Law, and Deviance
2005-2006 SECTION OFFICERS

CHAIR

Richard Rosenfeld
University of Missouri - St. Louis
richard_rosenfeld@ums1.edu

FORMER CHAIR

Charles R. Tittle
North Carolina State University
tittle@server.sasw.ncsu.edu

SECRETARY TREASURER

Ruth D. Peterson
Ohio State University
peter5@osu.edu

COUNCIL MEMBERS

Richard B. Felson (2006)
Pennsylvania State University
RBF7@psu.edu

Christy Visher (2006)
The Urban Institute
cvisher@ui.urban.org

Peggy Giordano (2007)
Bowling Green State University
pgiorda@bgsu.edu

Joachim Savelsberg (2007)
University of Minnesota
savelsbg@atlas.socsci.umn.edu

Karen F. Parker (2008)
University of Florida
kparker@crim.ufl.edu

Dana L. Haynie (2008)
Ohio State University
Haynie.7@osu.edu

EDITOR

William R. Smith
North Carolina State University
wsmith@server.sasw.ncsu.edu

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Olena Antonaccio
North Carolina State University
oantona@server.sasw.ncsu.edu

Invitation to Join Evolution and Sociology Section-In- Formation

The Evolution and Sociology Section-in-Formation of the American Sociological Association is designed to help reconnect sociology with the life sciences. Supporting this section means supporting a biologically-grounded, scientific sociology - a great development for the 21st century. For more information about this section-in-formation, go to Evolution & Sociology Section Web Page <http://www2.asanet.org/sectionevol/> or contact rlhopcro@email.uncc.edu.

You must be a member of the American Sociological Association to join the section, which then costs only \$5. Student memberships in the association cost only \$17 (plus the cost of one journal). Please encourage your students to join!

Rosemary L. Hopcroft

Associate Professor
Department of Sociology
University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Charlotte NC 28223
Phone (704) 687 4156
Fax (704) 687 3091
E-mail rlhopcro@email.uncc.edu
Web_Page
<http://www.uncc.edu/rlhopcro>

Why Have the U.S. Crime Rates Been Dropping?

Explaining the U. S. Crime Drop

I asked four sociologists to speculate briefly about the meaning of the 1990s crime decline in the U.S. from the position of the theoretical perspectives with which they are identified. **Marcus Felson** interprets the crime drop in light of shifting opportunities. **Steve Messner** proposes that the reduction in crime during the 1990s was well within normal historical perturbations in U. S. crime rates and does not indicate a "phase change" associated with basic institutional transformations. **Charles Tittle** suggests that the crime decline may have been associated with crime-reducing shifts in controls and opportunities, but cautions that the data do not exist to test the relevant variables specified in control-balance theory. Finally, **Rob Sampson** suggests that social disorganization theory may need significant revision in light of recent immigration and crime patterns. Their full responses appear below.

Rick Rosenfeld, Chair, Crime, Law and Deviance Section

Routine Activities and Two Periods of Crime Rate Change

Marcus Felson
Rutgers University

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

In the past, I already showed that the routine activities of daily life best explain crime rate acceleration from 1963 until the mid 1970s. I also explained that other crime correlates could not explain these changes. For example, that was not a period of increasing poverty, inequality, or racism, and the social indicators of the time clearly proved the point.

A narrow application of the routine activity approach is sometimes used to argue that it is inapplicable to more recent decades -- during which crime rates leveled and then declined. That assertion stems from a narrow reading of the original work. That included these precepts, among others.

Generality: Routine activities of daily life provide the opportunity to put criminal inclinations into action. These activities set the stage for more crime or less.

Specific application: The specific changes in routine activities for a specific period of American history increased its crime rates dramatically. To wit, a

proliferation of lightweight goods and the dispersion of activities away from family and household settings made it easier to carry out crime. That's why various crime rates tripled, quadrupled, and quintupled from 1963-1967. Recall that plastics, transistors, and lightweight aluminum revolutionized consumer goods.

In looking at other eras, we cannot look at exactly the same variables. For example, Patrick Colquhoun attributed London's crime wave at the end of the 18th Century to the proliferation of goods going through its port and warehouses, now easy to steal. He did not know about transistors or plastics.

Since 1980, the spread of lightweight durables was already completed -- although the extra-light flat-screen television is a recent enhancement, both to the consumer goods market and the opportunity for thieves. The female labor force was already a dominant fact of life.

Yet, some changes have occurred.

1. The decline in the use of cash has removed crime opportunities from homes, stores, and streets. Although credit fraud opportunities have increased, they have not kept pace with the shrinking chances to steal cash.

2. Many lightweight consumer products have

declined in value and spread to everybody, hence, are no longer worth stealing. For example, pocket calculators and ordinary desktop computers are not worth it to a thief in most cases.

3. Car entertainment systems have been redesigned to undermine their value to thieves.

4. Cars themselves are not as easily or quickly stolen by pure amateurs.

In short, the general routine activity approach is consistent with the leveling and subsequent decline in crime. On the other hand, the usual claims about poverty, inequality, and racism do not fit the facts. Table 1 sums it up. Of all the traditional arguments, only deterrence has much chance to survive. But the increased punishments for crime are mainly applied after offenders have passed their ages of prime offending, and only for certain offenses. Moreover, the chance of being punished remains quite tiny for burglary, shoplifting, and even ordinary assaults. We are left with only one choice -- to forget the emphasis on bad people, and consider instead how society mass produces crime opportunities.

Table 1. Various Crime Correlates and Criminogenesis, 1963-1980, 1981-2005

Correlates	First Period 1963-1980, Crime acceleration	Second Period 1981-2005, Crime deceleration	Conclusions
A. Poverty causes crime	Period of increasing prosperity	Period of stable or increasing prosperity	Poverty could not be central for crime changes
B. Racial conditions cause crime	Period of improving minority position	Period of declining minority political position, stable economic position	Racial conditions could not be central for crime changes
C. Income inequality	Period of slight change in income inequality	Period of slight increase in income inequality	Income inequality could not be central source of crime changes
D. Mass media cause crime	Mass media already highly active	Mass media continuing to be highly active	Mass media could not be central for crime changes
E. Risk of imprisonment causes crime to decline	Risk of imprisonment for most crimes very small, declines somewhat	Risk of imprisonment increases but slightly	Risk of imprisonment could not be central for crime changes
F. Length of imprisonment	Length of imprisonment declines for many crimes	Length of imprisonment increases for drug crimes and some advanced offenders	Length of imprisonment could not be central for crime changes among young offenders
G. Changes in policing	Traditional policing becomes less effective, with more ground to cover	Innovations in policing occurred, but unclear how widely they were used	Unclear the role of changing policing in crime changes
H. Routine activities <i>narrowly defined</i>	More lightweight durable goods, women in labor force, single person households	These changes already reached their zenith	These changes explain earlier rise and failure for that rise to continue
I. Routine activities <i>broadly defined</i>	Include the box above	Less use of cash; product innovations to reduce theft; reduced value for many durable goods	These changes explain changes in both periods, and are subject to empirical validation.

Institutional-Anomie Theory and Recent Crime Trends in the U. S.

Steven F. Messner

SUNY, Albany

Institutional-anomie theory (IAT) explains levels of crime with reference to the basic organization of a society – its culture and institutional structure. Following in the Durkheimian tradition, the theory is predicated on the premise that any given type of social system tends to generate a “normal” level of crime. The observed level of crime in any concrete society will not, of course, be a constant year after year. It is likely to vary as a result of unique historical events that produce upward or downward perturbations around the “normal,” system-generated level, even if the system has not changed in any fundamental way. This theoretical orientation implies that crime rates will exhibit appreciable variation across societies but a good deal of stability over the short-run within societies, and the evidence overwhelmingly affirms that this is in fact the case.

IAT is thus relevant to explaining crime trends that occur over spans of time that are potentially commensurate with changes in basic cultural orientations and institutional

arrangements, and that are of sufficient magnitude to suggest a shift in the “system level” of crime. The time frame for the widely heralded crime drop of the 1990s would seem to be too short to encompass appreciable transformations in the social organization of American society. Moreover, it is by no means clear that the scope of this reduction is sufficient to be regarded as a “phase change” in crime levels, especially if the reference period is not the most recent decade but several generations. For example, the plot for homicide rates from the vital statistics over the course of the 20th century (ignoring the early years, during which the data are problematic) resembles a sine curve. Current levels are perhaps below the average value but are not as low as those in the late 1950s. When viewed in this long-term perspective, current crime levels are by no means exceptional. While the reduction in crime rates over the past decade has certainly been a salutary social development, it would not seem to qualify as the kind of change that falls within the scope conditions of IAT.

The attempt to apply IAT to explain recent trends in crime nevertheless serves a useful purpose by calling attention to theoretical issues that have yet to be adequately addressed. How can the component of the observed crime rate that represents the “normal” level be isolated? What are the criteria

for identifying system-generated levels of crime and meaningful “phase changes” in such levels that can presumably be explained with reference to transformations in the social organization of society? Finding answers to these challenging questions is important for developing IAT and for enhancing our sociological understanding of crime more generally.

Control Balance Theory and Recent Crime Trends

Charles Tittle

North Carolina State University

Control Balance theory (CBT) explains individuals’ deviant behavior, and by aggregation, societal or group rates of deviance. It does so by articulating the interplay of four main variables (control ratios, opportunity, constraint, and self-control), specifying a causal process beginning with motivation stemming from situational provocations that remind individuals of their control circumstances. Though changes in average values of any of the CB variables could account for alterations in crime rates, data are unavailable for establishing trends in CB variables. Moreover, even if changes in the aggregate values of one or another of the CB variables could be determined, effects on the other CB variables, and ultimately crime rates,

would not necessarily be straight-forward. For instance, shifts in control ratios (amount of control that can be exercised relative to that experienced) would alter the proportions of people all along the control ratio continuum. Such changes would produce increases in some kinds of deviance while reducing deviance of other kinds. Given deviant motivation, the peculiar interplay of control ratios with situational opportunity and constraint, and with self-control, affects the type of deviant response. Consequently, some motivated people resort to criminal behavior while others turn to non-criminal forms of deviance. Therefore, because adequate data are lacking, applying CBT to explain crime trends necessarily involves much speculation.

However, one likely scenario is that average control ratios in the United States declined during the past 15 years, producing a larger proportion of the population with control deficits and correspondingly fewer people in the balanced and minimal surplus categories. Yet, there has also probably been some increase in the proportion with extreme surpluses. If all else were equal, those shifts should have produced increases in deviant behavior, including crime, falling within the lower (such as robbery or assault) and upper range of CB desirability (such as corporate fraud). However, constraint (situational risk and magnitude of likely response) for criminal behavior

with low CB desirability (such as larceny) apparently increased. Enhanced constraint probably led many of those with relatively low control ratios who became motivated for deviance to choose non-criminal forms (such as road rage or public outbursts of anger) rather than crime. At the same time, however, constraints on criminal behaviors expressive of large control surpluses apparently did not increase, enhancing the chances of plunderous forms of crime even while rates of ordinary crime declined. Hence, if all the facts were systematically recorded they would probably show rates of crime and deviance with high CB desirability (such as looting of corporate coffers and other abuses of power by executive decisions) and many forms of non-criminal deviance (such as lying, cheating, and deceit) to have increased dramatically. Though changes in variables central to CBT have led to less "ordinary" crime, for which there are FBI statistics, they have also produced much unrecorded, non-criminal, but nevertheless destructive forms of deviance, including increases in discourtesies of all kinds, contentiousness, incivility, and numerous forms of socially disapproved conduct.

Immigration and the Crime Drop

Rob Sampson,
Harvard University

Many explanations for the crime drop in America have been put

forth, none terribly compelling. So rather than rehash the usual suspects, let me put forth one that has been neglected but carries promise. *I hypothesize that recent trends in immigration constitute a macro-social explanation of both the crime drop in the 1990s and its recent leveling off.*

Consider the so-called "Latino paradox," whereby Latinos do better on various social indicators—including violence—than expected given their socioeconomic disadvantage. Using Chicago data, my colleagues and I found a lower rate of violence among Mexican Americans compared to blacks and whites, with the gap explained in large part by immigrant generational status and living in neighborhoods with a high concentration of immigrants. First generation immigrants exhibit lower violence than second generation immigrants, who in turn are less violent than third (and higher) generation Americans. This pattern is also true for blacks. Living in a neighborhood of concentrated immigration is directly associated with reduced violence even after taking into account a host of factors including individual-level immigrant status. Consider further that Latino immigration to the U.S. rose sharply in the 1990s, especially in the middle part of the decade, especially from Mexico, and especially to immigrant enclaves in large cities. The emerging story is provocative and goes against the grain of popular stereotypes.

Following media portrayals (and the original Chicago School), we would expect concentrations of recent immigrants and an influx of “foreigners” to drive up the crime rate since these groups tend to settle in economically disadvantaged and presumably disorganized communities. Yet immigrants and Latinos are less violent, particularly when they live in concentrated immigrant areas. We are thus witnessing a radically different pattern than early 20th-century America, where immigration was linked with increasing crime and became a building block for social disorganization theory. By contrast, in today’s world it is no longer tenable to assume that immigration and ethnic diversity automatically lead to disorganization and consequently crime. My favorite theory needs revision!

In fact, my thesis is that the broad reduction in American violence over the last decade was due (in part, of course) to increasing diversity and immigration. Note that immigration increased at its most rapid rate in the mid to late 90s and has since leveled off – just like aggregate crime rates. Moreover, LA and NYC, the nation’s two largest cities and major drivers of national crime trends, have become international magnets for migration and are two of the most diverse cities in the world.

To my knowledge, immigration has never been a serious contender among crime drop

suspects, but the broad pattern of secular declines in violence at the same time that immigration skyrocketed suggests at minimum a plausible explanation that needs to be considered. For the empirical motivation underlying my thesis, see “Social Anatomy of Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Violence” (2005); for theoretical elaboration see “Cultural Mechanisms and Killing Fields: A Revised Theory of Community-Level Racial Inequality” (2006) – both available at

<http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/soc/faculty/sampson/>.



Spotlight on
Programs in Crime, Law and
Deviance

The Crime, Law and Deviance Program, Department of Sociology, The University of Georgia

Tom McNulty

Baldwin Hall

Athens, GA 30602-1611

<http://www.uga.edu/soc>
706-542-2420

We are a department of 34 graduate students, 300 undergraduate majors, and 23 faculty members, eight of whom specialize in the study crime, law, and deviance (CLD). In the tradition of Sociology departments at leading research universities, we offer a graduate program in CLD that provides a

strong theoretical and methodological foundation for students seeking academic careers. Our undergraduate curriculum stresses broad social science knowledge. We also support a Bachelor’s program in Criminal Justice (CJ), which combines an emphasis on liberal arts with pre-professional training, including full-time internships and job placement. Sociology and CJ is a very common double-major combination among our undergraduates. Like other excellent criminology/CJ programs, our CLD faculty maintains a portfolio of interdisciplinary research on a wide range of topics. They have enjoyed success in obtaining external grants and in publishing their work in top-ranked journals and presses. Grant-funded projects afford opportunities for student-faculty collaboration in research activities, and supplement the classroom training provided by our award winning teaching faculty in both qualitative methods and advanced statistical techniques.

Research: Research conducted by our CLD faculty addresses a variety of prominent themes. Most of the work is theoretically driven, including research on family processes and delinquency, communities, race, and crime (**Ron Simons** and **Tom McNulty**), the nature and causes of conflict and violence (**Mark Cooney**, **James Balkwell**, and **Dean Rojek**), gender, crime, and victimization (**Jody Clay-**

Warner), punishment and social control (**Martha Myers**), and the organization of substance abuse treatment systems (**Paul Roman**).

Our faculty is pursuing several lines of research regarding family processes. One focus is on how parental behavior influences the development of conduct problems, and how parents are able to moderate the impact of risk factors for delinquency. A second program uses a life course perspective to investigate the manner in which family relationships account for onset, amplification, and desistance from antisocial behavior. Several of our faculty focus on domestic and intimate violence, addressing theoretical questions relating to child abuse and future criminality, the context of sexual violence, intergenerational transmission, and differences in the developmental histories of batterers.

CLD faculty also studies the relationship between community factors, race, and crime. Much of this work is longitudinal and uses multilevel analysis and multiple methods to assess community (e.g., geographic information systems, observational ratings). A key emphasis is on the extent to which community factors, such as socioeconomic deprivation and collective efficacy, influence criminal behavior and account for racial differences in involvement. Related studies focus on the factors that give rise

to the "code of the street," and how commitment to the code increases the probability of perpetrating and becoming a victim of violence. A third agenda is concerned with identifying community characteristics that enhance or diminish the effect of parenting practices on delinquency risk. A fourth is investigating the emotional and cognitive implications for criminal involvement of exposure to community disadvantage.

Although the work of our CLD faculty is predominantly quantitative, some conduct qualitative or mixed-method research. **Mark Cooney's** work addresses the Sociology of conflict management, particularly the role of third parties. He draws on anthropological and historical materials as well as on data from modern societies to articulate a cross-cultural perspective on both pre-modern and contemporary forms of violence (see Warriors and Peacemakers: How Third Parties Shape Violence, NYU Press). **Martha Myers'** research examines trends in the punishment of blacks and whites in postbellum Georgia, with emphasis on how the frequency and severity of punishment responded to social changes (see Race, Labor, and Punishment in the New South, OSU Press).

The Graduate Program: The graduate program in CLD is directed toward PhD students seeking careers in research,

scholarship, and teaching. Although we offer M.A. degrees, we do not have separate curricula. All students receive financial aid or assistance from grant funded projects. Our program rests on the philosophy that cross-fertilization with other disciplines is essential to promote the breadth of social science knowledge that will be required of the next generation of leaders in CLD research.

UGA has a tradition of interdisciplinary collaboration, and our graduate students benefit greatly from our department's close affiliation with several research centers. The focus of these centers is to provide a stimulating intellectual environment for interdisciplinary research and to promote faculty and student career development. The Center for Research on Behavioral Health and Human Services Delivery is a vast resource for research on substance abuse treatment, patterns of alcohol/drug related behaviors and attitudes, and the sociological analysis of substance abuse policy. The unit has obtained over \$3.5 million dollars in external funding in recent years, including training grants for students. We have strong ties with the Center for Family Research, and are collaborating on projects with scholars from Psychology, Child and Family Development, Biostatistics, and Geography. Funding includes a \$3.6 million dollar grant from NIMH for a 10-year panel study of African

American families, and a \$2 million dollar CDC grant for a 4-year study of the dimensions of community life that influence the risk for violence. Our department also houses the Laboratory for the Study of Social Interaction (LaSSI), where faculty conduct social psychological research on social networks and procedural justice. LaSSI research is currently funded by grants from NSF. These ongoing activities provide abundant opportunities for student involvement, access to methodological expertise and excellent research facilities, as well as assistantship funding. Our low student-to-faculty ratio facilitates instruction and collaboration in research.

Our program attracts students with excellent credentials, and they have been very active in the discipline. In the past year, our CLD students presented 7 papers at professional meetings, published 7 papers in peer-reviewed journals with faculty members, have won 3 national graduate student paper competitions, 3 competitive dissertation grants, and a National Research Service Award from NIAAA. Thus, our recent doctoral graduates have done well on the job market, taking tenure track positions with The University of Kentucky, The University of Denver, Western Kentucky University, and The College of Charleston.

Undergraduate Program: Our undergraduate program offers

over 70 course sections annually and has an enrollment of about 300 majors. Many CLD students in our program pursue a dual major with Criminal Justice. The CJ major at UGA has been in existence for the past 25 years, and is nationally renowned as a top program. Candidates develop substantive breadth by taking courses in criminology, law and society, juvenile justice, corrections, and policing, while also acquiring research skills and satisfying diversity and writing requirements. Through structured internships majors learn about the operation of the criminal justice system and future career possibilities. Coupled with the solid background in social theory and methods provided by an outstanding Sociology department, the program furnishes a superb foundation for advanced study in a number of areas. Consistent with our department's emphasis on research, majors are strongly encouraged to gain experience by working with faculty or by conducting their own projects. This is facilitated by a favorable student-faculty ratio as well as UGA's Center for Undergraduate Research Opportunities, which is devoted to engaging undergraduates in research with faculty. The center sponsors an annual regional conference at which students present their work. Qualified students may complete a Thesis as part of an honors option, and some have published their work with their faculty mentors. Another attractive feature of our

program is the opportunities for out-of-classroom enrichment that it provides. Majors can spend a semester or an academic year in the U.K. or Italy, and UGA additionally offers over 70 different campus-wide study abroad programs in 30 countries. Our undergraduates win their share of College and University awards. Indeed, in the last academic year, 25% of those earning B.A. degrees in our department graduated with honors (Magna cum laude and higher). The campus Career Center, fall semester Job Fair, and opportunities to interact with leading researchers and practitioners in the field via class presentations, departmental colloquiums, panel sessions, and participation in our research centers further prepare CLD graduates for life after UGA. More Information: To find out more about the Crime, Law, and Deviance Program at the University of Georgia visit our web pages (<http://www.uga.edu/soc>; <http://www.uga.edu/crimjust>), or contact one of the following people: (1) **Jody Clay-Warner**, Director of the Graduate Program (jclayw@uga.edu); (2) **Woody Beck**, Director of the Undergraduate Program (wbeck@uga.edu); or (3) **Susette Talarico**, Director of the Criminal Justice Program (talarico@uga.edu)

Please submit material for Spring issue of CLD Newsletter to wr_smith@ncsu.edu by **March 31, 2006**.