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## Social Disorganization and the Ability and Willingness to Enact Control: A Preliminary Test

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### ABSTRACT

*Dominant models in the social disorganization literature differentially focus on the ability of neighborhoods to enact social control and the willingness to do so. Despite the interest in both concepts, often no clear definition of either is provided, and there is little discussion of their relationship or how they interact to affect neighborhood crime rates. This paper begins to explore the relationship between ability and willingness to enact social control. The findings suggest that, for formal control, ability and willingness are closely related. Furthermore, at the aggregate level, concentrated disadvantage combined with perceived inability has a strong impact on neighborhood crime rates.*

**KEYWORDS:** social disorganization; ability; willingness; social control.

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Problems with a lack of conceptual clarity hampered the development of the theory of social disorganization since the early work of Shaw and McKay (1942). Bursik (1988; also see Bursik and Grasmick 1993), for example, has argued that one of the most important confusions surrounding Shaw and McKay's work was the lack of distinction between social disorganization and crime. Is social disorganization an important factor in understanding neighborhood crime rates? Is it a result of crime? Or is crime an indicator of social disorganization?

The revitalization of social disorganization in the 1980's is attributable, at least in part, to the work of theorists and researchers clarifying and reformulating Shaw and McKay's model. Two models in particular have been the focus of much attention. The first is the systemic model developed by a number of theorists but associated most closely with Bursik and Grasmick (1993). Central to the systemic model are social ties which are seen as critical to social control for they are the mechanism through which individuals in a neighborhood come to know each other, establish common values, and carry out informal social control. In addition, recent work has recognized that social ties are critical in the distribution of, and access to, social capital and social support (Bursik 1999).

Along with its emphasis on social ties, the systemic model focuses on the *ability* to enact social control.

Under systemic models, social control is defined as:

the effort of the community to regulate itself and the behavior of residents and visitors to the neighborhood to achieve...the common goal of living in an area relatively free from threat of crime (Bursik and Grasmick 1993: 15).

According to Bursik and Grasmick (1993), systemic models of social disorganization then attempt to identify the factors that decrease the "*regulatory ability*" of neighborhoods (see also Kornhauser 1978). The twin emphases on social ties and ability suggest that social ties are seen in systemic models as a measure of the neighborhood's regulatory ability. Without access to the resources provided by social ties, the ability to intervene is diminished for there is no effective way to reward conformity or punish deviance (for examples see Bursik 1999; Sullivan 1989; Valentine 1978).

More recent is a second model of neighborhood crime found in the recent work of Sampson and his colleagues (1997, 1999) on collective efficacy. The term "collective efficacy" as defined by Sampson and his colleagues (Sampson, Randenbush, and Earls 1997) involves informal social control and trust/social cohesion. Sampson and his colleagues define informal social control in terms of the perceived *willingness* to intervene. The link to trust and social cohesion is that

neighbors are unlikely to be willing to intervene if levels of trust and cohesion are low. As they state:

In sum, it is the linkage of mutual trust and the willingness to intervene for the common good that defines the neighborhood context of collective efficacy. Just as individuals vary in their capacity for efficacious action, so too do neighborhoods vary in their capacity to achieve common goals (Sampson et al. 1997: 919).

Collective efficacy—both the willingness to intervene and trust/social cohesion—is predicted by Sampson and his colleagues (1997) to be shaped by neighborhood structural characteristics including residential mobility and concentrated disadvantage. Thus, while one model, Bursik and Grasmick's (1993), focuses on *ability* to intervene; another, that of Sampson and his colleagues (1997), emphasizes the *willingness* to intervene.

Despite the interest of social disorganization theorists in both the ability and willingness to enact social control, researchers interested in exploring the contribution of these factors to neighborhood crime rates face at least three difficulties. First, often no clear definition of ability or willingness is provided so that researchers can distinguish between the two concepts. Since social disorganization researchers thus far have focused on one or the other of the two concepts, there has been no need to draw a distinction between the two concepts. The lack of clear definitions and the empirical focus on one over the other concept leads to a second difficulty. It is not clear, theoretically, if the factors affecting ability are the same factors affecting willingness. There is reason to believe, however, that the factors affecting each theoretical construct are at least partially unique. Finally, there is no clear understanding in the social disorganization literature of how the two concepts relate and how they independently or interactively affect neighborhood rates of crime.

An additional problem exists with the research on the willingness and ability to enact social control. Much of what is known about ability and willingness deals with informal social control (see for example, Kubrin and Weitzer 2003; Bursik and Grasmick 1993). Theorists and researchers alike, however, recognize the need to examine formal control as a type of control important for understanding neighborhood rates of crime (see for example Kubrin and Weitzer 2003; Bursik and Grasmick 1993).

The purpose of this research is to simultaneously explore two theoretically important conceptual variables in social disorganization theory and to empirically assess their potential for understanding neighborhood crime rates. In the first half of the paper, a discussion of

ability and willingness to intervene and enact social control is begun. We attempt to provide definitions of each concept, review the literature on factors that affect each, discuss how the two concepts are conceptually linked, and ultimately develop a model that specifies how the concepts mediate structural characteristics of neighborhoods and subsequently affect neighborhood crime rates.

In the second half of the paper, an analysis of the ability and willingness to enact social control is presented. The analysis focuses on two forms of ability; social ties and quality of police services, as well as one form of willingness to enact formal social control; cooperation with the police. Three questions inform the analysis. The first asks if there is variation across neighborhoods in the ability to enact social control and willingness to enact formal control by cooperating with the police. HLM models with willingness, perceptions of police ability, and social ties with no independent variables were used to address this question. The second question deals with the individual and neighborhood level factors that affect ability and willingness. Three HLM models were estimated so that the effects of the level two variables can be interpreted as contextual effects (Bryk and Raudenbush 1992). The third research question concerns the effect of ability and willingness on neighborhood crime rates, specifically concerning burglary and assault. To estimate their effects, we first aggregated these measures by taking the mean of each variable and then running ordinary least squares regression. Finally, we also used regression to test for interactions between social ties and the measure of disadvantage and alienation from the police.

## **ABILITY AND WILLINGNESS TO ENACT SOCIAL CONTROL**

### **Defining Ability and Willingness**

The problem of social control is central to the work of criminologists in general and social disorganization theorists in particular. Social control deals with attempts to control the behavior of group members by the use of rewards and/or punishments (Kornhauser 1978). Social control includes consideration of both internal and external forms of control (Kornhauser 1978). Internal controls include both direct (such as the guilt one feels after doing something wrong because of internalization of beliefs) and indirect (such as the effect of commitment to conventional goals) forms of control. Social disorganization theorists, though, have focused most often on external controls, both direct (the result of supervision) and indirect (the result of social ties).

When considering external controls it is important to make a distinction between the ability to control behavior and the willingness to do so. Though both are necessary for effective external control, they are

distinct. The distinction seems to be recognized by social disorganization theorists, some of whom focus on ability (Bursik and Grasmick 1993), while others focus on willingness (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997). It is because of the distinctiveness and importance of each that it is necessary to establish working definitions of ability and willingness to enact social control. *Ability* refers to the existence of, access to, or the capacity to create resources needed to enact social control. *Willingness*, on the other hand, refers to the motivation or desire to use available resources for social control. Central to the definition of both terms is the concept of resources. Following the lead of Coleman (1990) and Cullen (1994; Cullen, Wright, and Chamlin 1999), we define two broad types of resources as important for social control; social capital and social support. Social capital is defined as “the set of resources that inhere in family and community social organization and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person” (Coleman 1990: 300) that can be “accessed and/or mobilized for purpose of action” (Lin 2001: 25). Social support, on the other hand, is typically defined as “the perceived or actual instrumental and/or expressive provisions supplied by the community, social ties and confiding partners” (Lin 1986: 18; see also Cullen 1994). It too is embedded in, or emerges from, communities and is demonstrated at the community level in the “social altruism” or “capacity for compassionate action inherent in the neighborhood” (Chamlin and Cochran 1997; Silver, 2000).

There is research that assesses the impact of ability and willingness to enact social control. At this point, three things are notable about this research. First, the research focuses on one or the other of the two concepts. Second, often the evidence about ability and willingness is indirect. Third, the research deals largely with the informal level of control.

Research on the impact of ability as measured directly in terms of social capital and social support is rare. Some research on social support is available and is beginning to provide support for Cullen’s contention that social support varies across neighborhoods. For example, Silver (2000) found that neighborhoods vary in the levels of social support available to psychiatric patients. More evidence does exist using several indirect measures of ability, particularly structural disadvantage and social ties. Research does find that neighborhoods characterized by disadvantage have higher crime rates than those that are not (e.g., Bursik and Grasmick 1993; Peterson, Krivo, and Harris 2000).

Research findings on social ties, which can be seen as paths through which social capital and social support are accessed or created and thus proxies of ability, are inconsistent. Some studies found that social ties are important in understanding neighborhood levels of

crime and risk of victimization (Sampson and Raudenbush 1999; Sampson et al. 1997; Sampson and Groves 1989; Velez 2001; Veysey and Messner 1999). Simcha-Fagan and Schwartz (1986), however, found no relationship. Finally, Warner and Rountree (1997) found that the relationship of social ties to neighborhood rates of crime varies by type of crime and type of neighborhood. In particular, they found that social ties do not decrease crime in mixed or minority neighborhoods. Warner and Rountree (1997) concluded that social ties might not be as important in understanding social control in some neighborhoods as others. Ethnographic research also supports this conclusion, indicating the existence of neighborhoods with dense social ties that still have high crime rates (Patillo 1998).

Research on the effect of willingness is more direct. Research by Sampson and his colleagues (Sampson et al. 1997; Morenoff, Sampson, and Raudenbush 2001) on collective efficacy supports the idea that willingness, as measured by respondents’ perceptions of how likely it is that their neighbors would intervene in various situations, is important in understanding neighborhood rates of crime. In addition, an early study by Maccoby, Johnson, and Church (1958) also found that high and low crime rate neighborhoods vary in terms of residents’ willingness to intervene in the activities of neighborhood children.

### **Factors Shaping Ability and Willingness**

Having defined ability and willingness to enact social control, the factors that shape each can be discussed. Following the lead of Bursik and Grasmick (1993), neighborhood structural characteristics are identified as important factors shaping the ability to enact social control. Following the lead of Sampson and his colleagues, four factors are identified as important in understanding willingness—neighborhood structural characteristics, trust, environmental characteristics, and ability.

From the work of Shaw and McKay (1942) on, social disorganization theorists have focused on neighborhood structural characteristics as factors shaping the ability to enact social control. Today’s systemic model follows this lead by positing that neighborhood structural characteristics shape social ties. In particular, the systemic model argues that it is the structure of social ties—their size, breadth, and depth—that are affected by neighborhood structural characteristics (see Bursik and Grasmick 1993; Bursik 2000). For example, Bursik (2000) argues that mobility and racial heterogeneity diminish the size, breadth, and depth of social ties, because they affect the time one has to build relationships and the social distance between individuals.

Research provides general support for the prediction that neighborhood structural characteristics shape social ties, but the findings are somewhat inconsistent. For example, at the individual level, socioeconomic status has been found to have a positive effect on frequency of social interaction in one study (Bellair 1997), but a negative effect on friendships and acquaintances with immediate neighbors in others (Sampson, 1991, also see Sampson and Groves 1989). At the aggregate neighborhood level, research found rates of poverty to be unrelated to social ties (e.g., Sampson 1991). Residential stability has been found to be positively associated with social ties (Warner and Rountree 1997) and network density (Sampson 1991) in some research. Bellair (1997), however, reported that residential stability was unrelated to social interaction. More consistently, racial and ethnic heterogeneity are found in research to be negatively related to social interaction (Bellair, 1997) and social ties (Warner and Rountree 1997).

In models of collective efficacy, where willingness is the focus, neighborhood structural characteristics are also posited to be important. Sampson et al., (1997) focus particularly on how mobility and heterogeneity break down the trust and social cohesion on which a willingness to intervene is built (see also Ross, Mirowsky, and Pribesh 2001). Research on collective efficacy supports this prediction. In their research, Sampson and his colleagues (1997) found that concentrated disadvantage in neighborhoods is negatively related to collective efficacy while individual level socioeconomic status is positively associated with collective efficacy. In addition, in an early study of willingness to intervene, Hackler, Ho, and Urquhart-Ross (1974) found that upper class neighborhoods were more inclined to intervene informally than lower class neighborhoods, though some were even more likely to intervene formally.

Sampson and his colleagues (1997) identify another factor important in shaping willingness to enact social control; trust. Sampson and his colleagues (1997) argue that to the extent that neighbors are trusted, willingness to intervene is increased. Their research supports this prediction. Research on the relationship between trust of the various agents of the criminal justice system and willingness to intervene also supports this prediction. In an early study of the relationship between attitudes towards police and citizen behavior, Harlan (1971) found that residents of a ghetto neighborhood in Detroit had high levels of distrust of the police. He found further that these attitudes were significantly related to their responses to hypothetical situations asking about intentions to report to the police. In addition, some researchers examining battered women have tied race with mistrust and previous negative experiences with police to the decision not to

call the police (Fleury, Sullivan, Bybee, and Davidson 1998; Rasche 1988).

At the neighborhood level, Zatz and Portillos' (2000) research on South Phoenix neighborhoods supports the conclusion that distrust of police is related to an unwillingness to call them, even in the face of a serious crime. They found that while part of the neighborhood was willing to support the police in the control of gangs, another part was unwilling to do so because of their distrust of the police. In addition, Triplett, Sun, and Gainey (2002) found that neighborhood levels of the perception of the police as legitimate (as measured by perceptions of the police as providing quality services, providing the kind of services neighborhood residents wanted, and their neighborhood receiving about or more than its fair share of police services) significantly affect one type of coordinated action, willingness to cooperate with the police. This, in turn, was found to significantly affect neighborhood rates of crime.

More recently, in an important study on St. Louis neighborhoods, Kubrin and Weitzer (2003a) found support for the idea that a distrust of the police is related to an unwillingness to call them. They discuss a "policing vacuum" in extremely disadvantaged St. Louis neighborhoods where the perception that the police are inadequate leads, in part, to the development of a culture that demands that individuals use "summary justice" to handle offenses themselves. Their research focused on retaliatory homicide where they found that individuals typically decided to handle matters themselves instead of calling the police. Even for the serious offense of homicide, Kubrin and Weitzer (2003a) found an unwillingness to assist the police even by providing information. Fear of retaliation, accompanied by the perception that the police could not protect them, was a key factor found in shaping this lack of willingness to cooperate.

Further evidence supporting a link between citizens' attitudes toward police service and willingness to call the police comes from ethnographic research. For example, in Anderson's (1999) description of Germantown Avenue, residents report that the police are indifferent in some situations and abusive in others, something they do not see occurring in other neighborhoods (see Wacquant 2002 for a critique of Anderson; but see also Anderson's 2002 response). He writes:

In the community the police are often on the streets, but they are not always considered to have the community's best interests at heart...In the inner-city community there is a generalized belief that the police simply do not care about black people...Many assume that the police hold the black community in low repute and sometimes will abuse its members. As a

result, residents are alienated from the police and police authority (Anderson 1999: 320-321).

This alienation leads directly to unwillingness to call the police as Anderson's (1999) description of a situation involving a "decent" family illustrates. Here he describes a "decent" family that becomes concerned about the activities of a new neighbor who is obviously "street." Frustrated and demoralized by the past behavior of the police, members of the "decent" family are reluctant to do anything themselves about the behavior of "street families" for fear of retaliation, nor will they call the police for help.

Environmental characteristics (e.g., signs of social disorder) and land use factors, in particularly the presence of bars or nightclubs, have consistently been linked to neighborhood crime rates (Davidson and Smith 2001; Parker and Auerhahn 1998; Peterson et al. 2000; Rocek and Maier 1991; Skogan 1990). There are three reasons why the presence of bars, liquor stores, or nightclubs may also affect persons' willingness to intervene and hence their effects on crime may be, at least partially, indirect. First, such businesses are often located in areas that are also characterized by signs of disorder. In these areas, individuals may be so focused on their own security that they fail to intervene in situations where they normally would. Second, the *nature* of the service bars and nightclubs provide may decrease the level at which individuals are willing to intervene. For example, even if an individual would normally intervene upon seeing someone stumble in a parking lot, the belief that this person is simply drunk because they are coming out of a bar may reduce the chance an individual is willing to intervene. Finally, these institutions are often guarded by formal agents of social control (e.g., local police or private security). Such activities may make individuals feel that it is not their responsibility to intervene.

A final factor predicted to shape willingness is ability itself. Sampson et al., (1997) argue that social cohesion is a final factor important in shaping willingness. To the extent that social cohesion is also about social ties, and that social ties are paths through which resources for social control are made available, it is a measure of ability. In terms of informal social control, ability obtained through social ties shapes willingness as neighbors see that their actions work. Research supports the importance of social ties but also suggests that social ties alone are not sufficient for understanding neighborhood social control (see Warner and Rountree 1997 for a discussion of the research on social ties). Despite the prediction that dense social ties are important in understanding neighborhood crime rates, research remains relatively rare and findings are inconsistent (see for example Sampson and Raudenbush

1999; Sampson et al., 1997; Sampson and Groves 1989; Velez, 2001; Veysey and Messner 1999).

In terms of the use of formal social control mechanisms, ability can also be assessed in terms of the quality of services received. As with informal social control, the more effective these strategies are perceived, the more likely people will be willing to use them. There is evidence in the area of policing that quality of services is important in shaping willingness to work with the police. This evidence is indirect but starts with the finding that there is variation in police services across areas. For example, studies have shown that inequality of delivery and distribution of police service has long existed along racial/ethnic lines (Brown and Coulter 1983; LaFave and Remington 1965; Myrdal 1944). Further, research on the neighborhood context of police behavior found that police do act differently in different neighborhoods (Jacob 1971; Smith 1986; Smith et al. 1984; Sun and Payne 2004; Weitzer 1999, 2000). Finally, research has found differences by arrest, as well as the recording of crimes, by neighborhood racial and economic composition (see for example, Warner 1997). The research suggests that differences in the provision of services by the police are recognized by members of the neighborhoods and affect both attitudes towards the police and willingness to call or cooperate with the police. In contrast, however, are studies that focus on attitudes about the level of service. These studies are less supportive of a relationship between level of service and willingness to cooperate with the police. In a 1996 study, Frank and his colleagues found that attitudes regarding satisfaction with police services were not related to levels of private or public cooperation with the police. Others have found that the seriousness of a crime is a better predictor of the decision to call the police than citizens' attitudes toward police performance and toward relations between police and citizens (Birkbeck, Gabaldon, and LaFree 1993), though attitudes still remain important.

### **The Relationship between Ability and Willingness**

There is predicted to be an interaction between ability and willingness to enact social control. Social control is expected to be highest and crime rates lowest in neighborhoods where both ability and willingness are high. Thus, where social ties are dense, quality of police services is perceived to be high, and where neighbors are willing to cooperate with the police we expect to find the lowest rates of crime. This is predicted to occur in neighborhoods where disadvantage is at its lowest and trust is at its highest. Social control is expected to be lowest and crime rates highest in neighborhoods where both ability and willingness are low. This situation is most likely to occur in neighborhoods where disadvantage is highest and trust is at its lowest level. In between these two extremes,

however, are perhaps the majority of neighborhoods. Here the importance of both ability and willingness will be most clear. The prediction that ability is a factor shaping willingness leads to the prediction, however, that there are few neighborhoods with high levels of willingness and low levels of ability.

In the next sections of the paper, we examine variation in two forms of ability; social ties at the informal level and quality of police services at the formal, as well as one form of willingness to enact formal social control; cooperation with the police. In addition, the analysis provides an empirical assessment of the factors which shape the ability and willingness to enact social control and their effects on neighborhood rates of crime.

**METHODS**

**Data**

Three different data sets were combined to form the data set used in this study. First, citizen survey data from the Project on Policing Neighborhoods (POPEN) are used to measure citizens' perceptions of quality of police services and willingness to enact public control. POPEN data were collected from two cities – Indianapolis, Indiana and St. Petersburg, Florida. Crime data, however, were only available for Indianapolis, thus, the analysis in this study is limited to this one city. Telephone interviews with approximately 5,400 adults residing within 50 neighborhoods in Indianapolis, Indiana were conducted by Indiana University's Center for Survey Research in 1996. The sample was stratified by neighborhoods and based on telephone directories. Approximately 100 adults were randomly selected from each neighborhood. Neighborhoods were defined by the boundaries of police patrol beats, which were determined based on natural neighborhood lines, workload, and physical barriers such as highways and rivers. The population of each beat ranged from 1,169 to 19,808 with an average of 7,410. The land area varied from .49 to 4.6 square miles with an average of 1.8 square miles. Compared to the 1990 census, the samples under-represented males and over-represented Caucasians, seniors (age 60 and over), and homeowners (Reisig and Parks 2000: 613-614). The second data set used in constructing the data for this study was the 1990 census. These data were used to construct neighborhood structural variables. The final data set included index crime rates by neighborhood. This was obtained directly from the Indianapolis Police Department.

**Variables**

At the neighborhood level, there are two dependent variables measuring neighborhood-level crime rates: assault and burglary rates per 1,000 neighborhood

residents. Both measures are average crime rates for the years 1995, 1996, and 1997. Two measures were chosen so the model fit could be assessed on both violent and property crimes. Assault and burglary were chosen of the violent and property crimes available in the data set, because they are relatively common and likely to provide more reliable measures of crime than events such as homicides, which are more rare. Although one cannot rule out the possibility of under-reporting of assault and burglary, it has been shown that under-reporting is primarily a function of the severity of the offense, and it is likely that the more serious assaults and burglaries are reported (see Gove, Hughes, and Geerken 1985).

Factor analysis with varimax rotation was used to construct the two measures of ability; perceptions of the quality of police work at the formal level and social ties at the informal. Four items measuring quality of police services were expected to load on one factor (e.g., "Overall how satisfied are you with the quality of police services in your neighborhood?", "The police in your neighborhood try to provide the kind of services that people in your neighborhood want.", "When it comes to getting your fair share of police services, would you say that your neighborhood gets more, less than, or about its fair share?", and "How would you rate the job the police are doing in your neighborhood in terms of working with people in your neighborhood to solve local problems?"). Three items measuring social ties were expected to load highly on another factor indicating social ties in the neighborhood (e.g., "About how often do you get together with neighbors?", "How many of your relatives live in your immediate neighborhood?", and "How many of your friends live in your immediate neighborhood?"). Indeed, as indicated in Table 1, two factors with eigen values greater than one emerged and explained 58 percent of the variation across items. The items loaded on the theoretically predicted factors. Factor scores were used to create two scales.

*Table 1. Factor Analysis: Dimensions of Perceived Quality of Police Services and Social Ties.\**

| Dimension                                  | Factor Loading |
|--|----------------|
| Overall satisfaction with police           | .866           |
| Police provide services needed             | .833           |
| Police working with residents              | .817           |
| Neighborhood fair share of police services | .725           |
| How many friends in neighborhood?          | .808           |
| How often get together with neighbors?     | .648           |
| How many relatives live in neighborhood?   | .567           |

\* Factor loadings less the .400 were not reported here.

A single item was used to measure willingness (“About how many of your neighbors do you think are willing to cooperate with the police?”). To assess whether the measures of ability and willingness are distinct, the measure of willingness was included in a separate factor analysis with all indicators of the two measures of ability. While willingness did load on the perceived quality of police services, it was kept as a separate measure of willingness for empirical and theoretical reasons. First, empirically the item had the lowest factor loading (.529 the next lowest was .710) and subsequent reliability analyses suggested that its inclusion lowered, albeit slightly, the reliability of the scale (from .80 to .78). Furthermore, the inter-item correlations (see appendix 1) between items expected to measure police ability range from .43 to .64. Correlations between these measures and the single item measuring willingness never reach or come close to the lower bound ranging from .25 to .33. Theoretically, a central interest of the paper is in examining the distinction between the measures of ability and willingness, and the wording of the items points to distinct concepts. The measures of police ability all concern the respondents’ perceptions of the police, while the willingness variable measures the respondents’ perceptions of other residents’ willingness to call the police. The two measures are moderately correlated ( $r=.377$ ) and willingness is viewed as independent and endogenous to the ability measures.

Two sets of exogenous variables are included in the analyses. Exogenous variables at the individual level included age, education level, gender, years residing in

the neighborhood, whether the respondent was an owner or renter, and two dichotomous indicators of race/ethnicity (Black and other) with whites being the reference category. The exogenous neighborhood level variables consist of census measures and three measures aggregated from the resident survey. Concentrated disadvantage and racial heterogeneity were derived from the 1990 census. Based on work by Wilson (1987), concentrated disadvantage was measured by summing the percentage of labor force that was unemployed, the percentage of population that was poor, and the percentage of families that were headed by single women. The measure is similar to others found in empirical studies of concentrated disadvantage (e.g., Peterson et al. 2000) and has a Cronbach’s standardized alpha of .87, suggesting that the scale is a highly reliable measure. Racial heterogeneity was measured using Blau’s (1977) index of intergroup relations,  $(1-\sum P_i^2)$ , where  $P_i$  is the proportion of the population in a given group. Five racial/ethnic categories were used to construct this index, including White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian. A higher score on the index indicates a more racially diverse neighborhood. The third structural characteristic, residential mobility, is defined as the percentage of residents who lived in the neighborhoods for less than five years. This variable was constructed from a single item asked in the citizen survey that was then aggregated to the neighborhood level. Two other measures aggregated from the resident survey were the proportion living within five blocks of a liquor store and the proportion living within five blocks of a bar or night club. These measures were included

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics: Individual and Neighborhood Level.

|                          | N    | Mean   | S.D.   | Minimum | Maximum |
|--------------------------|------|--------|--------|---------|---------|
| <b>Level 1 Variables</b> |      |        |        |         |         |
| Years Resident           | 5041 | 17.28  | 15.03  | 0.00    | 51.00   |
| Home Owner               | 5025 | 0.70   | 0.46   | 0.00    | 1.00    |
| Education Level          | 5014 | 12.99  | 2.79   | 0.00    | 19.00   |
| Female                   | 5054 | 0.60   | 0.49   | 0.00    | 1.00    |
| Black                    | 4992 | 0.30   | 0.46   | 0.00    | 1.00    |
| Other Race               | 4992 | 0.06   | 0.23   | 0.00    | 1.00    |
| Age                      | 4956 | 49.56  | 18.19  | 18.00   | 98.00   |
| Police Ability           | 4468 | 0.00   | 1.00   | -2.80   | 1.35    |
| Social Ties              | 4468 | 0.00   | 1.00   | -1.87   | 3.89    |
| Willingness              | 4961 | 4.08   | 1.30   | -1.86   | 5.00    |
| <b>Level 2 Variables</b> |      |        |        |         |         |
| Liquor Stores            | 50   | 0.56   | 0.14   | 0.18    | 0.89    |
| Bars/Nightclubs          | 50   | 0.52   | 0.21   | 0.03    | 0.87    |
| Assault                  | 50   | 34.05  | 18.29  | 7.99    | 93.61   |
| Burglary                 | 50   | 22.96  | 8.49   | 3.30    | 45.48   |
| Disadvantage             | 50   | 39.38  | 18.49  | 13.19   | 81.70   |
| Heterogeneity            | 50   | 0.26   | 0.18   | 0.02    | 0.52    |
| Mobility                 | 50   | 27.27  | 13.75  | 8.20    | 80.00   |
| # of Respondents         | 50   | 303.48 | 107.38 | 111.00  | 454.00  |



because of recent findings on the effect of liquor stores and liquor consumption on neighborhood rates of crime (Block and Block 1995; DiIulio 1995). Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics of all variables used in in this study.

**Analysis**

Three questions inform the analysis. The first asks if there is variation across neighborhoods in the ability to enact social control and willingness to enact formal control by cooperating with the police. HLM models with willingness, perceptions of police ability, and social ties with no independent variables were used to address this question. This is comparable to a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), which estimates the amount of variance between groups. This analysis will thus allow an examination of the extent to which neighborhoods vary on their levels of ability and willingness to enact social control.

The second question deals with the individual and neighborhood level factors that affect ability and willingness. Three HLM models were estimated and in each case the individual level variables were grand mean centered so that the effects of the level two

variables can be interpreted as contextual effects (Bryk and Raudenbush 1992).

The third research question concerns the effect of ability and willingness on neighborhood crime rates, specifically burglary and assault. To estimate their effects, these measures were aggregated by taking the mean of each variable. Ordinary least squares regressions were then run to estimate their effects on neighborhood levels of crime. Unfortunately, there were serious problems with multicollinearity in the main effects models as indicated by large variance inflation factors (VIF). Three key variables were highly correlated at the aggregate level: perceptions of quality of police service, perceptions of residents' willingness to cooperate with the police, and concentrated disadvantage. To deal with the problem, the aggregated variables were standardized and combined by taking the mean of the three measures. The new variable measures the extent to which areas are characterized by concentrated disadvantage, the police are seen as ineffective, and residents are unwilling to cooperate with the police (Cronbach's alpha = .87). The scale might be considered a measure of disadvantage and alienation from the police.

*Table 3. HLM Models of Ability and Willingness to Intervene.*

|                          | Police Ability | Social Ties    | Willingness<br>(Reduced Model) | Willingness<br>(Full Model) |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Level 1 Variables</b> |                |                |                                |                             |
| Years Resided            | -.003 (.001)*  | .015 (.001)**  | -.001 (.001)                   | -.003 (.001)                |
| Home Owner               | -.023 (.036)   | .002 (.032)    | .352 (.042)**                  | .358 (.041)**               |
| Education Level          | .016 (.005)**  | -.028 (.005)** | .047 (.007)**                  | .047 (.007)**               |
| Female                   | -.022 (.033)   | -.082 (.027)** | -.098 (.035)**                 | .077 (.034)*                |
| Black                    | -.087 (.040)*  | -.004 (.039)   | -.228 (.052)**                 | -.196 (.051)**              |
| Other Race               | -.104 (.063)   | .027 (.058)    | -.380 (.077)**                 | -.349 (.074)**              |
| Age                      | .012 (.001)**  | -.003 (.001)** | .005 (.001)**                  | .001 (.001)                 |
| Police Ability           |                |                |                                | .316 (.017)**               |
| Social Ties              |                |                |                                | .149 (.017)**               |
| Level 1 R <sup>2</sup>   | .160           | .438           | .366                           | .547                        |
| <b>Level 2 Variables</b> |                |                |                                |                             |
| Intercept                | .148 (.127)    | -.026 (.115)   | 4.509 (.174)**                 | 4.472 (.159)**              |
| Liquor Store             | -.167 (.199)   | -.134 (.181)   | .003 (.274)                    | .077 (.251)                 |
| Bars/Nightclubs          | -.060 (.120)   | .383 (.110)**  | -.491 (.164)**                 | -.529 (.151)**              |
| Disadv./Alienat.         | -.006 (.001)** | -.001 (.001)   | -.011 (.002)**                 | .009 (.002)**               |
| Heterogeneity            | .056 (.163)    | -.158 (.149)   | .027 (.226)                    | .030 (.206)                 |
| Mobility                 | .007 (.002)**  | -.001 (.002)   | .009 (.003)**                  | .006 (.003)*                |
| Model R <sup>2</sup>     | .640           | .563           | .743                           | .799                        |
| X <sup>2</sup>           | 145.770**      | 118.716**      | 150.816**                      | 136.337**                   |

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

We also used regression to test for interactions between social ties and the measure of disadvantage and alienation from the police. As suggested by Jaccard and his colleagues (1990) we centered the main effects before computing the interaction term providing a sensible interpretation of the main effects. For example, the coefficient for social ties would be the effect of social ties at the mean level of disadvantage and alienation, while the coefficient for disadvantage and alienation would be the effect at the mean level of social ties.

## FINDINGS

The findings reported in this section of the paper center around three questions. The first question asks if there is variation across neighborhoods in the ability to enact social control at the informal and formal levels, and the willingness to enact formal control by cooperating with the police. To answer this question, HLM models with willingness to cooperate with the police and the two measures of ability—perceptions of quality of police services at the formal level and social ties at the informal—were run with no independent variables. The findings (not shown in tabular form) suggest there is important variation across neighborhoods in their levels of both the ability and willingness to enact social control. For each model there was significant variation (Chi-square  $p$  values < .01) and the intra class correlations showed that 8 percent of the variance in willingness, 4 percent of the variance in social ties, and 6 percent of the variance in perception of police ability was between neighborhoods. While there is considerable variation *within* neighborhoods in respondents' perceptions of the willingness of their neighbors to cooperate, their perception of the quality of police services, and their social ties, there is also significant variation *across* neighborhoods.

The second question deals with the individual and neighborhood level factors that affect ability and willingness. Three HLM models were estimated, and in each case the individual level variables were grand mean centered so that the effects of the level two variables can be interpreted as contextual effects (Bryk and Raudenbush 1992). In these models only the level-1 intercept is allowed to vary. Although an exploratory analysis of how the individual level effects might vary across neighborhoods may prove insightful, the analyses presented are already complex and with strong theoretical predictions. Such an analysis is thus beyond the scope of this paper. The results of the HLM analyses are presented in Table 3.

There are at least four important results from this part of the analysis. First, the results show that, in general, neighborhood structural characteristics are important causes of both ability and willingness.

Structural characteristics increase the explanatory power over individual characteristics by 48 percentage points for perceptions of police ability (.160 to .640), by 13 percentage points for social ties (.438 to .563), and by 38 percentage points for perceived willingness of residents to cooperate with the police (.366 to .743). Second, the findings indicate that ability, as indicated by perceptions of police ability and social ties, strongly affect perceptions of residents' willingness to cooperate with the police. Perceptions of police ability and social ties increase the explanatory power of the individual level model by more than 20 percentage points.

Third, the results show that while there are some commonalities in the factors that affect the measures of willingness and ability to control, there are important differences as well. At the individual level, years residing in the neighborhood was negatively associated with perceptions of the quality of police services but positively associated with social ties. The longer an individual lives in a neighborhood, the stronger the social ties, but the less likely to perceive police services as satisfactory. People who own their residence were more likely than renters to perceive neighbors as being willing to cooperate with the police. Ownership, however, is unrelated to perceptions of the quality of police services or social ties. Education and age were both positively related to perceptions of the quality of police services and willingness to cooperate with the police, and age was negatively related to social ties. Blacks were less likely than whites to perceive the police as providing quality services and to perceive residents as willing to help the police. Other racial and ethnic groups were also less likely than whites to perceive residents as willing to cooperate with the police. This finding held even though neighborhood level variables were controlled. Finally, females were less likely than males to see neighbors as willing to help police and tended to have smaller social ties.

At the neighborhood level, neither being near liquor stores nor racial/ethnic heterogeneity had any significant effects, but having bars or nightclubs nearby was positively associated with social ties. Concentrated disadvantage was negatively related to perceptions of the quality of police services and perceptions of resident willingness to cooperate with the police. In contrast, mobility was positively related to both perceptions of the quality of police services and willingness of residents to cooperate. A significant and large amount of the variance was explained in each model. Overall, the results suggest that there are unique factors that affect the different measures of ability and willingness.

A fourth and final result of note is found in the effect of neighborhood disadvantage and alienation on willingness. When ability is not controlled for, residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods are less willing than residents of more advantaged

Table 4. OLS Regression Predicting Burglary and Assault Rates.

|                         | Assault |       |         | Burglary |      |         |
|-------------------------|---------|-------|---------|----------|------|---------|
|                         | b       | S.E.  | $\beta$ | b        | S.E. | $\beta$ |
| Social Ties             | -11.44  | 13.08 | -.128   | -.51     | 6.46 | -.123   |
| Liquor Stores           | -17.10  | 16.04 | -.130   | -2.38    | 7.92 | -.039   |
| Bars/Nightclubs         | 19.37   | 10.59 | .226+   | 22.07    | 5.23 | .555**  |
| Disadvantage/Alienation | 16.29   | 2.48  | .795**  | 4.91     | 1.22 | .516**  |
| Heterogeneity           | -5.23   | 13.85 | -.051   | -1.20    | 6.84 | -.025   |
| Mobility                | .36     | .20   | .274+   | .02      | .10  | .034    |
| Model r-square          |         | .553  |         |          | .495 |         |

+  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

neighborhoods to call the police. When ability is controlled for, however, residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely to be willing to call the police.

The third research question concerns the effect of the two measures of ability and the measure of willingness on neighborhood crime rates, specifically burglary and assault. Table 4 presents the results of the OLS regressions.

Unfortunately, we were unable to estimate the separate effects of the measures of ability at the formal level; perceptions of the quality of police services, willingness to cooperate with the police, and concentrated disadvantage. However, the combined scale, concentrated disadvantage and alienation from the police, significantly affects both rates of burglary and assault ( $\beta = .516$  and  $.795$ , respectively). The second measure of ability, social ties, is negatively related to both burglary and assault but is not statistically significant. Although the proximity to liquor stores was unrelated to rates of burglary and assault, proximity to bars and nightclubs was positively related to both and particularly strongly related to burglary rates ( $\beta = .555$ ). Heterogeneity was unrelated to both burglary and assault rates, but mobility was positively related to neighborhood rates of assault ( $\beta = .274$ ).

A test was run for an interaction between social ties and the scale measuring concentrated disadvantage and alienation from the police. The interaction, however, was not statistically significant nor was there an improvement in fit for either model. The relationship between social ties and crime then does not vary across levels of disadvantage and alienation from the police.

## DISCUSSION

The central purpose of this paper was clarification of several issues concerning two important concepts drawn from the literature on social disorganization; ability and willingness to enact social control. In addition the paper focused on ability and willingness at the formal level of control because of a lack of research in the area. The paper began by providing definitions of each concept that, though both center around resources, were

intended to point out the difference between the two. From the definitions, the discussion moved on to identify factors that past literature has identified as shaping both willingness and ability to intervene. The rest of the paper then centered around the empirical assessment of variation in levels of ability and willingness, the factors shaping each, and the effect on neighborhood rates of crime. The results of the analyses suggest that it is important to examine closely both ability and willingness.

The analysis did find that there is significant variation both across and within neighborhoods in the levels of ability and willingness. It further found support for the prediction that neighborhood structural characteristics are important factors in understanding neighborhood variation in levels of ability and willingness. In addition, ability (as measured by social ties and perceived police ability) was found to be strongly related to residents' willingness to cooperate with the police. Two interesting findings resulted from this part of the analysis. One of the most interesting findings in this area is that race is related to perceptions of the quality of police services controlling for neighborhood characteristics. While some past research has suggested that race differences are fully or better accounted for by neighborhood structural factors or location (Kusow, Wilson, and Martin 1997; Sampson and Jeglum-Bartusch 1998), our findings support other studies that reported a connection between citizen race and their perceptions or evaluation of police services even when neighborhood characteristics and other factors are controlled (e.g., Cao, Frank, and Cullen 1996; Henderson, Cullen, Cao, et al. 1997). The second finding is that when ability is controlled, residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods are more willing to call the police than residents of more advantaged neighborhoods. This may result from a lack of alternatives in disadvantaged neighborhoods for handling problems.

Do ability and willingness to enact control, especially at the formal level, significantly affect neighborhood crime rates? The analyses presented here suggest that the answer to this question is yes. In fact,

the findings indicate that concentrated disadvantage in conjunction with alienation from the police is more important than social ties. This finding on social ties may result, however, from the need for a better measure of social ties at the informal level. Research has already begun to suggest other ways to measure social ties. Granovetter (1973), for example, argues the case for weak ties, while Krohn (1986) has argued that social ties that are multiplex are important for social control. Others have argued strongly for consideration of the content of social ties, because the inclusion of criminal others in social ties is not uncommon in high crime areas, even when some members of the network may strongly object to the criminal activities of others (Anderson 1999; Miller 1986; Pattillo 1998; Valentine 1978).

The analysis also gives important information about the relationship between ability and willingness to enact social control. The evidence is preliminary but suggestive of three conclusions. First, to the extent that the measure of social ties captures ability at the informal level of control, this analysis suggests that ability is different from willingness. This finding may result from the fact that social ties measure ability at the informal level, and our only measure of willingness is at the formal level. They do indicate however that ability and willingness are different and that future research should consider this distinction. Second, the analysis suggests that ability at the informal level is distinct from ability at the formal level of control. The results from the factor analysis show that the two measures of ability are not strongly related. Social ties and perceptions of the quality of police services do not load highly on a single factor. This result is perhaps unsurprising, for previous research has shown that strong social ties can develop and thrive in neighborhoods otherwise socially and economically disadvantaged (Pattillo 1998). Finally, the analysis indicates that our measures of ability and willingness (perceptions of quality of police services and perceptions of neighbors' willingness to cooperate with the police) are closely related. This finding too is not surprising since the ability to reach the police is at times just a matter of picking up the phone, something most people would only need the willingness to do to be able to achieve. It is also not surprising given research by Anderson (1999) that closely ties mistrust of the police with an unwillingness to call them. Critiques that his conclusions are not grounded solidly in his data to the contrary (see Wacquant 2002), the results of our analysis provide support for Anderson's work.

The findings suggest several interesting avenues for future theoretical development and empirical assessment. The first is the need for an assessment of ability and willingness at the informal level. It is at this level where the distinctiveness of each concept may be

most important. Consider recent discussions of social ties. Strong social ties may provide the ability to control in the sense of access to resources. When there is an unwillingness to use those resources because of intimate criminal others in the networks, however, social control may not result. Second, future research may well wish to explore the relationship between ability and willingness at both the informal and formal levels. It may well be as Kubrin and Weitzer (2003b) suggest, that there is a strong relationship between what happens in terms of social control at the informal level and what happens at the formal. In fact, Anderson's (1999) work on the development of the code of the street suggests just that, as well as their own on retaliatory homicide (Kubrin and Weitzer 2003b). Finally, there is the need for better measures of ability and willingness at both the informal and formal levels. Attention to these and other theoretical and empirical issues should push the boundaries of social disorganization theory and allow for more precise and sophisticated empirical tests.

Two implications for policy arise from the findings of this study. First, police administrators should seek ways to improve the quality of their services. Our findings indicate citizens' perceptions of the quality of police services influence their willingness to cooperate with the police. Moreover, quality services should be offered to minority residents in socially disadvantaged neighborhoods, since they are less satisfied with police services and are less likely to cooperate with the police. Police departments may enhance the quality of their services by providing the same level of protection enjoyed by those in advantaged neighborhoods, stressing supportive rather than control activities, rendering cultural diversity training to patrol officers, and recruiting and assigning more minority officers to minority neighborhoods. Second, local governments, including police, should pay more attention to local bars and nightclubs. Our findings show that local bars and nightclubs, rather than liquor stores, are related to higher crime rates. Local governments may monitor and regulate these businesses through routine code inspection and strict violation enforcement. Police could treat them as "hot spots" and design appropriate patrol strategies to prevent and handle crime-related incidents.

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*Appendix 1. Correlations Between Items Measuring Willingness and Ability.*

| Variables  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1. Overall satisfaction with police              | --  |     |     |     |
| 2. Police provide services needed                | .64 | --  |     |     |
| 3. Neighborhood fair share police services       | .51 | .48 | --  |     |
| 4. Police working with residents                 | .64 | .56 | .43 | --  |
| 5. Neighbors cooperate with police (willingness) | .32 | .33 | .25 | .32 |



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