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Community as a Broken Window

Social psychologist Philip Zimbardo achieved widespread prominence—inside and outside academia—when he conducted the "Stanford Prison Experiment" (SPE) (Kulig, Pratt, and Cullen, 2017). In 1971, Zimbardo and his collaborators created a mock prison in the basement of the basement of Jordan Hall, which housed the psychology department at Stanford University. Selected from seventy-five potential volunteers, twenty-four college students, who were determined to be psychologically normal, were randomly assigned to the role of either a guard or a prisoner. Intended to last two weeks, the study had to be terminated prematurely after six days because the students-turned-guards soon treated their captives in a coercive and demeaning way, eliciting conflict and distress. Zimbardo (2007, p. 3) called this the "Lucifer Effect," after the "metamorphosis of Lucifer into Satan." Indeed, the SPE seemed to confirm that prisons were inherently inhumane—that the nature of the institutional situation inevitably trumped personality and caused otherwise good kids to act badly (Zimbardo, 2007; Zimbardo et al., 1973). Although this conclusion has been questioned (Griggs, 2014; Kulig, Pratt, and Cullen, 2017), it remains a powerful and popular view, so much so that the study was celebrated in a 2015 movie, *The Stanford Prison Experiment*, with Zimbardo played by actor Billy Crudup.

The SPE thus ranks as one of the most famous social science experiments ever undertaken—and, again, ensured Zimbardo's national notoriety. What is less well known, however, is that he conducted another study that also would have a major impact, this time on the policing of America's inner

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cities. Although designed for other purposes, Zimbardo's research on the fate of abandoned cars would be used by James Q. Wilson and George Kelling (1982) as the conceptual hook to introduce their now-classic "broken windows" theory. Zimbardo's study was reported in a 1969 article in *Time*, which was called "Diary of a Vandalized Car" and apparently caught the eye of Wilson and Kelling (see also Zimbardo, 2007).

Zimbardo and his fellow researchers wondered what would happen if a car was made to look as though it was abandoned and whether the fate of the vehicle would vary across social contexts. To achieve the experimental condition of abandonment, they parked a "good-looking" vehicle alongside a curb and then took off the license plates, slightly raised its hood, and moved out of sight where they could record any vandalism. Indeed, the lack of plates and a raised hood were intended to serve as "sure 'releaser' signals to lure citizens into becoming vandals" (Zimbardo, 2007, p. 24). To vary the context, the researchers conducted the experiment in two separate middle-class residential neighborhoods—one in the Bronx across from New York University's branch campus and one in Palo Alto across from Stanford University's campus. For the researchers monitoring the vehicle's fate in the Bronx—in what Zimbardo (2007, p. 24) calls a "*Candid Camera*–type field study"—the results soon proved stunning.

Within ten minutes, a car carrying what appeared to be a middle-class family of three stopped by the experimental automobile. With his eight-year-old son by his side, the father retrieved a hacksaw from the trunk of his vehicle and then proceeded to remove the battery and radiator. The mother, observed to be "well-dressed" and carrying a "Saks Fifth Avenue shopping bag," stood by the vehicle "keeping watch" ("Diary of a Vandalized Car," 1969, p. 68). This willingness to strip the car did not prove to be an idiosyncratic incident. Operating in broad daylight with passersby ignoring or even talking to them, in a little over a day (twenty-six hours) "a parade of vandals" absconded with the "air cleaner, radio antenna, windshield wipers, right-hand-side chrome strip, hubcaps, a set of jumper cables, a gas can, a can or car wax, and the left rear tire" ("Diary of a Vandalized Car," 1969, p. 68). A middle-aged man reached into the car, pilfered a part, and then placed it in the baby carriage he was pushing. The vehicle's final destruction was left to two teenagers, who threw the auto's rearview mirror at the headlights and windshield, and to two five-year-olds, who used the "car as their private playground, crawling in and out of it and smashing the windows" (1969, p. 68).

In Palo Alto, a different story unfolded. A comparable car stood untouched for a full week. One rainy day, a man even shut the hood to protect the engine. And when Zimbardo retrieved the car and drove it back to the Stanford University campus, three neighbors contacted the police to report the possible theft of the abandoned vehicle (Zimbardo, 2007, p. 25).

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As a social psychologist, Zimbardo attributed the differential results to the situation—and not to the possibility that New York contains more people than California with criminal dispositions. Thus, even though the car was parked in a residential Bronx neighborhood, the context of a large urban area fostered "ambient anonymity"—the belief that "others do not know us or care to" (p. 25). Such anonymity, claims Zimbardo (2007, p. 25), "reduces their sense of personal accountability and civic responsibility" and can lead to "antisocial, self-interested behavior." By contrast, Palo Alto was a vastly different community, marked not by ambient anonymity but by "reciprocal altruism"—that is, the assumption that neighbors have mutual regard and, when necessary, would act to protect one another's person or property. This kind of trust and fairness, asserts Zimbardo (2007, p. 25), "thrives in a quiet, orderly way in places such as Palo Alto where people care about the physical and social quality of their lives and have the resources to work at improving both." In short, reciprocal altruism flourishes in organized communities that have close ties and collective efficacy—conditions outlined in the social disorganization/systemic model tradition (see Kornhauser, 1978; Sampson, 2012; Shaw and McKay, 1942).

Notably, in developing their broken windows theory, James Q. Wilson and George Kelling highlighted a specific conclusion from the vandalized car experiment. They were in agreement with Zimbardo that the situation and not individual dispositions triggered the vandalism. "Window-breaking," observed Wilson and Kelling (1982, p. 31), "does not necessarily occur on a large scale because some areas are inhabited by determined window-breakers whereas others are populated by window-lovers." Neighborhood context perhaps matters in how quickly vandalism might occur—almost immediately in the Bronx because of its "anonymity, the frequency with which cars are abandoned and things are stolen or broken, the past experience of no one caring" and only after a while in Palo Alto, "where people have come to believe that private possessions are cared for, and that mischievous behavior is costly" (p. 31). Indeed, "vandalism can occur anywhere once communal barriers—the sense of mutual regard and the obligations of civility—are lowered by actions that seem to signal that 'no one cares' " (p. 31). Even in Palo Alto? Although not discussed by Zimbardo in his account of the experiment, Wilson and Kelling (1982, p. 31) reported that shortly after Zimbardo hit the abandoned car with a sledgehammer, "passersby were joining in. Within hours, the car had been turned upside down and utterly destroyed. Again, the 'vandals' appeared to be primarily respectable whites" (p. 31).

So, if vandalism is not due to the concentration of bad people within bad neighborhoods, what is the key causal factor? For Wilson and Kelling, it is "broken windows" or, to use more academic language, social disorder. "Social psychologists and police officers," they noted, "tend to agree that if a

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window in a building is broken *and is left unrepaired*, all of the rest of the windows will soon be broken. This is as true in nice neighborhoods and in run-down ones" (1982, p. 31, emphasis in the original). The study thus assumed importance because it provided empirical support for this claim (Zimbardo, 2007, p. 25). In essence, the releaser signals of an elevated hood and lack of license plates on the experimental car were the functional equivalent of a broken window in a building; they invited more acts of vandalism.

As will be seen in more detail, Wilson and Kelling were not interested in vandalism but with applying the metaphor of broken windows to the problem of inner-city crime. For them, "at the community level, disorder and crime are usually inextricably linked, in a kind of developmental sequence" (1982, p. 31). Disorder involves minor breaches of community standards, such as displays of public drunkenness, the homeless sleeping in doorways, and rowdy teenagers congregating on street corners who harass passersby. Other manifestations of disorder are more physical than social—graffiti despoiling building walls, dilapidated buildings, and litter strewn about the sidewalks and street gutters. They argued that signs of disorder operate like broken windows—they invite more disorderly conduct and convey the message that nobody in the community can prevent waywardness. Disorder is the context out of which crime arises and flourishes. Thus, the "developmental sequence" of Wilson and Kelling's broken windows theory is as follows: disorder → crime.

As a political scientist, Wilson (1975) had criticized criminologists for searching for root causes of crime that could not be changed—short of a revolution occurring. Perhaps not surprisingly, he and his collaborator Kelling did not blame crime on deindustrialization, economic inequality, or cultures of violence nourished by concentrated disadvantage. Rather, the underlying cause of crime, especially in inner-city neighborhoods, was the *tolerance of disorder*, which in turn created conditions ripe for widespread criminality. In their view, however, crime was not an intractable problem beyond the reach of governmental intervention. No, they did not call for the expansion of jobs and other social welfare programs. Instead, Wilson and Kelling argued that the state already had at its disposal the resources it needed to eradicate disorder: the police. By using "order maintenance" techniques, officers could fix the broken windows of disorder. Once order was restored, crime would fall.

Wilson and Kelling (1982) set forth these ideas not in an academic journal article or full-length book but in a nine-page essay published in the *Atlantic Monthly* titled "Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety." In most instances, writings such as this slip into obscurity, ignored by professors, police chiefs, and politicians alike. But this work appeared at

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a propitious time. It resonated with many observers of urban life who increasingly saw the nation's cities, especially its inner cities, as wildly out of control. When such views prevail, theories offering social order as the solution to crime generated by disorder make sense (see Rothman, 1971). Beyond this diagnosis, Wilson and Kelling rejected the prevailing view that "nothing works" to reduce crime, whether the intervention is undertaken by the police or correctional officials (Cullen and Gendreau, 2001; Sherman, 1993a). In fact, their diagnosis—that disorder leads to crime—offered a ready cure: get rid of disorder. Again, they argued, optimistically, that the police were up to this challenge.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the prevailing social context in which urban America was portrayed as increasingly gripped by social and physical disorder. This context lent credence to the image of the city as a broken window. Wilson and Kelling's broken windows theory is then reviewed in detail and, in the following section, their thesis that disorder leads to crime is evaluated. Finally, the role of policing strategy in reducing crime, including broken windows or zero-tolerance policing, is examined. The dispute over which type of policing will achieve the greatest public safety remains a vibrant policy issue today.

Disorder and Decline

Wilson and Kelling's "broken windows" *Atlantic Monthly* essay appeared at a time—extending from before to after its publication in 1982—when violent crime was an increasingly salient social and political issue (Beckett and Sasson, 2000; Garland, 2001; Simon, 2007). Starting in the mid-1960s, the homicide rate per 100,000 began a steady upward trend, doubling from 5.1 in 1965 to 10.2 in 1980. This rate fell to 7.9 in 1984 and 1985, but then swung upward again, exceeding 9.0 per 100,000 in the first half of the 1990s. In 1994 alone, more than 23,330 Americans were murdered (Disastercenter.com, 2016). Cities were particularly hard hit by this crime trend. In 1991, the homicide rate for cities with more than one million residents was 35.5; those living in small cities (100,000 to 249,999) fared better but still faced a murder rate of 15.0 (Cooper and Smith, 2011).

These statistics evoked a sense of true peril. In their book *Body Count*, Bennett, DiIulio, and Walters (1996, p. 13) lamented, "Late twentieth-century America has the distinction of being history's most violent 'civilized' nation." Our "shining city on the hill"—as America was once termed—"now leads the industrialized world in rates of murder, rape, and violent crime" (p. 13). They then cautioned, "We may be experiencing the lull before the coming crime storm" (see also DiIulio, 1995). In fact, crime in the United States took a sudden, largely inexplicable turn downward, leading to what Zimring (2007)

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calls "the Great American crime decline" (see also Blumstein and Wallman, 2000; Tonry, 2014). One temporary exception was juvenile violence that shot up in the latter part of the 1990s, but then followed the overall downward trend (Zimring, 2013). Remarkably, in 2014 the nation's homicide rate per 100,000 residents was 4.5 or 14,249 victims—statistics not seen since the 1960s (Disastercenter.com, 2016). In New York City, to cite but one example, the homicide rate in 2009 was only 18 percent of its 1990 total (Zimring, 2012).

Thus, broken windows theory appeared in the midst of a prolonged crime boom—bracketed by fifteen-year periods of escalating and/or high offense rates. The reality of crime, which hit urban America the hardest, lent credence to the image of the city as a broken window that could not be fixed even by the wars on drugs and crime various presidents initiated (Beckett and Sasson, 2000). During this era, however, cities seemed to be suffering from more than an intractable crime rate. They appeared to lose the capacity to enforce not only law but also order. They were portrayed as places to flee, as many White residents did to the suburbs. Old neighborhoods increasingly appeared to be plagued by run-down if not abandoned buildings and by public spaces populated by troubled if not troubling people. In short, disorder had set in.

In 1990, Wesley Skogan documented the extent and consequences of these conditions in his acclaimed book, *Disorder and Decline: Crime and the Spiral of Decay in American Neighborhoods*. Skogan based his conclusions on surveys from six cities, covering forty areas, between 1977 and 1983. He was careful to measure both social disorder—"loitering, drugs, vandalism, gangs, public drinking and street harassment"—and physical disorder—"noise, abandoned buildings, litter, and trash" (1990, p. 191). Although conceptually distinct, Skogan found that social and physical disorder were intercorrelated; that is, where one type was present so was the other type, a toxic brew. He cautioned that social disorder had wide-ranging impacts that could contribute to the further decline of neighborhoods. As he noted:

> Disorder not only sparks concern and fear of crime among neighborhood residents; it may actually increase the level of serious crime. Disorder erodes what control neighborhood residents can maintain over local events and conditions. It drives out those for whom stable community life is important, and discourages people with similar values from moving in. It threatens house prices and discourages investment. In short, disorder is an instrument of destabilization and neighborhood decline. (1990, p. 3)

Most of all, observed Skogan, communities marked by disorder "can no longer expect people to act in civil fashion in public places. They can

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no longer expect landlords to respect the character of their neighborhood" (1990, p. 3). Why did this deterioration in public rules occur in urban areas? For George Kelling and Catherine Coles (1997), two causal factors are clear, and they are not factors such as the deindustrialization of the urban core or concentrated disadvantage. First, they indict the growth of individual rights trumped by the civil rights movement, which led to the decriminalization of drunkenness, the deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill, and the limits on the enforcement of loitering and other public order laws. Although perhaps well intentioned, observe Kelling and Coles, these initiatives led to the increasing amount and ultimately tolerance of deviance and disorder in city streets. Second, at the same time, modern policing had moved away from its traditional role of order maintenance and prevention. In its place, law enforcement has embraced a "warrior strategy" that focuses on crime fighting and responding rapidly to 911 calls. Thus, at the time that police were needed to enforce order, they instead became isolated and lost their connection to the citizens in urban neighborhoods. For Kelling and Coles (1997, p. 194), the solution lay in "taking back the streets" by "restoring order." Broken windows policing was the key to doing so.

Wilson and Kelling's Classic Essay: Police as Window Fixers

In their classic essay, Wilson and Kelling (1982) had a simple message that resonated with Americans in the 1980s: people were fearful to go into the city because things were out of control. Once upon a time, police officers on foot patrol walked the streets, talked to the residents, and used their discretion—perhaps including a touch of aggression—to maintain order. But those idyllic days had passed, with officers now cruising around in police vehicles. They might occasionally roll down the window to yell at a rowdy teen or bothersome alcoholic to behave themselves, but otherwise they had little interest in minor forms of urban incivility. They had moved from maintaining order to supposedly fighting crime, a task that research showed they did poorly. Police officials and their officers simply did not understand that however important crime was, those living in and traveling to inner-city neighborhoods were immediately confronted each day with a social and physical environment rich with clues about the prevailing level of social order and of their safety. "But we tend to overlook or forget," observed Wilson and Kelling (1982, pp. 29–30), "another source of fear—the fear of being bothered by disorderly people." These were not "violent people, nor, necessarily, criminals, but disreputable or obstreperous or unpredictable people: panhandlers, drunks, addicts, rowdy teenagers, prostitutes, loiterers, the mentally disturbed" (p. 30).

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Police had erred in not addressing these small things, not understanding that they produced fear and, said Wilson and Kelling, a fertile ground for the concentration of crime in the area. The prototypical inner-city community had become like a dilapidated, vandalized building with all its windows broken. At one point in time, this structure was in full repair. But at some point, one window was shattered and nobody cared enough to fix it. This single broken window was a sitting invitation for passersby to consider this building as untended and thus as an attractive target to vandalize further. As more windows were smashed—and again not fixed—the signal strengthened that this was a property that could be vandalized at will. Eventually, the building would be ruined and unfit for human settlement.

Again, the single empirical study cited by Wilson and Kelling to lend credence to this broken windows thesis was Zimbardo's experiment reported in "Diary of a Vandalized Car" (1969). They described the findings in detail, showing how, especially in the Bronx, a car that was arranged to look abandoned soon suffered vandalism, with one act encouraging future acts until the vehicle was virtually destroyed. Wilson and Kelling thus argued that there are grave consequences to sending the message that "no one cares" (p. 31). "Untended property," they warned, becomes fair game for people out for fun or plunder, and even for people who ordinarily would not dream of doing such things and who probably consider themselves law-abiding" (p. 31). In a similar way, they argued that "untended behavior" in cities leads to a spiral of social decline, marked by the "breakdown of community controls" (p. 31):

> A stable neighborhood of families who care for their homes, mind each other's children, and confidently frown on unwanted intruders can change, in a few years or even months, to an inhospitable and frightening jungle. A piece of property is abandoned, weeds grow up, a window is smashed. Adults stop scolding rowdy children; the children, emboldened, become more rowdy. Families move out, unattached adults move in. Teenagers gather in front of the corner store. The merchant asks them to move; they refuse. Fights occur. Litter accumulates. People start drinking in front of the grocery; in time, an inebriate slumps to the sidewalk and is allowed to sleep it off. Pedestrians are approached by panhandlers. (1982, pp. 31–32)

According to Wilson and Kelling (1982, p. 31), "at the community level, disorder and crime are usually inextricably linked, in a kind of developmental sequence." Disorder does not spark a crime wave immediately. Rather, as residents become wary of their environment and fear that crime might be rising, "they will modify their behavior accordingly. They will use the streets

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less often, and when on the streets will stay apart from their fellows, moving with averted eyes, silent lips, and hurried steps" (p. 32). They will start to live by the dictum of "don't get involved" (p. 32). In the language of criminologists, informal social control and the capacity to enforce shared values of civility will attenuate. It is at this stage, argue Wilson and Kelling (1982, p. 32), that "such an area is vulnerable to a criminal invasion":

> Though it is not inevitable, it is more likely that here, rather than in places where people are confident that they can regulate public behavior by informal controls, drugs will change hands, prostitutes will solicit, and cars will be stripped. That the drunks will be robbed by boys who do it as a lark, and prostitutes' customers will be robbed by men who do it purposefully and perhaps violently. That muggings will occur.

This disquieting image of the city as a broken window spiraling into decline, however, was pregnant with optimism. The broken window thesis contained a clear solution to reverse urban decay: fix the broken windows. The key to this policy prescription was understanding the causal sequence underlying inner-city crime. Social disorder, by leading to weakening informal social control, created a place that attracted crime and made it easy to commit.

For Wilson and Kelling, the police would have to be the agents of social reform. They would have to fix the windows. Wilson and Kelling thus rejected the prevailing notion that law enforcement could not be used to reduce crime (Sherman, 1993a). As noted, however, they argued that officers were focusing on the wrong intervention target: crime itself and usually after the incident had occurred. Wilson and Kelling thus urged that police return to their traditional function of order maintenance. Concretely, this would mean their being in the neighborhood, often on foot, where they would put a stop to bothersome incivilities. They would tell loiterers to move along, drunks sleeping in doorways to go elsewhere, rowdy teenagers to quiet down and leave people alone, and prostitutes to ply their trade on someone else's beat. If need be, they would use their discretion to arrest recalcitrant deviants. Once order was being restored, the good people of the neighborhood would take to the streets, informal controls would strengthen, and criminals would realize that they need to seek out other places to do their handiwork.

As public policy analysts, Wilson and Kelling were interested in using available government resources in the most effective way to solve the problem of urban disorder, crime, and decline. They were not interested in so-called root causes of crime, such as poverty, which they saw as either causally unimportant or beyond the reach of public policy. Still, it is puzzling that

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Wilson and Kelling never pondered the question of the origins of all the criminals, prostitutes, alcoholics, homeless, and loiterers that were prepared to invade a neighborhood showings signs of social disorder. They were confident, it seems, that this diverse wayward crowd could be displaced elsewhere or perhaps have their behavior suppressed by the police. But they never seemed to probe how the conditions of the neighborhoods they were studying might have created these troubled souls in the first place.

Do Broken Windows Cause Crime?

The causal connection between disorder and crime in urban America is undoubtedly complex (Sampson, 2012; Sampson and Raudenbush, 1999, 2001, 2004). For example, signs of physical and social disorder could cause a neighborhood to be stigmatized as a "bad area" and thus lose investment in homeownership and business development. If concentrated in minority areas, this disinvestment could contribute to racial inequality, increased economic barriers, and impoverished conditions inhospitable to healthy human development. Wilson and Kelling, however, ignore these potential criminogenic pathways, instead proposing that such "broken windows" lead to crime in a single way: by prompting decent citizens, increasingly fearful for their safety, to withdraw from public spaces and to diminish their willingness to activate informal social control. Into this vacuum, the disreputable and deviant find comfort and feel empowered to socially spoil the neighborhood.

But is there a direct link between disorder and crime—or, as Taylor (2001, p. 372) asks, between "grime" and crime? This is not some esoteric criminological question. For interventions to be effective, they must target known criminogenic risk factors with "treatments" that are responsive to—that is, capable of changing—the underlying condition (see Bonta and Andrews, 2017). Belief in the thesis that minor incivilities lead ultimately to major crimes is a powerful justification for using available police resources to show zero tolerance for any form of disorder. On balance, the research has not been supportive of all aspects of the broken windows theory (Taylor, 2001). Three critiques have surfaced: the no-effect critique, the spuriousness critique, and the perceptual critique.

The No-Effect Critique

First, in *Illusions of Order: The False Promise of Broken Windows Policing*, Bernard Harcourt (2001) provides the most comprehensive critical examination of Wilson and Kelling's ideas. As part of this assessment, he revisited the empirical results presented by Skogan (1990) in *Disorder and Decline*. In his data analysis, Skogan reported that residents' perception of disorder (as

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measured by his combined social and physical disorder scale) was related to self-reports of robbery victimization. In replicating this study, Harcourt challenged the robbery finding on methodological grounds, noting in particular that it was produced largely by neighborhoods in only one of the six cities studied (Newark). More instructive, he broadened the analysis to consider a range of other crimes. Importantly, Harcourt (2001, p. 78, emphasis in the original) concluded that "there are *no* statistically significant relationships between disorder and purse-snatching, physical assault, burglary, or rape when other explanatory variables are held constant. . . . In the end, the data do not support the broken windows hypothesis." Harcourt is thus articulating the *no-effect critique*.

A salient result in Skogan's (1990, p. 75) research should not be overlooked. Although the focus was on his examination of disorder, he found as well that "poverty, instability, and the racial composition of neighborhoods are strongly linked to crime" (see also Harcourt, 2001; Pratt and Cullen, 2005). Thus, while he favored, with reservations, the policing of disorder, his policy prescription for reducing inner-city crime was broad based. For example, his analysis of the "political economy of disorder" led him to recommend making "key investments" in job creation and housing (Skogan, 1990, pp. 172, 174). In contrast, by singling out only broken windows for fixing, Wilson and Kelling ignored any discussion of these empirical realities—these "root causes" of crime—boldly suggesting that the police could be relied on to solve the urban crime problem through order maintenance (see Wilson, 1975).

The Spuriousness Critique

Second, Sampson and Raudenbush (1999, 2001) provide the leading example of the *spuriousness critique*. For them, disorder is very real and "fundamental to understanding urban neighborhoods" (2001, p. 1). Disorder is important because it "can be observed, while crime, by contrast, is largely unobserved" (p. 1). Disorder and crime also co-occur, which might lead to the assumption that broken windows are criminogenic. Alas, they caution that the "contention that disorder is an essential cause in the pathway to predatory crime is open to question" (p. 1).

Their critical insight is that the association between disorder and crime is more apparent than real. Sampson (2012, p. 126) starts with the important observation that the line between incivilities and crime is not as clear-cut as Wilson and Kelling suggest:

> Consider items commonly used to define social disorder, such as solicitation for prostitution, loitering, and public use of alcohol or

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> drugs. Or consider "incivilities" such as graffiti, smashed windows, and drug raids in the streets. All these are evidence either of crimes themselves or ordinance violations, meaning that in one sense the broken windows theory is saying that crime causes crime. When cast in this light, broken windows theory takes on a different and, in my view, less compelling explanation of crime.

Put another way, Sampson sees many incivilities as part of what has been called the "generality of deviance," where such actions either are crimes or are analogous to them (see Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). If so, then they might have a common origin. "It may be, then," notes Sampson (2012, p. 137), "that public disorder and predatory crimes are manifestations of the same process at different ends of a seriousness continuum." They may have a common cause that causes both disorder and crime to occur in the same place—inner-city neighborhoods. Their association is thus spurious.

To test this possibility, Sampson and Raudenbush used data from the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN). This massive undertaking surveyed thousands of residents, community leaders, and adolescents across 343 Chicago neighborhoods. They wanted to see if disorder predicted crime across neighborhoods. To do so, they made two important methodological choices.

First, as is explained in more detail in Chapter 8, Sampson developed "collective efficacy theory" to explain community variations in crime rates (Sampson, 2006, 2012; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls, 1997). In this analysis, he was betting that both disorder and crime would be explained by the core factors in his theory. These included measures of factors such as concentrated disadvantage, immigrant concentration, residential stability, population density, mixed land use, and—most important—collective efficacy. The construct of collective efficacy was measured by a scale that assessed residents' social cohesion and their willingness to exercise informal social control. When residents are cohesive, they are a collective; when they have "shared expectations for control," they can be said to have the potential for efficacy (Sampson, 2012, p. 152). Most important, collective efficacy implies the capacity to activate neighbors to come together to solve a problem that violates their values—such as a drug market or a rash of burglaries—should one arise.

Second, Sampson and Raudenbush (1999, 2001) wanted to develop an objective measure of disorder that did not have to rely on how individuals perceived their urban world. Perceptions are used in studies because they can be obtained simply by having respondents complete a survey and express their views (e.g., whether graffiti is a "problem" in the area). Sampson and Raudenbush, however, took the road less traveled: they used "systematic

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social observation" (SSO) to methodically record the level of disorder. In their words:

> To measure disorder, trained observers videotaped what was happening on the face blocks of 23,000 streets in 196 neighborhoods that varied by race/ethnicity and social class. As the observers drove and filmed, they produced a permanent visual record that would be accessible at any time. They also logged the observations they made on each face block. Counted as signs of physical disorder were such items as garbage on the streets, litter, graffiti, abandoned cars, and needles and syringes. Counted as signs of social disorder were such activities as loitering, public consumption of alcohol, public intoxication, presumed drug sales, and the presence of groups of young people manifesting signs of gang membership. (2001, p. 4)

Thus equipped with a strong theoretical framework and strong measure of disorder, they were prepared to assess the broken windows thesis. Their findings proved striking. The SSO measure of disorder was initially related to predatory crime. But once collective efficacy and the other independent variables were controlled, "the connection between disorder and crime vanished in 4 out of 5 tests—including homicide, arguably our best measure of violence" (Sampson and Raudenbush, 1999, p. 637). The only exception was robbery. "The implication," they noted, "is that disorder and crime have similar roots. The forces that generate disorder also generate crime" (2001, p. 4). The spuriousness critique thus seems to be substantially supported.

These finding have policy implications. According to Sampson and Raudenbush (1999, p. 638), "the active ingredients in crime seem to be structural disadvantage and attenuated collective efficacy more so than disorder." It is thus not clear how police suppression of incivilities will make communities safer. The wrong cause is being targeted for change. As they caution, "attacking public disorder through tough police tactics may thus be a politically popular but perhaps analytically weak strategy to reduce crime because such a strategy leaves the common origin of both, but especially the last, untouched" (1999, p. 638).

Sampson and Raudenbush (2004) add one final insight regarding disorder and crime. Broken windows theory would predict a close relationship between objective and perceived disorder. In fact, Wilson and Kelling imply that residents are acute observers of social and physical disorder, knowing when to retreat from public spaces (when incivilities rise) and when to return to public spaces (when, aided by the police, incivilities diminish). And, in fact, Sampson and Raudenbush's analysis of the PHDCN data show a relationship. But the key finding is that perceptions of disorder are increased

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even more by a high concentration of Blacks and the poor. These effects were found not only among residents but also in a sample of leaders who worked in the communities but did not live there (Sampson and Raudenbush, 2004). Thus, it appears that perceptions of disorder cannot be understood apart from their racial and economic context. Who is in the neighborhoods, not just loitering and littering, matters most in the meaning observers ascribe to an area.

Sampson (2012, p. 144) reports that neighborhood reputations are "durable and hard to overcome." In essence, areas become stigmatized—labeled as "disorderly." Most disquieting, he discovered that perceived community disorder was related to a measure of "later poverty"; objective disorder was unrelated to this outcome. Sampson (2012, p. 147) notes the implication of this finding:

> I suggest that collectively shaped perceptions of disorder may be one of the underappreciated causes of continued racial and economic segregation in the United States and perhaps cities elsewhere. At the very least, shared perceptions of disorder appear to matter for reasons that extend far beyond the presence of broken windows or the physical structure of the built environment.

The Perceptual Critique

Published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Wilson and Kelling's (1982) classic article was remarkable in its straightforward thinking: fix broken windows. It is difficult to imagine anyone who would argue to the contrary—that a broken window should be left unrepaired. It offered a compelling, optimistic solution to an urban problem, crime and decay, that heretofore seemed intractable: get the police to rid communities of bothersome incivilities. If the neighborhood is spruced up and the wayward who externalize the costs of their deviance are removed, then the good urban villages of a past era will reappear. So, stop worrying about root causes of crime and empower the police to walk the beat, enforce social rules in a no-nonsense way, and let the decent people know they have a defender close by.

As Sampson and Raudenbush's work painfully discloses, urban life is more complicated than can be portrayed in a nine-page article written a quarter century ago for a general audience. They have shown that objective and perceived disorder are different phenomena that may have different effects. More than this, they have suggested that community stigma, similar to individual stigma, is sticky and not easily shed. Once an area becomes publicly labeled as a "bad neighborhood," it is not clear what it would take—police action included—to persuade residents, let alone local criminals and nonresidents, that community redemption has been achieved. The challenge

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is particularly difficult if, as Sampson and Raudenbush suggest, perceived disorder is inextricably mixed with how many African Americans live in an area. If being Black is the "incivility" that triggers perceptions of disorder, then "fixing" this "broken window" is far beyond the police's reach. The point is that Wilson and Kelling undertheorized perceptions of fear and risk, treating them as malleable and responsive to changes in objective conditions. Perceptions are more complicated than portrayed, thus calling the broken windows thesis into question. This is the *perceptual critique* (see Kubrin, 2008).

In this regard, Gau and Pratt (2008, p. 163) note that Wilson and Kelling's model is rooted in claims about perceptions: that residents' perceptions of disorder "cause fear and social withdrawal, which thereby opens the streets for serious predatory crime." In an innovative strategy, they used data in which respondents in a 2003 survey in Eastern Washington rated seventeen different crime and disorder items on the extent to which they were a problem in their neighborhood. If crime and disorder were distinct constructs, then they should load on separate factors. Alas, they did not, loading instead on a single factor. This finding poses problems for broken windows theory, which:

> insists that people observe disorder as a visible indicator of a breakdown in local social control. However, if people view disorder and crime as the same thing, then crime itself could serve as the visible indicator of the lack of informal social control in a community. If this is so, then broken window theory is untenable because it is tautological—crime cannot logically be asserted to cause itself. (2008, p. 181)

Gau and Pratt also point out that disorder, while a source of fear, is not the only factor that predicts this emotion (see, e.g., Ross and Jang, 2000). A voluminous literature now exists linking fear to a host of factors, including actual and vicarious victimization, perceived vulnerability and sensitivity to risk, type of crime (e.g., rape for women), situational contingencies, and media exposure (Fisher, Reyns, and Sloan, 2016). This empirical reality is consequential because it means that even if disorder is reduced, many other sources of fear of crime may remain untouched, and, in turn, residents will still be reluctant to take to the streets. "Thus, if disorder is not alone in causing fear," note Gau and Pratt (2008, p. 181), "then a key assumption that underlies the broken windows process is undermined."

Link and his colleagues (2017) raise another concern: the causal ordering between disorder and the perception that the risk of crime in the local environment is high. Again, broken windows theory contends that incivilities increase residents' perception of crime risk, which in turn leads them to

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withdraw from public spaces. Using data from Baltimore collected in 1987 and 1988, they examined this thesis longitudinally over the one-year period. Notably, they found evidence favoring the reverse causal model (crime risk → incivilities). As they concluded, the "results support an alternative view that crime risk perceptions themselves may shape how problematic the locale is seen to be" (2017, p. 676).

Yet another concern is knowing which incivilities matter more to which residents. It may be that some types of disorder are more likely than others to cause social withdrawal from public spaces. For example, having to negotiate rowdy, harassing teens or witness an open-air drug market might lead to more fear than seeing litter in the gutter or people jaywalking. Further, although some residents might stay home to avoid disorder (e.g., the elderly), others might find such street life attractive (e.g., young adult males).

Finally, Harcourt (2001) alerts us that the very notion of "order" is a social construction of reality that privileges a particular implicit normative theory of what is good and bad conduct in a specific public location—the inner city. The power to define matters as we draw a sharp distinction between "street disorder and other disorder" (2001, p. 130). As he notes:

> Paying a housekeeper under the table is a crime. So is avoiding sales tax by paying with cash or getting a false out-of-state residence, underestimating taxes, or taking office supplies home. Tax evasion, insider trading, insurance or loan misrepresentation, noncompliance with environmental or waste disposal regulations and police brutality—these are all disorderly acts and yet they figure nowhere in the theory or order maintenance policing. Who gets to define disorder for purposes of order maintenance and or what basis? (2001, p. 130)

Even with street disorder, observes Harcourt (2001, p. 130, emphasis in the original), we must ask, "Who drew the line between order and disorder in the first place? . . . Why is it, exactly, that *loitering* is disorderly? Or *littering*?" Many of us, it seems, may have thrown a wrapper on the ground, drunk alcohol in public, or even urinated in a bush or in a dark alley when no bathroom was available. As Harcourt cautions, creating a false moral university is blinding. "The truth is," he notes, "it is often hard to distinguish between the law abider and the disorderly" (p. 132). Indeed, it is ironic that the vandals in the very scenario used by Wilson and Kelling to demonstrate the broken windows principle—the stripping of the abandoned car—were mostly respectable adults and not disreputable "drunks, addicts, rowdy teenagers, or unattached adults" (Harcourt, 2001, p. 132). For Harcourt, dividing the world into the orderly and the disorderly, the decent and the street folks,

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the respectable and the disreputable is fraught with conceptual weakness and, ultimately, with policy misadventure:

> The point is, of course, that these may be the wrong questions. The proper question may be, why use these categories in the first place—particularly since the category of the disorderly is so unstable. It triggers an aggressive response to the disorderly—reflected in the idea of "cracking down" on disorderly people—even in the absence of any empirical evidence. (2001, p. 132)

Do the Police Reduce Crime?

As scholars of law enforcement, it is perhaps understandable that Wilson and Kelling proposed that police officers are best positioned to rid declining inner-city neighborhoods of their broken windows. But this choice is hardly the only one that might have been suggested (Harcourt, 2001; Kubrin, 2008). In fact, in the early 1980s, little confidence existed that the police could do much to reduce crime, let alone fix the disorder that might underlie it (Sherman, 1993a). Evidence-based policing was yet to be invented (Sherman, 1998), and a sustained era in police innovation was in its initial stages (Weisburd and Braga, 2006). In any event, even with a modicum of imagination, it is possible to envision a range of methods to reduce disorder. On the physical side, building owners could be sued to obey city ordinances and repair their property; abandoned buildings could be demolished; more trash cans and street cleaning could keep litter to a minimum; city investment in newly paved streets and fancy brick inlays on sidewalks could mirror the "look" found in middle-class enclaves; and beautification campaigns could bring flowers, trees, and green space to the area. On the social side, homes might be found for the homeless, treatment for the drug addicted and the mentally ill, and recreation and jobs for the "rowdy" teens with nothing to do but congregate on street corners. More generally, efforts could be made to bolster the collective efficacy of local residents. "A more palatable bottom-up approach," Kubrin (2008, p. 209) reminds us, "would be to enlist the efforts of neighborhood residents by, for example, informally mobilizing neighborhood cleanups or creating neighborhood watches." In fact, such efforts are under way in inner-city communities across the nation (Kubrin, 2008).

The research is clear that the size of a police force—simply having more officers on staff—is, at best, weakly related to crime (Lee, Eck, and Corsaro, 2016). The key issue is how the police are deployed and what enforcement tactics they employ. Much debate still exists on the effectiveness of such crime-reduction strategies (Cullen and Pratt, 2016; Weisburd and Braga, 2006). Importantly, Wilson and Kelling were shrewd enough to know that

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simply throwing more officers at the problem of disorder was a foolish idea. Instead, they proposed that officers walk the beat, see their function as order maintenance, not fighting crime, and use their discretion to stop public displays of incivility. This approach came to be known as "zero-tolerance" policing because of the mandate to crack down on minor forms of disorder. It was not clear how this approach would do much to dent physical cues of disorder that were built into the environment, such as abandoned or dilapidated buildings, streets marked by potholes, or the lack of community beautification. It also was not clear where the homeless sleeping in doorways, teens hanging on the corners, and drug addicts in need of a fix would go when rousted by police officers intolerant of their presence. Perhaps they could move on and become some other neighborhood's concern.

Notably, Wilson and Kelling's approach gained considerable legitimacy when the city of New York experienced a dramatic drop in crime, so much so that Franklin Zimring (2012) could title his book *The City That Became Safe*. When William Bratton became the city's police commissioner in 1994, he led a dramatic reform of the department, which included elements of zero-tolerance policing suggested by broken windows theory. The subsequent marked decline in crime rates seemed to provide convincing evidence that order maintenance enforcement aimed at suppressing minor incivilities was an effective strategy for blunting serious crime (Kelling and Coles, 1997).

Two central difficulties, however, make the accuracy of this claim unclear (Braga, Welsh, and Schnell, 2015). First, serous crime declined in other cities and areas that did not embark on broken windows policing. For example, Eck and Maguire (2000) analyzed homicide rates before and after the implementation of police reform in New York. They noted that the homicide rate had already peaked in the city and started to decline prior to the initiation of the reform. More instructive, in the next three years, the decrease in homicide rates was greater in Connecticut and in areas of New York outside the city.

Second and more complicated, the centerpiece of New York's reform was the CompStat system. In brief, statistics on the distribution of offenses across the city were used by officials to map emerging crime hot spots and to target personnel for rapid deployment. Regular meetings were held to review the data, to plan strategy, and to hold precinct and operational commanders accountable for addressing the identified crime problems. As Zimring (2012, p. 129) explains, "strategic features in the 1990s program include (1) crime reduction as a central priority, (2) sustained resources allocated to hot spot identification and control, and (3) very aggressive street police behavior in target areas, including stop and frisk and minor offenses targeted at suspicious street behavior or persons." To the extent that law enforcement contributed to the city's crime drop, it is not clear whether it was hot spots policing, the use of minor violations to stop and frisk potential "bad guys"

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(e.g., carrying guns), or cracking down on incivilities. Zimring (2012, p. 130) points out the "rather frequent conflation of the order maintenance focus of 'broken windows' with the crime-centered crusade of CompStat." He goes on to question whether "the department ever tried to enforce 'quality of life' offenses as a consistent priority" (p. 146). For example, noting that prostitution is a classic broken windows offense, he shows that "the rate of prostitution arrests never went up in the CompStat era" (p. 146).

Where does this all leave us? It is fairly clear that carefully planned, focused police interventions reduce crime (Braga and Weisburd, 2012; Braga, Papachristos, and Hureau, 2014; Lee, Eck, and Corsaro, 2016; cf. Gill et al., 2014). The debate over broken windows or zero-tolerance policing, however, has been less settled, with scholars lining up on both sides of the effectiveness debate (cf. Harcourt, 2001; Kelling and Sousa, 2001). A recent meta-analysis by Braga, Welsh, and Schnell (2015) does much to define the status of the empirical literature.

Their search "identified 30 randomized experimental and quasi-experimental tests of disorder policing" (2015, p. 567). Overall, they found that the strategy of policing disorder had a significant and meaningful crime-decreasing effect ($d = .210$). Probing further, they then analyzed the data by two different types of disorder policing: "(1) increased use of aggressive order maintenance techniques to reduce disorderly behavior by individuals and (2) community problem-solving approaches that seek to change social and physical disorder at particular places" (p. 573). And here their findings take on much importance. The effect size for the community approach remained stable ($d = .271$), but for aggressive policing fell markedly ($d = .058$). "When considering a policing disorder approach," Braga, Welsh, and Schnell (2015, p. 581), conclude, "police departments should adopt a 'community coproduction model' rather than drift toward a zero-tolerance policing model" (see also Carr, 2003, 2012).

Conclusion

In the 1980s, it appeared to many Americans that the urban core was in serious difficulty. Violent crime was intractably high, and signs of social and physical disorder were ubiquitous. The image of the city as a broken window thus seemed empirically accurate, and, equally important, it resonated with the nation's sense that the ghetto was a lost cause. The genius of Wilson and Kelling was their abiding confidence that at least some urban neighborhoods could be saved from the spiral of decline. For them, the police were the one representative of the larger society who had the capacity and moral obligation to stand beside the decent residents trapped in communities that the rest of us feared to tread (see also Anderson, 1999). They were to be instruments of

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what Rengert (1989) once called "spatial justice"—using the state to protect the community from those who do not care who they hurt or inconvenienced. In a very real way, saving the city meant taking sides, an uncomfortable but necessary choice.

As discussed, their classic essay could not anticipate the many criticisms that subsequent scholarship would articulate. In a way, however, Wilson and Kelling were perhaps guilty of excessive hubris—having no qualms about differentiating the disorderly form the orderly or the crime-reducing powers of order maintenance policing. The world ultimately proved more complicated than they admitted.

Still, Wilson and Kelling played an instrumental role in reinvigorating American policing, calling on officers to do their jobs and make cities safer again. Although not the only voice calling for police reform, they were among the loudest in a chorus that persuaded many police officials to experiment with a range of policing strategies aimed at decreasing crime (see Weisburd and Braga, 2006). Ironically, while the field of "corrections" fell prey to nothing-works thinking and mass imprisonment, the field of policing embraced accountability and effectiveness.

The image of the city as a broken window, however, faded as the United States turned into the current century. To be sure, pockets of entrenched concentrated disadvantage and deteriorated neighborhoods persist. But cities seemed to rebound in the public mind, many of which grew much safer, more gentrified, and more culturally appealing. A spiral of advancement was replacing the spiral of decline. The time soon would come for a new, more optimistic image of the city.

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