Community-Based Violence Prevention: The Potential Mechanisms of Black Community Cohesion and Implications for Public Policy

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INTRODUCTION

In cities across the country, there are community-based organizations (CBOs) working to address violence[1] in communities of color, particularly violence involving youth, guns, and groups[2]. They are what Sharkey et al. (2018) call "community non-profits," organizations that are "designed to address violence and rebuild communities" (pg. 1215). I have personally observed that New York City is home to a number of such organizations. In New York City and across the U.S., community-based organizations are not part of the traditional justice system response to violence; the standard is punitive measures from police, prosecutors, and prisons (Center for Popular Democracy et al. 2017; Tita and Papachristos 2010, pp. 24-25; Venkatesh 1999, pg. 551). According to Venkatesh (1999),

> …law enforcement approaches…are not adequately informed by…community-based agencies…Instead, police typically employ unidimensional strategies that break up public gang activity, imprison gang members and disrupt narcotics distribution schemes (pp. 554-555).

In New York City alone, thousands of people have been arrested as part of gang take downs since at least 2015 (Meminger 2017). According to the NYPD, there are "about 500 active criminal

[1] The term "violence" in this paper refers to acts occurring in public spaces, commonly referred to as "community violence" or "street violence." It is inclusive of violence with weapons such as guns and knives, as well as robberies and assaults. It is not inclusive of domestic or intimate partner violence. Although violence is the primary focus, related crimes such as narcotics sales may also be addressed by the community-based organizations described in this paper.

[2] The term "group" is used as a catchall for various terms such as gangs, crews, sets, etc., since these all refer to similar social phenomena of people mutually associating with each other. In addition, the term "gang" can have various social and legal definitions. For example, some states (e.g. California, Florida) have legal definitions of what a gang is, with potential criminal penalties for gang membership. (National Network for Safe Communities 2016)

street-gang groups" in New York City, and law enforcement believes that about half of the shootings in 2017 are attributable to groups (Shea 2018). News articles have proliferated in recent years about the NYPD's gang database, which reportedly contains more than 17,000 names (Coltin 2018).

Nationwide, viral videos of lethal law enforcement interactions with black bodies have become commonplace, and mass incarceration – the term for the U.S.'s global dominance in penal confinement, particularly of black bodies – is now a household term. The troubling relationship between law enforcement and black communities is well documented, yet there is no reason to believe that black human beings desire safety to any less degree than others. Community-based approaches are potential alternatives to traditional law enforcement, and can even strengthen law enforcement efforts, yet instead public budgets over the past few decades have favored arrest, prosecution, and incarceration (Meares 2009, pp. 660-665; Center for Popular Democracy, et al. 2018, pg. 1). The mechanisms through which CBOs reduce crime and violence are not well understood, and are largely absent from the crime prevention literature (Sharkey et al. 2018, pp. 1233-1234). Similarly, many evaluations of community-based approaches deem them to be ineffective, but the reasons for failure are not always clear either (Bursik and Grasmick 1993; Dershem 1989; Rosenbaum 1988). Recent research shows that CBOs played a significant role in the great crime decline in cities across the U.S., with the largest reductions occurring in urban communities of color (Ellen and O'Regan 2009; Sharkey et al. 2018). Lack of understanding from policy analysts, government officials, and funders could potentially impede the success of CBOs that may depend on them for resources. Conversely, a better understanding of community-based crime prevention efforts, especially in the high-stakes field

of violence prevention, could lead to more effective community-based approaches that reduce crime and violence and improve overall community well-being.

A sizable body of literature examining community-based crime prevention has grown over several decades in sociology, criminology, and social work, yet gaps remain. Gill (2016) quotes Welsh and Hoshi (2006) as stating "there is little agreement in the academic literature on the definition of community prevention and the types of programs that fall within it" (pg. 78). The literature review that follows was informed by a set of research interests grounded in the experience of doing community-based anti-violence work in New York City:

1) what are some community-based approaches to violence prevention in urban black communities?
2) are there similarities in community-based anti-violence approaches in New York and other cities?
3) to what extent do shared motivations, methods, and philosophies exist, intentionally or unintentionally, among anti-violence workers in different urban areas?
4) are there similar and/or shared strategies among different community-based organizations that can serve as models for public policy?

The remainder of this paper is divided into three main sections; first, I will provide an overview of the literature on community-based crime prevention. Second, I will discuss research gaps and what is missing from the literature. Third, I will put forward a preliminary research agenda to address those gaps.

OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY-BASED CRIME PREVENTION LITERATURE

To a large extent, the theory and practice of community-based crime prevention stems from the notion of *social control*, which can be defined as "the effort of the community to regulate itself and the behavior of residents and visitors to the neighborhood to achieve this specific goal" (Bursik and Grasmick 1993, p. 15). Assuming that everyone wants to live in a neighborhood free of crime and disorder (Bursik and Grasmick 1993, p. 15), the extent to which residents can work together to effectuate this ideal is a measure of their social control. Although crimes are defined by the penal laws of various jurisdictions, the definition of "order" is more subjective as what is considered socially acceptable behavior can vary from community to community, or even from person to person within a community. If community residents have similar notions on what constitutes order, then they can work together to achieve mutually desired goals. If a community consists of residents who have different notions of what constitutes order, then it may be more difficult to collectively achieve a common sense of order. The ability of communities to organize for the purposes of exerting social control and preventing crime is the theoretical backbone of *social disorganization* theory. In practice, this looks like the anti-violence campaign known as “Occupy the Corners,” in which residents and activists congregate on a city corner in an area that has experienced violence. I helped to organize Occupy the Corners in Harlem in 2013 as part of Street Corner Resources, a small CBO in Harlem. The goals included catalyzing greater community participation in anti-violence work, challenging community apathy toward the problem of street violence, and building community solidarity.

Foundational Theory: Social Disorganization

A basic understanding of Shaw and McKay's seminal work, social disorganization theory, is necessary in order to engage with the community-based crime prevention literature. I will first review the theory and its most potent offspring, Bursik and Grasmick's *systemic model*, and then I will review critiques and alternative formulations. Social disorganization theory examines the ecological, rather than individual, causes of crime (Shaw and McKay 1969 [1942], p. 315; Bursik and Grasmick 1993, p. 33). According to the theory, greater social organization leads to less crime, while greater social disorganization leads to more crime (Bursik and Grasmick 1993, pp. 29-33). In other words, communities in which its members are able to work together to achieve common goals are better positioned to prevent crime (this idea is very prominent in Sampson's *collective efficacy* theory, which I will discuss later in this paper). Shaw and McKay examined changing neighborhoods and observed a negative relationship between juvenile delinquency and neighborhood income, as well as a negative relationship between juvenile delinquency and neighborhood tenure. Their research showed that as immigrant and migrant groups settled into neighborhoods, over time crime in those areas fell, while crime rose in areas with recent immigrant and migrant arrivals (Shaw and McKay 1969 [1942], pp. 374-375). They concluded that delinquency rates were a reflection of institutional stability, therefore neighborhoods consisting of recent migrants and immigrants, or neighborhoods where the residents did not have plentiful access to resources, would be more susceptible to higher delinquency rates (Shaw and McKay 1969 [1942], pp. 380-383). They also found a negative correlation between delinquency rates and neighborhood's distance from the center city; poorer neighborhoods in the inner-city had higher delinquency rates than more affluent neighborhoods farther from the inner-city. Bursik

and Grasmick (1993, pg. 33) state that Shaw and McKay were not arguing that lack of income is a driver of crime, but that rather "the pattern of neighborhood delinquency rates were related to the same ecological processes that gave rise to the socioeconomic structure of urban areas." In other words, the social forces that lead to a certain community being low-income are the same social forces that lead to higher delinquency rates, but what those social forces are is not clear. This lack of clarity is a source of critiques, which I will discuss later in this paper. Despite the lack of clarity, Shaw and McKay's theory challenged contemporary essentialist theories that claimed the roots of crime are in the intrinsic nature of individuals and ethnic/racial groups (Chaskin 2010, pp. 3-4). They argued that higher crime rates in black neighborhoods were not due to any supposed innate criminality in immigrants from other countries or black migrants from the south moving into northern cities (Shaw and McKay 1969 [1942], pp. 382-384).

Foundational Praxis of Social Disorganization Theory

Shaw and McKay believed the solution to juvenile delinquency was to change economic and social conditions of a community, that individual assistance alone was not enough, and that broad treatment programs should be enacted to meet this goal. To this end, Clifford Shaw founded the Chicago Area Project (CAP), a community-based organization (CBO) that empowers local residents to provide the resources and services they believed they needed (Bursik and Grasmick 1993, p. 160; Lewis 1996, pp. 99-100; Shaw and McKay 1969 [1942], pp. 322-326). CAP, which still exists, offers a broad range of social services and supports to try to change the community, including education, employment, and health. It includes community residents in planning and execution of social programs, involving them in the decision-making process alongside professional social workers. The founders believed that local residents were there best

people to address the challenges they faced (Shaw and McKay 1969 [1942], pp. 323-324). In a sense, CAP was a large community organizer, reflecting the thought that the solution to community instability is greater community organization. The Chicago Area Project served as a model for future CBOs with respect to theory and implementation (Bursik and Grasmick 1993, p. 166; Hope 1995, p. 27; Lewis 1996, p. 96).

Social Disorganization Theory Reformulated: The Systemic Model

Bursik and Grasmick (1993) build on Shaw and McKay's work, attempting to address social disorganization's flaws, particularly in how community ecology relates to crime. Whereas Shaw and McKay's take on social disorganization had a broad focus on community relationships, Bursik and Grasmick argue that a community is really a complex system of actors that interact with each other on multiple levels; this is what they call the *systemic theory of neighborhood organization* (Bursik and Grasmick 1993, pp. 12-13). To organize their framework, they adopt Albert Hunter's three levels of social control: private, parochial, and public (Bursik and Grasmick 1993, p. 16). The authors contend that neighborhoods can address crime through looking at each of these areas. "Private" deals with one-to-one interactions, typically between family or friends; for example, a parent instructing their child to behave in a certain manner, or one friend convincing another not to break the law. "Parochial" is the level on which institutions expert social control, such as schools, religious bodies, etc. "Public" is the level on which community residents can obtain resources and support from public agencies.

Critiques and Alternatives to Social Disorganization Theory

Shaw and McKay's original social disorganization theory, and Bursik and Grasmick's reformulation, are the foundation upon which the greater part of community-based crime

prevention is built. The original theory was clearly a great theoretical contribution, as it is still affecting current scholarship (as will be noted in this paper), however it was not without flaws. Perhaps most glaringly, while social disorganization theory highlights the role of the community in crime generation and prevention, there is not a clear connection on how one impacts the other (Bursik and Grasmick 1993, pg. 33). Shaw and McKay believed that eventually black families would advance economically and move from the inner city to outer affluent areas, following the path of European immigrants (Shaw and McKay 1969 [1942], pp. 382-383). While their original theory challenged racist perspectives, it was not built to withstand white supremacist urban policies that led to intergenerational poverty concentrated in urban communities of color (Hudson 2012). The correlation between race, poverty, and crime fueled the growth of Anderson's (2012) "iconic ghetto," the mythological image of black neighborhoods as being poverty-stricken criminogenic cesspools. Additionally, one can ask the question of what exactly the definition of disorganization is, and who gets to define it (Lewis 1996, p. 100).

Patillo (1998) challenges social disorganization theory post-Bursik and Grasmick's reformulation, arguing that tight community networks can actually enable criminal behavior by protecting community members that are willfully breaking the law. She conducted an ethnographic examination of a middle-class black neighborhood in Chicago, in which some criminal behavior, such as drug-dealing, persists partially due to the reluctance of some residents to call the police on their neighbors' children (Patillo 1998, pp. 763-764). While Patillo uses the systemic model as the theoretical base of her study, she "departs from both social disorganization theory and the systemic model…in the explanation of how [residential] networks

facilitate control" and claims that "dense social networks have both positive and negative effects for social control through specific mediating processes" (pg. 754).

Lee and Martinez (2002) challenge the notion that recent immigrant arrival lead to disorganized communities that foster crime. They used spatial analysis to examine black homicide rates in two Miami neighborhoods and any potential impact of Haitian immigration. Given Haiti's history as a self-liberated former French colony of African slaves, most Haitians are phenotypically black, yet some Haitian immigrants still experience marginalization when settling into predominantly native-born African-American neighborhoods (Lee and Martinez 2002, pg. 368). They found that increased Haitian immigration is not associated with higher black homicide rates, which is consistent with a previous empirical study looking at immigration and crime in Miami (Lee and Martinez 2002, pg. 372; Lee et al. 2001). Lee and Martinez's observations counters those of Shaw and McKay.

Hill (1959), building upon Merton's (1957) work, looks at *anomie* as a cause of juvenile delinquency in urban black youth. *Anomie*, a term taken from Durkheim's study of suicide (1951), refers to social isolation, and being disconnected from societal norms. Hill claims that *anomie* among black youth is caused by denial of access to opportunity in a racist society (pg. 278). In a virtual rebuke of Shaw and McKay, Hill states that,

> In general, Negro community life in most metropolitan areas is highly organized. Organization in and of itself is not a deterrent of deviant conduct…it is neither organization nor the degree of disorganization that poses the greatest threat to society. Rather, it is the values, moral codes, reference group behavior, and self-images and conceptions that produce the high incidence of juvenile delinquency among juvenile youth." (pg. 283)

He further asserts that Shaw and McKay's observations of crime rates, race, and geographic positioning are skewed due to residential segregation and racism (pg. 284). Shaw and McKay *did*

consider segregation in their formulation of social disorganization theory, but they focused more on economic segregation without a thorough analysis of racism and white supremacy. As stated previously, they assumed the blacks would eventually follow similar urban growth and migration patterns of European immigrants (Shaw and McKay 1969 [1942] pp. 18-22).

Similar to Hill's work, Peterson and Krivo (1993) look at racial segregation and its resulting social isolation combined with loss of formal social control (e.g. government services) as a cause of violence in urban black communities. They argue that "social isolation and the related lack of social control is the mechanism by which segregation leads to more homicides" (pg. 1020). Peterson & Krivo build on Sampson and Wilson's (1995) work that social inequality and structural barriers result in cultural adaptations that foster social disorganization and in turn, lead to crime. Sampson and Wilson (2018) recently reformulated their work in which they explored what they call "cognitive landscapes," the notion that in areas of persistent poverty, crime, and "ineffective policing, residents come to expect crime, disorder, and the illegal economy to be a part of their daily lives" (pg. 16). They point out that potential anti-crime measures include the work of community-based organizations, and cited Sharkey's (2018) work highlighting the role that CBOs have played in reducing urban crime. In addition to drawing on social disorganization theory, Sampson and Wilson also draw on Sampson et al.'s (1997) collective efficacy theory, which hypothesizes that greater social cohesion among residents combined with a willingness to act for the common good, is linked to reduced crime. Neighborhoods with greater collective efficacy are better positioned to exert informal social control, not only for the purposes of controlling crime, but also for demanding resources from agents of formal social control (i.e. the state) (pp. 918-919).

Can Community-Based Approaches Reduce Crime and Violence?

Starting with the Chicago Area Project (CAP), community-based approaches have drawn heavily on theories listed above, most notably social disorganization. The literature tends to focus more on voluntary residential programs, while community-based organizations are often overlooked, but nonetheless scholars have examined a range of approaches and methods. In addition to social services as exhibited by CAP, direct outreach, community mobilization, law enforcement partnerships, and voluntary community groups all fit within community-based crime prevention.

Social service provision via direct outreach is a method commonly used to address juvenile and gang crime. Irving Spergel, a seminal scholar/practitioner, developed an extensive literature on community-based crime prevention focused on youth and gangs. Spergel employed what he called the “street worker model” to reach delinquent youth. He defines street work as "systematic effort of an agency worker, through social work or treatment techniques within the neighborhood context, to help a group of young people who are described as delinquent or partially delinquent to achieve a conventional adaptation" (Spergel 1966, p. 22). Usually employed by a community-based organization, the street worker operates on the private and parochial levels of social control, building relationships with youth through the support of a community-based organization.

This model is a precursor to the model commonly used today having someone who has a criminal history but subsequently underwent a positive transformation to reach out to others still involved in criminal activity to some degree and work with them to lead a more positive life. People who have a criminal background and engage in that kind of work are becoming known as

"credible messengers," because their unique experience empowers them to reach people involved in criminal behavior with a message of desistance. This harkens back to Shaw's belief that social service agencies, such as in the Chicago Area Project, should be staffed with people from the service area instead of relying too much on external social service professionals (Shaw and McKay 1969 [1942], pp. 322-323). Today, the idea of credible messengers is becoming more popular, as evidenced by the recent launches of the Credible Messenger Justice Center at Hunter College and the Institute for Transformative Mentoring at The New School. Both aim to provide training and guidance for people with experience going through the criminal justice system and/or committing crime to develop personally and professionally, and to use their experiences as assets to help others. Similarly, the Cure Violence model incorporates people who have lived experience committing street violence in getting others not to do the same. In the literature, street work is often associated with gangs. Although the body literature on gangs doesn't always necessarily include a community-based component, it often does, and the literature on community-based crime prevention very often addresses gangs. Thus, there is significant overlap between the two areas despite being distinct. Bursik and Grasmick (1993) devote an entire chapter to gang crime in the neighborhood context. They cite Spergel's work as a guide, as he claims that "social disorganization theory may best account for development of violent gangs" (Spergel 1984, p. 201). He claims that the breakdown and weaknesses of primary and secondary institutions - the private and parochial levels of social control in Bursik and Grasmick's systemic model - results in gang formation (Spergel 1984, pp. 201-202).

Empirical Evidence

The empirical evidence has tended to cast doubt on the ability of CBOs themselves to reduce violence, but partnerships with law enforcement have shown more promise. Spergel developed the comprehensive gang program model, which "required criminal justice and social service agencies to integrate and collaborate on key elements of control and social development, with participation from local neighborhood groups" (Spergel et al. 2006, pg. 205). The model is built on five strategies designed to work together and stand alone: "1) community mobilization, 2) social intervention, 3) provision of social opportunities, 4) suppression [e.g. law enforcement], and 5) organizational change and development targeted to gang-involved delinquent or criminal youth, or youth at high risk of gang involvement" (Spergel 2010, pg. 235). An evaluation found a statistically significant difference in rearrests across three sample populations (Spergel et al. 2006, pp. 211-212). The program provided a range of resources and supports including direct street worker outreach, conflict mediation, and general community development activities (pg. 205). Law enforcement, including police and probation departments, was an integral component of the larger strategy to focus directly on young people involved in group (e.g. criminal gang) activity (pg. 205).

Focused deterrence models implemented across the country also utilize community-law enforcement partnerships, but on a smaller scale than the comprehensive gang model (National Network for Safe Communities 2016, pg. 7)[3]. The Group Violence Intervention (GVI) model, alternatively known as Boston CeaseFire or the Boston Gun Project, operates on three pillars: 1)

[3] Declaration of Conflicting Interest: I am currently employed by the National Network for Safe Communities as a Field Advisor for the Group Violence Intervention (GVI) model. This paper is solely my responsibility as a doctoral candidate and does not necessarily reflect the official views of the National Network for Safe Communities.

strategic law enforcement, 2) support & outreach, 3) community moral voice (National Network for Safe Communities 2016). Law enforcement identifies groups known to engage in crime and violence, and together with social service agencies and community members, delivers a message to group-involved individuals stating that violence must stop. The first group that commits an act of gun violence and/or the most violent group receives prioritized attention from law enforcement, but all the groups receive prioritized attention from social service agencies and community-based organizations, to support alternatives to violence (National Network for Safe Communities 2016). The message is delivered either through a large meeting, known as a "call-in," or through individual "custom notifications" (National Network for Safe Communities 2016). A key component of GVI is utilizing informal social control to prevent violence, either through group members telling other members to desist from violence, or through CBOs exerting a positive influence on group members (National Network for Safe Communities 2016).

A similar focused deterrence model, known as the Offender Notification Forum under the federally funded Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) program, focuses on individuals returning from incarceration on parole or probation, regardless of group affiliation[4]. Individuals are invited to a call-in, in which they are informed of their legal exposure for committing a violent act, but they are also offered social services and reentry support. Similar to GVI, the message is delivered through a tandem of law enforcement agencies and social service providers. Both the GVI and PSN models rely heavily on procedural justice and legitimacy theories – the idea that people who feel that they have been treated fairly are more likely to see the law as legitimate, and people

[4] Declaration of Conflicting Interest: my previous employment included implementing the Project Safe Neighborhoods model. This paper is solely my responsibility as a doctoral student and does not necessarily reflect the official views of any of my previous employers.

who see the law as legitimate are more likely to obey it (Papachristos et al. 2012). A systematic review found that focused deterrence strategies result in a statistically significant reduction in crime (Braga et al. 2018). The study noted the essential role that community-based organizations play in the success of focused deterrence, especially vis a vis a law enforcement-only approach. The authors note that

> …existing empirical evidence suggests that "person focused" policing interventions associated with the standard model of policing, such as programs designed to arrest and prosecute repeat offenders, were not effective in controlling crime…[but]…a blended enforcement, social service and opportunity provision, and community-based action approach, are effective in controlling crime." (pg. 240)

Despite this strong emphasis on a blended approach, the literature contains "little knowledge of which of the mechanisms underlying the model have the strong impacts on outcomes" (pg. 239). Braga et al. contend that "we need more studies aimed at examining this and other potential mechanisms that may improve community outcomes" (pg. 239).

One approach that relies on community-based organizations without enforcement is Cure Violence, formerly known as CeaseFire Chicago. Cure Violence takes a public health approach, treating violence like a disease that must be stopped from spreading from person to person. The model utilizes street outreach workers to connect with individuals at-risk for engaging in violence. It involves public education, involvement of community leaders and sometimes law enforcement, and community mobilization (Ransford et al. 2010, pg. 93). Some of the street outreach workers, known as violence interrupters, respond to public disputes in an attempt to diffuse potentially dangerous situations and prevent retaliation.[5] A core component of the Cure Violence approach is "the desire to change the norms and thinking of individuals and

[5] I have personally witnessed violence interrupters at work in Harlem during the time I worked with Street Corner Resources.

communities so that they reject violence as an acceptable form of behavior" (pg. 93). Statistical evidence shows that Cure Violence played a role in reducing violence in Chicago, including a greater violence reduction in implementation neighborhoods than comparable areas, but it is difficult to prove causality due to confounding variables, such as Project Safe Neighborhoods operating at the same time (pp. 93-96). GVI, PSN, and Cure Violence all utilize informal social control to one degree or another. This echoes Bursik and Grasmick's systemic model of social disorganization; utilizing community institutions to shape social norms around violence.

One anti-violence program that was partially based on Cure Violence was One Vision, One Life (One Vision) in Pittsburgh, PA. Wilson and Chermak (2011) claim their evaluation of One Vision is one of the few "quality studies of community-initiated actions that could be thought of as an alternative to strictly an enforcement strategy" (pg. 995). In other words, One Vision could be viewed as an attempt to reduce violence utilizing a practically entirely community-based strategy that did not rely on law enforcement at all, with a high-quality evaluation. Wilson and Chermak utilized a quasi-experimental propensity scores analysis to examine differences in violent crime rates between One Vision's catchment neighborhoods and comparison neighborhoods (pg. 1001). They found that One Vision did not reduce violence, but there was an associated *increase* in violence; the reason why is unclear (pg. 1011).

Dershem (1989) argues that "the apparent failures of current crime prevention strategies stem from poor program evaluation rather than from inappropriate program design or operation" (pg. 60). Although Dershem is speaking primarily of citizen patrols, neighborhood watches, and environmental design, the same could be said for CBOs involved in crime prevention that may incorporate some of these tactics.

Contrary to the trend in the literature that doubts the impact of CBOs, Sharkey et al. (2018) show that they have played a strong role in macro-level crime reduction. Looking at a panel of over 260 cities within a time period of over 20 years (1990-2013), Sharkey et al. found that "the addition of 10 community nonprofits per 100,000 residents leads to a 9 percent decline in the murder rate, a 6 percent decline in the violent crime rate, and a 4 percent decline in the property crime rate" (pg. 1234). The authors claim that throughout the study period,

> As surveillance of urban neighborhoods intensified and the criminal justice system expanded its reach, residents and community leaders began to establish thousands of local organizations designed to strengthen their neighborhoods, provide support and safe spaces for young people, and confront violence…Strong social theory on community life suggests that local organizations are a core component of the informal networks that are essential to generating social control, and thus limiting violence (Sampson 2012) (pg. 1233)

This recent evidence shows the strong role that CBOs play in violence reduction and prevention. Whether in partnership with law enforcement or stand alone, there is sufficient evidence to pursue community-based approaches to crime and violence.

WHAT'S MISSING FROM THE LITERATURE?

Qualitative Methods

The vast of majority of the literature examining community-based approaches relies on quantitative methods, however quantitative studies are difficult to successfully execute due to the plethora of confounding variables. It is very difficult to isolate one variable, or to devise an experiment to determine causality. While quantitative studies can provide information on the impact of a particular intervention, they don't provide insight as to why or how the intervention was successful or not. Wilson and Chermak's (2011) evaluation of One Vision One Life does not provide critical insight on why the program did not reduce violence, or why it was it was associated with an increase in violence. How can policy makers, program designers, and

community nonprofits learn from their experience? Ferrier and Ludwig (2011), in reviewing Wilson and Chermak's (2011) paper on One Vision One Life, propose that ethnographic research may shed different light on program design and evaluation. The contend that ethnography "would be an important complement to the sort of quantitative evaluation evidence presented in the One Vision study" (pg. 1034). Additionally, Sharkey et al. (2018) call for more research "to understand the mechanisms underlying" their findings that community nonprofits help reduce crime and violence (pg. 1235). Quantitative methods can prove that CBOs have an impact, but they do not shed light on "specifying exactly what community organizations do to confront violent crime in their neighborhoods" (pg. 1235).

Racial Analysis in Community-Based Violence Prevention

Race is central to theories on the causes of crime and violence, whether implicitly or explicitly. From Shaw and McKay to Sampson and Wilson, there have always been inherent questions in the literature as to whether race plays a role in the production of crime, and if so, to what extent? However the literature on community-based crime prevention does not ask the same questions – does race place a role, and if so, to what extent?

Skogan (1988) views community groups, such as block associations and neighborhood watch groups, as organizing forces to combat social disorganization (p. 40). He finds that black residents have higher participation rates in community crime prevention programs than white ones. He claims that city dwellers have three options when it comes to crime: 1) move (e.g. to the suburbs), 2) take action (e.g. join community program), 3) do nothing. Given that black residents have higher mobility constraints than their white counterparts, they really only have two choices: get involved or do nothing. Thus, black residents get involved more than white ones

because they have less options not to do so (Skogan 1988, p. 52-53). Although Skogan is writing about less formalized community organizations than incorporated nonprofits, some CBOs may use the strategies he references; Occupy the Corners may not be qualitatively much different from some neighborhood watch programs. Therefore, his observations that black residents have higher rates of community participation are relevant to this discussion, particularly the implications for collective efficacy and informal social control. The relationship between race and collective efficacy is not exactly clear (Uchida et al. 2015), but the literature on *linked fate* and group identity could provide some useful insight. Sanchez and Vargas (2016) find that African Americans have higher levels of group consciousness and linked fate than other racial and ethnic groups. The authors define group consciousness as,

> "a politicized in-group identification based on a set of ideological beliefs about one's group's social standing, as well as a view that collective action is the best means by which the group can improve its status and realize its interests." (pg. 161)

Similarly, *linked fate* is the notion that one's individual interests and well-being are tied to that of their group (pg. 162); *black solidarity* "generally refers to the acceptance of racial identity and grouping of the Black race" (Hoston 2009, pg. 721). Bledsoe et al. (1995) found that black people who experience greater levels of black solidarity are more likely to join an organization focused on improving conditions for black people, and are more likely to work to improve the black community rather than pursue integration (pg. 435). It's possible that what Skogan observed was not black residents taking action due to lack of options, but rather due to notions of linked fate, a strong sense of group consciousness, and black solidarity. It could also be possible that predominantly black communities with higher levels of linked fate, group consciousness, and black solidarity could also have higher levels of social cohesion, leading to greater collective

efficacy and informal social control, and ultimately reduced crime and violence. Shaw's plan for the Chicago Area Project (CAP) emphasized local leadership in fostering social organization, but racial solidarity was not a component. If it is the case that CBOs in urban black communities build social cohesion through a sense of linked fate, group consciousness, and black solidarity, this would build on the competing theories mentioned earlier in this paper. A black community cohesion approach to violence reduction is consistent with social disorganization and collective efficacy theories through strengthening informal social control and enforcing community norms that build the black community. Additionally, it could reduce *anomie*, the feeling of isolation, by connecting potential offenders with the broader black community. It could also address the social isolation caused by racial segregation, as well as the cultural adaptations caused by structural disadvantage.

RESEARCH AGENDA

The question of "what are the mechanisms by which CBOs reduce violence and associated crime in urban black communities" hungers for further investigation. I suspect that part of the mechanism is through building community, a sense of social cohesion. For CBOs that have local leadership that is phenotypically and/or self-identified as black, I suspect that community building strategies are racialized, either implicitly or explicitly. From my own experience in the anti-violence community, and considering the community-based crime prevention literature, I hypothesize that for these CBOs and their staff, the goals are not merely the reduction of crime and violence, but the development of the black community. If this is the case, then it would make sense that traditional quantitative studies that are primarily measuring the impact on crime rates may not capture the full scope of work and community impact of CBOs. Wilson et al. (2010)

highlight this tension between crime reduction and community building in their evaluation of One Vision One Life – the staff and other outreach workers became more focused on supporting community members instead of an exclusive focus on violence reduction, which was the measure of the program's success. Therefore qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and participant-observation, would be more suitable tools for investigation. If the theories and empirical data discussed in this paper hold true, then black community cohesion can – and has – reduced crime and violence in urban black communities, we just need to investigate *why* and *how*.

Part of understanding the mechanisms also includes the impact of resource allocation from a public budgeting perspective. As mentioned earlier, public budgets tend to favor traditional law enforcement over community-based approaches, but as Dershem (1989) notes, some community-based approaches don't succeed due to lack of proper implementation and evaluation, not because of faulty theory or program design. Some advocacy organizations (Center for Popular Democracy et al. 2017) are calling for a reallocation of public funding from police to broader community supports. Once we begin to understand the mechanisms by which CBOs reduce crime and violence, we can then use descriptive statistics to see how costs for community-based approaches fare compared to traditional law enforcement.

Why is This Relevant to Public Policy and Society?

There is clearly a need to find more effective ways of producing public safety that do not cause racialized socioeconomic damage. The results of this research could be used to develop more effective and impactful law enforcement strategies to reduce crime and incarceration. Furthermore, the research could lead to the development of more robust community-based

policies and less reliance on the traditional uses of the criminal justice system to address crime through arrest, prosecution, and incarceration. Undoubtedly there are related social policy goals that could be furthered through a community-based approach, from public health to education to housing. Reducing crime and improving communities would seem to be laudable goals in and of themselves, but there may be broader opportunities for economies of scale in social policy. As Sharkey et al. (2018) mentioned, community-based organizations do more than just fight crime, they also strengthen neighborhoods.

CONCLUSION

Over reliance on the criminal justice system to address crime in urban black communities has resulted in negative social outcomes for black people and lack of trust in law enforcement. Community-based policies are a possible alternative that can reduce crime and violence while improving the overall health of a community, yet many community-based crime prevention efforts are not well understood. In particular, there are community-based organizations in urban black areas working to address crime and violence. Empirical data shows that CBOs have played a significant role in the great crime decline of the past 20 – 30 years, but it's unclear *how*. Community building through black community cohesion could be a potential framework through which to understand the violence reduction mechanisms that CBOs employ in urban black neighborhoods. Once a better understanding is achieved, the next step is understanding the public value of community-based methods compared to traditional law enforcement. If policymakers and funders have a better understanding of community crime-prevention efforts in general, and CBOs in urban black areas in particular, both crime prevention and community building efforts could be much more effective.

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