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RACE AND CRIME

The relationship between race and crime has been a primary concern among sociologists and criminologists since the beginning of the disciplines in America. Various racial and ethnic minorities in the United States have consistently been associated with higher rates of criminality, including peoples of Italian, Polish, Irish, German, Hispanic, and African descent, among others. Throughout history, most of the “high crime groups” have been newly immigrated populations. However, at the turn of the millenium, most of these groups seem to be distinguished predominantly by their skin color, residential location, and socioeconomic status. Hispanics and African Americans living in impoverished ghetto neighborhoods are subject to disproportionate police attention, and are overly represented in court dockets, jail and prison populations, media accounts of crime, street crime victims, and public fear of crime.

Data sources and meaning

There are two main sources of crime-related data that are typically analyzed to support the various race/crime explanations: the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) and the National Crime Victims Survey (NCVS). Each tells us something slightly different about crime and its relationship to race. The UCR are prepared by the Federal Bureau of Investigation from official police department statistics, and therefore vary in reliability and validity depending on the type of crime (data are generally better for serious street crimes and violent crime). The UCR necessarily exclude all unreported crime (the “dark figure of

crime”) and crime not typically addressed by law enforcement, particularly white collar, corporate, and governmental crimes (Walker, Spohn, and DeLone). Analysis of the UCR tells much about police behavior while variously underestimating the amount of most crime types.

In general, the UCR demonstrate that racial minorities are much more likely to be arrested compared to whites, and other criminal justice data clearly demonstrate disproportionate representation in each successive part of the criminal justice system. Indeed, near the close of the 1990s, African Americans constituted 12 percent of the U.S. population yet 32 percent of those arrested for property crimes and 41 percent for violent crimes. The greatest disproportionality among Part 1 or Index crimes were for murder/non-negligent manslaughter and robbery, where African Americans account for 56 percent and 57 percent of all arrests, respectively. Two less serious offenses (included in the UCR as Part 2 crimes) for which African Americans are particularly overrepresented among arrestees are gambling (67 percent) and vagrancy (46 percent), both highly associated with poverty (U.S. Department of Justice, 1998). The UCR does not detail any rates for Hispanics (Walker et al.).

Studies of the relationship between race and criminal sentencing have produced conflicting results (Walker et al.). While racial minorities tend to receive longer sentences overall compared to whites, these differences are usually explainable by factors such as prior record and seriousness of the offense. The argument has been made, however, that such indicators were themselves the result of racial discrimination on the part of the police, judges, and juries, thus leading to a greater likelihood of an African

American or Hispanic defendant having a longer prior record, or that the socioeconomic position of most minorities increases the likelihood of committing an offense considered more serious by the courts. Regardless of the possible explanations, it is clear that the end result of the court process was the increasingly disproportionate incarceration of racial minorities in U.S. jails and prisons throughout the twentieth century (Irwin and Austin; Walker et al.).

Prisons throughout the nation are disproportionately occupied by African Americans and Hispanics. Although these trends hold true across most geographical areas, the rates of disproportionality tend to be higher in the South and in state correctional systems (Irwin and Austin). Indeed, African Americans represent 38 percent of inmates in federal prisons and 55 percent of those in state prison systems. Hispanics represent 28 percent and 17 percent of federal and state correctional populations, respectively (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999).

The second major source of crime data is the NCVS, administered by the Bureau of the Census for the Bureau of Justice Statistics. By sampling the general population about criminal victimization, the NCVS is able to uncover unreported crimes and describe the characteristics and relationships between victims and offenders. Overall, while the NCVS also indicates disproportionate involvement of racial minorities in street crime, the gap between minorities and whites is typically smaller than is apparent in the UCR (Walker et al.). African Americans account for 52 percent of all personal victimizations, including 49 percent of all violent crimes (excluding homicide, which is not determined by the NCVS). Hispanics account for nearly 49 percent of all victimizations, including 43 percent of violence. Although the vast majority of most crimes are committed intraracially (that is, white on white or black on black), respondents in the NCVS perceived that only 25 percent of violent offenders were African American (Bureau of Justice Statistics). These data, together with the much higher arrest rates of minorities for violent crimes, suggest that minorities probably commit fewer crimes than their arrest rates would suggest but are disproportionately caught and punished for the crimes they do commit.

Finally, one major explanatory factor that must be taken into consideration when studying disproportionate minority representation in crime is the socioeconomic status of minorities in American society. Despite legislative and judicial

decisions over the past several decades, African Americans and other racial minorities remain as much or more residentially segregated at the turn of the millennium as before the monumental changes in the 1950s and 1960s (Massey and Denton). The ghetto experience is typical for most African Americans, including the entrenched poverty, unemployment, poor schools, and lack of social opportunities that are associated with such transitional and "disorganized" neighborhoods (Hagan; Wilson). Indeed, the various inequalities that exist within ghetto communities have been linked to numerous crimes, particularly homicide (Kovandzic, Vieraitis, and Yeisley).

Combined, these sources indicate that racial minorities (particularly African Americans and Hispanics) are disproportionately involved in street crime, victimized by street crime, and brought under the control and supervision of the criminal justice system. Furthermore, street crimes are more characteristic of impoverished, inner city, and ghetto neighborhoods; and occur more often among the nonemployed, young, and male. These same groups also appear to be more likely to penetrate deeper into the criminal justice system, with racial disproportionality increasing at each successive step into the system.

There is a near complete absence of valid or reliable white-collar, corporate, and governmental crime statistics in the UCR and NCVS measurements. This is an extremely important void when considering the relationship between race and crime, because by even the most conservative estimates street crimes account for only a fraction of all crimes. Nonetheless, American media, politicians, public, and even criminologists tend to focus on street crime, thereby dramatizing and potentially exaggerating the real racial over-representations of racial minorities in crime and the criminal justice system.

The nature and direction of the race and crime relationship

Official crime measures indicate that certain races are disproportionately represented in crime statistics and the criminal justice system. While there is legitimate cause to question official crime measures, a relationship between race and crime nonetheless exists. Two theoretical models explain the relationship between race and crime. The first explanation is the *disproportionality hypothesis*, which states that certain races, namely African Americans and Hispanics, are disproportio-

tionately represented in official crime statistics and the criminal justice system because these races are disproportionately involved in crime. This approach explains the relationship between race and crime as a product of legitimate, or legal, factors, such as offense severity and prior record. Obviously, if members of race A commit more crime than members of race B, then race A will be disproportionately represented in official crime statistics and the criminal justice system for legitimate reasons.

The second theoretical explanation is the *disparity hypothesis*, which states that multiple facets of society, namely the various stages of the criminal justice system, treat some races differently than others. In other words, there is disparity between how a member of one race and a similar member of another race are treated. This approach contends that extralegal factors play a role in affecting various parts of society and the criminal justice system. Rather than only considering legal variables, such as offense severity and prior record, when arresting or sentencing offenders, disparity theorists argue that society considers extralegal factors, such as race, ethnicity, social class, or lifestyle, when dealing with actual or potential offenders. According to the disparity hypothesis, members of some races are treated differently by the criminal justice system, and it is this pervasive disparity and discrimination that explains why some races are disproportionately represented in official crime statistics and the criminal justice system.

Bio-psychological theory

Several theoretical approaches justify the disproportionality hypothesis. Early research adopted an individualistic approach that focused on the biological and psychological differences of criminals and became known as biological positivism. Researchers believed criminals to be physically different from noncriminals, and considered criminals to be atavistic throwbacks that could be identified by certain biological features or physical stigmata. Many of these early biological studies singled out certain races as having more criminalistic features than others, and biological explanations of disproportionate involvement of certain races in crime were born. Many of the early biological studies have been written off as little more than pseudo-science; however, individualistic studies emphasizing biological and psychological differences between offenders and noncriminals have not disappeared. In

1939, E. A. Hooten, a Harvard anthropologist, stated that "criminals are organically inferior," and went on to propose that "the elimination of crime can be effected only by the extirpation of the physically, mentally, and morally unfit; or by their complete segregation in a social aseptic environment" (quoted in Vold and Bernard, p. 6). This belief that the causes of crime lie inside individuals has endured decades of criticism.

Biological and psychological positivism experienced somewhat of a revival in the 1970s, as a number of researchers began to look into biological and psychological factors associated with criminality. Biological and psychological factors, such as brain disorders, hormonal problems, biochemical effects, nerve disorders, chromosomal abnormalities, and intelligence deficiencies, have all been linked to criminal behavior. One of the most controversial biological/psychological positivistic perspectives is presented in *The Bell Curve* (1994) by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray. Herrnstein and Murray argue that Intelligence Quotient (IQ) determines success in life and that people with lower IQs are more likely to receive welfare, be unemployed, and commit crime. The authors argue that African Americans score lower on IQ tests than whites, that IQ is genetically determined and does not change throughout the life course, and that lower intelligence results in increased criminal offending. Critics argue that there is no such objective entity as "intelligence" and that IQ tests are culturally biased. Herrnstein and Murray and their work have been largely discredited by the scientific community, but their approach to explaining the disproportionate criminal offending of particular races proved popular and has some advocates.

Biological and psychological studies have played an important role in shaping what is known about crime. However, their popularity has been more due to their controversial ideological nature than their scientific merit. Their treatment of complex behaviors as scientific by-products of biological or psychological differences in persons is overly simplistic and woefully inadequate. Crime is a normative concept, and biological explanations tend to ignore the fact that what is deemed "criminal" in one place might be considered noble elsewhere. Despite the shortcomings of this vein of research, it has found a place in the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, and criminology, and remains as one approach to explain differential patterns of offending across racial categories.

Sociological theory

During the early part of the twentieth century, sociological explanations of crime causation grew in popularity. The sociological approach emphasized the environment and social interaction as causal factors in the study of crime and delinquency, rather than individualistic biological and psychological factors. A collection of social scientists in Chicago is credited with starting this trend, and their cohort of researchers came to be known as the Chicago School.

Members of the Chicago School accused existing individualistic theories of myopic reasoning, and proposed a broader approach acknowledging how societal factors play a role in causing crime and delinquency. The social landscape in the United States was changing rapidly, as people left rural farm communities for industrial urban centers. No place better represented this migration than the city of Chicago. The city's population grew rapidly throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century, and virtually every racial and ethnic group came to be represented in the Chicago demographic. Members of the Chicago School saw this rapid change as a major factor in causing crime and developed a number of theories to explain the relationship between various societal factors and crime.

Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay are most clearly identified with starting this line of inquiry. Their work in the area of *social disorganization* explained how areas characterized by poverty and constant social change experience a breakdown in a number of social institutions, such as the family, employment, religion, education, and community. This breakdown results in a weakened value system, and the ability of disorganized communities to discourage deviant and criminal behavior is compromised. Once this disorganized environment, characterized by social instability and crime, takes hold, it is difficult to eradicate, as the compromised value system and resulting crime are passed along to subsequent generations. Many minority neighborhoods experienced social disorganization and increases in crime, which explains the disproportionate representation of certain races in official crime statistics and the criminal justice system.

In addition to social disorganization, *learning theory* and *differential association* explain how society plays a role in causing crime. Once the seeds of crime are planted in a community, delinquents and criminals either directly or indirectly

teach others how to commit crime and the criminal substructure is passed on to future generations. Researchers, such as Edwin Sutherland, Donald Cressey, and Ronald Akers, have made profound contributions by explaining how crime is learned. Some minority communities seem to experience a disproportionate amount of crime, and communities with a lot of crime are rich in learning environments for future criminals. Therefore, learning theory plays an integral role in explaining why some races are disproportionately represented in crime statistics.

Anomie/strain theories are also helpful in explaining this phenomenon. Researchers, such as Robert Merton, Albert Cohen, Richard Cloward, Lloyd Ohlin, Steven Messner, and Robert Agnew, have made profound contributions in explaining why some societies experience more crime than others. Some societies like the United States place a relatively heavy emphasis on monetary success without emphasizing the merits of legitimate means of achieving this end, such as hard work, honesty, and education. These societies are said to suffer from anomie or normlessness, and indirectly encourage their citizens to seek monetary success without adhering to legitimate means. People who have limited access to the legitimate means of achieving monetary success have to disproportionately resort to illegitimate means. Society generates and conveys an expectation of what represents "success," but does not afford all its citizens the opportunities necessary to achieve "success" via legitimate means. This gap between the legitimate means and societal goals produces a strain in the lives of groups and individuals as they actively seek what is deemed "success" by society. This strain can cause people to employ illegitimate means in the search for monetary success, or indulge in other deviant and criminal behaviors as a way of rejecting the stated expectations of society. Anomie/strain explain why some races, who are often not afforded the same educational, employment, and social opportunities as other races, are disproportionately represented in crime statistics and the criminal justice system.

Control theory also plays a prominent role in explaining why some races are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system. Control theorists, such as Travis Hirschi, Albert Reiss, Ivan Nye, and Walter Reckless, contend that numerous factors act to "control" human behavior. While control theories have been presented a number of different ways, the basic message is that some people, who have fewer or

less effective controls, are more likely to indulge in unconventional behavior, which sometimes takes the form of crime and delinquency. Hirschi specified four types of control: *attachment* to others and caring about their perspective and well-being; *commitment* to conventional norms; *involvement* in conventional activities; and *belief* in the moral validity of conventional norms. Some people and some groups simply have more controls in their lives than others. Some groups seem to have fewer controls, which explains why some races are disproportionately represented in official crime statistics.

Out of the Chicago School blossomed numerous theories that explained how social factors play a role in producing crime and delinquency. Many of these social factors affect certain neighborhoods more than others, and as a result, affect certain groups disproportionately, so many neighborhoods are racially homogenous. The biological and psychological theories attempt to explain why some races are disproportionately involved in crime. Similarly, the sociological contributions go a long way in explaining what role environmental and social factors play in explaining this phenomenon. However, the approaches discussed thus far seem to ignore the pervasive economic and racial inequality that characterize the American experience.

Conflict theory

By simply researching what biological, psychological, or societal factors cause some groups or individuals to commit crime in a given society (the disproportionality hypothesis) implies that there is consensus among different groups about how society should operate, what laws should be enforced, and how justice should be carried out. The disparity hypothesis rejects this consensus approach in explaining why some races are disproportionately represented in official crime statistics and the criminal justice system.

The disparity hypothesis is based on a conflict theory perspective. The conflict perspective views the law as a tool used by dominant groups, those that have the social, political, and economic power, to maintain their privileged position over subordinate groups. Dominant groups include the white race, the wealthy, and the politically connected. Subordinate groups include minority races, the poor, and the politically neglected. These subordinate groups pose a threat, and the dominant groups use the legal code to keep the subordinate groups from usurping their power.

Behaviors often adopted by members of the subordinate groups are often criminalized in American society, while behaviors adopted by the dominant groups go unpunished. An excellent example is the disparity between federal sentencing guidelines for crimes involving powder cocaine and crack cocaine. Crack cocaine is the cocaine product of choice for poor and minority communities because it is less expensive than powder cocaine. Crack cocaine is made of powder cocaine and several benign substances, but it is less pure and therefore contains less pure cocaine than its powder counterpart. However, sentences for possession of crack cocaine are one hundred times as severe as sentences for possession of powder cocaine. For example, a person convicted of possessing five hundred grams of powder cocaine receives the same mandatory minimum prison sentence of five years as someone possessing five grams of crack cocaine. More than 90 percent of persons sentenced in federal courts for crack cocaine violations are African American (Walker et al.). This law, imposed by dominant groups, results in the arrest, conviction, and imprisonments of thousands of African Americans every year, and it is a clear illustration of how the law is used to control and suppress certain races.

Conflict theory rejects the consensus approach and contends that different groups do not necessarily share the same values, agree on what behaviors should be criminalized, and believe in the same penalty structure. Dominant groups determine what values should be favored, which laws should be enforced, and what penalties should be imposed, while the subordinate groups, often made up of minorities and the poor, are targeted, arrested, and punished unfairly. Conflict theory best explains and supports the disparity hypothesis, which is quite different than the disproportionality hypothesis. However, both perspectives are used in the disciplines of sociology and criminology to explain the disproportionate representation of certain races in official crime statistics and the criminal justice system.

Integrated theory

Most recently, integrated theoretical perspectives are offering a broader eclectic explanation of the association between race and crime, one that is capable of linking many other theoretical and empirical approaches in a variety of ways (Walker et al.). In general, most suggest that eco-

conomic and racial segregation (ghetto inequality) contribute to crime primarily through their concentrated efforts on ghetto neighborhoods, as well as by isolating the extremely disadvantaged away from mainstream society (Massey and Denton). Cumulatively, these conditions impose severe deprivation on ghetto residents, eliminate opportunities for social and economic mobility, encourage deviant adaptations, and prevent structural change by provoking fear and condemnation of ghetto residents by mainstream society. Residents of ghetto neighborhoods are therefore more likely than most others to risk criminal justice sanctions by participating in illegal occupations such as drug dealing, gambling, and prostitution (Hagan). Drug markets, in particular, bring about a wide range of drug-related property and violent crimes as addicts scramble to obtain money to support their habits and dealers protect their illicit businesses (Chaiken and Chaiken). Such an integrated perspective unites social disorganization, social learning, anomie, control, conflict, and other theories while focusing on socioeconomic conditions as the base of the relationship. In addition, integration permits an understanding of the issue that acknowledges both disproportionality and disparity.

Conclusion

Clearly, a relationship between race and crime exists. It is less clear what accounts for this relationship. Research suggests that both disproportionality and disparity play a role; however, additional research is needed to better understand the complex nature of the race/crime correlation.

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See also CLASS AND CRIME; CRIME CAUSATION: BIOLOGICAL THEORIES; CRIME CAUSATION: SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES; UNEMPLOYMENT AND CRIME.

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RAPE: BEHAVIORAL ASPECTS

The National Victim Center and Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center reported in 1992 that 13 percent of all adult American women have been raped at some time in their lives. The NVC/CVRTC Report estimated that there were 683,000 forcible rapes during 1992, which translates to about 1,871 rapes per day. The American Psychological Association's Task Force on Male Violence Against Women concluded that between 14 and 25 percent of adult women have experienced rape (Goodman et al.). Although numerous methodological problems clearly preclude any definitive conclusions, a diverse cross-section of studies spanning several decades suggest that approximately 25 percent of adult women have experienced some form of