

Chapter 2

Chapter

The Structure of the Community

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Learning Objectives

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By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- Identify the demographic structure of a community.
- Explain the process of classifying a minority or ethnic group.
- Show how minorities share in the community power structure.
- Illustrate the evolution of minority, ethnic, and interest groups in the community.
- Show critical points of conflict between specific areas and the larger society.

2-1 Introduction

What makes a community safe from crime? In research published by the Figgie Corporation, eight broad elements relating to community composition were identified as key components in eliminating crime. These elements are the following:

- Improved police methods and procedures where quality of service and innovative techniques are stressed.
- Stability of the community population, especially relating to lower socio-economic class.
- Community cooperation with and support of local police.
- Neighborhood Watch and other crime-prevention programs.
- Active community organizations, especially churches and volunteer groups that sponsor programs geared toward young people.
- Good criminal justice administration, including strict and fair judges, excellent district attorneys, and a good court system.
- A history of low unemployment.
- Low population density within a community.

When we analyze the community structure, the above elements should be kept in mind as examples of model elements of a low-crime-rate community.

2-2 Key Elements of a Community

A "community" is comprised of a human population living within a geographical area and carrying on a common interdependent life. The com-

munity has many "populations." Thus, before we can identify important problems of the population, we need to identify the different groups that make up that population. These groups can be classified by

1. identifying key elements of the community.
2. identifying factors that make people different.
3. identifying areas of conflict.

A "community" can be identified by one or more of the following specific characteristics, each of which will be briefly explained:

- Geographical limits
- Demographic characteristics
- Economic and educational factors
- Racial and ethnic factors
- Employment factors
- Ecological factors
- Lifestyles
- Language groups
- Miscellaneous factors

2-2a Geographical Limits

A community may often follow natural or man-made boundaries. The boundaries can be rivers, freeways, county lines, school districts, or dozens of other divisions that will identify the community. Conversely, a community rarely follows the political boundaries that are established for cities, counties, or states.

2-2b Demographic Characteristics

The major components of a community may have unique traits, yet most of the characteristics that make up a community have overlapping features. This overlapping creates commonality of attitudes, consciousness of kinds, collections of institutions, and possession of common causes and goals. Some of the major identifiers in a community are as follows.

Economic and Educational Factors

Neighborhoods most often are comprised of persons of similar economic background, whereas communities range from the poverty-stricken to the super-rich. Working couples at one time were rare in the community.

Education is the great equalizer, and many people who are recipients of higher education will find themselves in a community consisting largely of

other persons with similar educational backgrounds. However, economics is probably the determinant rather than education per se.

Whether or not a community is growing or declining will also be dependent upon the area's economy, employment opportunities and available, appropriately priced, housing.

Racial and Ethnic Factors

It is said that there are few persons of pure race left on earth. The same may be said of the racial composition of neighborhoods. There are few areas left that are all black, Hispanic, or Asian, etc. In the United States, most of the communities housing ethnic groups also include a great variety of individuals from many different races. In a community, races will tend to split into different entities.

Employment Factors

Workers of the same working class tend to gravitate to neighborhoods that support similar or like occupations, levels of work, etc. However, in a city, there is a great diversity of all categories, and it is often difficult to identify where one community begins and another stops.

Ecological Factors

People are attracted to different parts of the country and various communities for many reasons—such as prevailing weather, beach access, recreation and cultural facilities, and scenery, to name a few. Although our society is often accused of being highly nomadic, this is not actually true when one looks at the country in its entirety. According to the last census, 63.8 percent of our population is still residing in the state in which they were born.

Lifestyles

Criminal justice problems occur in the conflict that arises out of the variation of cultural backgrounds. Thus, we are experiencing a cultural revolution that is transforming the rules of American life to accommodate the multiculturalism of our society. As a society, we are faced with changes such as women's rights and the environmental and quality of life movements, which have caused the discarding of the traditional rules of personal conduct.

There are hundreds of other changes in the ways of life that have been important in the creation of conflict in the community. These conflicts create huge dislocations in our lives. Those near these dislocations (i.e.,

variations in white, black, and Hispanic communities) feel the impact of change most. However, the entire society feels the shock of change. The reality is that most cultures do not readily adapt to the white, middle-class style of living.

Language Groups

Indo-European is the predominant language family throughout the world. The twelve other major language groups create serious problems in the criminal justice system. For example, Asians immigrating to the West Coast have created colonies of people isolated by language. The main problem that arises from language barriers in a community is unwillingness to report crime or to prosecute criminals in what to the victim is an alien court setting. In many instances, victims of crimes feel they cannot talk freely to criminal investigators. Many refuse (or are unable to) furnish information because of language barriers.

Miscellaneous Factors

Age: Neighborhoods tend to support persons of like ages. However, it is not unusual to find the very young and the very old clustered in older neighborhoods. This may be the result of economics more than age because with advanced age usually comes increased economic dependence upon others.

Culture: Culture is defined as a collection of artifacts, tools, ways of living, and a language common to a fairly large group of people—all passed on to the next generation with few changes.

2-3 Factors That Make People Different

The agents of the criminal justice system should understand why subgroups within an area or community are different. They must recognize that the particular interests of these subgroups differ from those of the larger society. By understanding the motivation of the members of subgroups, an officer can better understand the hostility and often the resentment of the subgroups to any display of authority by agents of established government.

These subgroups make up pressure groups that are struggling for some sort of power recognition. To these groups, organized agents of government represent the main power structure, and are therefore highly suspect, even without ever having taken punitive or repressive actions against the subgroups seeking power.

system does not meet their expectations, they try to change it through intimidation, social chaos, and finally, street demonstrations. Agents of the criminal justice system are caught between these opposing forces.

Religion

Religion is one of a collection of institutions that distinguishes groups of people in society. Religion is perhaps the strongest of all groupings that divide people ideologically. It is the prime motivator of people's feelings on critical issues in society. Issues such as abortion, the death penalty, and gambling laws are all church-initiated. Thus, the church is a powerful instrument for forming attitudes of people living throughout the world. The church and the criminal justice system rarely clash because the goals of compliance with Judeo-Christian rules are what organized society in the Western world is all about.

Do not assume that the power of religion is viewed as all good in contemporary society. Organized religion is often at odds with the majority of society in several areas (e.g., abortion). The so-called Moral Majority and some organized religions disagree with women's organizations on the right to an abortion. Many religious groups are at odds with the majority of the American public who are in favor of capital punishment. Religious attitudes toward gambling and liquor control have many times created a crisis in local jurisdictions. The influence of churches has created a "hodge-podge" of laws governing the control of gambling and alcohol throughout the country. For example, in Texas, liquor laws are decided by local precincts. This results in conflicting laws between neighboring communities. It is almost impossible to equitably enforce that type of random law making.

Family Groups

Family influence, although still a primary force on an individual, is diminishing as the upbringing of children becomes divided between "alternative parents." Value programming of an individual child is shared by several different forces that diminish the direct influence of the family. For example, a live-in baby sitter is not uncommon in American households. Shared parenting between divorced parents, television babysitting, peer-group influence, and school cultures all share in values formation.

In the past, the family was important because there was a consistency in life planning. During this period, group and social ostracism of split families was common, and a singular value system was believed to be essential to the development of a good personality. In light of today's

research findings about multifamily life, the original values may have been overemphasized in the importance of value programming. Today's offspring tend to thrive in multiple households, in which families often consist of his, hers, and their children. When these family structures are socially acceptable, the offspring do not suffer intellectually, socially, or emotionally.

The family, although weakened by social forces, is still the most important social grouping for the transfer of values. It is the family, the tribe, or the clan that sets the standards for individual behavior. It is the family that sets dress codes, behavior standards, and other social amenities. However, the rights of the family versus the rights of the individual versus the rights of the state are in constant legal and ethical flux. Rights of the individual family member now seem firmly placed in the hands of the courts, rather than in religious or family decision making. Because the public does not universally agree that the courts have the wisdom to act in the place of the parent or the church, there is constant friction between the courts and selected elements of the community.

Ethnic Groups

The term "ethnic" has connotations of social and cultural traits. Ethnic groups share a common cultural heritage. Although the groups may or may not have racial ties, it is the cultural ties that keep them bound to a community. For example, each ethnic group retains practices and ideologies that bind them to that group.

Ethnic groupings, however, may promote prejudicial and biased feelings when the basis for these cultural practices is not understood by the public at large. A few years ago, the leading proponents of social engineering in this country advocated "ethnic curricula" in the nation's schools. These courses became popular for groups wishing to better understand their heritage. As a result of that social engineering experiment, thousands of graduates of "Black Studies" or "Mexican-American Ethics" graduated into a white society that soon made these disciplines obsolete. Because of this obsolescence, minority teachers were absorbed into faculties without the proper foundation of a broader education. The result has caused resentment and hostility in those persons who are the molders of student opinions. This experiment in the development of multiculturalism may have promoted ego strengthening, but it fractured much of the community cohesion that had been developed over the years.

The larger community, as a rule, resents being used in such obvious social experiments. This resentment eventually creates animosity and

prejudices. As long as ethnic cultures are practiced within a community, the larger society accepts those differences.

The police are most sensitive to this type of "cultural orientation." They often view some of the tactics of the ethnic group as being un-American, quasi-legal, and unethical as seen through the eyes of the white, middle-class person. Whether these perceptions have any validity is not important. A prejudiced person sees only acts that support his or her beliefs, thus strengthening perceptions that do not rely upon fact.

Multiculturalism, if properly practiced, can strengthen a group, but often at the risk of alienating the group from the rest of society. In view of the "social engineering" of the past three decades, one may question whether a unitary culture, as far as the rule of law is concerned, would not have better served those who strive for recognition and power in the larger society.

Racial Factors

When examining almost any criminal statistic, one easily recognizes that being of a minority race makes one susceptible to increased activity in the criminal justice process. Blacks have historically demonstrated the greatest alienation due to the difficulty they have faced in integrating into white-dominated society. Hispanics and Latinos, along with Asians, are also experiencing great difficulty in gaining equality of justice under the current American system of law. Historically, other groups have experienced discrimination and isolation in this system. Over time, groups such as Southern Europeans, Irish, and Poles have gained status within this system. Most of these racial groups have abandoned their original ethnic identities, and have been assimilated into the broader culture. Unfortunately, it appears to be much more difficult for races of color to achieve this feat.

Race is one of the sharpest and most pervasive of the social classifications. Because of heritage, one is identified with race from birth to death.

Race is distributed worldwide. Some of the more common racial characteristics include the following:

- Skin color
- Hair color and texture
- Eye color and shape
- Cephalic index; i.e., ratios of head and nose width to length
- Body hair distribution
- Stature
- Prognathism; i.e., lower facial projection

2-4 The Areas of Conflict in a Community

Logically, conflict between the criminal justice system and elements of the community comes from those segments of the community that are in conflict with the cultures, mores, and laws of the larger society. Because the ghettos of cities are not in concert with the larger society, they become popularized as the breeding grounds of crime. Because ghettos house more than 70 percent of racial or ethnic minorities, the ghetto, minorities, and crime become interrelated; and are the focus for most of the anti-crime efforts of the criminal justice system.

A ghetto is an area of a city inhabited, often as a matter of involuntary segregation, by people of an ethnic or racial group who live in poverty and social disorganization. By definition, when we discuss ghetto crime problems, we will be addressing poverty, racial groupings, and social disorganization, each of which may be a cause of criminal behavior.

2-4a The Black Ghetto

Approximately 69 percent of the black population lives in metropolitan areas, with about 56 percent of that number living in the inner city. Within the central city, there is a high ratio of poor blacks. About 66 percent of all blacks who live outside the South are residents of the twelve largest cities in the United States. If society were to integrate totally, about 95 percent of all blacks would have to relocate.

Because of social, economic, and psychological abuses, blacks are caught in a vicious circle of failure that leads to welfare dependency, the inability to prepare for jobs, and a lack of motivation. Education is the way in which people have traditionally escaped from poverty and from the ghetto. Thus, good education is more important to the future of the ghetto student than to other students.

Although all areas of a city have a potential for crime problems, in none is it so apparent as in the ghetto areas. Because the "ghetto syndrome" is allied with poverty, there is little chance that police efforts in a ghetto will impact upon the economic status of a slum dweller. Because the police cannot control the root cause of poverty, society at large must be held responsible for the resolution of poverty in a community. The problems of welfare, joblessness, and low motivation to work, to the extent that they are poverty related syndromes, must be resolved hand-in-hand with any crime prevention program.

Criminal justice anti-crime programs may assist in easing the problem of social disorganization in a community. Often, persons in the ghetto can,

through a coordinated effort, make living in a ghetto safer. When ghetto residents, who are the victims of crime, organize into neighborhood-type programs, they are much less apt to be victimized. Through this type of common effort, these residents often find they can control their destiny by reducing crime.

Chapter Summary

Crime incidents vary from one substructure to another. Factors such as mobility and stability of the community population are important in how close to the community power structure a person may feel. Community cooperation resulting from citizen cohesiveness is an important factor in gaining support for police community relations efforts. Cohesiveness comes from a community with similar demographic characteristics.

Cultural factors, such as different ways of living and different common languages, offer barriers to the cohesiveness of a group.

Social factors such as nationalism, religion, and family groups are the isolating factors most difficult to overcome in creating a cohesive community. There is often militant behavior in defense of these subgroups. These subgroups furnish a basis for the spread of multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism, although strengthening subgroup cohesiveness, can be deadly to the integration of the community at large.

The black ghetto has been cited as an example of racial and economic isolation, but this example could apply to many races and ethnic groups throughout the history of the United States.

Discussion Questions

1. According to the Figgie study, is the structure of community components important in eliminating the causes of crime?
2. Why are geographical boundaries important when determining the cohesiveness of a community?
3. In more than fifty percent of all marriages, both husband and wife work. What impact does this statistic have on crime?
4. What is the significance to crime when the percentage of native-born can be as low as 22 percent in Nevada or as high as 81 percent in Pennsylvania?

5. Why are cultural traits, such as ways of living and different mother languages, isolating factors in a community?
6. Religion, nationalism, and family groups are major valuing groups in United States society. Why are they not easily changed?
7. Do you believe that family groups are probably still the most important social grouping for the transfer of values?
8. Explain why ethnic groups may or may not share a common racial heritage.
9. What are the three racial categories discussed in the text?
10. Why is intelligence not a measurable factor in racial classification?
11. Why does conflict in a community often center in the ghettos of the black and Hispanic communities?
12. Explain how anti-crime programs of the police are designed to elicit cooperation from the different factions in the community.

Critical Incidents for Analysis and Discussion

1. The institution of family, although universal, varies in form from society to society. Family structure provides a network of privileges and prohibitions. How are legal, economic, and religious differences handled in these two family structures: the extended or consanguine family (belonging to the same blood) and the nuclear or conjugal family (joined or united)?
2. Analyze how these families vary in structure in urban, industrial societies as opposed to rural, agrarian societies. How do these changes translate into police services?