
THEORIES OF ORGANIZED CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

This chapter will enable you to:

- Understand the fundamentals behind rational choice theory
- See how deterrence theory affects crime and personal decisions to commit crime
- Learn about theories of crime
- Learn about social disorganization theories of crime
- Explain the enterprise theory of organized crime
- Learn how organized crime can be explained by organizational theory

INTRODUCTION

In 1993, Medellín cartel founder Pablo Escobar was gunned down by police on the rooftop of his hideout in Medellín, Colombia. At the time of his death, Escobar was thought to be worth an estimated \$2 billion, which he purportedly earned during more than a decade of illicit cocaine trafficking. His wealth afforded him a luxurious mansion, expensive cars, and worldwide recognition as a cunning, calculating, and ruthless criminal mastermind. The rise of Escobar to power is like that of many other violent criminals before him. Indeed, as history has shown, major organized crime figures such as Meyer Lansky and Lucky Luciano, the El Rukinses, Jeff Fort, and Abimael Guzmán, leader of Peru's notorious Shining Path, were all aggressive criminals who built large criminal enterprises during their lives.

The existence of these criminals and many others like them poses many unanswered questions about the cause and development of criminal behavior. Why are some criminals but not others involved with organized crime? Is organized crime a planned criminal phenomenon or a side effect of some other social problem, such as poverty or lack of education? As we seek answers to these questions, we are somewhat frustrated by the fact that little information is available to adequately explain the reasons for participating in organized crime. Some might argue that individual characteristics such as greed, opportunism, and a propensity for violence were the primary factors contributing to Escobar's rise to prominence in the criminal underworld. Although there are many causes of individual crime, sociologists have argued that there must be a broad explanation of criminal behavior. But sociologists' explanations have rarely

addressed the specific phenomenon of organized crime. Explanations of individual criminal behavior can provide some insight into it.

Criminological theory is rooted in the causes of criminal behavior. Such theory considers the characteristics of individuals and society that result in crime. For example, we know that the cause of a murder could be an individual psychological condition or something in the social environment. Whether a theory proposes an individual personality or social condition, experts agree that no single theory serves to explain all types of crime.

This chapter considers the theories that are most applicable to explain membership in organized crime, and although we use the word *theory*, we should point out that not all explanations discussed are theories per se. Theories are explanations that consist of clearly defined, interrelated, and measurable propositions. Many explanations in this chapter fall short of that definition and can be characterized as organized hypotheses, paradigms, conjectures, and speculations. Nonetheless, in this chapter we offer a glimpse of both empirical and speculative theories that explain different aspects of organized crime.

ALIEN CONSPIRACY THEORY

One of the most widely held theories of organized crime today is known as the **alien conspiracy theory**. This theory blames outsiders and outside influences for the prevalence of organized crime in U.S. society. Over the years, unsavory images, such as well-dressed men of foreign descent standing in shadows with machine guns and living by codes of silence, have become associated with this theory. The alien conspiracy theory posits that organized crime (the Mafia) gained prominence during the 1860s in Sicily and that Sicilian immigrants are responsible for the foundations of U.S. organized crime, which is made up of twenty-five or so Italian-dominated crime families. Also known as the La Cosa Nostra, the families are composed of *wise guys* or *made men* and number about 1,700 members.

Although some skeptics insist that the alien conspiracy theory was born out of hysteria incited by the media, it has received considerable support over the years from federal law enforcement organizations, public officials, and some researchers. It has been argued, however, that federal law enforcement organizations have self-serving reasons to promulgate this theory: It explains their inability to eliminate organized crime, it disguises the role of political and business corruption in organized crime, and it provides fertile ground for new resources, powers, and bureaucratic expansion. In fact, almost a century of criminal investigations, public hearings, and studies by presidential commissions have produced conflicting information regarding the existence of the Italian American group known as the Mafia. That Italians are involved in organized crime is certainly not a point of debate; the degree of interconnectedness between Italian crime syndicates and their overall power in the world of organized crime is considerably more controversial.

Mafia or Cosa Nostra families are thought to control well-defined geographic areas and specific criminal enterprises. Five families are said to dominate New York City: the Colombo, Lucchese, Bonanno, Genovese, and Gambino families, each named after its founder. Also representing a large geographical area is the alleged Mafia family in Chicago, which is known as the *outfit*. Influence from the Chicago outfit reaches to other cities, including Phoenix, Milwaukee, Kansas City, and Los Angeles. In addition to the individual families, a national

commission exists whose function is to arbitrate disputes between families and assign territory (discussed later in the chapter).

Ethnicity is a key to the alien conspiracy theory of the organized crime phenomenon. Many criminologists argue, however, that available empirical research indicates that this theory misinterprets and overstates the role of ethnicity in organized crime. Some evidence suggests that many organized crime groups consist of persons of a specific ethnic background who cooperate on a regular basis (Block 1979; Abadinsky 1985; Potter and Jenkins 1985; Pennsylvania Crime Commission 1986), but Haller's (1990) study of Lansky's and Capone's enterprises makes clear that organized criminals who wish to survive and prosper quickly learn the limits of kinship, ethnicity, and violence and proceed to form lucrative partnerships on the basis of rational business decisions and common needs.

An apparent contradiction of the alien conspiracy theory is the simple fact that virtually every U.S. city had well-developed organized crime syndicates long before the large-scale Italian immigration of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. If Italians and other immigrants played a major role in developing organized crime, they were only joining and augmenting widespread crime corruption already native to the United States.

RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY

When we consider theories of organized criminal behavior discussed in this chapter, we consider why some people conduct themselves in a manner that potentially entails risk, personal injury, arrest, or imprisonment. Some theorists believe that regardless of the reason for committing crime, the decision to do so is a rational choice made after weighing the benefits and consequences of the action.

Examples of this theory include a man who discovers that his wife is having an affair and chooses to kill her, her lover, or both; the bank teller who is experiencing personal financial difficulty and decides to embezzle funds from the bank to substantially increase her earnings; and an inner-city youth who decides that social opportunities are minimal and that it would be easier to make money by dealing crack cocaine. These are just a few scenarios in which people make a reasoned choice and exemplify a theory of criminality known as rational choice.

Rational choice theory first emerged in the mid-eighteenth century and was originally referred to as classical theory. It was developed by the **classical school of criminology** through the writings of Cesare Beccaria and Jeremy Bentham. It perceived people as free agents who are able to make rational choices in virtually all aspects of their lives. This school views organized crime members as possessing free will and as being able to make rational decisions regarding their involvement in crime and wrongdoing. Policies stemming from this approach dictate dealing harshly and quickly with offenders in an effort to deter them from making such choices again. Little consideration was given to the offenders' backgrounds or the circumstances surrounding the crimes that they committed.

Because offenders were considered to be rational thinkers, punishment for their crimes was based on the pleasure–pain principle. This meant that the pain of punishment for the offense must outweigh the pleasure the offender received as a reward for committing the crime. So, in theory, the rational offender would

realize that it was not worth it to commit the criminal act in the first place. Beccaria also espoused the idea that the punishment should fit the crime.

Rational choice theory suggests that people who commit crimes do so after considering the risks of detection and punishment for the crimes (**risk assessment**), as well as the rewards (personal, financial, etc.) of completing these acts successfully. On the other hand, persons who do not commit crime decide that completing the act successfully is too risky or not worth the benefits. It should be noted that crimes are committed for an array of reasons, which include economic, psychological, physical, social, and even political motivations. In the context of organized crime, financial incentives clearly play an important role in the person's decision to engage in crime. However, it is likely that dynamics other than rational choice can cause persons to commit a crime; for example, although an enforcer for a syndicate has financial interests in his organizational role, he also could act because of the need for acceptance, respect, and trust by other members or the organization. It is likely that the enforcer understands that his actions could result in his arrest and possible imprisonment. However, because he believes that his criminal talents or the resources of the organization will aid him in avoiding detection, he feels confident that the crime can be carried out with minimal risk.

DETERRENCE THEORY

Some theorists believe that crime can be reduced through the use of deterrents. The goal of deterrence, crime prevention, is based on the assumption that criminals or potential criminals will think carefully before committing a crime if the likelihood of getting caught and/or the fear of swift and severe punishment is present. As a rule, deterrents to crime are both general and specific in nature.

General deterrence theory holds that crime can be thwarted by the threat of punishment. If people fear that they will be arrested, they will choose not to commit the criminal act. Capital punishment is an example of general deterrence. Although evidence indicates the contrary, the purpose of capital punishment is to discourage people from committing crime because they fear that the state will put them to death.

Special deterrence theory holds that penalties for criminal acts should be sufficiently severe that convicted criminals will never repeat their acts. For example, if a person arrested on a first-time marijuana possession charge is sentenced to spend sixty days in a boot camp designed for first-time offenders, the punishment is to convince him or her that the price for possessing marijuana is not worth the pleasure of using it.

Although the effectiveness of deterrence is highly debatable and not supported by empirical evidence, some experts suggest that it can be effective. For example, Wilson (1975: 494) points out that most crimes are committed by a small number of people. Because many courts and corrections

Critical Thinking Project

Are organized crime groups a presence in your own community? To what extent? Considering the perceived benefits of organized crime to some areas of

the country, explain your attitude about organized crime activities in your home town and state.

components of the criminal justice system embrace treatment instead of punishment, criminals are more willing to risk getting caught. He argues that if the expected cost of committing crime goes up without a corresponding increase in the expected benefits, would-be criminals will commit fewer crimes.

PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAITS AND CRIMINALITY

Many different views regarding the connection between psychological traits and crime exist. The term *personality* can be defined as a phenomenon of behavior that is governed by one's emotions and thoughts and that controls the manner in which a person views life events and makes personal choices. Specific personality traits have often been linked to criminals, but whether certain personality traits are present in criminals is controversial.

A person's personality traits do play a role in that person's day to day decision making. When examining criminal populations, a number of personality traits, such as anxiety, conduct disorders, depression, and short attention spans, have been identified (Farrington 1988). Such traits tend to make people especially susceptible to problems such as substance abuse, promiscuity, violence, and sociopathy. However, the same traits have been found among significant populations who have never been arrested for a crime.

One personality type that has been identified by the research in biopsychology is the **sociopathic** (or psychopathic) **personality**. The sociopath is thought to be a dangerous, aggressive person who shows little remorse for his or her actions, who is not deterred by punishments, and who does not learn from past mistakes. Sociopaths often appear to have a pleasant personality and an above-average level of intelligence. They are, however, marked by an inability to form enduring relationships. Abrahamsen describes the sociopath (also called a psychopath) as someone who has never been able to identify with anyone else. The person lacks fundamental traits, such as the ability to love and care for others and to experience emotional depth, and displays an unusually low level of anxiety. Harvey Cleckley, a leading authority on psychopathy, offers this definition (1959: 567–569):

The Antisocial Personality

[Psychopaths are] chronically antisocial individuals who are always in trouble, profiting neither from experience nor punishment, and maintaining no real loyalties to any person, group, experience, or code. They are frequently callous and hedonistic, showing marked emotional immaturity, with lack of responsibility, lack of judgment, and an ability to rationalize their behavior so that it appears warranted, reasonable, and justified.

Cleckley's Description of the Sociopathic Personality

1. Considerable superficial charm and average or above-average intelligence
2. Absence of delusions or other signs of irrational thinking
3. Absence of anxiety or other neurotic symptoms; considerable poise, calmness, and verbal facility

4. Unreliability, disregard for obligations, no sense of responsibility in matters of little or great importance
5. Untruthfulness and insincerity
6. Lack of remorse, no sense of shame
7. Exhibition of antisocial behavior that is inadequately motivated and poorly planned, seeming to stem from an inexplicable impulsiveness
8. Poor judgment and failure to learn from experience
9. Pathological egocentricity, total self-centeredness; incapacity for real love and attachment
10. General poverty of deep and lasting emotions
11. Lack of any true insight, inability to see oneself as others do
12. Ingratitude for any special considerations, kindness, and trust
13. Fantastic and objectionable behavior—vulgarity, rudeness, quick mood shifts, pranks—after drinking and sometimes even when not drinking
14. No history of genuine suicide attempts
15. An impersonal, trivial, and poorly integrated sex life
16. Failure to have a life plan and to live in any ordered way, unless it be one promoting self-defeat (Cleckley 1976)

For the concept of sociopathic behavior to be useful in understanding criminality, it must be correlated with criminal behavior. Criminality refers to lawbreaking in a given society at a given point in time. The sociopath is viewed as someone who does not respond emotionally after committing an act that generally elicits shame and guilt in most people, which is an element of Cleckley's definition. Research by Hare (1980) suggests that these two characteristics, no sense of responsibility and no sense of shame, indicate sociopathy. The lack of shame or guilt is presumably linked to the sociopath's inability to learn from experience, in particular the inability to avoid punishment.

Some studies have estimated that about 25 percent of all prison inmates are antisocial, although no data exist on its prevalence in society at large (Rabin 1979: 236–251). One problem in understanding the nature of the sociopath is that most research in the area has been conducted on people who already have criminal convictions. The available literature does not allow us to generalize about the behavior of sociopaths who are successful in avoiding arrest.

The Dependent Personality

Dependent personality is also known as inadequate personality, passive personality, and asthenic personality. There are two particularly important characteristics of this personality type. The first is reflected in the definition of dependent personality as found in the 1987 edition of DSM-III-R, the psychiatric diagnostic guidelines: "pervasive pattern of dependent and submissive behavior beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts." Persons with this trait have a history of poor social interaction and have been described as being "weak and ineffective, lacking energy, passive and nice but totally inadequate."

The inability to interact successfully with people at an early age is carried into adulthood. Dependent personality types have maintained a relationship with a significant member of the immediate family—typically, the mother or

father—well into their adulthood. Of particular interest is the discomfort those with the disorder feel about having maintained the relationship although they did so anyway. In fact, many dependent personality types actually feel resentment and animosity toward their significant other, but often state that they don't know what to do about the relationship. Many significant others had made most, if not all, decisions for persons with this disorder.

The second important characteristic of dependent personalities is the overcontrolled aspect of their personalities. As a rule, individuals falling into this category are unable to control their anger, frustration, and hostility. The emotional life of such people can best be described by comparing them to a very large, expanded steel coil. The coil, at the time of the person's birth, begins to be compressed within the person's psyche. As he or she experiences situations in which frustration, anger, and hostility are involved, the giant coil compresses more and more. Each time the person is involved in circumstances that cause stress or anxiety, the tension of this emotional coil increases. Concomitantly, a button that can trigger that coil to expand develops, and the person runs the risk of an explosive episode. Unfortunately, there is little or no way that one can predict when or how the coil will be triggered. When a situation occurs that is perceived by the person as hostile, he or she reacts excessively and inappropriately, releasing years of anger and frustration.

Closer Look

Case Narrative of an Antisocial Personality Type

Edward is the fictitious name of a person who is responsible for the death of a police officer in the northeastern part of the country. At the time he killed the officer, Edward was 32 years old. He is the oldest of eight siblings, having seven half-brothers and -sisters, and his father had left the household when he was six months of age. Because Edward's mother was very young when she gave birth to Edward, he and his mother continued to live with Edward's grandmother. It was Edward's grandmother who was the dominant person in the household. Over the next several years, Edward's mother worked outside the home as a seamstress.

The grandmother's discipline was reported by Edward as being very inconsistent. There were times when he would be praised for having done something and punished the following day for having done the very same thing. The family's socioeconomic status was reported to have been marginal. Although Edward claims that he was physically abused during times he was being

punished, there was no report of sexual abuse. During his school years, Edward claims that he did "average" in elementary school—his definition of average was As and Bs. This changed dramatically during his high school years, when his grades dropped to Ds and Fs. During this time Edward dropped out of school. During his prison term, he completed his GED.

Edward's social encounters were replete with conflict. From police reports it was determined that Edward had a reputation of being threatening and impulsive. His friends, according to newspaper accounts, characterized him as "dangerous because you didn't know what he would do." Frequently, his response to frustration was aggression. Edward had been found guilty of another homicide, which took place prior to the law enforcement officer shooting. The person he had killed had been a friend of his for almost twenty years. The two got involved in an argument concerning a girlfriend, and during the argument, which took place in a car driven by Edward, he shot his friend in the neck. Not certain that he had killed him, he took his friend's pulse to determine if, indeed, he had died. Once Edward was certain

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Closer Look (continued)

his traveling companion was dead, he proceeded to push his body on the floorboard of the car to conceal its presence. As he “drove around for awhile trying to find a place to dump the body,” he removed the gold jewelry, rings, and watch from the body since “they weren’t no value to a dead man.”

According to police and court reports, Edward’s reputation also included his ability to use and con others into thinking that he intended to include them in his future plans. What actually happened is that once a person no longer proved to be a means to a desired end, Edward would quickly remove himself from the relationship without explanation. It became apparent to others that the only person that Edward had feelings for was Edward himself. On the afternoon that ended with the law enforcement officer’s death, Edward and two associates had decided to “hold up a gambling joint.” Prepared to face resistance at the illegal gambling establishment, the three were all well armed with handguns and shotguns. Having completed their robbery, they proceeded to drive away from the building. Edward, the front-seat passenger in the car, reportedly told the driver of the car to proceed without too much speed so that no unnecessary attention would be drawn to them. The driver drove the wrong way down a one-way street, attracting the attention of an officer who was on patrol in his marked vehicle. After the officer stopped the vehicle, Edward opened the door of the

car and walked to the officer’s car. Asking the officer why he had stopped their vehicle, the officer told Edward to go back to his car and wait there. During this verbal exchange, Edward noted that the officer was “speaking into his radio” and not paying attention to what Edward was doing. When Edward finally returned to the car in which he was a passenger, he told the person in the back seat of the car to “get ready . . . something is going to happen . . . someone is going to get hurt.” He then told the person in the back seat to get his shotgun because something “had to be done about this . . . I’m going to shoot him.” When asked by the back-seat passenger if Edward meant that he was going to kill the officer, Edward responded “You’re damn right—I’m going to kill him.” Edward quoted himself further as saying, “I’m going to shoot this man because I have a feeling something is going to happen.”

Edward reportedly walked back to the officer’s car and stood to the side of the seated officer. Edward stated that when he arrived at the side of the car, the officer was “still looking at the radio when he was talking into the microphone. He didn’t see me come to the car. Then he looked up out of the corner of his eye for a fraction of a second and saw that I had a gun. I shot him once in the chest and went back to the car.” Edward then told the driver of the car to drive away because he had “just shot the officer.” They succeeded in their escape.

LEARNING THEORIES

Some learning theories have been used to explain the onset of criminal activity. The body of research on learning theory stresses the attitudes, ability, values, and behaviors needed to maintain a criminal career.

Researchers from a number of disciplines, such as sociology and psychology, have studied how individuals learned deviant values and behavior within the context of family and friends. Experts suggest that how to become criminals and how to deal emotionally with the consequences of such activity are learned.

Miller on Gangs Miller (1958) argues that participation in youth gangs often provides a training ground for future organized crime participants. During this period of development in a youth gang, useful organized crime qualities are inculcated in apprentices. Miller (1958: 7) identified toughness and smartness (obtaining money by one’s wits) as important values necessary for such development. He also suggests that this crime–community nexus creates the

“capacity for subordinating individual desires to the general group’s interests as well as the capacity for intimate and persistent interaction” (Miller 1958: 14).

According to Sutherland (1973: 5), criminal behavior is learned as a result of associations with others, and the propensity for innovating through criminality depends on the strength of these associations. Sutherland argues that criminal behavior occurs when definitions favorable to violation of the law exceed definitions unfavorable to violation of the law. Sutherland suggests that factors such as deprivation, limited access to legitimate alternatives, and exposure to innovative success models (i.e., pimps, gamblers, or drug dealers) create a susceptibility to criminal behavior.

Sutherland viewed **differential association** as a product of socialization in which criminals are guided by many of the same principles that guide law-abiding people. A study of the tenets of differential association shows that the sources of behavioral motivation for criminals are much the same as those for conformists (e.g., a desire for money and success). The difference is, of course, that criminals pursue their goals through unlawful means.

Sutherland on Differential Association

Sutherland’s Principles of Differential Association

1. Criminal behavior is learned.
2. The fundamental basis of learning criminal behavior is learned in intimate personal groups (e.g., gangs).
3. Criminal behavior is acquired through interaction with other persons in a process of communication.
4. The learning process includes the techniques of committing the crime and specific rationalizations and attitudes for criminal activity.
5. General attitudes regarding the respect (or lack of respect) for laws are reflected in attitudes toward criminal behavior.
6. A person becomes delinquent or criminal because of an excess of definitions favorable to violation of law over definitions unfavorable to violation of the law.
7. Differential association can vary in duration, frequency, and intensity.
8. The processes for learning criminal behavior parallel those of any other learning process.
9. Criminal behavior is an expression of general needs and values (as with noncriminal behavior), but is not explained by these needs and values (Sutherland 1973).

According to Sutherland, people learn the specifics of criminality, such as specialized techniques, attitudes, justifications, and rationalization. Learning these specifics develops a favorable predisposition to criminal life-styles.

Suttles on Community History

Suttles (1968: 111) proposes that a “strong sense of history” is an important factor in the development process from participation in juvenile crime to organized crime. Suttles believes that this historical sense of community provides a strong sense of criminal heritage.

SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION THEORIES

Some researchers link criminality to social conditions prevalent in neighborhoods. Many of them believe that the reasons crime rates are high in these areas are urban decay, a general deterioration of the ecology of inner cities, and general social and familial deterioration. Why are these inner-city neighborhoods, which have high poverty, low employment, and many single-parent households, prone to criminality? Some theorists suggest that in these socially ravaged areas, the necessary social services, educational opportunities, housing, and health care are inadequate or totally unavailable, thus exacerbating the problem of disorganization and criminality.

Relative Deprivation

Some researchers attribute inner-city crime to **relative deprivation**. This ecological approach suggests that the inequality between communities where the poor and the rich live in close proximity to one another creates a general feeling of anger, hostility, and social injustice on the part of inner-city inhabitants. Peter Blau and Judith Blau (1982) assert that poor inner-city youths, such as those in Los Angeles, New York, and Detroit, experience an increasing sense of frustration as they grow up and experience poverty, while they witness those who are well-to-do in nearby neighborhoods. These youths are able to witness affluence firsthand, but they are deprived of its benefits through social discrimination, which makes it virtually impossible for them to attain success through conventional means.

Bell's Queer Ladder of Mobility Theory

Bell's essay on the American way of crime (1953), although dated, represents the classic formation of the *queer ladder of mobility*. Bell explained the entry of Italian American criminals into organized crime (1953):

The Italian community has achieved wealth and political influence much later and in a harder way than previous immigrant groups. The Italians found the more obvious big city paths from rags to riches preempted. . . . The children of the [Italian] immigrants, the second and third generations, became wise in the ways of the urban slums. Excluded from the political ladder . . . finding few open routes to wealth, some turned to illicit ways.

An extension of the queer ladder theory explains that **ethnic succession** develops as one group replaces the other on the queer ladder of crime, while the earlier group moves on to respectability along with legitimate social status and livelihood. According to ethnic succession, Jews replaced the Irish in crime, Italians replaced the Jews, and blacks, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Colombians are now replacing the Italians.

Bell's theory seems reasonable, but some critics have argued that it lacks empirical support. Furthermore, it has been suggested that immigrants did not

Critical Thinking Project

Examine at least one highly visible organized crime figure who has appeared in recent newspaper and magazine accounts. Explain how learning theories

could explain how the figure became involved in criminality.

choose the queer ladder because of frustration or the few legitimate opportunities that were open to them, but because rare and exciting opportunities to wealth (i.e., bootlegging) were available. In other words, serendipity played an important part in routinizing nationwide syndicated crime.

We know that when Prohibition was enacted, Lucky Luciano was 20, Vito Genovese 19, and Carlo Gambino 17. By the end of Prohibition in 1933, each had acquired capital, organizational skills, and social influence. Perhaps one could argue that Prohibition and personal choice, not frustration and blocked ladders of opportunity, propelled these small-time hoodlums into nationally syndicated confederations of crime (Lupsha 1981).

The process by which organized crime provides a means for social adaptation begins with the basic definition of success. Merton (1938: 673) has argued that an emphasis on specific goals often develops in U.S. society. This emphasis becomes virtually exclusive and ignores appropriate means for achieving these goals. Sacrifices aligned with conformity to the normative order must be compensated by socialized rewards (Merton 1938: 674). Deviant acts become attractive when expectations of rewards are not fulfilled. According to Merton's **anomie theory**, aberrant behavior can be viewed as a symptom of the dissociation between "culturally defined aspirations and socially structured means." He argues that the emphasis on the accumulation of wealth as a symbol of success leads to a disregard for considerations of how that wealth was obtained (Abadinsky 1981: 30–31). Fraud, vice, corruption, and crime become increasingly common means of achieving culturally induced success goals (Merton 1938: 675–676).

Merton's Anomie

Patterns of criminal socialization probably have their origins in **socioeconomic stratification**, which relegates some people to environments in which they experience a sense of strain (Abadinsky 1981: 31). The strain is intense in environments that have traditionally spawned organized crime. Subsequent development patterns include identification and association with reference groups that formed as a result of criminal behavior. Sutherland (1973) suggests that factors such as deprivation, limited access to legitimate alternatives, and exposure to innovative success models (e.g., pimps, gamblers, or drug dealers) create a susceptibility to criminal behavior.

Cloward and Ohlin on Differential Opportunity

This is summarized by Cloward and Ohlin's (1960: 106–107) argument based on **differential opportunity**: Many lower-class male adolescents experience a sense of desperation surrounding the belief that their position in the economic structure is relatively fixed and immutable. As a result of failing to meet cultural expectations of achieving upward mobility, conditions become ideal for socialization functions such as recruitment, screening, and training for organized crime to occur at the community level. Cultural transmission of criminal behavior, due to generations of ecological conditions, has been recognized by several studies of gangs (Abadinsky 1981: 32). Shaw and McKay (1942: 175) suggest that patterns of criminal apprenticeship relative to Chicago youth gangs occurred in the community. They identified consistent patterns of younger boys participating "in offenses in the company of older boys, backward in time in an unbroken continuity. This relationship permits contact with older criminals and allows evaluations of individual potential for criminal success.

Taylor, Walton, and Young on Blocked Opportunity

Taylor, Walton, and Young (1973: 97) argue that when opportunities to succeed are distributed unequally, consequential results include the adoption of illegitimate means of obtaining success associated with definitions of the American Dream. Merton (1938: 678) supports this argument: “the use of conventionally proscribed but frequently effective means of attaining at least the simulacrum of culturally defined success” applies when people select success routes outside normatively prescribed channels.

Considerable precedent for using illegitimate goals to achieve success exists in locations noted for the presence of organized crime. It is not unusual for some communities to have a history of illegitimate adaptation. Numerous families have ancestors who were involved in illegal efforts to organize unions or who were involved in an array of other illicit enterprises.

CULTURAL DEVIANCE THEORIES

Cultural deviance theories assume that slum dwellers violate the law because they belong to a unique subculture that exists in lower-class areas. The subculture’s values and norms conflict with those of the upper class on which criminal law is based. The subculture shares a life-style that is often accompanied by an alternative language and culture. The lower-class life-style is typically characterized by being tough, taking care of one’s own affairs, and rejecting any kind of governmental authority. This subculture is attractive to many youths in the inner city because role models such as drug dealers, thieves, and pimps are so readily observable. After all, if social status and wealth cannot be attained through conventional means, an attractive alternative is financial success through the lower-class subculture. As a result, lower-class youths who are involved in drug dealing, for example, are not really rebelling against the upper class as much as they are striving to comply with the rules and values of their lower-class culture.

Culture Conflict

Sellin (1938) first developed the concept of a **culture conflict theory**, essentially a clash between the social mores of the middle class and the conduct norms of other groups. These conduct norms are held by groups who live within conventional society, but have not been afforded full membership in it. Conduct norms can be defined as the day to day rules that govern the behavior of these fragmented groups. History has shown that an allegiance to conduct norms often results in a clash with the mainstream culture.

Smith’s Enterprise Theory

Smith (1980) has proposed an **enterprise theory**, which explains that organized crime exists because the legitimate marketplace leaves unserved or unsatisfied many people who are potential customers. The theory explains that economic enterprises involve both legitimate business and some types of criminal activity. Smith says that there is a range of behavior within which any business can be conducted. The legality of doing business is an arbitrary variable that can be changed by passing new laws. Doing so, however, does not necessarily result in a change of behavior. In other words, laws merely make legal behavior that was previously thought to be illegal, or vice versa.

A good example of the enterprise theory at work occurred during Prohibition. Passage of the Volstead Act in 1920 restricted manufacturing and distributing alcoholic beverages, but demand for the product remained virtually

unchanged. A result was the black market for alcoholic beverages, which resulted in the creation of enormous criminal enterprises to satisfy customers unserved by legitimate enterprises. The thirteen years of Prohibition blurred the line between clearly predatory underworld criminals and a new style of gangster who was quasi-legitimate.

According to Smith (1980), market dynamics operating past the point of legitimacy tend to establish the primary context of the illicit entrepreneur. A high-level demand for a particular form of goods and services (such as illicit drugs or prostitution) combined with a relatively low level of risk of detection and considerably high profits provides the ideal conditions for illicit business groups to enter the market and profit from supplying these goods and services. Clearly, an identifiable market is everything to the illicit entrepreneur. Furthermore, a certain rate of consumption is required to maintain an acceptable profit and to justify risks. Accordingly, competition is the great foe of the illicit entrepreneur and must be discouraged at all costs. To this end, illicit enterprises employ the use of violence, intimidation, corruption, and extortion to expand markets and increase revenues.

At the heart of enterprise theory (Smith, 1980) is the hallmark of economics, the law of supply and demand, which the illicit drug trade can illustrate. With few exceptions, certain drugs are illegal to possess or sell, but a substantial market for them exists. Organized crime groups, which enjoy considerable profits, supply this market. Proponents of drug legalization refer to the enterprise theory by arguing that legalized drugs would put those who sell them out of business and thus would significantly reduce the ranks of organized crime. Although strong arguments on both sides of the issue exist, the fact remains that when a market is altered the dynamics of organized crime (e.g., risk, violence, finances) may be forced to adjust, one way or another.

ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY AND ORGANIZED CRIME

An enormous and increasing body of literature provides empirical data on the organization of legitimate business, but only a handful of empirical studies provides such data on the business of organized crime. To some degree, this lack of information is a function of the nature of criminal enterprise. In addition, the existing body of data on criminal enterprise has been contaminated with misimpressions and outright inaccuracies emanating from myriad journalistic accounts and government reports that lack credibility and are fascinated with a conspiracy model of criminal behavior. Nevertheless, some efforts have been made to explore the organization of criminal enterprise through empirical investigation. From these studies have emerged two consistent themes that can form the basis for further research and exploration:

1. Groups engaged in criminal enterprise are loosely structured, flexible, and highly adaptable to environmental impacts. These enterprises respond readily to the growth or decline of a market for a particular illicit good or service and to the availability of new distributors and manufacturers. For example, when cocaine became an attractive drug of choice in the early 1970s, many drug distribution syndicates responded by adding cocaine to marijuana shipments or by replacing marijuana with cocaine. In recent years,

the glut of cocaine on the market in the United States and the concomitant fall in retail price have led distribution groups to market Dilaudid (a heroin substitute) and heroin in an attempt to stimulate new market demand, which will provide more profit than cocaine trafficking. Similar adaptations can be seen in the sex industry; as a result of the threat of HIV infection, the industry has shifted the emphasis from selling straight sex to selling fantasies, adult conversation, and the like, leaving more routine services to the less profitable street market. As another example, the institutionalization of intertrack wagering has caused bookmakers in Kentucky to shift their betting from horse racing to sporting events.

2. Organized crime is a business and has many similarities to legal businesses. However, because organized crime conducts its business in the illegal marketplace, it is subject to a series of constraints that limits and defines its organizational structure, size, and mode of operation. Small, fragmented enterprises tend to populate illegal markets. Two basic facts of the illegal market cause this. The first is that a small number of employees and organizational segmentation minimize exposure to law enforcement. As Reuter (1983) has pointed out, the employees of the illicit enterprise are the greatest threat to its continuation because they make the best witnesses against the enterprise. The second is that the geographic scope in organized crime is limited. This minimizes the number of law enforcement agencies, that the organization must deal with and provides a more efficient means of communication.

Empirical evidence strongly suggests that the pattern of association in organized crime resembles what has variously been called a network, a partnership, or a patron–client relationship. In his study of criminal enterprise in Detroit, Albini (1971), found illicit business dominated by criminal patrons who exchanged information, connected with government officials, and accessed a network of operatives for economic and political support for their enterprises. He found that these networks of association constantly changed and that the roles of patrons and client fluctuated. Haller (1990) found that criminal enterprise was organized on the basis of a series of separate small-scale business partnerships, involving senior partners (those with money and political power) and an ever-changing list of junior partners. Chambliss (1976) found an amalgam of crime networks conducting criminal enterprise in Seattle with shifting memberships and no central control. Block (1979) depicted the cocaine trade in New York as operated by “small, flexible organizations of criminals which arise due to opportunity and environmental factors.”

Reuter (1983) found gambling and loan-sharking industries in New York to be populated by small operators with no organization and having a monopoly or market hegemony and no central control or coordination. He found competition, treachery, communications breakdowns, and other forms of disorganization to be characteristic of the criminal enterprises he studied. Studies of criminal enterprises in Philadelphia (Potter and Jenkins 1985) found dozens of active enterprises with overlapping interests and participants, but no central direction or organization. These studies concur that criminal enterprise does not engage in routine production and distribution, but in a never-ending series of ad hoc projects and deals carried out through small, short-term agreements.

The propositions that can be derived from an analysis of the structure of organized crime support two conclusions that can be drawn from the available empirical evidence. Therefore, both the empirical evidence and the extant body of organizational theory suggest two basic propositions about the structure and conduct of organized crime's illicit enterprises.

1. All criminal enterprises exist in relatively hostile environments primarily as a function of their illegality. As a result of functioning in a hostile environment, criminal enterprises avoid complex technology and stay small in size with little organizational complexity, formality (i.e., formal rules, procedures, chains of command) is lacking, and the organizations are based on mutual understandings and a relatively discrete and concise set of operating procedures.
2. All criminal enterprise exists in relatively uncertain environments, both as a function of the illicit market and of the uncertain and changing nature of law enforcement policies and public attitudes. As a result, the danger of structural elaboration for criminal enterprises increases as the degree of uncertainty increases. However, the uncertainty of the environment requires that organizational structures be informal, with decentralized decision-making authority.

Both of these conclusions result from an analysis of the organizational literature and the commonalities in the empirical evidence on organized crime. The conclusions reached differ markedly from the popular image of organized crime and the model of criminal enterprise used by law enforcement agencies. That model suggests that criminal enterprise is controlled by a single criminal group (La Cosa Nostra) or at least by a body of large criminal conspiracies (Yakuza, the triads, the Colombian cartels, the Cuban Mafia, etc.) that exercise a tightly organized system of control that directs the efficient production of goods and services by organizational members. Inherent in this approach are the assumptions that (1) such a conspiracy or conspiracies exist, maintain a criminal monopoly in the marketplace, and follow a fixed, detailed, operating strategy, and (2) these criminal conspiracies are controlled by bosses at the very top of their hierarchies, with a chain of command that passes orders related to specific criminal tasks down to workers.

Moore (1987) suggests that this is not an unreasonable illusion. He argues that viewed from a distance, outside the world of illicit commerce, criminal enterprises might give the impression of producing a very high volume of illicit activity that, because of its prevalence, seems highly organized and, because of the distance of the observers, appears to be a single organization or several very large organizations. He suggests, however, that the same structure viewed from the inside would look like a series of partnerships organized around specific criminal projects.

Both the empirical evidence on organized crime and the logic of organization theory support Moore's assertions. First, empirical evidence strongly suggests that the internal structure of criminal enterprises is extremely fluid, with little control or direction from a central authority. Second, the logic of the situation demonstrates how unlikely a tightly organized criminal conspiracy is in actual operation.

A monopolistic syndicate would have to provide constant instruction and information to street-level vice purveyors, thereby jeopardizing the continued

existence of the organization. Such a syndicate would have to monitor employee performance, keep careful records, and engage in considerable discussion about specific plans, situations that also would jeopardize the organization's existence. If such a conspiracy existed, removing its head or leadership, would cripple the enterprise. Experience demonstrates that this has not happened despite successful prosecutions of syndicate leaders.

Social Implications of the Enterprise Model

We are left therefore with a model of criminal enterprise in which these organizations are not centralized, formalized, or departmentalized. This model has profound implications for both research and law enforcement. This view suggests that scholars interested in unraveling the mysteries of the persistence and prevalence of organized crime should look to market forces at work in criminal entrepreneurship, not to people who have attained some degree of notoriety in the field. The view also suggests that law enforcement policy should attempt to disrupt the organizational environment of the enterprise, rather than jail mythical corporate masterminds believed to be manipulating the criminal enterprise from afar.

The model suggested here is based on the simple truth that criminal enterprises come into existence and are profitable because of strong public demand for their goods and services. A market dynamic is at work that is independent of the criminality of any specific individual or group. It is inevitable that organizations will arise to meet these demands and reap the profits. The impetus behind organized crime is not a criminal conspiracy, but simple market opportunity, which can also constrain organized crime's structure, form, and social perniciousness. Therefore, the market and its environment provide the most appropriate point of intervention in controlling organized crime.

ORGANIZED CRIME AS A COMMUNITY SOCIAL INSTITUTION

An important focal point for understanding organized crime is available in a body of literature viewing the **community** as a social system. Conceptual dimensions of this school of thought suggest that much could be learned by examining local community functions. Warren (1973: 9) defines community as "that combination of social units and systems which perform the major social functions having locality relevance." This definition offers several constituent elements. First, it recognizes a community's organization of social activities, rather than geographic or legal boundaries. Second, it conceptualizes *locality relevance* dimensions of community in terms of access points to the social activities and functions necessary for daily living. Specifically, Warren identifies five major community functions having locality relevance:

1. Production–distribution–consumption
2. Socialization
3. Social control
4. Social participation
5. Mutual support

The failure of the production–distribution–consumption function is the key element for organized crime's existence. The legitimate market's failure to

serve sizable consumer populations is responsible for the existence of most vice operations. As a consequence, organized crime capitalizes on market voids and profits from services to these consumers. Several researchers (Merton 1957; Schelling 1976; Smith 1978) have noted similarities between legitimate and illegitimate businesses. Of course, organized crime's provision of consumer goods and delivery of services are defined predominantly as illegal. Nonetheless, demands by certain populations make the creation of such organizations inevitable. The organizing of crime results from the dynamics of the production–distribution–consumption function of the community.

Organized crime groups inevitably seek profitable and safe investments. Therefore, calculated movements into a community's commercial life through ownership of legitimate businesses are expected. Participation in legitimate business dimensions of the production–distribution–consumption process serves several needs (Anderson 1979a).

First, legitimate businesses offer concealment opportunities for illegal activities. It is not unusual for these businesses to serve as pickup points for gambling operations, as disposal points for stolen goods, and as fronts for other vice operations. Second, these businesses provide money-laundering opportunities for illegal profits. The Pennsylvania Crime Commission (1980: 227–230) provides evidence of laundering operations involving banks, beer distributorships, car dealerships, bars, and nightclubs. Third, legitimate businesses provide sources of reportable and legitimate income. Organized crime groups regularly use bars and restaurants as legitimate reporting mechanisms because the high cash volumes associated with them are ideal for the concealment of illegal profits (Pennsylvania Crime Commission 1984).

Finally, active participation in legitimate businesses enhances the existence of high degrees of integration with members of the business community. Chambliss (1978) reported that distinctions between organized crime and legitimate businesses in Seattle were nearly impossible to discern. In their Morrisburg study, Potter and Jenkins (1985) reported intense intertwinement of legal and illegal businesses serving as gambling collection points, pornographic film distribution points, fencing and loan-sharking operations, and street-level prostitution operations.

Similarly, organized crime provides lucrative services to some businesspeople in a community. This does not imply either that all businesspeople deal with organized crime or that all organized crime activities are favorable for business. What it does indicate, however, is that in a significant number of specific situations businesspeople avail themselves of the services of organized crime. Relationships between fences and retail establishments, such as pawnshops and salvage yards, are particularly good examples.

Additionally, organized crime's racketeering services provide businesses with potent weapons for harassing competitors or securing favorable employee contracts (Chambliss 1978; Pennsylvania Crime Commission 1980; Block and Chambliss 1981; Potter and Jenkins 1985). Numerous examples detailing this symbiotic relationship have been cited in the literature [e.g., the automobile industry's attempts to suppress unionization (Pearce 1976), local industry's collusion with the Teamsters (Chambliss 1978), the activities of the Roofer's Union (Pennsylvania Crime Commission 1980), and corruption in the garment manufacturing industry (Block and Chambliss 1981)]. Racketeering provides opportunities for collaborating with labor management in

Alignment with Legitimate Business

Benefits for Legitimate Business

You Decide

Can Law-Abiding People Tacitly Support Organized Crime?

Organized crime groups often supply illicit drugs. Consider someone you know who occasionally uses an illegal drug, such as a college student who smokes a marijuana joint at a party. Is this person guilty of supporting organized crime? You decide!

efforts to gain control of unions and their pension funds. The Teamsters union is an example of this relationship. Organized crime's extensive influence in Philadelphia area union health care plans is another example of this collusional relationship (Pennsylvania Crime Commission 1983).

Finally, businesspeople occasionally utilize organized crime's financial services in joint investment ventures. Numerous case studies have reported instances of local legitimate businesspeople openly engaging in partnerships with reputed organized crime figures, particularly in the trucking, construction, mining, and banking industries. This consensual relationship offers the advantage of stimulating quick capital accumulation for both parties. In addition, some illicit activity fails to supply quick capital needs that must be secured through ancillary legitimate sources. Drug networks offer investment opportunities for legitimate business capital that could subsequently be converted into wholesale illicit drug purchases. Furthermore, legitimate business holdings by gambling organizations have all but eliminated the need for lay-off services and provide avenues for profitable investments in real estate and local service industries.

Organized Crime Provides Benefits to Legitimate Businesses

- Harassment of business competitors
- Extra capital for joint investment ventures
- Opportunities for collaborating with management to control labor unions

Illicit Income for Community Members

Collusional relationships between organized crime groups and legitimate community businesspeople represent only a small part of the picture. Relative to a community's production–distribution–consumption function, organized crime often provides services and jobs for community residents that the legitimate world cannot or will not supply. Doing so is particularly important in depressed or economically declining areas. Laswell and McKenna (1971) identified the numbers business as the single largest employer in Bedford–Stuyvesant. Whyte (1961) reported that gambling operations often provide employment in legitimate business settings. In the Morrisburg study, Potter and Jenkins (1985)

Reasons That Organized Crime Aligns with Legitimate Business

- Collaborative business investments
- Concealment opportunities for illicit activities
- Provision of money-laundering resources
- Sources of reportable legitimate income
- The appearance of legitimacy

determined that the city's largest gambling organization provided full-time employment for at least fifty persons and part-time employment for many others. In addition, the gambling network provided supplemental income for persons who were on fixed or low incomes or who had other economic problems. Many of these participants had no moral or ethical opposition to gambling. Furthermore, these participants came to depend on this vital source of supplemental income.

Organized crime also provides prostitution, pornography, and drugs. Regardless of moral and political issues surrounding it, prostitution often employs women whose primary goal is to support their legitimate incomes. James (1976, 1977) argues that many women enter prostitution as a career choice that is made possible by organized vice operations. Numerous jobs are associated with both the legitimate and illegitimate sides of the production and distribution of pornography. Satchell (1979) and Kirk, et al. (1983) estimate the existence of 100,000 legal jobs in the pornography industry. Drug networks provide employment income for numerous participants occupying various levels in the organization.

An often overlooked aspect of organized crime is its provision of legitimate jobs for waitresses, clerks, technicians, and bartenders. It seems logical to argue that many people thus employed by organized crime operations could be threats to the community in other employment activities. Because many of these people are unskilled, not well socialized, and unemployable, poverty and unemployment could make them amenable to various predatory crimes directed at people within the community if they were not offered the option of taking such jobs in criminal enterprises. Therefore, in a bizarre way, organized crime can be said to reduce conventional criminality.

Another contribution relative to the provision of jobs is the economic enhancement associated with money received from organized crime groups. Whyte (1961) described Boston gamblers as free spenders at local businesses who probably use these businesses's legitimate services. Silberman (1978) suggests that gambling profits assist small shopkeepers in competing with chain stores or larger competitors. Although this could seem insignificant, money generated by organized crime can be an important determinant, especially in depressed areas, in the survival of some small businesses.

Organized crime often provides investment capital that would otherwise not be available from other sources. Developments in cities such as Las Vegas; Miami; Newport, Kentucky; and Saratoga Springs, New York, illustrate the power of organized crime's investment capital. Morrisburg gambling syndicates enhanced the survivability of small businesses that ultimately assisted in the revitalization of a sagging economy (Potter and Jenkins, 1985). The Pennsylvania Crime Commission (1980) estimated that mob-owned businesses employ approximately 2,000 persons in Pennsylvania's garment industry.

The **socialization** function is helpful in explaining why organized crime is not regarded as an inherent evil in all communities. Many years ago, Bell (1953: 13) proposed that crime was an American way of life. He argued that the pioneers of American capitalism were not graduates of the Harvard Business School, but amassed fortunes by "shady speculations and considerable amounts of violence." Bell (1953) and Ianni (1974), among others, have argued that crime, particularly organized crime, offers avenues for social mobility, especially in communities where legitimate paths are either blocked or difficult to achieve.

Legitimate Employment Opportunities

Community Acceptance of Organized Crime

Local studies of organized crime (Gardiner 1970; Potter and Jenkins 1985) lend credence to this argument. The communities studied (Wincanton and Morrisburg, respectively) had large populations of blue-collar, religiously oriented persons who had experienced economic decline and who had, in essence, seen their jobs and accustomed life-styles collapse. Most forms of basic manufacturing either reduced operations or experienced a complete shutdown, leaving residents with limited legitimate options for “success-goal” achievement.

In addition to the dearth of legitimate success routes, some communities have specific conditions that make innovation more likely to result in criminal outcomes (Abadinsky 1981: 30–32). Cohen (1965) argues that community reference groups shape modes of adaptation to social conditions. He suggests that in observing other people who have attained success by innovating, a sense of strain that helps shape future conformity develops. Other community members are influenced by reference groups’ actions and means of success attainment (Cohen 1965: 6). Patterns of criminal socialization probably have their origins in socioeconomic stratification that relegates some people to environments in which a sense of strain is experienced (Abadinsky 1981: 31). Subsequent development patterns include identification and association with reference groups that innovated through criminal behavior.

Although empirical studies of organized crime have not specifically set out to evaluate these socialization processes, all have reflected on community socialization functions (Gardiner 1970; Albin 1971; Laswell and McKenna 1971; Ianni 1974; Chambliss 1978; Abadinsky 1981; Potter 1994). In each case, a strong sense of criminal–community history and a consistent reverence for that history have been reported. These studies also identified belief patterns that criminal organization members were not substantially different from their legitimate business and political counterparts. Most studies have reported well-defined systems of ethnic and socioeconomic neighborhood demarcation patterns.

A sense of economic and social desperation in communities that have experienced economic decline has also been identified consistently. Many neighborhoods where organized crime figures are active would have been classified as slums by some researchers. Finally, the existing information lends credence to the idea of the existence of socialization and social bonding processes that serve a recruitment function and ensure a sense of loyalty and belonging among organized criminals.

The Corruption Link

Understanding the social control function of a community is necessary to understanding its accommodations to organized crime. Since organized crime groups’ illegal activities are continuous, these groups must seek accommodations from a community’s formal social control entities. Hills (1969) argues that a basic characteristic of all organized crime is its collusion with enforcement and political structures. This close symbiosis between vice and political structures has been noted by numerous studies (Dorsett 1968, in Kansas City; Gardiner 1970, in Wincanton; Albin 1971, in Detroit; Haller 1972, in Chicago; Chambliss 1978, in Seattle; Bayor 1978, in New York City; Harring 1983, in Buffalo; Potter and Jenkins, 1985, in Philadelphia).

The compromises of the political and criminal justice systems include more than just graft and corruption; they also involve a subtle interplay among many community forces. These compromises not only make accommodations for organized crime with the criminal justice system, but also allow

organized crime to be used as a means of resolving contradictions inherent in the enforcement of pertinent laws.

Selective enforcement of laws prohibiting illicit services provided by organized crime is inevitable (Schur 1965). Cooperation between consumer and supplier of illicit services necessitates discretion in enforcing these laws. This process enables organized crime to influence the processes of justice and social control.

Community members involved in illegal transactions do not perceive themselves as victims and consequently are unlikely to initiate complaints regarding them. In the absence of a complainant or a victim, the police have difficulty prosecuting offenders (McCaghy and Cernkovich 1987). When enforcement does occur, its selective nature invariably strengthens organized crime groups at the expense of individual entrepreneurs (McCaghy and Cernkovich 1987). Stronger organization by a group decreases risk of arrest. Consequently, people apprehended by the police are often those with greatest vulnerability. Highly visible streetwalkers and independent pushers, rather than call girls and middle-level distributors for organized groups, are more likely to become the focus of police activity.

Some argue that selective enforcement of laws is itself a vital control function. The reduction of the strain on the criminal justice system limits organizational strain and reduces the potential for violence, thereby strengthening the community's social control function. The consequences of dysfunctions in the criminal justice system can be illustrated by the mob war in Philadelphia in the early 1980s (Pennsylvania Crime Commission 1983; Potter and Jenkins 1985). Alternatively, cities in which corruption is maximized, as in Newport, Kentucky (Messick 1967); Wincanton (Gardiner 1970); Seattle (Chambliss 1978); and Morrisburg (Potter and Jenkins 1985), experience very rare and brief occurrences of organized crime-related violence.

An equally important consideration is that such an accommodation in enforcement reduces tension emanating from the law itself. Social control functions must decide whether to enforce legislation that lacks consensus. Groups offended by certain behaviors often engage in moral entrepreneurship (Gusfield 1963). Most often, these groups are assisted by law enforcement agencies pursuing their own agendas. Similarly, community elites seeking to expand their base of support often support criminalization efforts. As these groups converge, they create a powerful impetus, resulting in legal proscription against this behavior (Chambliss 1964, Becker 1976; 1963; Haring 1977; Hindus 1977).

Unfortunately, this process is not without contradictions. Powerful community forces that assist in the criminalization processes often are involved in illegal activities and, more important, profit directly or indirectly from them and pressure law enforcement to permit these activities. Hills (1969) proposes that *tolerance policies* are adopted as an effort to accommodate illegal interests. Community members choosing to participate in illegal activities do so under restricted conditions. These restrictions give those who are offended by illegal behaviors the impression that the law is being enforced. Tolerance policies often facilitate control of illicit activities through ecological or geographical confinement. Designated zones (e.g., Boston's Combat Zone or Philadelphia's Arch Street) are highly controlled and monitored, thereby reducing or preventing incidents that could cause illicit activities there to be investigated.

Finally, persons involved in social control functions often benefit directly from the presence of organized crime. High demands for illicit services generate

huge profits sufficient to offer substantial inducements capable of encouraging the nonenforcement of these laws. Numerous studies (Gardiner 1970; Knapp Commission 1972; Pennsylvania Crime Commission 1974; Chambliss 1978) have documented this symbiotic relationship. Community members can benefit directly in the form of campaign funds, investment opportunities, assistance in negotiations relative to public service, and so on. A number of years ago, King (1969: 286) estimated that organized crime figures provided \$2 billion annually in campaign contributions to public officials. Relationships between organized crime, politicians, and the police represent the ultimate example of the social control of crime in the community. Antagonists, situated at polar ends of the criminal justice continuum, are engaged in functional and profitable collaborative efforts.

Interfacing with the Community

Social participation and mutual support, as community functions, are highly interrelated. These processes of association explain a great deal about the organization of organized crime. As discussed previously, Albin (1971) characterizes organized crime as a **patron–client relationship** emerging from social participation in a community. Individuals involved in organized crime and its operations in this web of social participation are not, in many cases, directly part of an organization. The structure of relationships varies considerably with each participant. Albin (1971: 288) argues that “rather than being a criminal secret society, a criminal syndicate consists of a system of loosely structured relationships functioning primarily because each participant is interested in furthering his own welfare.” The patron–client relationship has been observed by numerous studies of organized crime (e.g., Albin 1971; Block 1979; Reuter 1983; Potter and Jenkins 1985).

Organized crime’s role in providing assistance to the community in its major functions while taking advantage of opportunities provided by the community makes organized crime a functional community institution. Although some view organized crime from a social pathological perspective, realistically and in reference to the exigencies of contemporary social, political, and economic structures, organized crime is a simple, fundamental fact of community life.

As noted, organized crime occupies a key role in a community’s production–distribution–consumption function, which provides the rationale for the existence of organized crime. The community function provides the impetus for the creation of criminal enterprises, dictates their structures and means of operations, and makes profits possible. It is within this community function that interconnections between organized crime and other economic institutions exist, and it is the closeness of connections that creates difficulty in distinguishing between illegal and legal commerce.

Organized crime also occupies an important position in a community’s socialization functions. It not only socializes its participants, but also supports broad dimensions defining parameters of acceptable behavior, legally or illegally. Organized crime serves as a model for use of talents, including innovation, in specific social settings and as a means for adapting to exigencies within social, political, and economic environments.

Organized crime frequently complements functions of formal social control agencies. While actively engaging in some forms of violent predatory crime (probably instrumental forms surrounding control mechanisms), it

provides protection against other forms of predatory crime in some cases. It sets limits on illegal behavior and controls disruptive activities that the law cannot. An ameliorative influence is provided in response to deficiencies relative to social order maintenance functions.

Organized crime often provides a socially acceptable means for social participation to persons otherwise excluded from community functions. Existing as a massive social network, organized crime is interconnected with numerous segments of a community and provides opportunities for political, social, and economic participation. It services a complementary function to upperworld agencies with important forms of support. Finally, it often serves a cohesive function by strengthening social interaction patterns within some families and other social groupings within a community.

Community is a broad term, encompassing numerous aspects of social and political life. Organized crime serves a functional role in the community. Organized crime often maximizes opportunities and fills voids associated with a community's failure to provide adequate employment opportunities, sufficient retirement benefits, adequate information and assistance in providing and locating adequate housing and consumer goods, and sufficient funding to strengthen legitimate economic enterprises on which many community members depend for survival. In a strange and unique way, organized crime probably serves an effective social welfare function for many segments of some communities. These intricate and interconnected patterns within the community's basic social functions best explain the persistence and durability of organized crime in America.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

One way to obtain a better understanding of the unique dynamics of organized crime is to understand why persons pursue criminal careers with violent criminal organizations. One could argue that profit is a clear enough motivation, but this fails to explain the ease with which many organized crime members perform their ruthless actions. Rational choice theory is rooted in one perverse aspect of U.S. values: that only suckers work and that in our society people can choose either to be suckers or to seek easy money through exceptional illicit opportunities. This school of thought interfaces with the deterrence theory, which suggests that one reason many people choose not to pursue criminal careers is that they fear being detected, prosecuted, and imprisoned. Of course, if this theory has any relevance, it would apply only to people who perceive the justice system as being at least moderately effective.

Psychologists suggest that the most dangerous criminals are those with antisocial and dependent personalities that persons with

these personalities might be predisposed to join the ranks of violent criminal groups.

Enterprise theory suggests that the laws of supply and demand play an important role in the willingness of a criminal group to enter into criminal behavior. Finally, social disorganization theories suggest that a breakdown in social norms and opportunities has occurred and that the resulting frustration causes people to choose criminality as their only source of success.

Social scientists will probably never reach consensus about the exact causes of criminal behavior or the reasons that individuals are attracted to group criminal behavior such as organized crime. What is evident is that organized crime represents one of the most violent and insidious forms of criminality known in the world and that persons belonging to it seem to readily accept its violence, greed, and damage to society. As we explore other aspects of organized crime in subsequent chapters, we encourage the reader to refer to this chapter to identify causes for people to join organized crime groups.

DO YOU RECOGNIZE THESE TERMS?

alien conspiracy theory
anomie theory
classical school of criminology
community
cultural deviance theories
cultural transmission
culture conflict theory
differential association
differential opportunity
enterprise theory
ethnic succession

general deterrence theory
Marxist criminology
patron–client relationship
rational choice theory
relative deprivation
risk assessment
socialization
socioeconomic stratification
sociopathic personality
special deterrence theory

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

1. When considering group and individual organized crime dynamics, which theory of criminality seems most appropriate to you? Why?
2. Explain why you agree or disagree with the premise that organized crime is a social institution.
3. Explain how organizational theory helps us understand the concept and function of organized crime.
4. Discuss the ways in which organized crime complements the functions of formal social control agencies.
5. Discuss the various theories that might help explain a person's attraction to and an involvement in the subcultures of outlaw motorcycle gangs.
6. Consider the patron–client relationship as it relates to organizational theory and explain how groups that appear on the surface to be formalized, such as the La Cosa Nostra, can operate as a social institution as well.
7. Is it possible that criminal organizations that do not have a clearly defined hierarchy of command can effectively operate as an organized crime unit over an extended period of time? Explain.

SUGGESTED READING

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