PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Cheryl Maxson

Many of us on the Executive Board have felt concern about the vitality of the administration of the Western Society of Criminology. While the current Board sometimes seems to me to be indefatigable in its work for WSC, I know it is not. We need more help from the membership. This could come in the form of contributing to the planning of the annual conference, making suggestions about new candidates for the Board (and agreeing to stand for election, if asked), assisting in the production of our newsletter The Western Criminologist, helping in the development of our new official journal The Western Criminology Review...the list goes on.

We will be discussing this issue at the upcoming October Board meeting, but you can act NOW. If you would like to serve on a committee for next year, contact Vice-President Barbara Bloom (bloom@sonoma.edu or 707-778-7270). There is still much to be done in preparation for the 1998 conference. I know Miki Vohryzek-Bolden, program chair, would love to hear from you (vohryzek@csus.edu or 916-278-5931). Or contact me at cmaxson@almaak.usc.edu or 213-740-4285 and I will put you in touch with other committee chairs.

There is no time like the present to get more involved in the WSC. We need your help and the effort you contribute will pay off many times over in the continued vitality of the Society.

BOOK ANALYSIS

Crime and Disrepute by John Hagan and Crime and the American Dream by Steven Messner and Richard Rosenfeld

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INTRODUCTION

In beginning to understand the possible causes and explanations of crime, I will analyze the similarities and differences between Crime and Disrepute, by John Hagan and Crime and the American Dream, by Steven Messner and Richard Rosenfeld. In both books, the authors offer theories on crime at the macrolevel, and both implicate economics as playing a significant part in the cause and the explanation of crime. However, this is where the similarities between the two end. Hagan uses economic terminology, such as social capital and human capital, in his discussion of crime in America. Messner and Rosenfeld use economics as the foundation for their argument on the causes of crime. Both works present the idea that the economy is of paramount importance in our society.

It is much easier to discuss the differences between these two books than the similarities, as the differences are quite apparent. The most basic difference in these readings is that Hagan explains crime in terms of capital disinvestment, and Messner and Rosenfeld explain it in terms of anomie. Another contrast is the fact that Hagan advocates a new approach to explaining crime while Messner and Rosenfeld use already existing theories on crime causation. Both of the theories formulated in these writings are major contributions to the world of criminology, yet they offer a slightly different way of looking at crime than used in the past. Even Messner and Rosenfeld, who base their theory of crime causation on previous research, combine and reformulate these ideas to put a new spin on them.

PERSPECTIVES ON CRIME

Crime and Disrepute by John Hagan

Hagan begins his discussion of crime with a glimpse into history. He mentions the Progressive era and some of the conflicting practices regarding crime control such as imposing criminal penalties upon prostitutes, but largely ignoring the clients and the pimps of the prostitutes. Also, ethnic vice industries are mentioned and “ethnic succession.” These concepts refer to ways in which minorities (or “have not’s”) could climb the social ladder economically and become “have’s.” This concept of inequality in American Society is important to Hagan’s work.

Hagan suggests that in the past, social inequality, or the difference between the have’s and the have not’s, has been a good thing, and a sort of motivation. The have not’s are inspired to become have’s and therefore they work hard to achieve that goal. This creates productivity which can re-
duce inequality. During the period of time between the 1950’s and the 1970’s, this trend was apparent. Hagan labels this increase in productivity and decrease in economic inequality as the Golden Age. However, in the 1980’s and 1990’s, the chasm between the have’s and have not’s has grown and productivity has decreased greatly. As the gap grows, the crime rate seems to grow. Hagan suggests that perhaps there have been so many social and economic changes in our society that productivity and inequality do not necessarily go hand-in-hand. Since so many underlying factors in society have changed and shifted, previous social theories may no longer be relevant and new theories must be developed. Hagan argues that in order to reduce crime and reduce social inequality, we must increase capital.

Capital, Hagan says, takes on several different forms. First, there is physical capital which refers to productive equipment such as machinery and tools. There is also human capital, which refers to knowledge and skills people can acquire from training. Cultural capital involves adaptation to the surrounding setting and circumstances. Social capital is created through socially structured capabilities of individuals in groups. It can also be said that social capital is the result of the coming together of physical, cultural, and human capital. It is due to the breakdown of social capital that capital disinvestment results.

This theory of capital disinvestment is central to Hagan’s theory of crime. The process of disinvestment can happen in two ways: residential segregation, race-linked inequality, and concentrations of poverty. Residential segregation is the concept that people are divided into communities by their race, social status, and economic status. By concentrating minorities who are already stereotyped into one area, making their presence highly visible, the stereotypes surrounding those groups are perpetuated. Therefore, prejudice and discrimination are increased and this, in turn, helps encourage segregation.

Racial inequality is, of course, the gap in economic status between the different races. For example, blacks tend to make less money than whites. During the Golden Age, the difference between the earnings of blacks and whites decreased. However, at the end of that era, many manufacturing jobs were lost and the gap again grew as unemployment in the black community increased.

Concentration of poverty can be explained as the collection of one economic class in one area. An example of this is a ghetto. It is the cheapest area of a city to live in, therefore those who are poverty stricken tend to live in ghettos.

The result of these types of stratification and inequality is the loss of all different kinds of capital in a community and that brings about capital disinvestment. These factors bring about the lack of legitimate means of labor. Businesses tend to move out of ghetto areas and the resources of the neighborhood diminish. Because of the lack of resources, there are fewer employment opportunities for residents. This helps contribute to crime. As the legitimate means to earn a living are taken away, illegitimate means to do so become more popular. Hagan refers to the illegitimate means to make money as “deviance service centers.” While this type of crime industry may temporarily boost the economy of an area, ultimately it contributes to the depletion of human, social, and cultural capital.

As the crime rate grows in these areas, a cycle is created. Crime increases in poor and minority areas, therefore, those individuals are arrested and punished, usually by incarceration. Once incarcerated, those individuals are taken away from their family and their community which creates an even greater loss in capital, especially human capital. The penal practices currently in use have a tremendous effect upon the economy. Not only are people taken out of society to be punished, but they do not receive any sort of rehabilitation. Therefore, when their punishment is over, they often don’t know how to function in society any longer. Additionally, since there were no rehabilitative efforts made during incarceration, these people still have no marketable skills coming out of prison and still have no legitimate way to earn a living. As more capital is lost, the cycle simply perpetuates.

Instead of letting this cycle continue, Hagan argues that we need to put some resources back into designated communities. If businesses go back into depressed areas, then jobs will be created, which will in turn create a legal means of obtaining money. This will then increase the human capital, physical capital, cultural capital and the social capital in depressed areas. We also need to change the way incarceration works. If skills and education can be obtained during incarceration, then human capital will increase and the cycle will reverse. In other words, if the different types of capital grow, then even more businesses will be created, more jobs created, incomes will grow and the gap between the have’s and have not’s will begin to close. If these things are accomplished, Hagan claims, then the crime rate will decrease.

**Crime and the American Dream**

*by Steven Messner and Richard Rosenfeld*

The basis for the theory of the cause of crime presented by Messner and Rosenfeld is the concept of anomie. Anomie theory was created by Emile Durkheim, a sociologist. Anomie can be described at the macro level as a breakdown of normative institutions, thus contributing to a loss of social control. Institutions can be defined as patterns of expected behavior that carry sanctions and rewards (Bellah et al., 1991).

The authors combine several theories for the purposes of their argument. For example, cultural and learning explanations of crime together state that crime is caused by conforming to the standards of one group which, at the same time, violate the standards of another group. Crime is perpetuated in this instance by the learning process. Younger generations learn crime from those in their social group who are simply conforming to the norms of that group. Disorganization-control theory is another focus for Messner and Rosenfeld. This perspective suggests that criminality is the consequence of the lack of institutions, such as family structure, which exert control on individuals.

Finally, the anomie-strain theory approach asserts that American society is based on a capitalist economy, with the other
types of social structures and norms still present but falling far below the economy in the order of importance. American culture is set up to encourage values such as "individualism," "achievement," "universalism," and a "fetishism" with money (Messner and Rosenfeld, 1997:62). Another term for this is "the American Dream." It is the desire to get ahead "by any means necessary" (Messner and Rosenfeld, 1997:30).

In that sense, Messner and Rosenfeld claim that as Americans, our society is "organized for crime," our normative restraints are ineffective. The controlling mechanisms of our social structure no longer have any control over society. Americans are so caught up in the idea of achieving the American Dream (the end) that the restraints don't matter, and crime results. We all want to achieve the same thing, but we don’t all have the legal means to do so. Therefore, it becomes necessary to resort to illegal means to achieve that goal.

The solution to this problem is to balance culture and social structure. We must put more emphasis on the institutions of family, politics, and education, and less emphasis on economics. If we value those other institutions in and of themselves rather than in terms of using them to obtain money, then the focus will be shifted from the economy and a balance will result. According to Messner and Rosenfeld, if we change our values as a society, there will not be such a drive to obtain wealth and crime will therefore decrease.

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

One notable similarity between the Hagan and Messner and Rosenfeld readings is that they both deal with crime on the macrolevel rather than the microlevel. They do not deal with individuals, but with large groups of people.

The economy is of utmost importance in both theories of crime presented in these readings. However, Hagan claims that the economy can be changed to reduce crime. For example, moving resources into depressed areas will stimulate their economy and less crime will result from that change. On the other hand, Messner and Rosenfeld claim that we must change our values to make the economy less important. Crime, according to them, cannot be reduced by changing the economy, only by implementing effective normative restraints and balancing the economy with politics, education, and family.

Another difference is the type of theory invoked by each of the authors. Hagan claims that society has changed so much, and the nature of crime has changed so much that we can no longer look to previous theories on the cause of crime. A new theory must be developed and tested that takes into account the changes in society and crime that have occurred and are occurring. The theory of capital disinvestment is the basic idea that Hagan developed with this in mind. By contrast, Messner and Rosenfeld base their explanation of crime on already existing theories. They combine several theories regarding social structure and culture and the result is their version of the anomie-strain theory.

**CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD**

Hagan makes a significant contribution to the field of criminology in the creation of his theory of capital disinvestment. I also believe that if it does in fact explain crime, then the solution looks like it is possible to implement in society.

Another important contribution made by Hagan is the idea that punishment should be changed. The idea of rehabilitation during incarceration is very important. This way, when prisoners are released, it may be possible for them to find a good and secure job. It would help prisoners make a smooth transition from incarceration to living in free society. This is a program that should be implemented even if resources and businesses are not moved into depressed areas, as Hagan suggests.

While Messner and Rosenfeld use already existing theories of crime, they also build upon them and make them relevant to today’s society. Their point that all institutions bow down to the economic system in America is a huge contribution to the field. It makes the reader examine not only what other institutions exist, but how this emphasis can be shifted in order to focus more upon those institutions. Their book made me look at my own life and really see how much I am affected by the economic system, even though I am not always conscious of it. I, like most Americans, always have time to go to work, but have to find time to spend with family, etc.

**REMAINING QUESTIONS AND ON-GOING NEEDS FOR SCHOLARLY INQUIRY**

The first question these books raise in my mind is this: a theory of the cause of crime can be formulated at the macro-level, but can a solution for crime be achieved at the macro-level? Is it possible to implement a "blanket" method to reduce the crime problem in this society? I think it is more realistic to start small and work up. In other words, if we implement programs to control crime, or even to change the way our penal practices work at the local level, there is a better chance of reducing crime. If individual communities start making changes, then not only can each one find out what practices and programs work and don't work, but changes can be made at a slow pace. If changes are gradual, then I believe those changes will be met with less resistance than if national changes were suddenly written into law and swiftly enacted.

Another point comes to mind when reading these books regarding the macrolevel analysis of crime. Both pieces refer to Emile Durkheim. A notable part of Durkheim's work was the idea that crime is an important and necessary part of society. He argues that crime is inevitable because of the fundamental differences in human behavior. If crime did not exist, it would mean that everyone agreed upon what was right and wrong, and that everyone would behave in the same way. Because people are so different, and because municipalities, regions, and communities throughout the country
are so different, I argue that there is no way to eliminate
crime at the macrolevel.

Crime and the American Dream raises a question also. Is
there a practical way to change the values of this culture?
The “American Dream” has been a prevalent goal in our so-
ciety for so long, that it will be extremely difficult to get all
of society to change their values. The drive for economic
power is so deeply ingrained in all of us that I’m not sure it
is possible to change. Certainly it isn’t possible to make this
change quickly, and even an extremely slow change does
not seem likely to me.

Also, I think that Messner and Rosenfeld make a big as-
sumption that society is unhappy with the current structure
and that society wants a change. In reality, I feel that society
wants less crime, but would be unwilling to change our cur-
rent economic system. Implicit in this book is that the
American capitalistic system is the underlying cause of all
crime and if we (society) would simply give up our free en-
terprise system, then the crime problems would be elimi-
nated. Perhaps the authors are right in their implicit assertion,
however, maybe crime is the trade-off for living in a free so-
ciety. There might be less crime if we, as Americans, gave up
some of our civil liberties, but I think most Americans
would not be willing to make that sacrifice.

CONCLUSION

In summary, both of the readings offer explanations for
crime, and both call attention to social and cultural factors
influencing crime. Both implicate the economic system as
playing a major part in crime in our society, and both deal
with “the big picture” of crime. In other words, they deal
with crime in terms of large groups rather than with indi-
viduals.

Both books call for changes in society. Hagan recommends
that resources be moved into depressed areas and that we in-
vest in human capital in order to change society. This relo-
cation of resources and investment in human capital will
start a chain reaction which will result in reduced crime.
Messner and Rosenfeld suggest that as Americans we should
restructure our value system. According to them, society
must change by changing our thinking. We must all put less
emphasis on the economic system that casts a shadow on all
other aspects of our lives. If we achieve a balance in our val-
ues, and if we implement effective normative restraints, then
we will see a reduction in crime.

Of course, these books do raise some questions which can’t
be ignored. Perhaps we can look at crime on a national or
macrolevel, but I don’t see how an effective solution to
crime problems can be dealt with at that level. There are too
many variables between people and areas of the country,
even areas within the same city can be immensely different.

Also, there is no practical way to de-emphasize the value of
the “American Dream” as Messner and Rosenfeld suggest.
While I feel that Americans do value things like family, pol-
itics, and education, I believe it will be very difficult to get
people to place as much or more emphasis on these other
things as the economic system. That calls for a major change
in the way Americans think and act. While both these books
make valuable contributions to the field of criminology, I
also believe that they present problems and questions that
should not be ignored.

REFERENCES

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Messner, Steven F. and Richard Rosenfeld. (1997) Crime and the
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CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY,
FRESNO
Department of Criminology

California State University, Fresno (CSUF) is a diverse, multi-
service, fully-accredited institution meeting the educational
needs of over 20,000 on-campus students, as well as several
thousand others who participate in the Continuing Educa-
tion Program. Students represent twenty-five states and forty
foreign countries.

The first courses in Criminology at CSUF were offered in
1947, and department status was achieved in 1952. The
Criminology Department now has a current enrollment of
approximately 750 undergraduate and 50 graduate students.
The department consists of 12 full-time faculty members
whose expertise includes numerous specialties in the
criminal justice system. Various part-time faculty members
from major criminal justice agencies also instruct in the
department.

Criminology courses at the undergraduate level include in-
tegration of theoretical and applied materials of an interdis-
ciplinary nature. The undergraduate curriculum is designed
to prepare students for beginning professional work in crim-
inal justice and to provide preparation for graduate educa-
tion.

Corrections, Law Enforcement and Victimology Options:
The corrections option is designed for students interested in
careers in probation, parole, correctional institutions, and af-
filiated organizations. The law enforcement option is de-
signed for students interested in careers with federal, state,
and local law enforcement agencies, or law enforcement ca-
reers within the private sector. The victimology option is de-
signed for students interested in careers in the victim ser-
vice field.

Victim Services Certificate Program: This program, offered
by CSUF, is one of the first comprehensive academic train-
ing programs of its kind to be offered anywhere. The certifi-
cate program was recognized at the outset by the California
Youth Authority, which honored the program with its 1985 Victim Services Award. The program is sponsored cooperatively by CSUF’s School of Education and Human Development and the Justice Center of the Department of Criminology. The primary goal of the 12-unit program is to provide knowledge and skills needed for work with victims. Content of the program is useful for individuals interested in pursuing careers in most behavioral science areas. Courses are open both to regular students and continuing education students. The certificate may be completed along with a standard major or as a separate program of study.

Students working toward a Victim Services Certificate will be involved in an interdisciplinary examination of victim services including: theoretical concepts, causes and consequences of victimization, legal aspects, treatment and prevention programs, and victim rights and policies. Students will be assisted in gaining new perspectives and skills for effective work with different types of victims. The program is designed to allow students to select courses corresponding to their interests and professional needs.

Specific inquiries pertaining to the criminology program should be addressed to Chairperson, Department of Criminology, CSUF, 2225 E. San Ramon, Fresno, CA 93740-8029. For program advisement or further information on the certificate program, you may contact either Arthur Wint, Department of Criminology, CSUF, Victim Services Certificate Program Coordinator, McKeel Fisk Bldg., Room 244, Fresno, CA 93740-8029 or phone 209-278-7027 or 278-2305; or contact Joan Henderson, School of Education and Human Development, CSUF, Victim Services Certificate Program Coordinator, 101 San Ramon, #4, Room 101, Fresno, CA 93740 or phone 209-278-6839.

REMINDER — WSC 1998

The 1998 Western Society of Criminology (WSC) Annual Meeting is scheduled for February 26-March 1, 1998 at The Balboa Bay Club in Newport Beach, California. The theme of the conference is *Visions of Justice: From Retribution to Restoration*. Please contact Miki Vohryzek-Bolden, Criminal Justice Division, California State University, Sacramento. 6000 J Street, Sacramento, CA 95819-6085; (916) 278-5931, vohryzek@csus.edu, or correspond directly with the panel chair noted on the call for participation.

You may also want to visit the official WSC home page at http://www.sonom.edu/cca/wsc/wscmain.html. Please note that all program participants must pre-register for the conference. We encourage all panelists and speakers to provide abstracts and/or papers for other participants to read. Abstracts should be sent to the panel chair at least 45 days before the conference.

ONE FINAL NOTE

Dr. Mark Umbreit, Director of the Center for Restorative Justice and Mediation, University of Minnesota and Associate Professor, School of Social Work, will be the keynote speaker at the conference and will also moderate the viewing of several new videos on restorative justice. We look forward to seeing you at the Balboa Bay Club in Newport Beach.

FYI

The Forty-Sixth Semi-Annual Conference of the Association for Criminal Justice Research (California) is to be held at the Bahia in San Diego on October 23 and 24, 1997. This fall conference, under the direction of Darlanne Hector Mulmat, will feature discussions on the following topics: domestic violence and treatment; hate crimes—a social psychological, prosecutorial perspective; early intervention programs for juveniles; drug court innovations—the second generation; and anti-drug abuse examination. Contact ACJR at 510-642-2514 for more information.