

From Broken Windows to Busy Streets: A Community Empowerment Perspective

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Abstract

In the present article, we introduce a community empowerment perspective to understanding neighborhoods. A preponderance of literature exists on neighborhood risk factors for crime. Yet less is known about positive factors that make neighborhoods safe and desirable. We propose community empowerment as a conceptual foundation for understanding neighborhood factors that promote social processes, and ultimately, lead to an improvement in structural factors. We suggest that neighborhoods are empowered because they include processes and structures for positive social interactions to emerge and develop. We present busy streets as a mechanism that creates a positive social context, in which social cohesion and social capital thrive. Thus, empowered communities are characterized by climates that promote busy streets. Our article underscores the need to examine both the broader, structural context and social processes operating within this context. Such an integrative perspective is necessary to fully understand how to empower neighborhoods, particularly in the face of structural challenges.

Keywords

community health, community health promotion, empowerment, health promotion, social influence

Busy streets indicate safe, urban neighborhoods that exhibit a certain vibrancy, which promotes prosocial behavior. More specifically, busy streets are safe areas where businesses are flourishing, homes are occupied and well maintained, and residents are socially engaged with one another. Not only does such urban activity indicate safety, this positive energy may also influence individual behavior. Neighborhood energy determines whether people are attracted to or deterred from an area, how people behave in the area, and ultimately influences economic prosperity by encouraging or discouraging growth and expansion. Furthermore, urbanites often follow the adage of safety in numbers. City dwellers choose to walk on active streets predicated on the assumption that the presence of people deters crime. Thus, *busy streets* signify a neighborhood being empowered and ultimately, safe.

Most existing neighborhood research focuses on the negative predictors and consequences of economic disadvantage and environmental stress. Traditionally, researchers have focused on the role of broken windows (Kelling & Coles, 1996; J. Q. Wilson & Kelling, 1982), crime (Skogan, 1990; Taylor, Shumaker, & Gottfredson, 1985), neighborhood decay, and economic disadvantage (W. J. Wilson, 1996), as such risk factors influence both neighborhood and individual

outcomes. Although structural factors such as poverty, concentrated disadvantage, and residential instability present significant barriers for positive social interactions, such risk factors do not condemn neighborhoods to crime and isolation. Yet we still need integrative theories to guide research focusing on how positive social processes and neighborhood structures interact to produce safe streets.

We focus the present review on the positive factors that make neighborhoods safe and desirable. Our thesis is that *busy streets* create a positive social context where social cohesion, trust, social capital, and collective efficacy thrive. Neighborhoods with *busy streets* are empowered because such neighborhoods facilitate and foster requisite processes and structures for positive social interactions. Evidence of *busy streets* is represented by actively maintained, organized spaces, thriving businesses, and visible informal (and formal) social interactions.

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In a seminal article, Jacobs (1961) emphasized the positive role of concentrated residential populations and commercial establishments, as such establishments generate high amounts of street activity thought to strengthen social control. Jacobs proposed that neighborhoods with residential, commercial, institutional, and leisure functions combined, are safer than those with only one function. Furthermore, she proposed that multifunctional areas attract a continual flow of pedestrian and vehicular traffic that improve opportunities for surveillance, ultimately strengthening social control.

We still need a better understanding of how perceived social order, safety, and activity empower residents to further promote positive social interactions. Empowerment is thought to be an active, participatory process through which individuals, organizations, and communities maximize control of themselves and of their environments, while simultaneously strengthening both individual and community efficacy (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004; Rappaport, 1984; Solomon, 1976). We present community empowerment as a conceptual foundation for understanding neighborhood factors that promote positive social processes, and ultimately, an improvement in structural factors. Thus, busy streets may be requisite to the process of community empowerment. Furthermore, busy streets may facilitate community empowerment by generating social controls necessary for public safety.

Most existing neighborhood theories focus on the effects of urban decay and social disorder on neighborhood safety. Such theories have also played a role in guiding research of neighborhood effects on public health, crime, and individual behavior. Social disorganization theory (SDT) is one such theory that focuses on the role of structural factors (e.g., poverty), and physical characteristics (e.g., visible disorder) in creating social disorganization (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003; Shaw & McKay, 1942). Social disorganization is thought to create an environment conducive to criminal behavior. Broken windows theory (Kelling & Coles, 1996; J. Q. Wilson & Kelling, 1982) also focuses on the role of physical deterioration in facilitating crime. We review both theories before presenting an empowerment theory that extends the implications of such theories and further offers a positive approach to developing safer neighborhoods.

Social Disorganization Theory

SDT accounts for crime patterns associated with neighborhood structural features and social controls (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003; Shaw & McKay, 1942). Adherents of SDT argue that both deterioration of physical structures and observable social disorder reduce social control, which lead to increased crime. The term *social disorganization* refers to a community's inability to come together around common goals and chronic problems (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003) and is thought to arise from ineffective social control mechanisms and weak social bonds that

often characterize low-income, urban areas (Sampson & Groves, 1989; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997).

Social disorganization theorists focus on a variety of neighborhood-level risk factors that lead to higher crime rates. In addition to physical deterioration, neighborhood factors such as poverty rates, residential mobility, ethnic heterogeneity, and weak social networks decrease a community's capacity to control resident behavior, subsequently increasing the likelihood of crime (Sampson et al., 1997). Neighborhood crime may increase social disorganization by promoting fear, diminishing trust, raising social isolation, and increasing opportunities for additional crime (Bazemore & Umbreit, 2004). Visible social disorder (e.g., loitering, rowdy street behavior) worsens perceptions of danger, as residents interpret disorder as an indication of weak social control further weakening social ties (J. Q. Wilson & Kelling, 1982). From this perspective, structural risk factors and weak neighborhood social organization are critical determinants of crime (Sampson et al., 1997; Sampson & Laub, 1993).

Broken Windows Theory

Broken windows theory (Kelling & Coles, 1996; J. Q. Wilson & Kelling, 1982) is an example of an SDT that emphasizes the importance of structural deterioration as a main predictor of crime. J. Q. Wilson and Kelling (1982) proposed that a broken window symbolizes a neighborhood's lack of social control, serving as an invitation for more broken windows. Thus, untended deterioration increases the likelihood of future vandalism, further increasing social disorganization. Once physical and social signs of disorder become apparent, residents avoid walking on streets, which further reduces opportunities for informal social interactions. Social isolation subsequently leads to reduced community investment, residential mobility, and the loss of social capital required for effective social control of deviance and crime (Perkins & Taylor, 1996; Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999; Xue, Leventhal, Brooks-Gunn, & Earls, 2005).

In delineating neighborhood constructs further, Sampson and Raudenbush (2004) found that perceptions of neighborhood disorder have a social meaning independent from objective physical conditions. Authors reported that neighborhood racial composition was more strongly related to perceptions of disorder than systematic observations of disorder (Sampson & Raudenbush, 2004). Specifically, they found that the higher a neighborhood's ethnic minority population, the greater residents' reported perceptions of disorder, regardless of more objective measures of disorder such as the number of police incidents in the neighborhood. Such findings underscore the need to consider social factors when studying mechanisms that influence neighborhood perceptions. Findings also suggest that physical deterioration and disorder have an important social meaning, beyond observable signs of neighborhood decay.

Social disorganization and broken windows theories focus primarily on neighborhood deficits; such deficits include deteriorating physical conditions, social disorganization, and crime. Yet fear of crime is higher in neighborhoods characterized by low social involvement and a weak sense of community (Clark, 1993). Furthermore, fear of crime is not necessarily reflective of the actual crime rate in a neighborhood (Taylor & Covington, 1988). Notably, researchers have found that fear of crime remains closely linked to the formation and maintenance of trust, social activity, and social relationships (Blakely & Snyder, 1997; Taylor & Covington, 1988). Yet these conceptual frameworks have focused attention on neighborhood deficits, problems, and risks. Thus, existing deficit-oriented theories emphasize how neighborhoods deteriorate, but provide little understanding of how neighborhoods may thrive in the face of structural challenges. In addition, they provide even less understanding of how to empower neighborhoods to become more active, socially cohesive, and safe places.

Structural Characteristics

Structural characteristics represent neighborhood socioeconomic conditions and political resources of a community (Loeber & Farrington, 2012). Structural factors are often measured by concentrated poverty, access to resources, home ownership, and residential stability, along with other similar indicators of social and economic status (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Sampson et al., 1997; Tolan, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 2003). Structural factors inevitably influence neighborhood social processes, which may promote or impede the social organization necessary for achieving public safety (Sampson et al., 1997). Structural factors influence social processes within the neighborhood in several ways (Bourdieu, 1986; Sampson & Morenoff, 2006). Concentrated poverty is thought to limit access to critical resources, such as schools, health care facilities, parks, and other safe recreational spaces (W. J. Wilson, 1996). Poverty and limited access to resources may lead residents to perceive few opportunities in their neighborhoods, leading to frustration, dissatisfaction, stress, and social isolation (Tolan et al., 2003). Furthermore, as informal social control declines so begets weakening of social cohesion, further exacerbating the process neighborhood decline.

Residential stability is another structural feature of urban social organization that reflects residents' attachment to their community (Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974). Stability facilitates the formation of social networks, supports local ties and attachment to place, and enhances the opportunity for social cohesion and capital to form (Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999). Residential stability is closely related to home ownership, which is consistently linked to less crime (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Morenoff, Sampson, & Raudenbush, 2001). Even after accounting for poverty, neighborhoods with high levels of residential stability are characterized by higher

levels of reciprocated social exchange than unstable neighborhoods (Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999). Furthermore, in close-knit communities, residents may be motivated to stay, which is likely to increase levels of social cohesion and interpersonal trust (Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002; Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999). Conversely, neighborhood instability is associated with disorganization, isolation, and crime (Sampson & Wilson, 1995; Skogan, 1990; Taylor, 1996).

Researchers have traditionally examined either structural variables (e.g., social class, race, mobility) or proximal processes (relationships, social interactions) when seeking to identify determinants of crime. Structural factors, including poverty and residential instability, are thought to influence crime indirectly through proximal social factors (Sampson & Groves, 1989). Consistent with neighborhood research to date (Morenoff et al., 2001; Sampson et al., 1997; Tolan, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 2004), we reason that both types of factors are also necessary to understand neighborhood safety; yet we focus attention on the resources, strengths, and positive factors in neighborhoods that help them to establish *busy streets*.

We apply empowerment theory as a framework for understanding the positive social processes related to social control and busy streets. We propose that community empowerment facilitates busy streets by enhancing factors such as social cohesion, social capital, and collective efficacy, facilitating the establishment of social controls. Thus, *busy streets* refer to the idea that positive social interactions take place in public spaces that make them vibrant, safe, pleasant, and organized places to live. Positive social interactions are thought to result from a shared perception of safety, mutual trust, and sense of belonging.

We underscore that a busy street with many social interactions may not necessarily be a safe street. A busy street can also invoke danger because some social interactions involve crime (e.g., drug sales, prostitution). In high-crime environments, social networks may actually promote risk behaviors such as drug use and violence (Latkin, Forman, Knowlton, & Sherman, 2003). J. Q. Wilson and Kelling (1982) noted that the mere presence of people does not necessarily reduce fear of crime if the activity is associated with panhandling, loitering, and other unruly behaviors. Although social processes may reduce motivation to offend and increase social control, they can also serve as communication channels for potential offenders (Buonanno, Montolio, & Vanin, 2009). Our notion of a busy street not only acknowledges the importance of social interactions, yet focuses on those that bolster social institutions and also foster community empowerment.

Community Empowerment

Three components of community empowerment that parallel psychological empowerment (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995) and organizational empowerment (Peterson & Zimmerman,

2004) create the conceptual foundation for defining neighborhood characteristics that promote social organization and ultimately, busy streets for positive social exchange. The three components include the *intracommunity component*, which represents aspects of the social relationships among neighborhood residents; the *interactional component*, which represents individual and organizational social interactions that promote trust and social capital; and the *behavioral component*, which represents organizational collaborations between residents and organizations within communities and collective actions taken to improve a neighborhood.

Intracommunity Component

The intracommunity component of community empowerment refers to neighborhood residents' perceptions and beliefs about trust and organization of their community. Such beliefs are derived from residents' perceptions about their own interpersonal relationships, and more broadly about the perceived level of social cohesion in their neighborhood. Furthermore, perceptions about social capital and community efficacy also contribute. Thus, neighborhood social processes reflect the quality of social bonds, perceptions of social control, and engagement and investment in a community (Gorman-Smith, Tolan, & Henry, 2000; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Social cohesion, collective efficacy, and sense of community are vital aspects of the intracommunity component of community empowerment theory. The intracommunity components theoretically transcend demographic characteristics. Furthermore, communities with comparable racial compositions and income levels may, in fact, have high variation in terms of their social cohesion. Although neighborhood structural characteristics such as income, racial segregation, and residential mobility are likely to influence social processes, this is not integral to the underlying theory of busy streets. It may be more difficult to achieve busy streets in poverty-stricken areas with weak institutional support, yet the demographic characteristics alone do not define a community's potential or the human resources needed to transform a community. Sampson and Graif (2009), for example, found that collective efficacy (included in the intrapersonal component discussed) mediates the associations between demographic characteristics and crime, suggesting that collective efficacy is an exogenous construct to such factors.

Social Cohesion. Social cohesion refers to the presence of strong social bonds among neighborhood residents and additionally represents interpersonal connectedness, sense of community, mutual moral support, and the sharing of resources (Durkheim, 1997). Social cohesion is characterized by social ties, the quality of social interactions (Sampson et al., 1997), and social relationships characterized by interpersonal trust and norms of reciprocity (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993). Social bonds are created by institutions that

bridge social divisions, bring people together for a common goal, and provide a basis for conflict management (Berkman & Kawachi, 2000). Social cohesion in a neighborhood strengthens an individual's connection to and integration with their community. A connection to one's community is thought to decrease motivation to offend (Farrington, 2003; Sampson & Laub, 1993) and enhances motivation to exert social control in one's neighborhood. Social cohesion may also play a vital role in monitoring the presence of outsiders and socializing newcomers to the neighborhood. Finally, social cohesion facilitates the formation of social capital in a neighborhood through reciprocated exchange (Coleman, 1990), strong personal ties, and social support (Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999); social cohesion is also strengthened and weakened by the broader (societal) environment (Marmot, 2006).

Collective Efficacy. Collective efficacy refers to residents' beliefs and actions indicating that they can work together to achieve common goals, ultimately making their neighborhood cohesive and safe (Sampson et al., 1997). Collective efficacy is a task-specific construct that reflects shared expectations and mutual engagement by neighborhood residents to exert social control (Sampson et al., 1997). It is thought to exist relative to shared tasks ranging from maintaining public safety through neighborhood watches (Sampson et al., 1997) to working together on neighborhood cleanup or greening activities (e.g., a community garden or park).

Although collective efficacy and social ties are closely related constructs, social ties are thought to foster conditions that facilitate the formation of collective efficacy. Thus, collective efficacy characterizes a neighborhood's readiness for social action, representing a proximal social mechanism that explains the association between neighborhood social processes, social control, and crime (Sampson, 2011). Notably, Yang, Braga, Joyce, and Lipton (2014) found that negative effects of neighborhood accessibility on victimization were reduced by the level of collective efficacy.

Collective efficacy is intrinsically based on residents' shared beliefs about their collective ability to accomplish goals, as well as on social capital. Furthermore, collective efficacy would be reflected in the perceived ability of residents to accomplish tasks related to community organizing and political action. Likewise, a community with high levels of collective efficacy would also be expected to engage in such organization efforts, as these tasks are largely driven by the presence of social capital.

Sense of Community. The psychological sense of community (PSC) is a construct focusing on the individual's experience within a community context, rather than focusing on the neighborhood structure or neighborhood features (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Sarason, 1974). PSC focuses on the individual's perception, understanding, attitudes, and feelings

about their neighborhood or community. PSC also emphasizes individuals' relationship to their community and to each other. It is a construct that represents the interdependence of community members, and the extent to which they feel they can influence the well-being of the collective (Rappaport, 1977). Thus, sense of community is expected to thrive in a socially cohesive context whereby residents would be willing to engage in activities to improve their community and to prevent crime.

Although PSC and social cohesion are related constructs that are likely to mutually influence one another, they are not synonymous. Rather, PSC is an individual-level, psychological construct, related to individuals' perceptions of how much they belong to, and connect with a defined group or community. Conversely, social cohesion refers to one's assessment of the larger social context in which one lives, and is a perception of the collective. PSC is measured with items assessing how well individuals feel they know their neighbors, how closely individuals relate to and feel a shared identity with their neighbors, and how much individuals feel they can depend on their neighbors, to name a few. Although PSC and social cohesion may be associated with demographic characteristics of a community (e.g., income and racial composition), they are not necessarily related.

Interactional Component

The interactional component of empowerment refers to the social factors necessary to develop a sense of connectedness (vs. the individual-level focus of the intrapersonal component). Thus, this component includes the constructs of both social capital and social control because they involve social resources that relate to how residents cooperate with each other and local institutions to maintain quality of life in their community. Unlike the intrapersonal component, which focuses on residents' beliefs and attitudes, the interactional component refers to the resident–context interface that fosters positive social interactions and collective action.

Social Capital. Social capital represents the social resources and trust within a community related to the quality of their interpersonal relationships, the institutional linkages that foster social organization, and the investment people have to help one another in times of need (Coleman, 1990). Social capital can be considered collective social support because it generates the social ties that connect residents to neighborhood organizations that help them manage threats to their quality of life (e.g., crime). It is created when interpersonal and institutional relationships facilitate social action, interaction, and support (Coleman, 1988). Social capital provides the collective benefits gained from interpersonal trust and cooperation. Furthermore, it reinforces the social cohesion necessary for cooperation and promotes a sense that people can count on each other in times of need (Putnam, 1993, 1995). Although social cohesion is both a

predictor and outcome of social capital, social capital is not synonymous for social cohesion. Rather, social capital is a broader construct, also defined by the presence of institutional relationships.

Notably, Putnam (1993, 1995) found that social capital promotes perceived solidarity among residents. Social capital is tied not only to perceived solidarity but also to observable markers of civic engagement and solidarity (e.g., voter turnout, community club membership, and newspaper reading; Putnam, 1995). Thus, social capital is not only the outcome of solidarity but also encourages behaviors that reflect civic engagement.

Social capital is considered to be endogenous to social organization, meaning that social organization is a necessary condition for the formation of social capital. Furthermore, social capital is most often generated primarily by the structure of social organization, rather than by the attributes of individual residents (Sampson & Graif, 2009). Examples of social capital include strong ties between relatives, friends, coworkers, and neighbors. Thus, social capital is reflected in the tendencies of residents to be connected to one another. Furthermore, individuals appropriate social capital to achieve intended outcomes. In the context of busy streets, such outcomes may exist at individual or community levels (e.g., obtaining a job, successfully organizing a community event, planting a community garden, transforming abandoned properties, or cleaning up a neighborhood park).

Social Control. Social control is the capacity of a social group to regulate itself according to common principles and values (Janowitz, 1975; Sampson & Laub, 1993). Social control also refers to shared social norms and expectations for behavior, and ultimately encourages cooperative efforts on behalf of residents to lower crime and improve neighborhood structures (Sampson, 2011). Social control is reflected by behaviors such as monitoring neighborhood activity, involvement in neighborhood groups, and mutual caring for physical neighborhood features (Bursik, 1999; Sampson et al., 2002). Residents in neighborhoods with high levels of social capital are motivated to exert social controls to protect the well-being of their neighborhood. Social control is a direct consequence of social cohesion and collective efficacy.

Behavioral Component

The behavioral component of community empowerment refers to strengthening actions taken by residents and their local organizations to directly influence neighborhood outcomes. Actions may be individual efforts to join neighborhood associations or collective actions by the associations to improve quality of life. Collective actions might include crime watches, community gardens, planning social events, or organizing residents to promote or stop a policy that affects them. A promotive policy might be one for rezoning a portion of the neighborhood in ways desired by residents.

A threatening policy might be gentrification or building a highway through the neighborhood. In either event, the behavioral component of community empowerment refers to the readiness, willingness, and capacity of a community to take the social actions necessary to get things done for the collective good (Zimmerman, 2000). From this perspective, the behavioral component is intrinsically defined by social actions taken that intend to, and result in the strengthening of a neighborhood. Ideally, such actions should promote acceptance, inclusion, and unity. Yet each community will seek to promote different ideals and values. Thus, the specific social goals included in this component will vary as well. The common thread, however, is that an empowered community takes collective actions to achieve shared goals.

Busy Streets

The three components of community empowerment create the context for busy streets. Busy streets require individual beliefs (intracommunity), social processes (interactional), and collective action (behavioral). Busy streets encompass the social processes and resources necessary to overcome structural barriers (Loeber & Farrington, 2012; Tolan et al., 2003). The components of community empowerment combine to create the social environment necessary to improve both physical structures and social organization in a neighborhood or community. The intracommunity, interactional, and behavioral components are the basis of residential stability, a collective motivation to maintain quality of life, and the creation of busy streets.

Busy streets emphasize the role of positive, healthy social activity in promoting neighborhood outcomes. Neighborhood street activity creates opportunities for informal interactions that ultimately foster deeper social connections. These social connections also increase residents' sense of accountability and responsibility, further strengthening social control. Thus, community vibrancy creates a context that encourages interactions and social connections among residents, facilitating social control and reducing crime.

Neighborhoods where residents feel safe and comfortable being outside are typically characterized by socially active streets. Furthermore, positive street activity promotes socializing between neighbors, enhances monitoring of neighborhood activity, promotes patronage to local businesses, and helps to maintain the existing infrastructure. Positive activities are also thought to occur because residents are socially cohesive, feel a strong sense of community, have social capital available, and are engaged and invested in their communities. Although more difficult, these activities are also possible within contexts of disadvantage and instability. A social force to establish social linkages, develop social capital, and organize to redress neighborhood decay can help a neighborhood overcome disadvantage, prevent broken windows, and maintain busy streets.

Neighborhood structural and social characteristics influence each other, and neighborhood features and processes are critically linked to individual behavior, thus influencing and being influenced by safety. This interplay between the physical and social context can have a significant influence on safety and the well-being of a neighborhood or community. SDT accounts for crime and deviance by emphasizing the importance of physical and social cues that inhibit social interactions. Yet SDT focuses on negative features, instead of on positive features that foster social cohesion and other positive social processes. Conversely, empowerment theory (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004) provides a framework for promoting positive social interactions, which lead to busy streets.

Explanatory social variables (e.g., social capital, social cohesion, and collective efficacy) are determined by the broader context of neighborhood safety and well-being. Similarly, such social factors are endogenous to the larger structural environment (Bourdieu, 1986; Sampson & Morenoff, 2006). Elliot et al. (1996), for example, found poor neighborhoods had less social control, which was related to higher crime rates compared with less disadvantaged neighborhoods. Sampson et al. (1997) also found that neighborhood concentrated disadvantage and resource deprivation reduced collective efficacy and influenced crime, above and beyond the role of personal ties. Conversely, residential stability and concentration of resources predicted neighborliness after accounting for concentrated disadvantage (Sampson, Morenoff, & Earls, 1999). Thus, neighborhood social processes are more likely to emerge in contexts with high levels of residential stability and adequate socioeconomic resources (Sampson et al., 1999; Sampson et al., 2002).

Social processes, however, do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, they are routinely influenced by both the broader structural context in which they are nested, and also by the individual characteristics of the neighborhood residents themselves. Furthermore, many neighborhoods are characterized by close personal ties, but may still have weak social control because of the broader political context in which they operate (Hunter, 1985; Sampson, 2011). Thus, social processes may derive their meaning and function based on the institutional linkages that they foster. From this perspective, neighborhood social stability is grounded in the capacity of local organizations to obtain and manage external resources (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Sampson, 2011). Thus, the notion of busy streets explicitly considers the mutual influence between social processes and the broader structural context in which social ties are formed. In other words, the concept of busy streets is grounded in an ecological perspective that incorporates the vital nature of interdependence between individuals, their relationships, and the structural context in which they live.

Applying the community empowerment perspective to understanding busy streets suggests that neighborhood social

processes may be the highest in those neighborhoods where residents live there by choice, rather than feeling disempowered with regard to their decision to live there. Thus, in neighborhoods where residents perceive themselves as having agency and autonomy in choosing their location, their community ties may be stronger. This underscores the role of individual decision making (or perceived decision making) in influencing neighborhood participation and, ultimately, neighborhood satisfaction.

Implications for Practice

Community empowerment provides a guide for intervention development, particularly in neighborhoods with existing social disorder. It provides an alternative approach to existing deficits-based models and instead focuses attention on building resources, promoting health, and strengthening existing strengths of communities. A community empowerment approach informs neighborhood interventions that seek to create busy streets by establishing settings for positive social interactions, building local organizations and businesses, and helping to strengthen social control. According to this approach, the community settings fostering positive social interactions would focus on creating sense of community, collective efficacy, and social cohesion through participation in community development activities; such activities would include existing community programs, as well as projects initialized by community members. Efforts to build neighborhood organizations and businesses might focus on individual skill building, drawing in resources outside the community, and exerting social controls to help establish new norms and behavioral expectations. Examples may include neighborhood watch initiatives or establishing a collectively owned business that recycles resources within the community.

A community empowerment approach for promoting busy streets also involves developing settings for social interaction that build social cohesion and social capital by creating opportunities for community engagement, improving community structures, and building interpersonal and institutional trust. An underlying principle of empowerment theory also involves engaging community residents in the planning and implementing of community change initiatives to help establish social bonds and increase sense of ownership. The Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center (YVPC) incorporates these principles in a multilevel community initiative focused on one neighborhood area in Flint, Michigan. MI-YVPC is designed to create busy streets by applying a community empowerment approach. It involves community partnerships in planning and implementation in an effort to enhance aspects of intrapersonal (cohesion, sense of community, collective efficacy), interactional (social capital, social control), and behavioral (community engagement and environmental change) components of psychological empowerment.

YVPC includes six programs at individual, relational, and community ecological levels. The goals of YVPC are to transform areas of blight and decay into safe and inviting busy streets. The Center builds on strengths of existing organizations in the focus area to cultivate a sense of community, trust, and support among residents, and to foster collective efficacy. The six YVPC interventions are designed to cut across and integrate multiple ecological levels by improving environmental conditions, increasing neighborhood cohesion and resident participation, strengthening intergenerational relationships and cooperation, while involving both youth and families in this empowerment process.

Community-Level Prevention Programs

Clean and Green. Clean and Green focuses on addressing neighborhood blight and creating spaces that promote social interaction. Vacant homes and lots are associated with high rates of poverty, drug dealing, social isolation, crime, and also perpetuate neighborhood decay (Accordino & Johnson, 2000; Scafidi, Schill, Wachter, & Culhane, 1998). Yet we also know that improvements in vacant land can turn around a neighborhood (Bowman & Pagano, 2004). Alaimo, Reichl, and Allen (2010) reported that involvement in neighborhood gardens and beautification activities enhanced perceptions of social capital and social organization. Participants in community gardens also reported increased social support, neighborhood satisfaction, intergenerational relationships, and informal social control (Alaimo et al., 2010). Clean and Green was designed to reinvest in and rebuild deteriorating neighborhoods by engaging neighborhood organizations to reclaim and improve vacant properties. The program is designed to help neighborhood residents and organizations assume ownership of land, provided that they will maintain it. Many of the Clean and Green lots become community gardens or mini parks where local residents can congregate and strengthen their social bonds, and reinforce their community ties. This program enhances both the interactional and behavioral components of community empowerment, as it focuses on strengthening social cohesion among residents, and creating social capital, while engaging residents in actions that seek to recover blighted properties, thus improving the neighborhood.

Community Policing. Community policing is designed to improve relations between community residents and police. Community policing is an approach to law enforcement based on relationship building between police and the public, systematic collaborative problem solving, and decentralization of police services (Kelling & Bratton, 1993). It focuses attention on the co-identification of problems that underlie crime (e.g., physical disorder, public incivilities) and strengthening bonds between the police and community residents. Community policing encourages police to treat neighborhood residents with greater respect and is associated with higher levels

of cooperation with police (Mastrofski, Snipes, & Supina, 1996; McCluskey, Mastrofski, & Parks, 1999). Strong partnerships between police and neighborhood residents lead to a greater sense of safety and confidence in local institutions. Community policing is also thought to increase both informal and formal social control in a neighborhood (Skogan, 1990, 2006). This program focuses on the interactional and behavioral components of community empowerment by additionally developing social cohesion and social capital.

Relationship-Focused Prevention Programs

Fathers and Sons. The Fathers and Sons program focuses on relationship building between fathers and their preadolescent and adolescent sons. The program is designed to improve parenting skills, promote parent-child bonding, and to improve communication overall. Fathers and Sons builds on existing research evidence suggesting that parent-child bonding, positive parenting, and close parent-child relationships are critical pathways through which parents influence the attitudes and behaviors of their children (Caldwell, Rafferty, Reischl, DeLoney, & Brooks, 2010). Furthermore, parenting behaviors are viewed as mediators between environmental factors and youth risky behaviors (Caldwell et al., 2004). Fathers and Sons improves social cohesion within families, promotes the development of social capital, and includes a collaborative community service project. Additionally, the program helps create networks among participating families, further enhancing social capital for parents and their children. Thus, Father and Sons incorporates parts of all three community empowerment components by enhancing social capital of participating youth and their fathers, and also engaging families in community service activities thought to build a sense of community.

Youth Empowerment Solutions. Youth Empowerment Solutions (YES) is designed to strengthen peer and community relationships among middle-school adolescents through community improvement projects (Reischl et al., 2011). YES trains youth in leadership, community building, and project development. Youth participants also work with adult volunteers to plan and implement their projects (e.g., community gardens, murals, community celebration events). Thus, YES focuses on building cohesion and a sense of community among youth through engagement in community development projects. The enhancement of both social and institutional capital is intended to strengthen perceived social control, thus reducing the likelihood of participants engaging in crime and deviant behavior. Moreover, YES helps youth and supporting adults to envision, create, and take ownership of change in their neighborhoods. Notably, the YES program collaborates with Clean and Green to create settings and contexts for intergenerational interaction and activity. YES focuses on all three community empowerment components by focusing on youth as agents for violence prevention.

Individual-Level Prevention Programs

Targeted Outreach Mentoring. Targeted outreach mentoring is a local adaptation of the Boys and Girls Club's mentoring program that connects high-risk youth with trained case workers. Case workers work individually with youth to help them identify personal goals and access community resources to achieve those goals. An important part of this program is to generate a mentoring relationship between the youth and case worker so that the relationship is much more than a referral service. The goal of targeted outreach mentoring is to help youth build their social capital and connections to their community through the relationship established with the case worker and connections made with community organizations that can help support them over time.

Caveats and Cautions

Although the idea of promoting busy streets has several advantages because it emphasizes the role of neighborhood assets and resources, we note several caveats. Researchers have also found that highly permeable neighborhoods (e.g., easily accessible to outsiders) actually have higher crime rates (White, 1990). Accessibility is likely to increase the number of outsiders entering a neighborhood with little investment in the quality of life there. Furthermore, neighborhoods that are open to outside traffic are likely to provide more opportunities for crime and to attract more potential offenders (White, 1990). Yet Yang et al. (2014) found that negative effects of neighborhood accessibility on victimization were reduced by the level of neighborhood collective efficacy. This finding adds support to the notion of a busy streets approach that focuses on positive social processes.

The concept of busy streets is predicated on an assumption that residents who feel safe and secure in their neighborhood will be more likely to be visible, socially active with fellow residents and other community stakeholders. Yet we cannot ignore the effects of neighborhood socioeconomic status. Higher socioeconomic status neighborhoods might be characterized by quiet streets with few visible social interactions; although, such neighborhoods are not typically welcoming for criminal activity, as they may be less accessible by public transportation, they may be guarded by private security staff, and may also include physical barriers to deter nonresidents. Busy streets may also be less applicable to rural areas, as well as communities with low population density. Rather, busy streets is a concept most applicable to the multitude of once thriving, currently depopulated (and dilapidated) cities throughout the United States. Thus, it is in communities where we can apply the broken windows theory, that busy streets is most relevant.

We have discussed the reciprocal role of structural factors (e.g., poverty, mobility, racial segregation), and social processes (e.g., social cohesion, social capital) as they influence one another. Yet we are not suggesting our practical

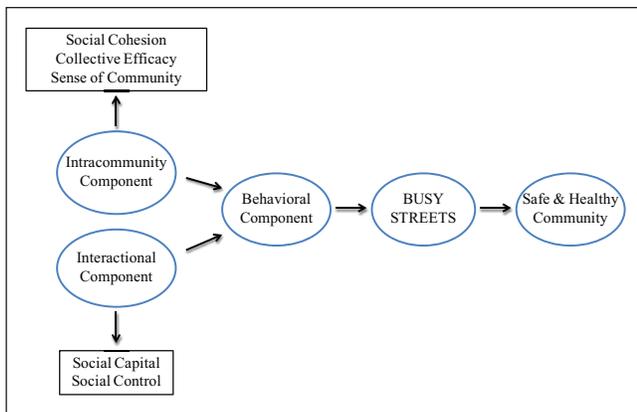


Figure 1. Conceptual model of busy streets.

ability to reduce poverty, or even decrease income disparities. Issues related to poverty and inequalities motivate our work; yet we are realistic in our ability to influence such outcomes. Rather, we are suggesting that by focusing on observable social characteristics (e.g., positive street activity that reflects the presence of strong social bonds), we may be able to strengthen communities that are otherwise lacking in resources. Perhaps by strengthening social cohesion and social capital, we may increase community engagement and investment, ultimately positively influencing the structural characteristics of a neighborhood. Busy streets are not a panacea for disadvantage, but they may set the stage for community improvement and investment, to ultimately promote economic development.

Conclusion

Community empowerment leads to busy streets by underscoring the importance of considering both the structural context and the social processes operating within. Empowered communities are characterized by climates that promote positive social interactions through the activity commonly found on busy streets. Such busy streets are thought to ultimately reduce the likelihood of crime and to promote public safety. Furthermore, empowered communities are settings in which social capital and social cohesion flourish, thus providing opportunities for residents to form strong social and institutional connections. In conclusion, we offer an integrative model as a guiding conceptual framework on which to build both empirical research and intervention design (see Figure 1). In this integrative model, we focus attention on critical social and structural factors that have been established as key characteristics of a healthy community. Our model is intended to provide an alternative to the prevailing deficit-oriented neighborhood theories. Instead, we focus on the role of positive neighborhood factors as they empower communities, ultimately making them healthy and safe.

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