COLLECTIVE EFFICACY (Kirk R. Williams)

Contribution to research on community level risk factors and violence – Addresses this question:

What mediates the relation between socio-economic indicators of disadvantage and demographic characteristics of communities and the rate of violence in those communities?

The notion of collective efficacy refers to the capability and willingness of communities to mobilize for the common good. As such, it refers to community level social characteristics and social processes, not attributes of individual persons.

The processes of deindustrialization, off shoring, and out migration of jobs from the inner city to the suburban ring, and now immigration of undocumented workers in some parts of the country, produced the socio-economic and demographic consequences discussed by Rob and underlying much of social disorganization theories of crime and violence:

Concentrated disadvantage in communities
Residential Instability of communities
Isolated racial and ethnic groups in communities

These factors have been linked to criminal violence, as discussed by Rob, but the addition of collective efficacy to this research tradition has provided a measurable concept that explains how these factors have such outcomes – by undermining the development of collective efficacy or destroying that which exists. This adds to our understanding of the social production of violence and offers leads to community level interventions to prevent it – mobilization efforts to build connections among people, promote mutual trust, and instill motivation for them to act collectively for the common good. Hence, the concept has both theoretical and programmatic significance.
Two dimensions of the notion:

1. Mutual trust and solidarity
2. Willingness to Intervene

The first dimension is analogous to the concept of social capital, for example:

Coleman: Social relations that make possible achievement of ends not otherwise achievable.

Bourdieu: Actual or potential resources linked to a durable network of institutionalized social relations.

Putnam: Networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.

Others have discussed this concept, including some that claim it’s nothing new, dating back to early 19th century social theorists, such as Durkheim, who wrote extensively about “social integration” and the negative consequences of “dis-integrative” social dynamics. This concept has moved into an entire field of study in sociology focusing on social network analysis.

The point is that social capital bears on the first component of collective efficacy – solidarity and trust. Such characteristics are a necessary condition for communities to mobilize collectively, for without interpersonal connections and trust among those involved, collective action is not possible. However, solidarity and trust merely set the stage for such action. Community members must also share a willingness to intervene for the common good, that is, to exercise informal social control. Hence, collective efficacy is an action oriented concept, while social capital is action neutral, referring only to capabilities.

Sampson and colleagues have conducted much research showing that socio-economic indicators of disadvantage and demographic shifts reduce collective efficacy, which in turn fosters crime and violence. However, their research has focused primarily on criminal violence in urban neighborhoods.
Two questions can therefore be posed:

1. Is the concept applicable to other social settings besides neighborhoods, such as workplaces, schools, or other contexts in which people have the possibility of regular social interaction?
2. Is it applicable to other forms of violent behavior besides criminal violence?

Bullying Study

Objective: Interventions to prevent bullying by changing the context of schools, with a special emphasis on changing beliefs about this behavior, fostering social cohesion and trust in the setting, and mobilizing bystander behavior in opposition to bullying.

Sample: 80 settings in which 2,332 adults and 10,093 youth will be involved in three pre/post surveys conducted in the fall and spring of the next three years.

Sampson’s scales of social cohesion and trust and informal social control (willingness to intervene) have been adapted to school settings. These scales will be used to measure change over the three year period in collective efficacy and whether that, in turn, is associated with a change in beliefs about bullying and the reduction in bullying behavior.

Multi-level model in which the effects of individual characteristics, including beliefs, on bullying perpetration and victimization will be estimated, and then we will determine whether collective efficacy measured at the site level moderates those estimated effects and whether is has independent effects on bullying beliefs and behavior.