Book Review/Compte rendu

Peter K.B. St. Jean, *Pockets of Crime: Broken Windows, Collective Efficacy, and the Criminal Point of View*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007, 245 pp. $US 23.00 paper (978-0-226-77499-2), $US 59.00 hardcover (978-0-226-77498-5)

Pockets of Crime seeks to evaluate broken windows and collective efficacy theories by, quite literally, taking their ideas to the streets of Wentworth, a police district on the south side of Chicago. Unlike his predecessors, St. Jean tests the validity of both theories from the *offender's* vantage point. Methodologically rich, the analyses rely on official police data, survey data, site visits, ethnographic interviews, and Systematic Social Observation (SSO) whereby video footage of neighbourhood streetscapes — initially recorded from both sides of a moving vehicle — is systematically coded and evaluated by offenders. Generally speaking, St. Jean discovers that levels of physical disorder were not significantly related to high rates of drug dealing, robbery, or battery. On the other hand, social disorder and levels of collective efficacy *were* related to all three types of crime. That said, the relationship between social disorder, collective efficacy, and crime proved to be complex.

According to the author, certain neighbourhoods are at a disadvantage from the outset by virtue of their particular patterns of ecological development. This state of "ecological disadvantage" offers unique social and environmental opportunities for offending (mixed land use, cheque cashing outlets, fast food restaurants, abandoned buildings, and unemployment). These environments also offer offenders certain ecological *advantages* for committing crime (distracted pedestrians, convenient escape routes, places to hide drugs, etc.). According to St. Jean, the ecological state of a neighbourhood, and the criminal opportunities it may or may not offer must be considered before analyzing the potential impact of social disorder and/or collective efficacy. High rates of social disorder tend to be associated with crime when and only when ecological opportunities for the latter exist. Likewise, collective efficacy is also challenged by ecological disadvantage in so far as particular areas with abundant opportunities for crime will make collective action particularly difficult and vice versa. In short, the level of ecological disadvantage is,

in a sense, a third variable that affects the relationship between social disorder, collective efficacy, and crime.

St. Jean's work makes a critical contribution to the literature by extending both broken windows and collective efficacy theory in new and exciting ways. While making it clear that traditional interpretations of both theories have tended to oversimplify the etiology of crime, the author emphasizes the need to pay close attention to the microsociological and environmental variations within and between neighbourhoods so as to fully appreciate the independent effects of ecological disadvantage, and concomitantly, ecological advantage. *Pockets of Crime* opens the door to a more detailed and syncretic approach to understanding the complex relationship between crime and place. Given the current state of anti-crime policy in Canada, and the political currency of broken windows policing within our neoliberal climate, St. Jean's analysis is timely and especially relevant.

Pockets of Crime's ethnographic research excels. St. Jean's interviews with drug dealers, robbers, police officers, and other neighbourhood stakeholders offers a unique opportunity to see the social and physical environment through offenders' eyes. In fact, St. Jean allows the interviewees to speak directly to the validity of broken windows and collective efficacy theory. Moreover, while the narratives are at times gritty and shocking, the transcripts reveal exceptional interviewing technique as the author pursues conceptual clarity while testing his emerging hypotheses. The ethnographic component establishes the theoretical importance of ecological disadvantage and its mediating and/or mitigating role vis-à-vis the broken windows and collective efficacy theories. On methodological grounds alone, the book is a wonderful achievement and would make ideal supplementary reading for any criminological theory or methods course.

St. Jean does, however, overlook a theoretical opportunity. By virtue of its rich ethnographic data, the book has much to offer those interested in environmental criminology and the potential contributions of both routine activities and rational choice theories. Many of the interviewees spoke about the suitability of victims with respect to their daily routines in a way that highlights the importance of rational decision-making in the sequence of events leading up to particular types of criminal activity (in particular, robbery and drug dealing). St. Jean fails to acknowledge these connections and the works of Cohen and Felson (*Social Change and Crime Rate Trends*, 1979) and Clarke and Cornish (*The Rational-Choice Perspective on Crime*, 2001) are not even cited. In no way does this oversight undermine the overall integrity of the book, but it does reflect a lost opportunity for connecting the analyses to other areas of

the discipline. Nevertheless, *Pockets of Crime* is a rich, challenging, and perhaps ground breaking work.

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