

Broken windows and community relations

[Sociology](#), [Community](#)



\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

\n \t

1. [Introduction](#) \n \t
2. [What is the Broken Windows Theory?](#) \n \t
3. [What is Collective Efficacy?](#) \n \t
4. [The Role of Political Strategies](#) \n \t
5. [Conclusion](#) \n \t
6. [Works Cited](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

Introduction

There are many factors that go into the bonds that individuals feel towards their community: how long they have lived there, if they have friends and family there, if they have a sense of pride in their neighborhood, etc.

However, if everyone in the community does not feel the same towards the community, and do not get involved like others, how does this affect the community as a whole? Do the residents share a common bond over where they live, or do they just want to keep to themselves and mind their own business? If someone saw a stranger trespassing on their neighbors lawn, would they do something about it or just let it be, because after all, it is not their problem. This paper will delve into the relationship between policing strategies that focus on community order, primarily the theory of broken windows, and how it affects the environment and collective efficacy of a neighborhood. This paper will look at scholarly articles with evidence about the overall effectiveness of policing strategies aimed at community order.

Which raises the question, do policing strategies such as broken windows raise the overall collective efficacy of communities?

What is the Broken Windows Theory?

The basic principle of Broken Windows is as follows: “ Serious crime flourishes where disorderly behavior goes unchecked” (King, Sociology 4615). To better explain this, it means that if crime is being committed and nothing is being done to stop those crimes, then more serious acts will soon follow. In an essay by James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling, they describe Broken Windows as a literal example of a broken window. They use the example of a broken window to give a picture of what they are talking about when discussing the theory: they basically state that if there is a broken window somewhere, and nobody does anything to fix the window, then more windows will be broken (Wilson/ Kelling 3). They say this is the case because there is no punishment or repercussion for breaking windows, so who cares if more get broken?

The Broken Windows theory first came about in New York City, and was first implemented in their subway system (King, Sociology 4615). The idea behind Broken Windows is that by cracking down on minor forms of crime, it will make criminals stay away from that area, and will lead to an overall safer community for everyone involved. It is also proven that after the Broken Windows strategy was implemented in New York City, that crime did in fact go down, but it is hard to determine if this was solely because of the implemented policies or other social factors as well (King, Sociology 4615).

What is Collective Efficacy?

Now, onto collective efficacy. Collective efficacy is defined as such, “ Social Cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good” (King, Sociology 4615). For intensive purposes, we will use an example of two neighbors: neighbor A and neighbor B. If neighbor A and neighbor B both live in a neighborhood where there is a high sense of collective efficacy, they will look out for each other and each others property. For example, if neighbor A sees someone breaking into neighbor B’s house, neighbor A will intervene (whether that be calling the police, yelling at the burglars, etc) to stop the crime from being committed.

Whereas on the other hand, if these two neighbors lived in a community where there is a low sense of collective efficacy, neighbor A may not decide to intervene when he sees someone breaking into neighbor B’s house because there is no sense of community. In communities where there is a high sense of collective efficacy, the more likely neighbors and members of the community will be to step up and make the community a better place because they know that others would do the same on their behalf. Now having a basic understanding of the policing theory of broken windows, and a definition of collective efficacy, the next section of this paper will look at how, and if, the two are related to one another.

The Role of Political Strategies

As the thesis states, we are trying to determine if certain policing strategies (focusing on the broken windows theory) affects a communities sense of collective efficacy. In an article by Joshua C. Hinkle, he tries to prove just this. In his article, Hinkle discusses how there is not a great amount of

research that has been done to prove whether or not broken windows plays any sort of role between a communities collective efficacy or not, so he has his own study. What he finds is that it would be hard to prove whether the broken windows policies is directly related to an overall higher or lower send of collective efficacy in a community, as is shown by this quote from his article: “ In terms of the ‘ direct or indirect’ debate reviewed above, the current study found support for the likely presence of indirect effects from disorder to crime – through lowered collective efficacy – which challenges those who have suggested only a direct path from disorder to crime” (Hinkle 422). Upon researching a second article by Daniel Tumminelli O’Brien and Richard A. Kauffman Jr, they did a study where they surveyed almost 650 students and how they felt about their neighborhoods (collective efficacy) and what they found was that disorder, in this case they were discussing the broken windows theory, did not directly relate to low collective efficacy: “ Multi- level models demonstrated that collective efficacy best explained variation in prosociality between neighborhoods, and that perceived collective efficacy best explained vari- ation within neighborhoods. Objective and perceived dis- order had no significant relationship with prosociality in these models, suggesting that disorder is not directly responsible for cross- neighborhood variation in pro-sociality” (O’Brien/ Kauffman Jr. 359). Neither of these articles have been able to gather enough research to prove for certain that the Broken Windows theory directly relates to high or low collective efficacy, rather they can only prove that disorder seems to lead to a lower sense of feeling towards ones community.

Do community based policing strategies such as the broken windows theory have an impact on a communities overall collective efficacy? Based on the scholarly articles used in this paper, the answer would seem to be no. There does not seem to be enough research available on how collective efficacy and the Broken Windows theory correlate to one another to make a decision that the two are related. Although, it should be noted that in both readings it is found that where there is a higher sense of collective efficacy among neighbors in communities, there tends to be less disorder. Even though the articles cannot draw a direct connection to collective efficacy and broken windows, there certainly seems to be enough evidence to at least connect them in principle. In places where crime goes unchecked, it will flourish because nobody will do anything to stop it. If one person breaks a car window and there are no repercussions, then others will soon follow. Without any sort of discipline, chaos ensues: “ Disorder seems to breed more disorder” (King, Sociology 4615).

Conclusion

To conclude, while there may not be enough historical evidence to prove a direct correlation between the Broken Windows thesis and a higher sense of collective efficacy among communities, there is certainly reason to believe it does. If neighbors feel safer in their neighborhood, there will be a stronger sense of bond among the community. People will get together with one another, they will hold community events, etc. Whereas if there is a low sense of bond in a community (low collective efficacy) and individuals do not feel safe in their community, then they will be less likely to interact with one another. Seeing as the whole point of Broken Windows is to crack down on

minor crime and misdemeanors to keep more serious crime away, it can certainly be the case that with the implementation of policies such as this, communities will be safer and feel in turn have a higher overall collective efficacy.

Works Cited

1. Hinkle, Joshua C. “ The Relationship between Disorder, Perceived Risk, and Collective Efficacy: a Look into the Indirect Pathways of the Broken Windows Thesis.” *Criminal Justice Studies: Vol 26 No. 4*, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2013, pp. 408–432., doi. org/10.1080/1478601X. 2013. 843253.
2. O’Brien, Daniel Tumminelli, and Richard A. Kauffman. “ Broken Windows and Low Adolescent Prosociality: Not Cause and Consequence, but Co-Symptoms of Low Collective Efficacy.” *American Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 51, no. 3-4, 1 Jan. 2012, pp. 359–369., doi: 10. 1007/s10464-012-9555-1.
3. Wilson, James Q, and George L. Kelling. “ The Police and Neighborhood Safety: Broken Windows”. *Criminal Justice System: Politics and Policies*, Seventh Edition, 1998. P 103-115, George F. Cole and Marc G. Getz, eds.
4. Dr. Ryan King. *Sociology 4615. “ Control of Crime”* Spring 2019. The Ohio State University, Lectures from week 1-16.