

Low Crime in Idaho
Understanding a Local Phenomenon in a Global Context

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NOTE TO THE READER: THIS PIECE IS STILL VERY MUCH IN PROGRESS AND
WHILE SOME CHANGES HAVE BEEN MADE, WORK REMAINS.

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Abstract

A long-standing interest in comparative criminology has focused on Japan's low crime rates in the hopes of shedding light on the etiology of crime at the global level. The authors compare Japan with rural Idaho in order to test existing low crime theories. The authors juxtapose the historical development and specific cultural values of Idaho, with historical and cultural elements identified as explanatory factors in the low crime literature on Japan. Based on the salient points identified as potential low crime predictors for each site, a matrix is established in order to test for congruence. This leads to a conceptual comparison between Idaho and Japan aimed at better understanding low crime phenomena at a micro- and macro-level. By contrast, it is hoped to also provide insight on high crime phenomena elsewhere.

Introduction

Criminology is the study of crime as a social problem, its causes, and correlates and is often done by concentrating on large metropolitan areas or Western industrialized countries where crime rates tend to be high (Willis, Evans, & LaGrange, 1999). Braithwaite (1989b) however notes that “[c]riminology has not done very well at explaining why some societies, some periods of history, some types of people, some types of cities have higher crime rates than others” (p. 129 as cited in Evans, LaGrange, & Willis, 1996). Indeed, even in a high crime country such as the United States, there is considerable regional variation in crime rates.

As per the most recent Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)’s Uniform Crime Report for 2009, the national violent crime rate was 429.4 per 100,000. This number, however, varies widely by geographic regions. Ranking states by ascending violent crime rates, it becomes apparent that states in the lowest crime rate quartile are primarily from two regions: New England (more specifically, from the very lowest rate state, Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, and then Rhode Island in 12th position), and the Intermountain West (more specifically, Utah at number 6, then Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana in 8th, 9th, and 10th position). Violent crime rates in this lowest quartile range from 119.8 to 252.6 per 100,000, showing a significant difference from the national average. On the other end of the spectrum, states in the highest crime rate quartile are predominantly Southern states (Oklahoma, Arkansas, Maryland, Florida in 41st through 44th positions, Louisiana in 46th position, and Tennessee and South Carolina as 49th and 50th), joined by a couple of Southwestern states (New Mexico as 45th and Nevada in the second to last position, next to the District of Columbia). Rates in this highest quartile

range from 501.1 to 1,345.9 per 100,000 (FBI, 2010). While this description is very cursory, it is helpful in identifying the complexity inherent in crime as a social phenomenon.

While it is reasonable to study a problem —high crime rates— to solve it, it conversely goes that the solution might be where such a problem does not exist. As such, Adler (1983) focuses on low crime countries and finds that despite their wide differences, they all share a social characteristic she coins “synnomie” —in opposition to Durkheim’s “anomie”— a “a congruence of norms to the point of harmonious accommodation” (p. 58). More specifically, Adler identifies continuity of values, shared values, group identity, stability of community, and policing as key elements of synnomie, and explaining low crime.

It is her use of a specific comparative research methodological approach —the “most dissimilar” site selection method (Marshall & Marshall, 1983)— that makes Adler’s inductive theory-building endeavor possible. Indeed, here is a selection of countries (Switzerland and Ireland, Bulgaria and the German Democratic Republic, Costa Rica and Peru, Algeria and Saudi Arabia, and Japan and Nepal) with seemingly nothing in common but low crime rates. It must therefore be whatever little they share — effective means of informal social control— that explains the low crime rates.

Going back to the initial focus on regional crime variations in the United States, we can now ponder whether those low crime areas within the United States share any of the characteristics identified by Adler as “synnomie.” Examining such a possibility means replicating Adler’s odd fellows comparison by selecting a low crime area in the

United States, and putting it side by side with another, very different, low crime area elsewhere and see whether they share anything that might explain the low crime.

Of the countries identified by Adler as low crime, Japan combines the required stark difference with the United States, with a high level of criminological attention (Adler, 1983; Bayley, 1976; Braithwaite, 1989a; Fujimoto & Park, 1994; Goold, 2004; Haley, 1996; Komiya, 1999; Leonardsen, 2004; Richeson, 1997). It thus stands to reason that it should be used as counterpoint in our low crime comparison.

As per the American low crime selection? The previously outlined regional variation in violent crime rate identified two main low crime regions: New England and the Intermountain West. Because the authors of this piece more specifically have ties to and knowledge about the latter, it stands to reason to use it in this unorthodox comparison.

The present study thus makes use of the “most dissimilar” site selection method (Marshall & Marshall, 1983) in order to examine whether synnomic factors identified by Adler as explaining why some countries —Japan— exhibit low crime rates can also explain low crime in areas —the Intermountain West— of a country with high crime rates. In order to do so, we will first present a critical discussion of Adler’s concept of synnomic and its implication for comparative criminological research. We will then expand on methodological issues of site selection and congruence analysis in historico-comparative research. Finally, Adler’s main synnomic concepts will guide our side-by-side theoretical interpretation of low crime rates in the Intermountain West.

It is our goal here to present a provocative alternative to traditional site selection in comparative criminology and to illustrate it at the theoretical level.

Anomie and Synnomie: Theoretical Framework – Section to be completed by co-author

Methods

The “most dissimilar” site selection method

The scientific method to assess causality hinges on three main conditions: that the presumed causes and effects be related, that the causes temporally precede the effects, and that there be no other possible explanation. When Adler identifies ten countries with low crime rates, she is on that quest to assess causality, the Graal of social sciences. In criminology, we often struggle with this outside the restricted arena of controlled experiments, and as result, we shy away from questions of causality (Becker, 1986-2007), as we cannot —and should not— all use randomized comparison groups. There are however ways to minimize risks of spurious causal relationships outside of the realm of laboratory control. Indeed, researchers favoring a historico-comparative approach can still assess causality. In our case, by comparing widely different sites on a similar outcome measure (low crime), Adler is ensuring that there can be no other possible explanation outside of that she identifies.

Going back to J.S. Mill, such an approach is qualified as the “method of agreement,” or “most dissimilar” site selection (Marshall & Marshall, 1983) in which cases are compared because the similarities in the outcome present in both cases imply the same hypothetical causal factor, even though the cases are different in many ways. It is opposed to the “method of difference,” or “most similar” site selection (Marshall & Marshall, 1983) in which cases similar in many ways differ in their outcomes and hypothetical causal factors under examination (Mahoney, 2003). Site selection in

comparative research is a major part of the research process and should be guided by the researcher's goal (which can be either inductive or deductive, either theory construction or theory testing), as opposed to haphazard convenience (Marshall & Marshall, 1983). For purposes of theory construction, the political science "most similar" method of site selection is preferred, while for purposes of theory testing, it is the "most dissimilar" method of site selection that is the most appropriate.

The present study examines whether Adler's synnomie can account for low crime in certain areas of the United States, which therefore qualifies as theory testing and thus warrants the use of the "most dissimilar" site selection method. In the "most dissimilar" site selection strategy, it is however crucial that the sites selected "[...] exhibit sufficient similarity to be meaningfully compared with one another" (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003, p. 8). Whereas the two sites selected here are different, it is also important to assess the ways in which they are still comparable.

Congruence testing in historico-comparative research

In criminology, research focusing on causal questions has sometimes been dubbed "variable research" (Abbott, 1997; Short, 1998), i.e., a type of research so concerned with controlling for intervening variables that it has led to somewhat abstract modeling existing out of any considerations for the context in which the modeled events take place. Such research has contributed to major increases in our criminological knowledge capital. It has also faced major shortcomings and controversies. This is due to the fact that variables should not be assumed to have the same meaning in all contexts (Abbott, 1997). Understandably, comparative criminology offers both additional challenges and possible solutions to that statement. Scholars in the comparative criminology subfield advocate

for an understanding of crime contexts at the global level, including “the ways in which ideology and culture act upon, and interact with, processes of socioeconomic, political and historical changes” (Richeson, 1997, p. #; Stamatel, 2006).

Assessing causality in such broad contexts thus requires a different set of methods, centered on the identification of common patterns.

Congruence testing provides the basis for claims regarding “common patterns.” (Goldstone, 2003, p. 50)

“Campbell (1975, p.182) points out that pattern matching provides a powerful tool for theory falsification in small-N research: investigators routinely find that their arguments cannot be sustained when within-case hypotheses are assessed” (Mahoney, 2003, p. 361). The opposite is true to the degree that a theory is reinforced, not proven, by successful matching. However, congruence testing would provide a reverse test for each step of the previously underlined process when it comes to whether or not social construction occurs. Indeed, successful pattern matching would imply an absence of social construction, whereas a failure to find congruence would then indicate support for the social construction hypothesis.

Low Crime in Japan

Researchers caution against oversimplified explanations of Japanese low crime such as homogeneity, Confucian values, or harmony (Goold, 2004; Haley, 1996; Komiya, 1999; Leonardsen, 2004), and that it is a combination of many complex social and cultural processes from which the end result is low crime.

Dag Leonardsen (2004) explained low crime in Japan as a result of a highly integrated society. Rooting his arguments in sociological theory, historical analyses, and an extensive review of the literature, Leonardsen describes a complex combination of

explanations of Japanese low crime: tight social networks that offer many chances to affirm identity as part of the group, social control by encouragement of the individual to practice self control in fear of ostracism from the group, continually reinforced values through a centralized government throughout space and time, and subordination to authority through traditional hierarchical and patriarchal relationships (this is especially the case for women). Leonardsen's arguments acknowledge the aspects of Japanese society that could negate its classification as a low crime society (i.e. the prevalence of domestic violence and white collar crime), but he chooses to ignore these crime categories in order to focus on the traditional context of crime.

Komiya (1999) asserted that the main cultural element in explaining Japanese low crime rates is the concentric nature of the world according to Japanese culture. The "uchi" world, or home, is situated within the "yoso" world or outer circle ("elsewhere"). Within the "uchi" circle, informal and yet inflexible rules regulating group relations prevent crime from occurring, and provide the necessary resolutions when it does occur. In the "yoso" world, those rules do not apply, and the same type of criminogenic factors as in Western societies can be found, along with their criminal justice solutions. The rules of the "uchi" world are governed by the notion of "giri" or duty, whereas the "yoso" world is governed by the Western notion of "rights" (Komiya, 1999, p. 372). The "giri" is of particular importance in order to establish one's place within the group. The group in Japan is not one based on common characteristics (motorcycle gangs, or retirees clubs), but on locality (for example, the company), and is therefore structured not on a skill-based hierarchy, but on a length of membership organizational frame. Within the group, which is of ontological nature in Japan, providing individuals with an identity and

a position on the social grid, the “giri” regulates relations, emphasizing duty to elders and self-control. It is this very strong net of informal social controls and emphasis on values of self-control that Komiya (1999) interpreted as the source of Japan’s low crime rates.

Kim and Lawson (1979) also cited the deep influence of Chinese Confucianism in the shaping of Japanese attitudes towards the law. The rites that govern human behavior, according to Confucianism, flow from nature which man must strive to follow, and only from good conduct can social harmony be achieved. Therefore interpersonal relationships are stressed over and above the individual.

Richeson (1997) also insists on the importance of self-control, in particular as a socializing tool for young children. He described the context in which self-control is developed in young Japanese children, in particular the high level of consensus existing within the community as per the low tolerance threshold for deviance. Crimes are perceived as astonishing and necessarily coming from foreign (“yoso,” outside) sources.

Laser, Luster, and Oshio (2007) also described a youth culture surrounded by messages of interdependence, especially in schools. When Japanese youth appear to be acting out, schools are known to tighten restrictions and rules to urge conformity. They brought to light the recent increase in crimes committed by Japanese youth, and conducted a self-report survey in one secondary school to attempt to determine potential causes for the deviance. The authors found that deviance in these Japanese youth appeared to coincide with variables also found in Western societies, such as having a parent involved in criminal behavior, history of physical or sexual abuse, and living in a high crime neighborhood. Factors found to mitigate crime were consistent with cultural explanations of tight social networks and highly reinforced values, as feelings of

belonging in school, positive relationships with the family, and high moral development were associated with lower deviance levels.

Haley (1996) focused on the restorative nature of the criminal justice system in Japan as the main explanatory factor for the low crime rates. He emphasized the necessity for community-level involvement in the process, along with complete adherence to the principals of restorative justice. The offender, along with his or her entire group, must take full responsibility for his or her actions, and show sincere remorse, and in turn, the entire community must grant complete forgiveness.

When exploring why urban migration and urbanization in Japan didn't lead to social disorganization and crime, Nomiya, Miller, and Hoffman (2000) suggested that the effects of these changes to urban demographics were in part countered by the stabilization practices of Japanese corporations. These corporations stress "family-like environments" for their employees by providing collective housing, encouraging them to socialize outside of work, and go to corporate recreational facilities (p. 5).

Finally, Bayley (1976, 1990) shows a more specific interest for the way the Japanese police their cities and towns. A fundamental difference in the relationship between the police and citizens in Japan and the West is how officers are viewed. Bayley focuses on the United States in relation to Japan, saying that American police have to constantly assert their authority to a suspicious populace. Americans "are taught to challenge the basis of police action and to question its need...In effect [American policemen] must generate authority as they work" (1990, p. 223). This relationship with the police is often a struggle for power. The citizen, in asserting his or her individualism, does not want to relinquish power, especially in the social sphere, to a government figure,

which amounts to tensions with the police. Thus the police assert their dominant enforcement role in order to maintain power rather than any social role. “In Japan, in contrast, the police are imbued with enormous authority because they are moral rather than legal actors...they play a role that is larger than the law” (Bayley, 1990, p. 223). Rake (1987) described the relationship between the Japanese police and the community as crucial—they understand themselves as allied, not adversaries. The *kobans*, or police posts, which are numerous fixed throughout every city, assure there are always officers on hand all day (Rake, 1987). They are not merely an ‘emergency presence’, Bayley explained, but become trusted figures in the community (in Rake, 1987, pp. 150-151). The Japanese police hold a special role in the community, and even make visits twice a year to obtain information from every household (Rake, 1987). Their role, as Bayley (1990) describes it, is less a symbol of the government and more of a priest or a schoolteacher.

Low crime in the United States

Rural Crime in the United States

Some predictors of crime hold across the rural/urban divide, such as family instability, but others, such as economic conditions being inversely related to crime – do not hold for violent crime in rural areas, and is even positively related to property crime in rural areas (Wells & Weisheit, 2004). Additionally, rural communities have certain characteristics that reduce crime, including a stable population/limited mobility, high informal social control through social networks, and the lack of county resources to detect crime (Berg & DeLisi, 2005; Wells & Weisheit, 2004).

Relations to the criminal justice system are tainted by a distrust and suspicion of government authority leading rural citizens to solve disputes outside the criminal justice system with what they describe as a “private, nonbureaucratic, nonenforcement ethos” (Berg & DeLisi, 2004, p. 318). This type of argument echoes that developed by Decker (1979) about the nature of policing in rural areas. He emphasizes the influence of community structure on police-community relations. Because of the environmental characteristics of rural communities, police officers are more likely to be part of the community, and thus have stakes in maintaining positive relations with residents.

Socio-culturo-historical development of the Intermountain West

The frontier, physical and ideological, shaped the culture of the West (Billington & Ridge, 2001). In the “Old West”, land was either to be preserved and used (fur-trappers and ranchers) or conquered (farmers and loggers) (Shumway & Otterstrom, 2001; Beyers & Nelson, 2000; Billington & Ridge, 2001). These “extractive industries” defined the Old West’s economy in the late 1800s (Shumway & Otterstrom, 2001; Blank, 1988), attracting population: miners followed the gold rushes, while Mormons and ex-Confederate soldiers migrated to establish farms and ranches in the 1860s (Blank, 1988).

Despite stereotypes of an equalizing rugged individualism on the frontier (Blank, 1988), communities “differed only in degree from their eastern counterparts; the popular picture of a predominantly male social order where youth reigned and equality was the order of the day, bears little resemblance to actuality” (Billington and Ridge, 2001, p. 11). Racial and religious minorities were facing violence and exclusion (Blank, 1988; Meinig, 1965), and established communities distrusted outsiders, especially the federal government which enacted policies affecting the frontier without any local input (Blank,

1988; Gimlin, 1980). Yet farmers, miners, and ranchers remained reliant on expensive irrigation projects and railroad extensions in order to maintain their businesses and well being, thus requiring the purse of the federal government.

The hegemonic values that prevailed were those of the white settlers, protected throughout the years by Idaho's physical and political isolation. Conformity to these values was demanded, and intolerance for those perceived to be nonconforming was high. The courts and law enforcement enforced conformity by favoring white settlers in crimes against minorities, often resulting in acquittal, whereas minorities' crimes against whites were often subject to much harsher punishments (Blank, 1988). Over time, this conformity required less violence as the prevailing values were continually reinforced through law and the courts, resulting in a homogenous society reflecting those frontier values of individualism, group solidarity, and reliance on the community.

Ironically, the ethics of individualism and self-reliance become more constructive when applied to the community level. The development of community on Idaho's frontier is exemplified by the Mormon settlements in the south. Although politically and culturally ostracized, the Mormons moved through the West in carefully planned homestead instalments. When settlements were stable enough, more Mormons migrated further into the frontier in a steady and planned growth. Within these communities, the family unit was stressed (Billington, 2001). However, Blank (1988) noted that a strong family unit is also apparent in other types of frontier settlements.

There is evidence to suggest that this reliance on community, in the form of attachment, remains in the West's rural culture today (Brehm, Eisenhauer, & Krannich, 2004; Theodori & Luloff, 2000; Harp & Rimbey, 1999). The notion of attachment, of

course, is related to Hirschi's (1969) social bond theory, and is a factor in abstaining from crime. The nature of attachment in the Intermountain West, however, may have changed with the shift from the "Old West" to the "New West" (Shumway & Otterstrom, 2001; Brehm, Eisenhauer, & Krannich, 2004; Theodori & Luloff, 2000; Beyers & Nelson, 2000; Harp & Rimbey, 1999). This shift is described by a movement away from the "extractive industries" such as mining, logging, ranching, and farming, to the "preservation of environmental amenities" with a strong emphasis on tourism, recreation, and retirement (Shumway & Otterstrom, 2001, p. 492).

Although population in the New West is increasing, those attracted to the area migrate there because of retirement, recreation, the natural beauty, and perceived shared traditional values (Shumway & Otterstrom, 2000; Beyers & Nelson, 2000; Johnson & Beale, 2002). For example, the most rapidly growing counties in the Intermountain West are what Johnson and Beale (2002) called "nonmetro recreation counties", defined as counties relying heavily on seasonal-type work, such as ski resorts. The evidence that many who buy second homes in recreation counties intend to retire there within 10 years, combined with the low natural growth rate in these counties reflect the type of immigrants to recreation counties as older and more affluent (Johnson & Beale, 2002). Thus while population is increasing in rural areas, the type of people moving in have less criminogenic attributes, as well as a preconceived attachment to the natural environment.

Brehm, Eisenhauer, and Krannich (2004) introduced the concept of ecological attachment to the discussion of well being, arguing that it is as important as attachment to family, friends, and social establishments. Attachment to the environment is often expressed as "sense of place," or "the affective bond between people and place or

setting” (Brehm, et al., 2004, p. 409). While the strongest form of attachment and “rootedness” comes in the form of social ties, the natural environment can also contribute to this attachment. Brehm and her colleagues explain that in the Intermountain West, the natural environment – clean air, mountains, physical space - is a major reason for in-migration.

This attachment to place is not new in Idaho, as the culture of ranching has always demonstrated a dedication to the natural environment (Starrs, 2002; Butler, 2002). Ranching is often considered a symbol of the Old West, embodying the traditional values of individualism, hard work, and self-reliance (Starrs, 2002; Blank, 1988). In recent years, however, the industry has rapidly declined (ranch lands have declined about 45% from 1982 to 1997), forcing ranchers to adapt by either consolidating lands or shifting to more recreational uses of land (e.g. dude ranches, horseback riding, hiking) (Field, 2002; Sullins, et. al., 2002), or the New West industries.

There is evidence that ranching also contributes to community cohesion and attachment (Harp & Rimbey, 1999). In a study conducted in Owyhee County, Idaho, Harp and Rimbey pursued the connection between community and ranching, basing their research on the assumption that “the nature and strength of local social networks include economic activities, such as ranching, and that social/economic ties at least partially account for social attitudes of cohesion, integration, and attachment” (1999, p. 2). They found that residents who had close friends in ranching had significantly higher community cohesion and integration, and that communities characterized by ranching also have significantly higher cohesion and integration.

Results: Congruence Analysis

Can the various types of explanations found in the literature on low crime rates in Japan be used in providing a better understanding of low crime rates in rural Idaho?

More specifically, based on Komiya's (1999) argument about the cultural reasons for low crime in Japan (importance of the dependence to the uchi world leading to high self-control and a sense of ontological security), it could be argued that Idaho embodies the exact opposite (predominance of self-reliance as derived by the frontier attitude) and yet achieves the same results? Or could it be argued that in rural areas, following Decker (1979) and Weisheit, Wells, and Falcone (1995), the very nature of the rural social structure implies an uchi and yoso-like dichotomization of the environment?

The following conceptual analysis aims at bridging the themes identified through the review of the literature on low crime in Japan, rural crime, and the developments of the American West, using Adler's (1983) concept of synnomie. This conceptual analysis culminates in the identification of a number of concepts, overlapping in their country-specific operationalizations (see table 1). It is these concepts and their overlaps that are presented below.

Table 1. Comparative crime prevention matrix

Japan	Crime prevention concepts and Overlapping operationalizations	Idaho
	Group Cohesion	
Giri	Uchi v. Yoso Insiders v. Outsiders	Individualism
	Socialization	
Self-control	Conformity Shared values	Self-reliance
	Social control	
Community as norm enforcers Police as moral authority	Informal justice brokering Restorative justice	Community as source of individualism and self-reliance Police as mediator and service provider
	Community stability	
Workplace	Group identity	Environmental attachment

Continuity of Values

Researchers caution against oversimplified explanations of Japanese low crime such as homogeneity, Confucian values, or harmony (Goold, 2004; Haley, 1996; Komiya, 1999; Leonardsen, 2004), and similarly, the same principles should be applied to the Intermountain West's rural society. Leonardsen examines the homogenization of values in Japanese society, and the conformity to these values that presents an atmosphere that discourages crime. These values, explained by Komiya (1999), are centered on "uchi" or home, and "giri" or traditional duty, and create a structured hierarchy of relations and informal social controls that emphasize self-control. The homogenization of these values is fortified by the centralized government and reinforced through traditional hierarchical relationships. Isolation was key to the insurance of the continuity of values, as Japan remained relatively closed to outside influence until the forced opening of Japan by American warships in 1853 (Komiya, 1999).

We see a comparable pattern of continuity and homogenization of values in the rural Intermountain West, through its history as a territory and then a state. The homogenization of values in the Intermountain West followed a course at first emphasizing the conformity of values through oppression and violence, then more recently through politics (Blank, 1988). Isolation, too, played a role in the Intermountain West's continuity of values. As well as being physically isolated, the federal government's actions (and inaction) created a need to rely on the environment and local community services. The presence of traditional industries also reinforces the continuity of values, with ranching in particular creating a web of social networks and high informal social control (Harp & Rimbey, 1999; Berg & DeLisi, 2005; Wells & Weisheit, 2004).

Shared Values

Although the values emphasized by Japanese and rural West cultures are seemingly different—one stressing relationships with and duty to the group, and the other stressing self-determination and individualism—the result of both was a tighter network of social bonds and informal social control. It would be impossible to compare the concept of *uchi* and *giri* straight across to the concepts of self-reliance and individualism, but it is possible to extract similarities in how these concepts and values play out in the social fabrics. Importantly, the notions of self-reliance misleadingly characterize frontier culture and rural Idaho as highly individualistic, but again, the values are being applied to a community level, as it is more realistic and applicable in the sociology of the rural West culture. Indeed, there are aspects of individualism in frontier culture, the pursuit of personal wealth being one (Billington & Ridge, 2001), but it is important to distinguish the notion of individualism as it pertains to self and individualism as part of a collective goal. In this case, individualism is one of the values apparent in rural Idaho culture, often going hand-in-hand with self-reliance. Meaning residents of rural communities in Idaho relied on each other for basic needs in the absence of government support. In essence, it is a group with shared values and goals, creating a tight-knit community where informal social controls are needed where formal controls are lacking.

As a result, Idaho's individualism and traditional frontier culture—without the violence—act as a cohesive force between residents, while simultaneously casting "outsiders" as the source of suspicion and crime. This dichotomous relationship appears

to be essential for casting moral boundaries and acceptable behavior within the group (Ben-Yehuda, 1985).

Group Identity

In the rural community, as in Japan, there are opportunities to affirm one's place in the group. In Japan, the school, the corporation, and traditional ceremonies offer reaffirmations of group identity (Komiya, 1999). The industries of the Old West play a role in the cohesion of the community as well as offer an important role in the group. Ranchers, loggers, miners, and farmers were essential to Idaho's frontier economy and even today remain cornerstones in the rural economy. The face of the industries may have changed, as Old West shifts to New, but their roles in the community remain essential (Blank, 1988; Harp & Rimbey, 1999; Starrs, 2002).

Through the transition from Old to New West, stability was maintained by preserving traditional values in the attachment to the environment. Old West industries have changed, but the attachment to the land remains as part of a group identity (Harp & Rimbey, 1999; Berg & DeLisi, 2005).

Community Stability

It is question whether societies can remain stable even as urbanization and migration scramble the demographics, but both Japan and rural Idaho have factors that worked to stabilize the communities in the face of rapid change. In Japan, part of "giri" and the "inner circle" is the corporation, which offers family-like bonds within the work setting, as well as encouraging the strengthening of social networks by socialization and group activities outside of work (Nomiya, Miller, & Hoffman, 2000). Komiya argues that

the rapid transition to industrial society after the forced opening did not result in the loss of traditional values, although many Western aspects were adopted under various foreign pressures, the changes were “Western in guise but Japanese in spirit” (1999, p. 372).

In Idaho, industry played a significant role in maintaining cohesion by promoting adherence to the status quo. Ranching remained an integral aspect to social networks in rural Idaho despite the decline of extractive industries (Harp & Rimbey, 1999), consequently retaining individualism and self-reliance as core values to community survival. The federal government is still contentious in the rural community, acting as an imposing outside threat to local autonomy that must be united against and regarded with suspicion (Weisheit, Wells, and Falcone, 1995). Thus the nature of the Idaho’s resistance to cultural change can be likened to Japan’s retention of traditional values through economic and industrial evolution.

Policing

In both Japan and rural areas, police are involved closely with the community. In the case of elected sheriffs, the police are tied to community interests and needs, as re-election is dependent upon the satisfactory meeting of those needs. As Japanese police officers act as “moral rather than legal actors” (Bayley, 1990, p. 22), rural officers are similarly confronted with disputes embedded in complex social relationships, of which they are encouraged to handle extralegally (Decker, 1979).

Police roles in both societies centre on providing community service and problem solving, as well as reinforce cultural norms and values. In Japan, as mentioned above, the police are a moral authority working with the community to enforce traditional family

duty and self-control (Bayley, 1990). Whereas police authority in rural Idaho is legitimized by the community through democratic means, thereby securing a particular normative hegemony since the sheriff's actions are tied politically to the need for re-election. Furthermore, the aversion to "outsiders" will increase the likelihood that the choice of local law enforcement will be an "insider", and already embedded in community ties. Thus the nature of rural policing combined with rural Idaho antagonism to "big government" or "outsider" influences create a social bond that fosters informal justice brokering similar to Japanese police.

Conclusion

Adler's (1983) investigation of ten low crime nations with seemingly different political, cultural, social and economic systems revealed a theme of underlying mechanisms, however manifested, at work in each nation to effectively control crime. The current investigation of two very different societies - rural Idaho and Japan - has revealed a similar trend. Going beyond variable-research, into contextual research has allowed an extension of Adler's (1983) theory of synnomie as an overarching and therefore intervening concept in explaining low crime.

The concepts identified, group cohesion, socialization, social control, and community stability, all find different and sometimes seemingly opposite operationalizations in the countries under study. As discussed in the analysis, the notion of individualism, very present in cultural discussions of the development of the American West, seems, when understood by itself, antagonist to what is known of Japanese culture, and so can be the other notions discussed. A contextual look, however, emphasises the

need to understand these relatively superficial cultural aspects in more depth, and provides the opportunity to identify overlapping confounding concepts.

It was this study's goal to answer the call for more dedication to theory in criminology (Braithwaite, 1989b), as well as a comparative criminology less haphazard (Marshall & Marshall, 1983; Stamatel, 2006) and more grounded in principles of contextual methods (Abbott, 1997; Bell & Hall, 2007; Eck, 2006; Sampson, 1993; Short, 1998). In doing so, the authors questioned not only issues surrounding superficial understandings of variables outside of their contexts, but also issues of site selection and units of analysis. Within a more context- and process-centered criminology, we might find that traditionally accepted units of analysis, such as the nation-state when it comes to comparative approaches, are not always the most adequate. Advocating for a non-traditional yet purposeful site selection, the present study has managed to position the low-crime debate within the confines of some segments of American society. This strategy is meaningful not only in internationally comparative terms (adding depth to our understanding of cultural explanations of crime in Japan), but also in national comparative terms (bringing implications for our understanding of high crime in other parts of the United States).

The present study, however, can only be seen as exploratory and preliminary. Further theoretical developments can only emerge from a two-fold process going in a somewhat inverse direction of that adopted by Adler (1983). Now that concepts have been identified with overlapping operationalizations in both countries, these can be quantitatively tested. Once this step accomplished, replications will need to be

conducted, following that same pattern, going from context to variables, questioning units of analysis, and seeking confounding factors at the cultural level.

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