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CORRELATES OF PARTICIPATION IN COLLECTIVE  
RESPONSES TO CRIME

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## Abstract

Based on an analysis of pooled city-wide samples from a random digit dialing telephone survey conducted in San Francisco, Chicago and Philadelphia, this study examines the correlates of participation in the collective responses to crime of neighborhood groups. Although only 10 percent of the sample reported participating in these collective responses to crime, these individuals represented more than half of all persons who were involved in neighborhood organizations. A large majority (sixty-six percent) of all neighborhood groups had some type of crime response and in organizations where these were present seventy-five percent of the members participated. Thus, there was a high likelihood that persons actively involved in neighborhood groups will participate in collective responses to crime when given the opportunity.

This examination of the correlates of participation in collective responses to crime and involvement in neighborhood organizations reveals that participants closely resembled other involved persons. But there are substantial differences between involved and uninvolved persons. Thus, the significant step in getting people to participate in collective responses to crime appears to be getting them involved in neighborhood groups. The absence of any significant relationship between perceptions of crime and involvement or participation further indicates that neither involvement in neighborhood groups or participation in crime responses is associated with one's orientation or perception of crime.

Based on an analysis of field observations collected over a 15 month period in 10 neighborhoods in Philadelphia, Chicago and San Francisco, we have found that most neighborhood groups that took action on the crime issue were concerned simultaneously or serially with a number of other issues. It was relatively uncommon to find groups that were solely concerned with crime. Instead, most collective crime activity is carried on in multi-issue groups. Examining the histories of groups with responses to crime, we found that crime usually was not the first issue which the organization addressed. The role of crime programs in these organizations suggested that most people who became involved with a neighborhood organization that engaged in crime responses did not do so because of the organizations' crime concerns. Further, their participation in the organizations' response to crime had more to do with their role in the organization than with their perceptions and beliefs about crime.

In this paper we attempt to test and refine these generalizations about the dynamics of participation in collective responses to crime by analyzing data gathered in a random digit dialed telephone survey conducted in the same three cities (Chart 1). The survey included city-wide and neighborhood samples in each city. This analysis will only use the pooled city-wide data. Subsequent analyses will deal with neighborhood and city variations.

A collective response to crime, as defined here, is an activity in which at least two unrelated individuals act jointly to "do something about crime." The collective quality of the response may involve a large or small number of people, may be highly organized or spontaneous and informal. "Collective" responses tend to involve activities that people can only accomplish in cooperation with others. We rely on the actors

Chart 1

DATA TYPES AND SOURCES

City-Wide Telephone  
Samples

Neighborhood Telephone  
Samples and Field Observations

San Francisco

Mission  
Sunset  
Visitacion Valley

Chicago

Back of the Yards  
Lincoln Park  
Wicker Park  
Woodlawn

Philadelphia

Logan  
South Philadelphia  
West Philadelphia

definition of whether or not a collective activity is a response to crime.

Thus, "doing something about crime" is a formulation of the participants rather than the researchers. An activity such as a youth recreation program which is perceived as an anti-crime program by one group may be considered nothing more than a recreation program by another.

Although we rely on individual perceptions to define responses to crime, it is clear that some collective activities such as civilian patrols, neighborhood surveillance or home security education programs are generally regarded as responses to crime while other activities such as youth employment or recreation programs and community organizing are less consistently conceived of as crime programs.

The data discussed here deal only with collective responses to crime taking place in urban neighborhoods and are further limited to participation in collective responses carried out by neighborhood groups.

There is considerable literature regarding the correlates of participation in various types of voluntary associations and a much more limited body of data on participation in specific types of activities (Smith, 1975). There have been no previous considerations of the full range of collective responses to crime or responses at the neighborhood level (DuBow, Kaplan and McCabe, 1978). A few studies however, have examined the correlates of participation in specific types of collective responses to crime such as anti-burglary programs (Schneider and Schneider, 1977) and citizen patrols (Marx and Archer, 1976).

Our intent is to analyze and compare the characteristics of individuals who are involved in neighborhood groups with those who participate in the crime responses of those groups. The term involved will be used to refer to persons who report that they are involved with a neighborhood group.

It does not imply a type or intensity of involvement. Participation will refer to respondent reports that they took part in the response to crime of a neighborhood organization in which they were involved.

Participation is a more specific and more active status.

- 1) The data presented below support the hypotheses suggested above. There is little difference between participants and non-participants among those who are involved in neighborhood groups.
- 2) The characteristics of participants are primarily those that are distinctive of those who are involved, i.e., individual differences can be found between the involved and uninvolved but not involved non-participants and participants.
- 3) In these factors that are correlated with involvement and hence with participation there is a notable absence of any significant difference in perceptions of crime and of the efficacy of types of solutions to the crime problem. Perceptions of crime appear not to effect or be effected by involvement or participation.

#### The Data

The telephone survey included questions on perceptions of crime (risk, fear, changes in rates, concerns) victimization experiences and contacts with the police, knowledge of the victimizations of others, perceptions of the efficacy of various responses to crime, individual behavioral reactions to crimes, measures of neighborhood integration, and standard demographic information.

The dependent variables in the study are measured by the responses to a series of questions about involvement in neighborhood organizations and participation in collective responses to crime. Respondents were

asked whether they were involved in any neighborhood group, whether the group or organization had ever done anything about crime, and whether they participated in the activity. Involvement, doing something about crime, and participation were self-defined by the respondents. A collective response to crime is thus whatever respondents perceived them to be. It should also be emphasized that participants in collective responses to crime, in these data, are a subset of all those who were involved in neighborhood organizations.

#### Patterns of Involvement and Participation

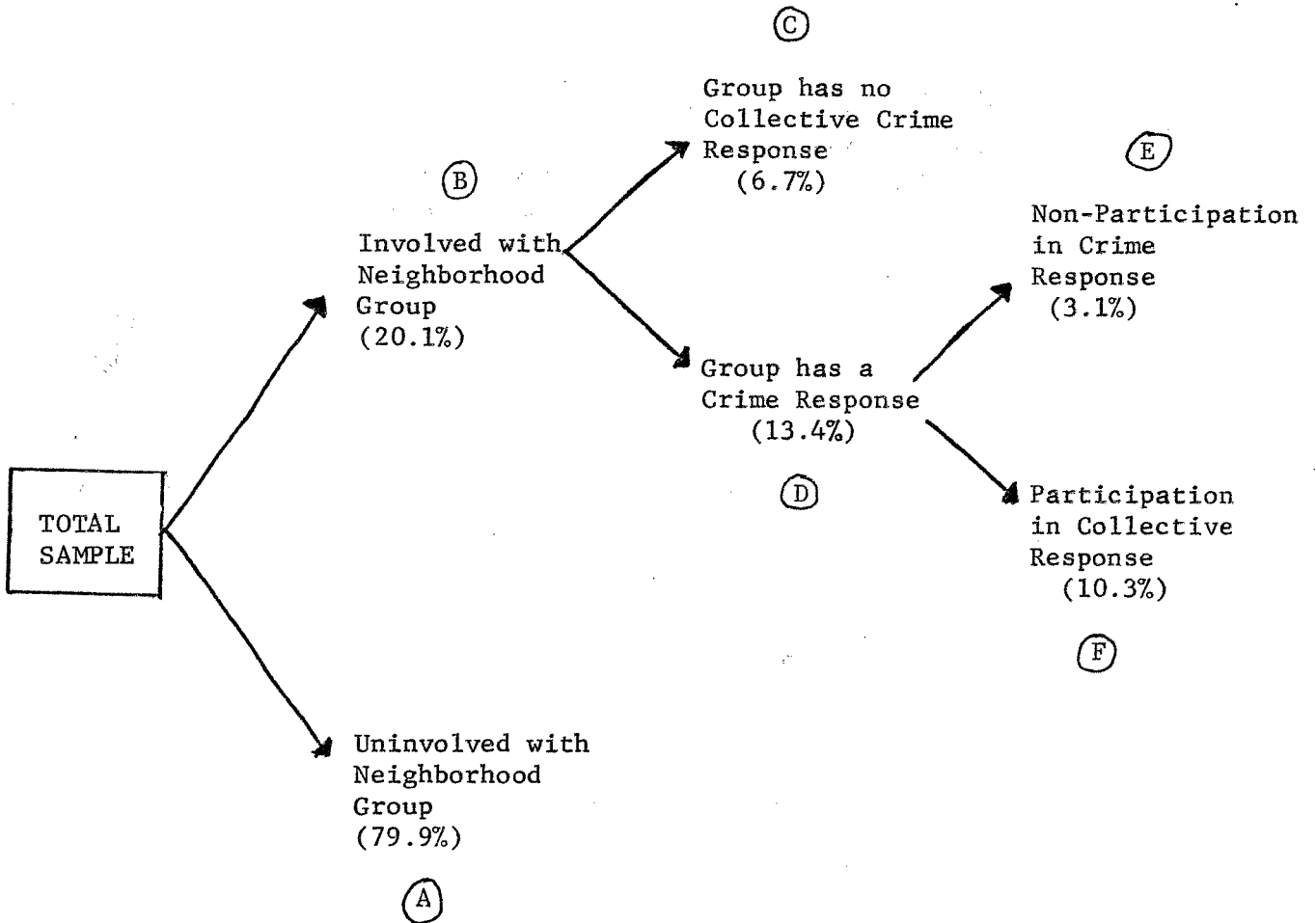
Twenty percent of the sample report an involvement with at least one neighborhood group (see Figure 1). Thus, the majority of people in urban neighborhoods take no direct part in the activities of neighborhood groups of any type. This proportion is lower than rates of involvement when the broader category of voluntary associations is considered (Smith, 1975). Here, involvement only includes neighborhood organizations and groups. Respondents mentioned many different types of organizations, but more than half of those involved mentioned territorial organizations at the block or neighborhood level.

Only 10.3 percent of the sample report taking part in collective responses to crime. While this means that 90 percent are not participating, the proportion is no lower and may even be higher than for participation in other problem areas affecting neighborhoods. There are few other issues that command higher levels of participation. This proportion underestimates the total involvement in collective responses to crime because it includes only participation in programs ~~not~~ based in the neighborhood, e.g., a court or police reform group or an anti or pro-handgun group that



Figure 1

PERCENTAGE OF PERSONS INVOLVED IN NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS AND PARTICIPATING IN COLLECTIVE RESPONSES TO CRIME IN THE POOLED CITY-WIDE SAMPLES



N = 1355 based on city-wide samples from San Francisco, Chicago and Philadelphia.

might be city-wide. It misses whatever city-wide groups such as the League of Women Voters, ACLU, Junior League or chamber of commerce might be doing. It also does not reflect the most informal types of collective responses to crime. We only ask about participation in the collective responses carried out by groups that respondents said they were involved with. Elsewhere in the survey we ask about mutual surveillance arrangements which may be quite informal, but there are likely to be other forms of informal responses which were measured.

At the same time that the percentages of overall participation are low, the proportion of organizations which engaged in a collective response to crime are high. Sixty-six percent of those neighborhood groups in which our respondents were involved engaged in some type of response to crime. Collective responses to crime are a common aspect of the activities of neighborhood groups. Thus, for those persons involved in neighborhood organizations the chances are quite high that they will have the opportunity to participate in a collective crime response.<sup>1</sup>

Most people who are involved with neighborhood organizations that have a crime response participate in it. Seventy-five percent of the people involved with neighborhood organizations that have or had crime responses, participated in those activities. This data suggests that neighborhood organizations are quite successful in getting their members to take part in crime responses.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>To the extent that respondents were not fully aware of the activities or organizations in which they were involved our data may underestimate the proportion of such groups with crime responses.

<sup>2</sup>The high rate of participation may be an overestimate. People who have participated in a collective response to crime are more likely to report on the presence of such an activity in their neighborhood organizations than those who did not take part. If this is the case, there were more people who were involved with organizations that had crime responses who did not participate. Even if most involved people who reported no crime response were unaware of one that existed in their organization, the participation rate in collective responses to crime would still be over fifty percent

However, our field observations highlight the wide variation in the intensity of participation in collective responses to crime. The majority of participants do little more than come to an occasional meeting or on a particular occasion join in some activity. Only a handful of persons are active on any regular basis and involve themselves in the planning and implementation of a program. The pattern of a few highly active participants and many peripherally involved people is characteristic of almost all voluntary participation. Thus, organizations with a high proportion of members participating may still seek to increase the intensity of participation.

#### Correlates of Participation and Involvement

To understand the characteristics of individuals associated with participation in collective responses to crime, one might begin with a comparison of those who participate with those who do not. (Comparing, in Figure 1, the F's with the A+C+E). As Figure One makes clear, non-participants include those who are not involved in any neighborhood organization (A) and those who are involved but do not participate (C + E). There are a substantial number of differences between participants and those who are uninvolved (F compared with A) and few differences between participants and non-participants who are involved (F compared with C + E). In Table 1 we report on those variables that were and were not significantly related in each of these two comparisons (columns 1 & 2). For the comparison of participants and those who were uninvolved 17 relationships were found to be significant at the .01 level and an additional 5 relationships are significant at the .05 level of significance. (using  $\chi^2$ )

Table I

REACTIONS TO CRIME TELEPHONE SURVEY  
THREE CITY-WIDE POOLED SAMPLES N = 1355

	1 Not Involved/ Participation (A with F)	2 Involved No Participation/ Participation (F with C and E)	3 Involved/ Not Involve (B with A)
<u>DEMOGRAPHICS</u>			
Education	.02	n.s.	.00
Income	.02	.02	.03
Children in the home	.00	.02	.00
Employment	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Occupation	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Race	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Age	n.s.	n.s.	.02
<u>RESIDENTIAL STATUS</u>			
Length of Residence	.00	n.s.	.00
Families in Building	.00	n.s.	.00
Home Ownership	.00	n.s.	.00
<u>EXPERIENCES</u>			
Contact with Police in the last yr. Victimization-Burglary within past 2 yrs.	.00 .03	n.s. n.s.	.00 .04
<u>SOCIAL INTERACTION</u>			
Ease in Identifying Strangers in the Neighborhood	.00	n.s.	.00
Proportion of Neighborhood Kids Known	.00	n.s.	.00
<u>COMMUNICATION DENSITY</u>			
Talk about Neighborhood Problems with Neighbor	.00	.00	.00
No. of Types of Local Crime Victims Known	.00	n.s.	.00
<u>INDIVIDUAL ORIENTED CRIME BEHAVIOR</u>			
Engrave Property	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Leave Light on at Night	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Notify Police when going away	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Stop Deliveries when away	.00	n.s.	.00
Frequency of Going Out at Night	.01	.02	n.s.
Escorted at Night because of Crime	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Take Car at Night because of Crime	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Take Something for Protection at Night	.05	n.s.	.02
Avoid Particular Areas at Night	.01	.02	n.s.
Carry Theft Insurance	.00	n.s.	.00

Table I (cont.)

	(A with F)	(F with C and E)	(B with A)
<u>COLLECTIVE ORIENTED CRIME RESPONSES</u>			
Keep Eye on the Street	.00	.02	.00
Ask Neighbors to Watch House	.00	.04	.00
<u>ATTACHMENT TO NEIGHBORHOOD</u>			
Feel a part of the Neighborhood	.00	n.s.	.00
Expect to live in Neighborhood in Two Years	.02	n.s.	.01
<u>PERCEPTIONS OF CRIME</u>			
Was Crime Ever Less a Problem than Now	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Fear in the Neighborhood at Night	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Fear in the Neighborhood during the Day	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
How big a Problem is Crime in the Neighborhood	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Perceived Risk of Personal Crime	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Perceived Risk of Burglary	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
People Using Illegal Drugs	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Vandalism	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
<u>PERCEPTIONS OF NEIGHBORHOOD CONDITIONS</u>			
Perceptions of Neighborhood Change	.00	n.s.	.01
Kids Hanging Out on Streets a Problem	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Abandoned or Burned out Buildings a Problem	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
<u>PERCEIVED EFFICACY OF ACTIONS</u>			
Belief that Neighborhood Groups can Reduce Crime	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Police Cannot Do Much About Crime	n.s.	n.s.	.01

n.s. = not significant at the .05 level using  $\chi^2$

In contrast, when participants are compared with other involved persons who were not participating in the crime responses only 1 out of 40 relationships examined was found significant at the .01 level and an additional 6 were found to be significant if a .05 level is employed. Participants resemble other involved persons more than they differ from them. When involved and uninvolved persons are compared (column 3 in Table 1) it can be seen that the difference between participants and uninvolved is explained almost entirely by the more general category of involvement. When one examines the correlates of involvement, almost all of the significant correlates of participation are included. We, therefore, will begin by discussing the correlates of involvement and then add those few relationships which distinguish participation and general involvement.

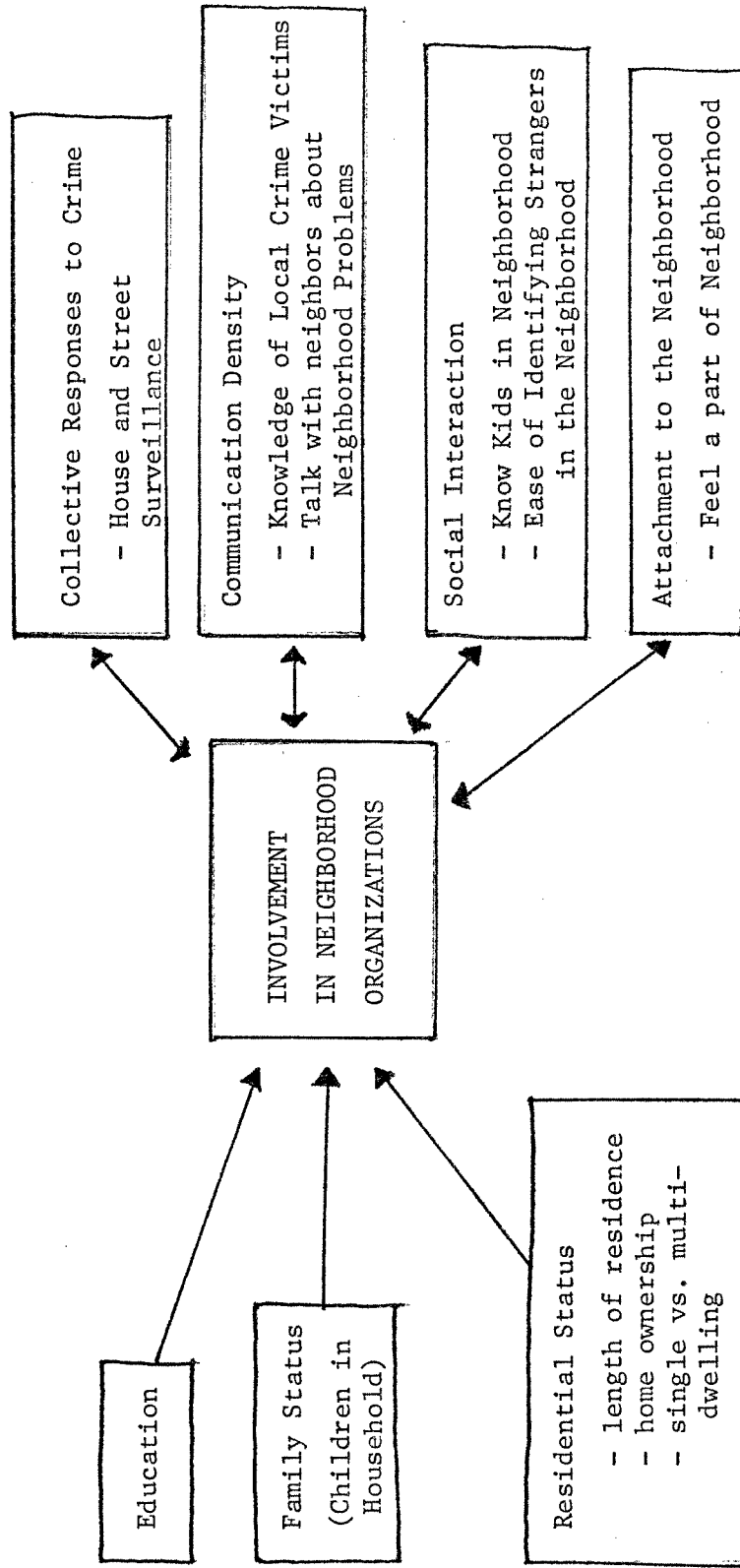
In Figure 2A we present the relationships listed in Table 1 (column 3) that were significant at the .01 level (chi-square). We have grouped the variables so that antecedent variables appear to the left of involvement while those to the right may either effect or be affected by involvement. The relationship with antecedent variables is represented by uni-directional arrows while those variables for which the causal direction is unclear are represented with two-way arrows. In most cases the individual items are grouped under more general concepts which they are measures of. The general concepts are capitalized while a description of the particular items where not obvious are included under each concept in smaller letters.

#### Education

The higher an individual's education the more likely they are to be involved with a neighborhood organization. This relationship has

Figure 2A

CORRELATES OF INVOLVEMENT IN NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS  
IN THE POOLED CITY-WIDE SAMPLES (Significance at .01, Chi-square)



been found in many studies of general participation in voluntary associations. (Smith, 1975, 253; Verba and Nie, 1972, 181; Hyman and Wright, 1971).

#### Family Status

Individuals with children living at home are more likely to be involved in neighborhood organizations. Children often provide the opportunity to get to know people in the neighborhood (Suttles, 1972) and their welfare may provide a set of reasons for caring about the neighborhood. Couples with children have been found previously to belong to more voluntary associations. (Wright and Hyman, 1958, 294).

#### Residential Status

Residential Status is measured here in terms of the length of residence in the neighborhood, whether the respondents owned their residences, and whether they lived in a single, small multi- or large multi-dwelling unit. Longer residence, home ownership, and residence in a smaller sized dwelling unit all were correlated with higher rates of involvement. The importance of length of residence in explaining participation in community organizations has been found by Kasarda and Janowitz (1974) and Hunter (1974). Home owners made an investment in the community and are likely to plan to stay; involvement in neighborhood organizations is likely to be induced by their having a stake in the area.

#### Communication Density and Social Interaction

Both involve behaviors that may indicate greater social integration. Not surprisingly those who talk with their neighbors more about neighborhood



problems are more likely to be involved. Talk is almost synonymous with involvement in neighborhood groups and is as likely to be an effect as a cause. We have included the number of types of neighborhood crime victims known by the individual as a measure of communication density on the reasoning that this variable measures the degree to which the individual knows about what is going on in the neighborhood.

Knowing more kids in the neighborhood and more easily identifying strangers are both considered here to be measures of social interaction. They are not the strongest behavioral measures. Both questions ask for a generalization about the respondent which may elicit responses that are more properly considered perceptions than behaviors. When home ownership is controlled the relationship between ease of recognizing strangers and involvement disappears.

#### Attachment to the Neighborhood

Respondents who feel more a part of the neighborhood are more likely to be involved in a neighborhood group. This is the only perception that is correlated with involvement. Residential status, social interaction, attachment to the neighborhood, and communication density all represent different ways to conceptualize and measure social integration. (Hunter, 1974) The presence of all of these as correlates suggests that social integration in its various forms is a major determinant of and outgrowth from involvement in neighborhood organizations.

#### Collective Responses to Crime

Those who are involved in neighborhood groups are more likely to watch the street in front of their home and are more likely to ask their neighbors to watch their home when they are away. These two forms of surveillance

both involve cooperative behavior involving interests other than one's self. They are significantly related to involvement while all individual behavioral reactions to crime such as protecting one's self or house or practicing avoidance are not. This correlation may mean that involvement encourages collective responses to crime of the more informal kind or that persons who engage in informal cooperative behavior are more likely to be involved in neighborhood organizations. Both seem equally plausible dynamics.

Aside from education all the correlates of involvement share a common strain, that of stability and integration into the neighborhood.

If we consider all variables significantly related to involvement at the .05 level as well, the model needed to understand involvement becomes much more complex (Figure 2B). The specific relationships will not be discussed here. However, we want to point out that a few more crime related behaviors and experiences appear, but there are still no perceptions that are significantly correlated.

Finally, we consider the correlates of participation when compared with involvement without participation (See Figure 3). All of the variables that are significantly related to participation were also found to be related to involvement with the exception of less avoidance among those who participate. Only one relationship was significant at the .01 level, the likelihood of talking with neighbors about neighborhood problems. This may be an indication that participation is a more active classification that more involvement and people who participate in anything may be generally more active within and outside the organization.

The three other behaviors found on the right side of participation (Figure 3) are likely to be, in part, consequences of neighborhood anti-crime programs. Many programs promote the two types of cooperative

Figure 2B

CORRELATES OF INVOLVEMENT IN  
NEIGHBORHOOD GROUPS

(significant at the .05 but not .01 level Chi-Square)

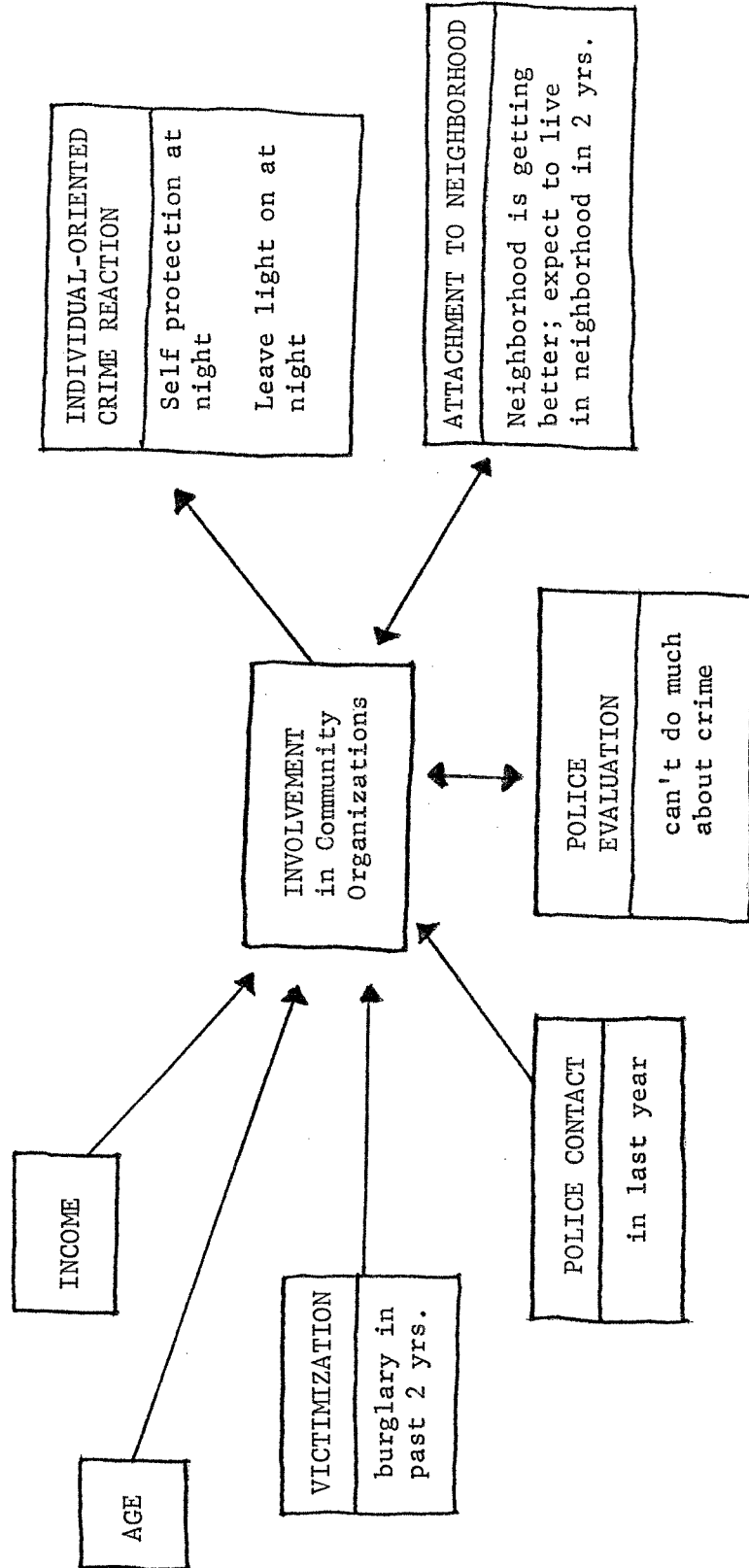
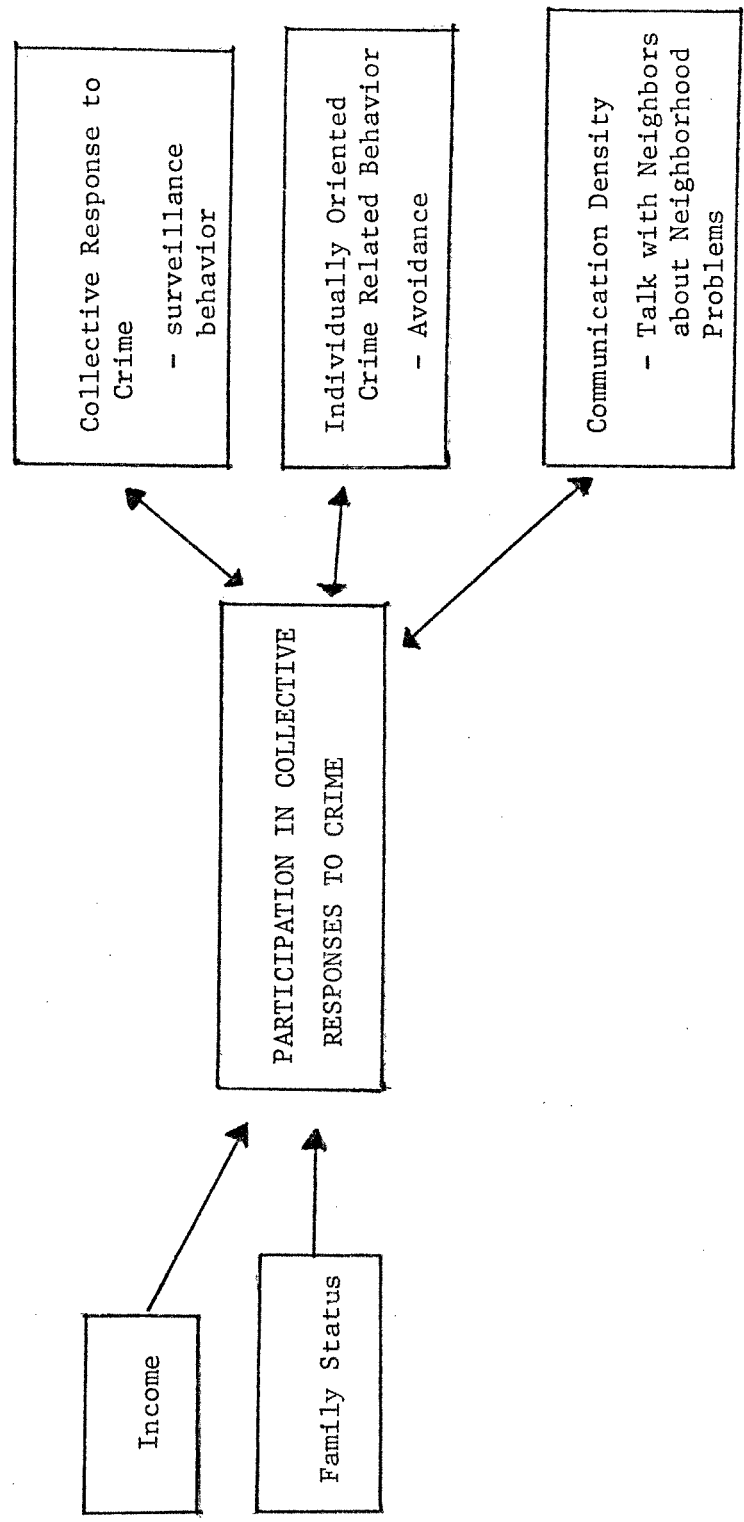


Figure 3

CORRELATES OF PARTICIPANTS IN COLLECTIVE CRIME RESPONSE AS COMPARED WITH THOSE WHO ARE INVOLVED BUT DO NOT PARTICIPATE IN COLLECTIVE RESPONSE TO CRIME

(Significance at the .05 level Chi-square)



surveillance activities found to be correlated with participation. The correlation between going out more evenings of the week (non-avoidance) and participation may be interpreted as both cause and effect. Those who go out more may be more likely to participate. Considered as a consequence of participation, going out more frequently at night suggests that participation may make people less fearful to go out. While some such effect may be operating, no perceptions of crime were found to be significantly correlated with participation.

The Absence of Perception of Crime from the Explanation of Involvement and Participation

Neither involvement in a neighborhood organization nor participating in its crime related activities is found to be significantly related to a number of different types of crime perceptions including perceptions of different types of risk, of changing neighborhood crime rates, of how much of a problem crime is in the neighborhood, and even how effective neighborhood groups could be in reducing crime. Getting involved in a neighborhood group and participating in its crime activities do not appear to be motivated or affected by thinking about crime.

Most of the neighborhood organizations that people are involved with which carried out a crime-related program were also active on a number of other issues. Crime was just one of the several issues on most of these organizational agendas. Fieldwork observations suggested that most people's participation in crime responses was (1) subsequent to their involvement with the organization and (2) only one of several activities participated in. The absence of perceptions of crime from our correlates of participation provides added strength to these observations.

How then can participation in collective crime responses be understood? First, it should be emphasized that the chances of such participation are greatly enhanced if an individual is involved with a community group. If the community group has a crime program, the chances are very great that the involved individual will participate. Second, the type of analysis derived from the telephone survey and based on individual differences does not appear to offer much enlightenment (See Figure 2B). The few differences between participants with the exception of income and family status and other involved persons are as likely to be results of their participation as they are causes.

The likelihood of individual participation may be more related to the characteristics of the organizations joined, how they involve members in particular activities, how much division of labor the organization encourages, and how the type of involvement it seeks. A neighborhood group that develops a citizen patrol that makes major demands on the time of the participants will involve a smaller proportion of the organizations' membership than a program that involves attendance at a series of meetings or some other less demanding type of participation. As these examples point out, the proportion of an organizations' membership taking part in a collective response to crime may belie the strength of the program. More sustained and effective programs may draw upon a smaller percentage of the membership than programs that are short lived or superficial but involve more members. Larger neighborhood organizations often work through committees that are each composed of a few very active people, who can focus in on one problem to the exclusion of others because they know other members are equally active on other issues.

A more complete understanding of the organizational factors related to participation is now underway and will be reported in future papers.

Perhaps, the most important policy implication that can be drawn from the current paper, however, is the unproductivity of trying to induce participation in local crime prevention programs through attempts to alter people's perceptions of crime or their perceptions of the efficacy of neighborhood action on crime. Participants were neither more or less afraid, aware of crime risks, concerned about crime than their uninvolved neighbors. Instead our data support a strategy of trying to increase social integration and general involvement in neighborhood organization regardless of whether those organizations are presently involved with crime issues. It is a difficult step to get people involved and a much easier step to get people involved in a particular issue, an axiom of which community organizers have long been aware.

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