INTRODUCTION

The chapters in this book are organized around the general theme of providing theory for practice. The theories in question are those of rational choice, routine activities and environmental criminology. The practices are those of situational crime prevention and allied approaches, such "as crime-prevention through environmental design and problem-oriented policing.

They say that there is nothing so practical as a good theory. But no theory is so good that it does not bear improving. Theories benefit most from a close acquaintance and engagement with practical concerns, such as the challenge of helping police to classify crime problems, or of finding better ways to deal conceptually with phenomena such as situational precipitators, displacement, co-offending, and innovation. There is also a need to understand better both how offenders, such as vandals or convenience store robbers, perceive and respond to facilitating or inhibiting features of crime settings when deciding whether or not to offend; and whether, for example, burglary-prevention strategies with a special focus on repeat victims hold the promise of being cost effective. The chapters that follow were selected to address these and other issues.

Taxonomies are important tools for making theory relevant to practice. They provide a way of structuring our perceptions of the phenomenological world; and this allows decisions to be made and actions taken. One way of enabling policing to adopt a more problem-oriented focus is that of helping officers to view crime problems in more crime-specific, situational terms. In the opening chapter, Eck and Clarke use routine activities theory to develop a simple but powerful way of classifying problems in terms of the settings in which they occur, and the behaviors exhibited. The resulting taxonomy contains 66 types of problems commonly faced by local police forces. The authors illustrate how this classification can be applied to everyday practice, and how it can help the police to distinguish between genuine police problems and other concerns.

For much of its development, situational crime prevention has concentrated on reducing opportunities to commit crime, manipulating factors such as risk, effort and reward in order to prevent offending. Wortley's recent proposition that the role of situational "precipitators" in offending has been unduly neglected offers a challenge to this traditional view, and brings an array of new and potentially

useful situational techniques to the field. In their chapter, Cornish and Clarke examine how these new techniques work to achieve their effects, with what crimes and criminals they are likely to be successful, and the extent to which the theory and practice of situational crime prevention will need modifying in order to incorporate them. In conclusion, they offer a revised and expanded classification of crime prevention efforts. The resulting 25 techniques make room for some of the new strategies, while continuing to emphasize the fundamental importance of opportunity reduction to situational crime prevention.

As Wortley points out in his chapter (which also provides a useful introduction to the role of situational precipitators, above), although institutions like prisons may appear to have all the leverage they need to control inmates, lack of knowledge about situational crime prevention means that administrators are often not able to take full advantage of the micro-level, problem-solving approach that characterizes this method. On the other hand, as capsule environments, prisons, like other total institutions, tend to generate their own unique pressures and provocations that may precipitate inmate offending. Prisons therefore provide situational prevention with two challenges: how to develop preventive measures to reduce the strength of any situational precipitators that may create or augment motivation to offend; and how to employ traditional opportunity-reduction techniques in ways that avoid the counter-productive result of increasing overall levels of stress and frustration within the institution.

One of the problems faced by situational crime prevention practitioners — and frequently raised by their critics — is the possibility that displacement of crime will undermine their best efforts. In their chapter, Brantingham and Brantingham employ concepts from environmental criminology to develop a better understanding of the phenomenon of displacement, and to find ways of anticipating when and where such displacement is likely to occur. Using their previous research on the journey to crime, routine travel paths, and the influence of neighborhood locations that act as crime generators and crime attractors, they further develop their work on the patterning of crime, and the likelihood of its displacement. Their goal is to move situational crime prevention from working on the basis of hunches about patterns of displacement to its more accurate prediction through the use of displacement-potential estimation tools. This promises to provide crime prevention practice with a powerful new means of extending the reach and effectiveness of its preventive measures.

As Felson points out in his chapter, at least half of all offending involves co-offenders. Yet little is known about how accomplices find

each other prior to committing their crimes together. After discussing the disproportionate impact of co-offending on crime, and the extra harm it causes, Felson reviews the many theoretical attempts to develop notions about ongoing social structures — such as the gang — that might explain how young offenders come to find each other. Rejecting these, he suggests an alternative solution based on routine activity theory and on earlier behavior-setting research carried out in Oskaloosa, Kansas, by the ecological psychologist Roger Barker. The result is the concept of the "offender convergence setting" — a time and place where likely co-offenders can meet without outside interference to hang out, size each other up, socialize and prepare to offend. Identifying local offender convergence settings and regulating them through situational measures offers a new way to reduce co-offending.

Crime scripts are useful tools for systematically partitioning the modus operandi of simple and complex crimes into discrete, standardized stages or units of action. In their ingenious analysis of check frauds, which builds on Tremblay's earlier research in this area, Lacoste and Tremblay apply the procedures of script analysis to the study of how these crimes differ, and of when and where innovation occurs in the crime-commission process. On the basis of their analysis, they are able to identify groups of check fraudsters who are more or less innovative, and to describe the various ways in which innovation changes, improves or adapts the original crime script. They relate the capacity to innovate both to specific offender characteristics, and to crime outcomes in terms of pay-off per fraud, and ability to avoid arrest or conviction. As well as supplying a means for studying the diffusion of illegal innovation, they authors suggest how, more generally, knowledge about the crime-commission process gained from script-theoretic analyses might be used to remedy some of the omissions in current social learning theories.

Rapid repair is a much-favored policy for tackling vandalism, but it relies on rarely tested assumptions about the important role played by existing graffiti and damage in eliciting vandalism behavior: that vandalism, in other words, breeds more vandalism. In her experiment with youngsters in London, Smith explores this issue using answers to questions about subjects' prior vandalism activities, and ratings of photographs of vandalized and non-vandalized property. A repeated measures factorial design allows her to conclude that existing graffiti and the width of the target each precipitate vandalizing responses in those who recently engaged in graffiti writing on targets similar to those being rated. In addition, there is evidence that recent damage experience at similar targets, as well as the hardness of the target material itself, affect reported willingness to vandalize.

Situational crime prevention depends for its success on a detailed knowledge of how specific offenses are committed. Studies of offenders' perceptions of the crime-commission process have long been the major means by which this knowledge has been collected. Petrosino and Brensilber's study of the motives, methods, and decision making of convenience-store (c-store) robbers lies in this long-standing tradition of providing research for practice. Two broad types of c-store robbers emerge from their data: a majority of impulsive, opportunistic offenders who seem to pay attention only to the more overt measures of situational crime prevention; and a minority of more sophisticated criminals who are influenced in their decision making by more subtle signs. Their research also raises interesting theoretical issues about the meaning and applicability of terms such as "rationality," "impulsivity," and "opportunism" to offenders like these.

Controversy and debate are welcome guests at the situational crime prevention table. Threats to theory (see the Cornish and Clarke chapter, above), and challenges to empirical data and its interpretation are important means by which theory and practice develop. The concept of repeat victimization is one of the most significant theoretical developments to have emerged in the crime prevention field over the last few decades. Farrell and Pease's chapter reanalyzes data from a study by LeBeau and Vincent of repeat burglaries in Charlotte, North Carolina, published in an earlier volume of this series. The present authors conclude that, notwithstanding the results of the earlier study, the prevention of repeat burglaries is, after all, a useful component of burglary-reduction strategies.

We hope that this volume, along with others in the series, illustrate the close relationship between theory and practice that characterizes our field, and makes it such an exciting one to work in. The natural and healthy competition among ideas that still exists in this comparatively new area of "crime science" is an indication of its vitality. The noticeable convergence of ideas is a sign of its growth.

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