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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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by  
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This volume of *Crime Prevention Studies* is an "Australian production"—more or less. Most of the authors are Australian, but those who aren't either work in Australia or presented their papers at a Griffith University conference on "Problem Solving For Crime Prevention," held in August 1994. However, despite its origins in the Antipodes, the book is in no sense parochial, limited in scope to Australian problems or case studies. On the contrary, it has been exciting as an editor to help shape a volume that is perhaps more "universal" and certainly more theoretical than its predecessors in this series, raising fundamental questions about the nature and politics of situational crime prevention wherever it is practiced. I would especially like to thank the series editor, Ron Clarke, for the opportunity to prepare this special issue, and for the many ways in which he has assisted in its production.

Given the theme of the Griffith University conference, it is not surprising that there is an emphasis on "problem solving" in the articles by Daniel Gilling, Peter Grabosky, and by Adam Sutton, all of whom made presentations. But it is instructive that these scholars have adopted a rather broad view of what problem solving entails. Indeed, the problem-solving motif grew as I put this volume together, becoming not only more expansive in terms of technical and theoretical issues, but also decisively more political than I had originally envisaged. The political dimension is actually crucial, and its detailed examination by several of the authors in this book is perhaps one of the main advantages of exploring situational prevention from an Australian perspective.

For situational crime prevention is contentious in the Australian context. Despite the impressive achievements of situational approaches in allied fields such as traffic safety and public health, and in crime prevention itself (e.g., Clarke, 1992), most Australian criminologists remain deeply suspicious of an orientation that is viewed as being wedded

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to a conservative crime control agenda emphasizing surveillance of marginalized groups and social exclusion (see, for example, the description of the conservative model of crime prevention in Rob White's chapter). As Adam Sutton comments in his chapter, these suspicions may not simply reflect Australian "sheer bloody-mindedness," but may point to limitations both in situational prevention as it is presently conceived and also in the presuppositions and theoretical orientations of criminologists raised in the tradition of sociological inquiry.

In my experience, advocates of situational approaches tend to be rather hurt by the criticisms of their work, even if they are not particularly surprised. After all, they protest, they are simply trying to make the world a better place for ordinary people—particularly the poor and marginalized, who are the most frequent victims of crime—by really doing something about the problem. They point to the apparently universal failure of "feel good" social improvement programs to make any difference in the crime rate, as well as to the disastrous consequences of a reliance on the criminal justice system through such policies as "three strikes and you're out," to which situational methods offer a genuine alternative (Homel, 1994). They highlight, moreover, the conspicuous successes of environmental, situational and regulatory approaches in fields like traffic safety and public health. Examples of the many successful situational and regulatory measures include seat-belt laws, design rules for vehicles, improved road engineering, randomized traffic law enforcement, needle exchange centers, "safe-sex" techniques emphasizing the use of condoms, better sewerage systems, and the universal provision of clean drinking water. They observe that most of these achievements arose from patient and systematic scientific research combined with broad political support for the ultimate objectives. It is maintained that if the same scientific, problem-solving, non-partisan approach were to be applied to our crime problems, spectacular improvements would be made in the quality of life for citizens who cannot now afford to live in safe suburbs or pay for expensive security systems.

Part of the difficulty with this response is, of course, that it could be said to be based on an oversimplified view of criminological science. As Daniel Gilling observes in his chapter, crime data do not speak for themselves but require interpretation, "... and in the act of interpretation a series of preconceived stereotypical notions about the nature of criminal victimization can come to the fore" (p. 15). These kinds of difficulties are usually not as great when one is analyzing concrete events like traffic

injuries, since there is a large degree of consensus about what the problem is and what should be measured. Perhaps more fundamentally, the very notion of "science" that is at the heart of the problem-solving paradigm is contested by sociological critics, who point out that processes like the breaking of a problem in a sequential fashion into "variables," and the attempt to quantify all aspects of a phenomenon, conceal implicit political decisions about how problems should be conceived and analyzed. For example, large-scale probability surveys of crime victimization, in contrast to more qualitative and local studies of victimization, may obscure crucial cultural and social differences in how crime is understood and experienced (Egger et al., 1995).

The problematic nature of the "crime problem" is, according to the critics, a major obstacle in the path of the potential user of "scientific" models of crime prevention. To develop another of Daniel Gilling's arguments, and echoing Gusfield's (1981) study of the culture of public problems, incidents involving private pain, even if they are quite common, only become a public problem if some societal institution is vested with the responsibility for doing something to stop the pain. In the case of crime, the "owners" of the problem are of course the police—who are viewed by the public and by themselves as being responsible for prevention—for reducing the pain of crime victimization. But this means that the police view of reality tends to prevail in problem definitions and in the strategies proposed as solutions, and that other institutions, like schools or big business, can be allowed to "disown" the problem. In theory, perhaps, a researcher can correct for the dominance of the police perspective in problem definition, but in my experience "on the ground," particularly in interagency projects, it is very likely that police will play a major role and be given a lot of the credit for project successes.

What happens "on the ground" in implementation, and how politics and social power enter into all aspects of the prevention process, is a major theme of five of the papers in this volume (Gilling, Grabosky, Sutton, White, and Walters). Peter Grabosky's chapter describes in entertaining detail the many ways in which crime prevention can fail to work, or even increase the crime rate, because the program "engineers" are often "... insufficiently aware of the wider social ecology, the complex, interdependent systems of social life in which the target behavior resides" (p. 13). Grabosky emphasizes such factors as *escalation* (for example, physical barriers may invite defacing), *creative adaptation* (entrepreneurial criminals stay "one step ahead of the law"), and *perverse incentives* ("toys-for-

guns" programs may inadvertently subsidize firearms manufacturers). Grabosky's main argument is that even successful prevention initiatives may cause "collateral harm," and that risk analyses should automatically be included in the planning process. Rigorous policy analysis should be an essential ingredient of crime prevention, and there is, in his words, "a role for institutionalized skepticism" (p. 18).

Reading Reece Walters's chapter on multi-agency crime prevention, it seems that nowhere were skeptics more badly needed than in South Australia when that state embarked in 1989 on the nation's first coordinated community-based crime prevention program. Adam Sutton, who was appointed program head for a period, sounded some appropriate warnings at the beginning when he pointed out that interagency coordination could easily founder on the shoals of competing agency philosophies and struggles over "territory," and that the proposed mixture of situational and social programs would be difficult to manage and evaluate (Sutton, 1991). The most striking aspect of Walters's article is his description of the political confusion that surrounded the program, especially through the operations of the "Coalition Against Crime," a group of 50 politicians, senior public servants and businesspeople who were supposed to instigate interagency involvement and oversee departmental expenditures. Walters wryly observes that two years after the government had launched its crime prevention policy, the coalition was still trying to understand and operationalize the policy using butcher's paper and professional facilitators! The results at the local level were often chaotic, with particularly damaging outcomes for Aboriginal communities. According to Walters, interagency programs need not necessarily fail, but must have specific and measurable goals and be carefully managed to resolve the inevitable political problems.

The essentially political nature of prevention, and the inherent tension between social and situational approaches, are also themes of Adam Sutton's highly readable account of what happens when criminology students (including police and other criminal justice practitioners) are required to design and evaluate a crime prevention intervention. Sutton observes that there is a deep-seated belief among most criminologists and criminology students that the origins of crime are caused by phenomena like economic and cultural dislocations, racism, and gender-based power imbalances, and that any program that does not aim to challenge and transform such systems is just "tinkering at the edges." His main point, however, is that groups who, for pragmatic reasons, opt for situational

prevention soon discover the often immense political obstacles involved even in identifying problems, let alone implementing an intervention. As Sutton puts it, "... because crime prevention is about identifying difficulties and trying to bring about change, even the most technical and apparently 'neutral' approaches can prove unsettling to established interests" (p. 13).

The political differences within criminology are thrown into sharp relief by Rob White, who proposes three models of crime prevention: *the conservative model*, which emphasizes crime control, opportunity reduction and rational choice, and tends to focus on protection, surveillance, and conventional street crime; *the liberal model* which sees crime as a social problem caused by individual or social pathology and focuses on correcting deficits and improving opportunities; and *the radical model*, whose key concept is social justice with a consequent emphasis on the need for political struggle and social change, especially with respect to the crimes of the powerful and the social system that fosters them. White emphasizes that these models are one-sided and exaggerated (political conservatives, for example, may be very concerned about "crime in the suites" as well as "crime in the streets"), but argues that they do reflect broad tendencies at the practical and policy level. His main point is that specific crime prevention strategies are not exclusively the product of any one model, but "how certain measures affect different groups of people depends very much on how they are implemented and the political basis for their particular implementation" (p. 10). Surveillance techniques, for example, could be used by radicals and conservatives alike, but the social content of the practices would be very different.

The authors in this volume who emphasize the inherently political nature of situational prevention present a challenge to advocates of situational approaches that has yet to be answered comprehensively. In some recent work, Ron Clarke and I (Clarke and Homel, 1996) did not undertake this task directly, but perhaps did something that is a necessary first step: we attempted to move situational prevention from an almost exclusive preoccupation with the physical environment to consider aspects of the psychological and social environments. Central to our analysis was the attempt to identify and classify techniques of prevention that blunt the effects of the kinds of "moral neutralization techniques" described many years ago by Sykes and Matza (1957) in their study of delinquency, and more recently by Bandura (1977) in his social learning analysis of aggression. We also relabeled the three columns of the original classifica-

tion to emphasize the perceptual basis of the situational approach, and to bring it more explicitly into line with the rational choice perspective.

Our rather cautious attempt to overcome some of the limitations, as we saw them, in conventional situational prevention thinking met with two main responses from our colleagues, even before the paper was published: they either loathed it or they loved it. Richard Wortley's chapter is a creative attempt to move beyond such polarized positions, by separating more clearly measures designed to manipulate internal controls (guilt) from those designed to manipulate social controls (shame). Wortley proposes a reorganization of the "guilt-inducing" approach to include such measures as *increasing victim worth*—e.g., victim cooperation strategies—(see Indermaur's chapter in this volume), and the addition of a range of measures to increase social controls, such as *reducing social approval* (e.g., the non-televising of "streaking") and *reducing imitation* (e.g., discrediting models that encourage crime).

Wortley's paper brings situational prevention even more closely into line with the deterrence literature (e.g., Grasmick and Bursik, 1990) and also with the rational choice perspective (Cornish and Clarke, 1986), and is clearly a significant theoretical advance, even if one is left with the feeling that every one of his eight new techniques deserves a paper of its own. Whether or not one agrees with every detail of Wortley's chapter (or of Clarke and Homel's), a major advantage of incorporating aspects of the non-physical environment into situational analysis is that one has at one's disposal a wider repertoire of techniques that can help to resolve some of the political impasses faced by prevention workers who, under present circumstances, often have to choose between distasteful "fortress society" techniques and social prevention programs of doubtful effectiveness.

Two empirical studies conclude this volume. Each study is of the decision-making processes of violent offenders (robbers or burglars), and each illustrates the value for prevention research of analyzing crime events from the offender's (and the victim's) perspective. The studies therefore illustrate the approach advocated by Clarke and Homel (1996), who propose an emphasis on *perceived effort*, *perceived risk*, and *anticipated rewards*.

Based on his analysis of 88 offenders and 10 victims involved in robbery and property crime in Western Australia, David Indermaur concludes that offenders are principally concerned with "getting the goods and getting away," and that in general the best way of preventing violence during the course of a crime is to make it more attractive to the offender to avoid

confrontation or to flee the scene as quickly as possible. In particular, often the most effective strategy is for the victim not to offer resistance and even to facilitate the offender's escape. The basis of this controversial advice is the finding that offenders often feel angry with the victim for not conforming to the "victim role." Non-resistance or cooperation may be one way of "increasing the victim's worth," in Wortley's terms. Indermaur's fascinating analysis illustrates the value for prevention research of integrating offender and victim perspectives, where it can be done. It also has important implications for social policy, suggesting that moves in some places to encourage homeowners and business proprietors to protect themselves with firearms may not deter offenders, but instead increase the number of violent encounters.

Shona Morrison's chapter on the decision-making practices of commercial armed robbers is based on a study of 88 offenders incarcerated in the U.K. This is the same number interviewed by David Indermaur in Western Australia, but the interview data are supplemented by police records of over 1,000 cases occurring in London in 1990. The paper is notable for its methodological rigor, and particularly for the thoughtful section on the validity of offenders' accounts of their decision making. A notable finding of the study is the degree of *rationality* that is evident when offenders' own interpretations of their actions are thoroughly investigated. Among the many important details are that serious repeat offenders are often satisfied with stealing small sums, and that the offenders in general had quite realistic ideas concerning what they were likely to gain from a robbery and what the risks of apprehension were.

Although it is important to remember that no information from the study was available about potential offenders who are deterred by existing prevention measures, Morrison's analysis suggests that there are no simple ways of reducing offenses committed by offenders who have embarked on robbery as a central element of an active criminal career. She suggests that further target-hardening and other situational measures may be the best avenue to pursue. But she also hints, intriguingly, that in the long term more may be gained by exploring questions such as how people develop a readiness to offend, and how they get their information about robbery as a crime. Morrison implies that effective prevention may involve social or developmental programs (Farrington, 1995), as well as situational measures. But perhaps a broader view of situational prevention, along the lines proposed by Ron Clarke and myself and by Richard

Wortley, would also suggest practical and more immediate ways of manipulating the psychological or social environments of these offenders.

This volume will have achieved the objectives set for it if it stimulates more creative thinking about situational prevention, and sensitizes both advocates and critics to its inherently political nature. In particular, it is my hope that in place of the present standoff between adherents of situational and social approaches we may see creative dialogue and the development of better theories to underpin the practice of prevention.

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