RECONSIDERING THE ROLE OF OPPORTUNITY IN SITUATIONAL CRIME

PREVENTION

Richard Wortley

Griffith University

Brisbane 4111

Australia

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the way the concept of opportunity has been often portrayed in the situational prevention literature is limiting and does not convey fully the sense that situations might actively encourage criminal behavior. Four ways that situations can facilitate crime are suggested: situations can present cues which prompt the individual to perform criminal behavior, they can exert social pressure on an individual to offend, they can induce disinhibition and permit potential offenders to commit illegal acts which they would otherwise not perform, and they can produce emotional arousal which provokes a criminal response. It is argued that these psychological phenomena are qualitatively different from situational decision making processes upon which prevention strategies are usually based. They invariably occur prior to any cost-benefit analysis and may be seen as 'readying' the individual to elect a criminal response. It is further contended that this broader view of the role of situations provides a better conceptual basis for moving beyond target-hardening prevention strategies, and in doing so, may also help in the task of 'selling' the situational crime prevention model.

The term opportunity-reduction is commonly used to describe succinctly situational crime prevention and to differentiate clearly situational techniques from other crime prevention approaches which aim to improve social institutions or alter criminal dispositions (Clarke, 1992, 1995). The rational choice perspective on crime, upon which the situational prevention model is based, portrays offenders as active decision makers who undertake cost-benefit analyses of presenting crime opportunities. Opportunities may be created by the offender, may be sought out, or may simply be taken as they fortuitously occur. Whichever is the case, situational prevention involves increasing the risks, increasing the effort or reducing the rewards associated with the crime opportunity such that the perceived costs of offending are judged to outweigh the perceived gains.

The prominence given to the role of opportunity in rational choice and situational prevention is justified by a broader theoretical perspective on behavior which emphasises the crucial role of the person-situation interaction (Mischel, 1968). Rational choice theorists have drawn upon the extensive psychological literature which challenges the traditional view of personality as a cross-situationally and longitudinally enduring predisposition (Clarke, 1992; Cornish and Clarke, 1986). Most modern psychological theories now acknowledge to a greater or lesser extent that behavior is relatively variable and shaped by the context in which it occurs. A person who may be described as aggressive, for example, does not behave uniformly in an aggressive manner. Rather, aggression is displayed occasionally and only when certain favorable conditions are met.

The argument of this paper is that the use of the term opportunity-reduction to describe situational prevention is limiting and does not capture fully the complexity of the person-

situation interaction as it is understood in psychology and as it is acknowledged in a more complete reading of the rational choice perspective. 'Opportunity' implies only that certain situational factors make it easy for the individual to follow a course of action that will deliver benefits. This paper reviews the ways situational influences on behavior have been conceptualised in psychology. This examination suggests that in many cases, situations are important not because they provide information about the likely outcome of a behavior (which is the basis of opportunity-reduction) but because they psychologically 'ready' the individual to respond in a certain way. That is, whereas the term opportunity-reduction assumes the existence of a motivated offender who, at the very least, is ready to give in to criminal temptations, a number of psychological theories emphasise the role of situations in promoting the inclination to commit crime. Situations, then, are broader than opportunities in the usual use of that word. The term opportunity-reduction, it is argued, has encouraged an undue focus on target hardening techniques by both practitioners and critics, and has contributed to the restricted appeal of the situational approach.

Four ways that situations might actively encourage criminal responses are suggested. Situations can present cues which prompt the individual to perform criminal behavior, they can exert social pressure on an individual to offend, they can induce disinhibition and permit potential offenders to commit illegal acts which they would otherwise not perform, and they can produce emotional arousal which provokes a criminal response.

SITUATIONS THAT PROMPT

The idea that situations cue, or prompt, behavior to occur is an integral but often neglected component of learning theory. Learning theory, of course, has always regarded the environment as the prime determinant of behaviour. However, in discussing learning explanations of crime, criminology texts have typically focused on the role of historical rather than immediate situational environments. That is, most attention has been given to the way in which behavioural patterns and habits are acquired. In effect, learning theory has been treated little differently from personality theories. The impression often conveyed is that individuals learn criminal habits which are internalised and then displayed in a more or less consistent manner. Changing criminal behaviour has been seen to involve for each individual offender the elimination of maladaptive behavioural patterns and the learning of new adaptive ones. Yet, the immediate environment is crucial within the learning paradigm. When Pavlov conditioned his dogs to salivate at the sound of a bell, he not only demonstrated that reflex behaviour could be learned, but that performance of such behaviour was situationally dependent. The surest way to prevent the dogs from salivating was to avoid ringing a bell.

There are three principal kinds of behavioral cues -- eliciting stimuli, discriminative stimuli and models. Eliciting stimuli are established through classical conditioning and evoke reflex or respondent behaviours (i.e., behaviors which are passive, automatic reactions to a situation). The bell which caused the dogs in Pavlov's study to salivate is an example of an eliciting stimulus. There are many everyday examples where particular environmental conditions become associated with predictable physiological or behavioural responses -- viewing erotic images produces sexual arousal, the sight of blood makes many people feel nauseous, a coffee-break

becomes a signal for many smokers to light a cigarette, and so forth. The technique of eliminating from the immediate environment eliciting stimuli which instigate undesirable behaviour is widely used in clinical psychology. For example, a person trying to keep to a diet might be instructed to ensure that all food is put away in cupboards and not left out in view where it is likely to prompt feelings of hunger. Similarly, treatment for sex offenders often involves ensuring that offenders avoid situations which may set in chain a reoffending cycle -- pedophiles should not take jobs which involve contact with children, exhibitionists should avoid driving to work on routes which take them past favoured offending sites, and so forth.

Discriminative stimuli are established through operant conditioning and signal the likely consequence of a particular behaviour. By indicating imminent rewards and punishments, discriminative stimuli are guides for future action and so initiate instrumental behaviours (i.e., behaviours which are goal-directed and involve the person acting upon on the environment). Depending upon the nature of the likely outcome, behaviour will be pursued or avoided. For example, a green traffic light signals to a driver that he/she may proceed safely through an intersection; observing a police officer in the rear-view mirror signals that the driver will nevertheless need to take care not to speed when doing so. Based on this principle, behavioral prompts may be introduced into an environment to indicate that certain behaviours are now appropriate. For example, strategically placed litter bins prompt people not to litter. Symbolic territorial boundary markers (low fences, shrubs, personal items etc) are signals not to trespass.

Models are described in social learning theory and induce imitation. For example, children who observe a model engaging in aggressive play are likely themselves to also play aggressively,

particularly if the model is seen to receive a reward (Bandura, 1965). Modelling effects are also particularly powerful if the model is of high status or is respected by the observer. For example, Lefkowitz, Blake and Mouton (1955) demonstrated that a pedestrian crossing the street against a red light will readily prompt others to follow. Imitation was greater when the model had the appearance of a well-dressed businessman than when the model was poorly dressed. Controlling modelling effects by increasing exposure to prosocial models or reducing the exposure to undesirable models is a popular method of attempting to influence behaviour. Parents screen their children's associates in a common-sense attempt to manage modelling influences. Conveniently, models do not have to appear in person but can be represented symbolically through film, videotape and other media. Advertisers use celebrities to endorse products in the hope that the public will be induced to imitate the celebrities and also use the product. A similar hope underpins public education campaigns (litter reduction, anti-smoking, seat-belt wearing and the like) which enlist the aid of sporting personalities and the like. The elimination of undesirable modelling influences is the rationale for restricting or censoring media portrayals of pornography and violence (Lab, 1983).

It is important to stress that stimulus control strategies involve more than simply minimising the possibilities for an individual to perform a behavior but are fundamentally involved in managing their propensity to behave in a certain way. For example, learning theory suggests that potential sex offenders may not experience the impulse to commit their preferred sex offense until the appropriate antecedent conditions are in place. Thus, keeping pedophiles away from children not only limits their physical opportunity to offend but helps them keep their sexual desires in check.

Human beings are social animals whose behaviour is shaped by their interactions and affiliations with other members of the species. Social influences have a crucial role in the development of an individual's core attitudes, beliefs and values. Moreover, a great deal of behaviour is governed by immediate social settings. In particular, social forces can pressure individuals to conform to and obey the expectations demanded of them by others.

Conformity refers to the tendency for individuals in groups to adopt group norms and standards of behaviour, even when these contradict personally held beliefs and values. Asch (1955) provided the classic laboratory demonstration of social conformity. Subjects were shown a card on which were drawn three lines of obviously different lengths. They were shown another card on which was drawn a single line equal in length to one of the three lines. Subjects were required to identify the matching line. However, each subject had to announce their judgements in a room of 7-9 confederate subjects all of whom first publicly gave the wrong answer. Asch found up to 78% conformity with the obviously incorrect response. Asch further found that conformity levels dropped (though were still apparent) when subjects were permitted to write their answers rather than announce them to the group. Thus, it seems that conformity involves two considerations. Some conformity occurs because of informational social influence. Individuals refer to the group for guidelines for correct behavior. Conformity also occurs as a result of normative social influence. In this case, individuals accede to group pressure in order to avoid disapproval and to gain acceptance.

The prison environment provides a good example of the power of conformity to induce antisocial and pathological behavior. Classic sociological descriptions of prison life emphasise the division between prisoners and guards and the formation within the prison walls of two separate societies, each demanding adherence from their members to informal social rules and expectations (Clemmer, 1958; Goffman, 1961; Sykes, 1958). The best known empirical study of prison social dynamics is the Stanford prison experiment (Zimbardo, 1973). This research involved the creation of a simulated prison in the basement of Stanford University. Male college student volunteers were recruited to play the parts of prisoners and guards. Zimbardo found that shortly into the experiment both groups began displaying pathological behaviours -- the prisoners became servile and showed signs of psychological distress while many guards became brutal and authoritarian. The researchers explained these results by suggesting that both groups adopted the explicit and implicit social norms associated with their assigned roles. They further argued that conformity to these roles was supported by practices and conditions found in most prisons -- the guards' uniform intensified their sense of power and collective identity; the inmates' uniform in contrast was humiliating and dehumanising; the use of numbers rather than names stripped away personal identity; the dependency of inmates on guards for daily needs was emasculating and promoted helplessness.

Obedience is the following of a direct command issued by someone perceived to possess legitimate authority. While some degree of obedience is essential to the smooth running of society, psychologists have been interested in the tendency for individuals to comply with unreasonable commands and to perpetrate all manner of cruelty in the process of following orders. The tendency for people to obey the orders of an authority figure was demonstrated

empirically in a series of studies conducted by Stanley Milgram (1974). In the prototype study, a confederate subject was strapped into what was portrayed as an electric chair. In an adjoining room a naive subject was placed before an impressive-looking but phoney 'shock generator'. The subject was told that the purpose of the experiment was to examine the effects of punishment on learning. The confederate deliberately gave incorrect responses to questions upon which the subject was instructed to administer 'electric shocks' as punishment. Despite the confederate screaming and begging in apparent agony, almost two-thirds of the subjects continued with the experiment and administered the maximum 'shock' levels.

In subsequent studies, Milgram (1974) found that the pressure on subjects to obey could be manipulated in a number of ways. He found that obedience varied with the psychological closeness between the subject and the victim. For example, if the subject was moved next to the victim, obedience decreased. On the other hand, if the victim remained silent, obedience increased. Obedience also varied according to the authority conveyed by the experimenter. When the experimenter stood beside the subject he exerted more influence and was more likely to be obeyed.

The most commonly cited real-world example of the potency of obedience effects is the routine, brutal treatment of Jews by Nazi soldiers and concentration camps guards in World War II is. Milgram hypothesised that obedience to authority in such circumstances is related to broader cultural values and social expectations. He suggested that many societies overvalue obedience and provide insufficient models for the appropriate defiance of orders. Individuals obey unreasonable commands because of a preoccupation with the administrative rather than moral

component of their job and through a sense of loyalty and duty to their organisation. When brutal orders are carried out, Milgram argued, 'typically we do not find a heroic figure struggling with conscience, nor a pathologically aggressive man ruthlessly exploiting a position of power, but a functionary who has been given a job to do and who strives to create an impression of competence in his work' (1974, p. 187).

SITUATIONS THAT PERMIT

Some situations permit individuals to engage in normally proscribed behavior by inducing disinhibition and interfering with the individual's ability to attend to the consequences of their actions. Disinhibition is usually associated with drug-induced states. However, social circumstances -- notably deindividuating conditions -- may also cause disinhibiting effects.

Deindividuation refers to the reduced self-awareness most commonly produced by crowd membership (Diener, 1980; Prentice-Dunn & Rogers, 1989; Zimbardo, 1970). Deindividuation is seen to involve interference with two levels of self-awareness (Prentice-Dunn & Rogers, 1989). Public self-awareness refers to the recognition of oneself as a social object. As a member of a crowd, an individual is afforded a degree of anonymity and becomes less concerned with the opinions and possible censure of others. At this level of deindividuation, people may be aware of what they are doing but have a reduced expectation of suffering any negative consequences. Private self-awareness refers to the ability to focus on one's own thoughts, feelings and values. As individuals become immersed in a group they submerge their identities and experience a decreased ability to self-monitor their behaviour. In this state they are particularly sensitive to situational cues and permit themselves to engage in behaviour which they ordinarily would not

perform. At this level of deindividuation, the individual's capacity for self-regulation is fundamentally impaired.

Early research on deindividuation focused largely on the role of public self-awareness. In one study, Zimbardo (1970) abandoned a car in New York and another in Palo Alto (population about 55,000). He found that the car in New York was quickly stripped by looters of all valuable parts while the car in Palo Alto was left untouched. Zimbardo argued that the behaviour of New Yorkers could be explained by the anonymity they felt living in a large city and the relative freedom from social and legal repercussions such anonymity provided. Zimbardo (1973) also partly explained the results of the Stanford prison experiment, described earlier, in terms of deindividuation. The guards' uniforms, which included reflecting sun-glasses, provided a disguise for their wearers which helped screen their identity and promote a sense of anonymity.

The role of private self-awareness has been the focus of more recent research. In a variation of Milgram's (1974) experimental design, Prentice-Dunn and colleagues (Prentice-Dunn & Rogers, 1980; Prentice-Dunn & Rogers, 1982; Prentice-Dunn & Spivey, 1986) examined the administration of 'shocks' by small groups of subjects. Private self-awareness was manipulated by varying subjects' levels of physiological arousal and sense of group cohesiveness. The researchers found that subjects in the deindividuated condition (high group cohesiveness and high arousal) delivered longer and more intense shocks to victims than subjects in the non-deindividuated condition (low group cohesiveness and low arousal). In its extreme form, deindividuation based on impaired private self-awareness is exemplified by the herd mentality and frenzied behaviour displayed by members of a 'lynch-mob' (Colman, 1991).

SITUATIONS THAT PROVOKE

Situations can also provoke crimes by engendering aversive emotional arousal which the individual must somehow dissipate, usually with some form of aggressive response. Two theoretical perspectives based on this general principle are the frustration-aggression hypothesis and the environmental stress model.

The frustration-aggression hypothesis was first proposed by Dollard et al (1939). Frustration was defined as the emotional state produced when an individual is thwarted in their pursuit of goal-directed behaviour. It was argued that frustration was the direct and inevitable cause of aggression. According to Dollard et al, when an animal -- including the human animal -- is prevented from performing behaviour which has previously delivered rewards, the animal automatically experiences an increased level of physiological arousal. The animal is then driven to reduce the unpleasant effects of this arousal and does so by responding with some form of aggressive behaviour (snarling, scratching, biting etc.). The subsequent reduction in arousal in turn reinforces the aggression. In similar future situations the animal will resort to the same response in an attempt to alleviate the feeling of frustration. If the animal is placed in a situation of extreme frustration, its aggressive behaviour will become even more vigorous.

There have been a number of challenges and refinements to Dollard et al's original theory. In particular, the idea that there is an invariable relationship between frustration and aggression has been largely dismissed. Frustration does not always produce aggression. Some people respond to frustration by productively striving to overcome the frustrating situation, while others simply

become resigned to defeat. Similarly, aggression is not always caused by frustration. Bandura (1977) pointed out that frustration is just one of a number of events which people experience as aversive. Verbal threats and insults, physical assaults, painful treatment, failure experiences, and delay or deprivation of rewards can all increase emotional arousal and provoke aggressive responses.

In a reformulation of the frustration-aggression hypothesis to bring it into line with social learning theory, Berkowitz (1969, 1989) argued that experiencing frustration prepares an individual to behave aggressively but does not necessarily guarantee aggression. The precise form the response to frustration takes depends upon an individual's learning history, cognitive interpretation of the event, and the availability of relevant behavioral cues. With respect to the last of these conditions, Berkowitz (1983) found that the mere presence in the immediate environment of a firearm increases the probability of aggression. Berkowitz hypothesised that, through their repeated association with violence, firearms (and similar symbols of aggression) become eliciting stimuli which conjure aggressive images and moods and facilitate overt aggression.

The environmental stress model is the dominant theoretical perspective in the field of environmental psychology. Environmental psychology is 'the study of the interrelationship between behavior and experience and the built and natural environment' (Bell et al, 1990, p. 7). Thus, environmental psychologists are concerned with the psychological effects of geographic and climactic variables such as temperature, sunshine, wind and humidity, and of the unintended consequences of the products of urbanisation including high-density living, workplace noise,

lighting and interior design. According to the environmental stress model, many factors in the

environment influence behaviour because of their aversive nature and the threat they pose to

human well-being (Baum, Singer & Baum, 1981; Evans & Cohen, 1987; Lazarus & Folkman,

1984; Veitch & Arkelin, 1995). Taken individually, these environmental stressors may represent

little more than background irritation. However, collectively and accumulatively, ambient

noxious stimulation may seriously affect psychological functioning. Stress reactions represent

the organisms attempt to manage or adapt to aversive conditions and events (the so-called fight

or flight response). Responses to environmental stressors may be physiological (e.g., arousal,

increased adrenaline activity, physical illness), emotional (e.g., irritability, anxiety, depression)

and behavioural (e.g., aggression, withdrawal, suicide). Brief discussion of two environmental

dimensions -- climate and crowding -- will illustrate the potential role of environmental stress in

provoking criminal behavior.

The idea that climate influences behavior dates back at least to the ancient Greeks and Romans

(Sommers & Moos, 1976). A number of studies have reported a correlation between temperature

and violent crime (Anderson, 1987; Cotton, 1986; Harries and Stadler, 1988). Goranson and

King (1970) showed that riots were more likely to occur during heat waves. Banzinger and

Owens (1978) found a correlation between wind speed and delinquency. Rosenthal, Sack, Gillen

et al (1984) found that depression was associated with reduced exposure to sunlight in winter. An

extension of natural climate research has been the study of artificial indoor climates. Laboratory

studies suggest that as the temperature moves outside an individual's comfort zone there is

deterioration on a number of performance variables (vigilance, memory, cognitive tasks etc.)

(Fine & Kobrick, 1987; Riley & Cochran, 1984). With respect to social behaviour, curvilinear

relationships have been found between temperature and aggression (Baron & Bell, 1975; Bell & Baron, 1977; Palamerek & Rule, 1979). It seems that moderately warm and moderately cool temperatures increase antisocial behaviours but extremely hot and extremely cold temperatures reduce them. Aggression, then, is facilitated within critical temperature bands. One explanation for this finding is that while people become more irritable when the temperature is uncomfortable, at some point heat has a debilitating effect while cold reduces arousal.

Crowding research is concerned with the psychological consequences of high density conditions. The effects of being crowded are distinguished from the deindividuating effects, described earlier, of being a member of a crowd. Much of the direct evidence for the deleterious effects of crowding has come from animal research. In both natural and experimentally manipulated environments, many animal species have been found to have a critical upper threshold for population concentration. In perhaps the best known study, Calhoun (1962) examined the behaviour of rats confined to a fixed-sized environment but otherwise provided with unlimited resources (food, water and nesting material). As the rat population increased, Calhoun found that social order disintegrated and a multitude of physiological and behavioural pathologies developed (abortions, infant mortality, desertion of young, aggression, cannibalism, tumours). Such research has been linked to correlational studies in humans which show that urban population density is associated with increased crime rates (Galle, Gove & McPherson, 1972; Gove, Hughs & Galle, 1977), mental hospital admissions (Galle, Gove & McPherson, 1972) and physical illness (Levy & Hertog, 1974; Schmitt, 1966). Findings of physical, psychological and behavioural problems have been also reported in field studies of specific crowded settings such as prisons (Cox, Paulus & McCain, 1984; Paulus, 1988), college dormitories (Baum & Vallis,

1977), night-clubs (Macintyre & Homel, 1996; Ramsay, 1986) and naval ships (Dean, Pugh & Gunderson, 1978)

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The situations discussed in this paper go beyond the concept of opportunity as it is usually employed in the situational crime prevention literature. Situations are conceived to not just enable crime to occur, but to play an active role in psychologically readying the individual to offend. Criminal motivations and dispositions have been shown to be dynamic and fundamentally dependent upon immediate circumstances. The research by Berkowitz (1983), for example, suggests that the availability of a gun does not just provide a convenient means of expressing aggression; its presence may actually incite feelings of aggression to occur.

The term 'readying' (rather than a more prescriptive term such as 'triggering' or 'instigating') has been used advisedly to describe the proposed role of these additional situational factors. The phenomena outlined in this paper can be explained by a variety of theoretical perspectives. Some theorists would undoubtedly support the use of a stronger term to describe the relationship between situations and behavior. 'Radical' learning theorists, for example, see eliciting and discriminative stimuli as absolutely determining action without recourse to any contemplative deliberation. On the other hand, social learning theorists allow a role for mediating cognitive processes. On the grounds that rational choice perspective is intended as an eclectic framework rather than a rigorous theoretical model, readying is preferred as a more inclusive term. It is suggested that readying events occur prior to cost-benefit analysis and may significantly affect that analysis, but do not necessarily determine the behavioral outcome. Individuals, then, do not

approach crime opportunities as equals. The decisions and choices of the highly deindividuated person or of the extremely frustrated individual are of a different -- and inferior -- quality to those of individuals not so affected. Conceived of in this way, situationally-induced preparedness to commit crime poses no threat to the essential integrity of the rational choice perspective. The central tenet of rational choice -- that crime is purposive and offenders seek to maximise their gains as they see them -- need not be disturbed.

In fact, the psychological processes reviewed in this paper are not new to rational choice theorists. To a large extent, the descriptions of the situations which ready the individual to offend simply make more explicit a perspective which has always been important in the theorising about rational choice and situational prevention. The observation that behavior is in a dynamic relationship with the environment was the starting point for Cornish and Clarke (1986). Right from the start, too, they recognised that situations impose limits on offender rationality. The definition offered for rational choice is highly qualified. As they saw it, 'offenders seek to benefit themselves by their criminal behavior; that this involves the making of decisions and choices, however rudimentary these choices may be; and that these processes, constrained as they are by time, the offender's cognitive abilities, and by the availability of relevant information, exhibit limited rather than normative rationality' (Cornish & Clarke, 1987: p. 933).

The problem is, this fuller sense of the role of situations has been submerged in subsequent descriptions, applications and critiques of the situational crime prevention model. To the extent to which psychological readying has been acknowledged, it has been treated as an integral component of the decision making process. Certainly, the current classification of situational

techniques (Clarke & Homel, 1996) includes techniques which address some of the factors mentioned in this paper. 'Controlling facilitators' (located under 'increasing perceived effort'), 'reducing temptation' (under 'reducing perceived rewards') and 'controlling disinhibitors' (under 'inducing guilt and shame') all convey something of the concept of limited rationality imposed by prior situational conditions. However, it is debatable how well these techniques are accommodated in this classification. For example, 'controlling facilitators' is not really the same as 'increasing perceived effort' (the crime prevention category under which it is currently classified). The former is to do with preparedness and the latter to do with outcomes. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, there is a case for restructuring the current classification of situational techniques to give explicit recognition to readying processes.

Moreover, the adoption of the term opportunity-reduction has diverted attention away from this wider perspective on the role of situations. At a conceptual level, a crime prevention model based solely around opportunity-reduction perpetuates, in its own way, a person-centred view of crime not much different from the view of offenders expressed in dispositional theories. Dispositional theorists portray the tendency to offend as essentially fixed. Offenders have criminal motivations and the solution to crime is to fundamentally alter the personality, attitudes and values of those who offend. From this perspective, manipulation of situational variables is viewed as having an inconsequential effect on 'deep-seated' criminal motivations. In a similar way, a narrow focus on opportunity-reduction implicitly accepts a static model of criminal disposition. It assumes the existence of a motivated, or at least ambivalent, potential offender who must be deflected from his intended course of action. This view gives insufficient recognition of the power of situations to affect individuals in ways in which they may not be

fully aware or over which they have limited control. That is, there is no sense conveyed that the inclination to commit crime is itself under situational influence.

A practical danger of this view is an over-reliance on target-hardening techniques. Opportunity-reduction defines the task of crime prevention in terms of blocking crime avenues so provides little encouragement for practitioners to think divergently. This paper has suggested a number of situational crime prevention approaches apart from making criminal behavior physically more difficult to pursue (e.g., reducing chances of conformity, preventing imitation, etc). This is not to say that these approaches have been completely ignored in situational prevention to date. In particular, recent theorising on the role of guilt and shame in situational prevention has suggested a number of similar techniques (Clarke & Homel, 1996; Wortley, 1996). It may be, then, that at the end of the day the value of this broader interpretation of the role of situations is largely in terms of improved conceptual clarity and shifting emphasis rather than a dramatic expansion of prevention strategies.

For critics of the situational model, the term opportunity-reduction has allowed the creation of a 'straw man' and made the approach an easy target on two counts. First, critics have been able more easily to argue against situational prevention on social and ethical grounds. They have implied that situational prevention equals opportunity-reduction, that opportunity-reduction equals target hardening, and that target hardening equals social control (Bottoms, 1990; Bottoms, Hay and Sparks, 1995; Weiss, 1987). They have been able to paint an apocalyptic vision of the target-hardened society constrained and divided by locks, bars, surveillance cameras and security

guards. While counter views have been forcefully argued (Clarke, 1992) this impression of situational prevention is prominent in the literature.

Second, critics have been able to argue that reducing opportunities displaces crime but does not prevent it. That is, it is suggested that altering the environment at one location will simply encourage the potential offender to seek out a more conducive location. Despite the accumulating evidence that fears of crime displacement are, to say the least, exaggerated (Clarke, 1992), the narrow opportunity-reduction model of situational prevention does not provide the most effective theoretical counter to this criticism. Indeed, for the motivated offender one rational response to being thwarted in a criminal endeavour *is* to try his luck somewhere else (with the only limitation that this new endeavour should not require too much effort). However, the notion that situations can help induce behavior, rather than just block it, better explains why displacement effects frequently do not occurred.

More generally, this expanded view of the role of situations does not just make better theoretical sense but makes better common sense as well. The essential problem for those promoting situational prevention is that the approach is based on a counterintuitive premise . The intuitive view is that human beings are the authors of their own behaviour. Even when someone's actions are unambiguously forced upon them by circumstances beyond their control, observers typically underestimate the role of these outside pressures and construct causal explanations which assume personal agency on the part of the actor (Jones, 1979; Ross, 1977). Fundamental attributional error, as this bias is called, is accompanied by an exaggerated belief in the stability of the personal characteristics of others and overconfidence that their behaviour is therefore relatively

constant from one situation to the next. In other words, most people start off as naive

dispositional theorists and need to be convinced to be otherwise. As long as they retain this

ingrained faith in personal control over behaviour situational prevention techniques will appear

superficial and misguided.

A fuller recognition of the role of situations presents a more intuitively appealing case for the

utility of situational prevention. Despite the ubiquity of fundamental attributional error, most

people, if they think for moment about their own behaviour, recognise that there is a great deal of

variability in the way that they act. They realise that they are neither always confident nor timid,

polite nor rude, or honest nor dishonest. Rather, they are aware that, as they move from one

situation to the next, how they behave depends upon where they are and who they are with. They

can usually recall times when they were induced by situational factors to perform behavior which

they did not seem able to stop or behavior which they later considered to be out of character. It

may be simply be their inability to stop eating a bowl of peanuts placed before them, or their

performance of some embarrassing act when part of a group. The point is this; the examples

people relate to are often about situations which affected their ability or inclination to control

their behavior rather than about situations involving their calculated exercise of control. A view

of potential offenders which sees their criminal 'tendencies' as fundamentally affected by

situational forces better conveys this dependency on the environment which we all experience at

one time or another.

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