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## The Offenders' Perspective on Prevention: Guarding Against Victimization and Law Enforcement

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Situational crime prevention strategies (SCP) by law-abiding citizens and government officials have come to the forefront of criminological inquiry since Cohen and Felson's (1979) routine activity approach and Cornish & Clarke's (1986) rational choice perspective were integrated under the theoretical umbrella known as the opportunity theories of crime (Felson & Clarke 1998). These theories share a common premise that the characteristics of a situation give rise to opportunities that cause crime; by blocking these opportunities, therefore, crime can be prevented (Eck 1998; Eck and Weisburd 1995; Felson & Clarke 1998; Welsh and Farrington 2009).

SCP was designed to offer various techniques for blocking crime opportunities by manipulating the specific situational characteristics that help generate such opportunities (Clarke 1980; Welsh and Farrington 2009). These techniques range from hardening crime targets by using locks, burglar-proofing or alarms, to extending guardianship by increasing surveillance and supervision. These actions increase the effort for offenders to commit crime and increase their risks of being detected (Clarke 1997). According to situational crime prevention and opportunity theories, therefore, these preventive actions serve to reduce crime opportunities by manipulating situational characteristics so that the costs are higher than the benefits of committing the criminal act; the offender is consequently discouraged from committing the crime (Felson & Clarke 1998).

In the criminal underworld, however, the function of situational prevention is more complex. Like non-criminals, offenders must guard themselves against victimization – including predation and retaliation by other offenders (Jacobs, 2000; Jacobs and Wright, 2006; Jacobs, Topalli and Wright, 2000; Topalli, Wright, and Fornango, 2002; Wright and Decker, 1994, 1997). In addition, and unlike the law-abiding population, criminals must also guard against law enforcement. To guard against law enforcement such as arrest, prosecution, or imprisonment, criminals implement strategies to block opportunities for government officials to control and punish crime (Adler 1993; Cooney 1998, 2009;

Goffman 2009; Goffman 1969; Jacobs 1996, 2010; Johnson and Natarajan 1995; Weisburd et al. 2006).

This paper explores situational prevention of both victimization and law enforcement from the offenders' perspective. It shows how offenders guard against victimization by employing situational crime prevention techniques, and will also illustrate how offenders use similar strategies to guard against law enforcement by police or other types of formal control. This contributes to criminology by building our understanding of crime prevention through an investigation of how offenders protect themselves and their property from victimization during risky criminal activities, while simultaneously increasing our knowledge of strategies that offenders use to evade law enforcement officials.

We begin with a review of the work in the traditions of situational crime prevention (Clarke 1980, 1997, 2008) and the offenders' perspective on crime (Sutherland 1937; Wright and Decker 1994, 1997), which provide us the groundwork for suggesting the offenders' perspective on situational prevention. We will then go on to describe the method and data employed in this paper, namely qualitative descriptions from middle- and lower-class drug dealers. These data will be used to illustrate various categories of situational techniques that protect against victimization and formal control. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications for understanding crime and crime prevention.

### **SITUATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION (SCP)**

SCP presents crime as a bounded rational choice made by an offender who evaluates the opportunities for it in a given situation (Clarke 1980; Clarke and Cornish 1985).<sup>1</sup> Thus, implicit within SCP is the notion of imperfect decision making by persons who weigh the overall utility – meaning relative costs and benefits – of crime versus others lines of action. Simply put, SCP is built on the

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<sup>1</sup> The rational and bounded aspects of offenders' decision making is discussed in detail in the "Discussion & Conclusion" section of this paper.

premise that the more rational opportunities exist for crime—i.e., the more a given situation facilitates a particular crime, and the greater its benefits compared to costs— the more likely are motivated offenders to commit crime. With this opportunity framework in mind, SCP is built on the core premise that opportunity plays a causal role in all types of crime—from burglary to drug dealing, robbery and sexual offenses (Felson & Clarke 1998; also see Welsh and Farrington 2009; Wilcox, Land, and Hunt 2003; Wilcox, Tillyer, and Fisher 2009).

Citing opportunity as a key causal factor in the occurrence of crime, SCP eliminates the traditional focus on criminal inclination and propensity in favor of concentrating on the more immediate physical conditions necessary for crime to occur. The focal point of SCP is on the setting in which crime occurs rather than on the criminal. It therefore assumes a likely offender to be a given, in that any individual may be an offender provided that the opportunity presents itself (Clarke 1997; Felson 1998). As such, SCP adheres to the principle that crime opportunities are space, time and situation specific, and largely generated from routine movements and activities (Clarke 1997). Accordingly, preventing crime requires that crime opportunities are blocked; without these opportunities, crime cannot occur. Opportunities and incentives to commit crime can then be reduced or eliminated through the manipulation of the crime setting.

## STRATEGIES & TECHNIQUES OF SCP

Clarke (2009) explains that the objective of SCP is to prevent the occurrence of crime events by creating unfavorable circumstances in which to commit crime (also see Cornish and Clarke 2003). This, he argues, can be achieved by using specific *strategies* designed to introduce “discrete managerial and environmental change” that help reduce crime opportunities (Clarke 1997:2). Each strategy of SCP corresponds with a set of techniques. *Techniques* are particular actions, or behaviors,

deduced from a strategy of crime prevention. Said differently, strategies are theories (abstract perspectives) about how to behave to achieve a given outcome, whereas techniques are specific actions deduced from a theory (empirical predictions). According to Clarke (2009:267), there are at least five broad strategies of opportunity reduction strategies, each of which has its own set of techniques.<sup>2</sup>

The first is increasing the effort required to commit crime. Techniques of this strategy include target hardening, controlling access to facilities, screening exits, deflecting offenders, and controlling tools of criminals such as weapons. In practice, this involves introducing manipulations such as tamper-proof packaging, electronic card access for buildings, ticketed access to parking lots and street closures.

A second strategy of SCP is increasing the risks of getting caught for offenders. Technique wise, this may include increased guardianship and assistance for guardians, reducing anonymity, using place managers, and strengthening formal surveillance. Thus to increase risks, SCP suggests improving street lighting, requiring taxi drivers to display IDs, and introducing CCTV or burglar alarms.

Reducing the rewards of crime is a third strategy of SCP. Techniques derived from this category include concealing or removing targets, indentifying property, disrupting markets, and denying rewards of crime. Examples of how to implement this strategy are the use of unmarked armored vehicles, women's shelters, property marking, licensed street vendors, and graffiti removal.

A fourth strategy of SCP is reducing the provocations that may lead to crime. This strategy's techniques are represented by reducing frustrations and stressors (e.g., being polite), avoiding disputes (e.g., separate seating for sports teams' fans), reducing temptation and arousal (e.g., prohibiting racist comments), neutralizing peer pressure (e.g., "It's Ok to say No"), and discouraging imitation (e.g., V-chips in televisions).

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<sup>2</sup> The techniques and example described below are taken from Cornish and Clarke (2003) and Clarke (2009:267).

Reducing excuses to commit crime is the fifth and final strategy of SCP. Techniques grouped under this form of SCP are setting rules, posting instructions, alerting, assisting compliance, and controlling drugs and alcohol. For instance, excuses may be reduced through ethics manuals, “No Parking” signs, signatures for customer declarations, public lavatories, and breathalyzers in bars.

In summary, there are different strategies—interpreted for the purposes of this paper as broad theories—and techniques—interpreted as specific actions—that may be used to prevent crimes. These include increasing the effort of and risks to offenders and also decreasing the rewards from, provocations to, and excuses for offending. The circumstances under which one strategy or technique is employed over another (or in combination with others) should depend on their costs and benefits. However, “the assessment must go beyond financial considerations and must include a variety of social and ethical costs, such as intrusiveness, unfairness, inconvenience, and discrimination” (Clarke 2009:266).

### **THE OFFENDERS’ PERSPECTIVE ON CRIME & PREVENTION**

The offenders’ perspective on crime is a method premised on the belief that important knowledge may be obtained from communicating with and observing offenders because (1) they have information about crime (2) that others, including police, do not have. Also, (3) changing the perspective from the law enforcer to the criminal – the hunter to the hunted – provides insights into the nuances of theories and how they may be altered to reach greater levels of generality, specificity, and validity in their predictions. If these three assumptions are true then research with offenders should provide its own unique insights into crime commission and its control – including the preventative kind (Bernasco 2010; Feeney 1986; Sutherland 1937; Wright and Decker 1994, 1997).

## THE OTHER SIDE OF PREVENTION

In an article that appeared in *Security Management*, Atlas (1991) reveals an irony of situational prevention techniques: they are also used by criminals to prevent law enforcement measures such as reports to police or arrests by them. He focuses on the theory of defensible space (Newman 1973), which has become a central pillar of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED). As defined above, this type of SCP falls under the strategy of increasing the risks for offenders.

Techniques of defensible space include manipulating the built environment in order to increase natural surveillance over residential spaces, and increase residents' territorial control over an area through the use of real and symbolic barriers to restrict access to an area. However, Atlas (1991) noted that criminals may use these defensible space techniques to create a safe place for them to commit their crimes. "For example, criminals ... survey others approaching the area ... provide a communications network to warn dealers of approaching police, and make improvements to the environment to slow down police entry and prevent drug thefts" (p. 2). These physical design manipulations included boarded or barred windows, reinforced doors, and peepholes. Social alterations included screening for friendly versus adversarial visitors (e.g., through the use of peepholes) and employing spotters. In this way, Atlas argues offenders use defensible space techniques to their advantage as a means of creating their own "offensible space".

Although Atlas may have been the first criminologist to note the parallels between situational crime prevention and the prevention techniques of offenders, he was not the first to examine how criminals take precautions to prevent law enforcement and victimization. For example, Sutherland's (1937) *The Professional Thief* discusses how offenders communicate with each other to provide and collect prevention-oriented information. To avoid victimization and find appropriate co-offenders, criminals may rely on information from their counterparts. "[E]ach professional thief is known

personally to a large proportion of the other thieves... Any thief may be appraised by those who know him, in a terse phrase, such as 'He is O.K.,' 'He is a no-good bastard,' or 'Never heard of him'" (p. 210). Similarly, offenders discuss the best and worst methods and places for offending without being caught and punished. They might say, "'Toledo is a good town,' 'The lunch hour is the best time to work that spot,' 'Look out for the red-haired saleslady—she is double-smart,' 'See Skid if you should get a tumble in Chicago,' 'Never grift on the way out'". These "and similar mandates and injunctions are transmitted from thief to thief until everyone in the profession knows them" (p. 210).

More recent research also examines offenders' preventative measures. Burglary is an obvious example of criminals weighing the relative risks of rewards (i.e., stolen items) and the risk of police detection or informal retaliation. One prevention technique of burglars is to break into the homes of associates after confirming their absence. As noted by an active burglar interviewed by Wright and Decker (1994), "I just try to [choose a target using] the people I know and got their phone numbers. 'Where you going? What you up to? You gonna leave? Who's at the house now?'... I can find out where they be at" (p. 64). Another tactic of predators is to refrain from stealing items that are easily identifiable. Jacobs (2000:113), for example, described a case where a robber decided not to steal "an expensive necklace from a prior victim for fear it would ultimately identify him."

The drug market literature is especially rich with descriptions of prevention techniques used by offenders. Johnson and Natarajan's (1995) study, for instance, explored the rational adaptations employed by drug dealers to counter law enforcement tactics such as crackdowns and undercover buy-and-busts. These adaptations included looking out for and warning others about suspicious persons, using code, stashing drugs, splitting apart the deal maker from the money and drug holders, checking for marked money, not selling to addicts, moving to a different location or not selling in public, dressing like normal working people, not selling when police are nearby, building skills to identify



them, learning their routine activities, and distracting them while disposing of the contraband. These actions show how drug traders adapt their behavior to protect themselves from adversaries (also see Adler 1993; Decker and Townsend 2008; Jacobs 1996, 1999; Weisburd et al. 2006).

## THE OFFENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ON SITUATIONAL PREVENTION

Like law-abiding citizens, criminals take active steps to protect themselves and their property from victimizers. By definition, victimization is subjection to crime; its counterpart is offending. In principle, any person could be a victim or offender. It is not unusual for people to be both in the course of life (Lauritsen, Sampson, and Laub 1991; Sampson and Lauritsen 1990). Moreover, it is well-known that offenders often victimize each other for reasons related to rationality (Jacobs 1999, 2000; Wright and Decker 1994, 1997) and because the routine activities of offenders serve to elevate their risk of victimization by providing more opportunities for it (Hindelang et al. 1978). In short, subjection to victimization is a probable cost for offenders (Jacques and Wright 2008a).<sup>3</sup>

Unlike law-abiding citizens, offenders also consciously act to prevent themselves and their property from detection and punishment by law enforcement officials. By definition, formal control is a governmental response to deviance (Black 1976).<sup>4</sup> Law enforcement is acted out by governmental officials, or agents, including police, prosecutors, judges, and prison guards. Such persons have titles and roles that correspond with stages of the criminal justice process, including the detection of

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<sup>3</sup> The two primary forms of victimization in drug markets are predation and retaliation (Jacques and Wright 2008b). When a given victimization is punishment for the victim's wrongdoing, this is defined as retaliation (Black 1983). Victimization unrelated to a victim's deviance are predatory (Cooney and Phillips 2002). There are four broad forms of criminal predation and retaliation: *Violent victimization* is subjection to aggression. *Fraudulent victimization* and *unseen victimizations* are, respectively, when money or other forms of wealth (e.g., drugs) are stolen from through deceit or stealth. *Destructive victimization* refers to cases where no one is hurt or stolen from but property is damaged or entirely destroyed. When an offender commits a crime against another offender – whether violent, fraudulent, unseen, or destructive – then, by definition, a victimization has occurred. These four kinds of victimization vary in both frequency and magnitude across people, groups, and situations.

<sup>4</sup> In this paper, social control is defined as “how people defined and respond to deviant behavior” (Black 1998:4). Social control is a vast concept. For some scientific tasks, it is empirically and theoretically useful to divide this broad concept into smaller parts (Jacques 2010). One typology of social control proposes there are five general forms; settlement; self-help; negotiation; avoidance; and the absence of control – toleration (Black 1998:Ch. 5; Cooney 2009).

offenses and mobilization of law, the handling of crimes, and the punishment of crimes. Subjection to law enforcement is a probable cost for criminals (Jacobs 1996, 1999, 2010).

For offenders, both victimizers and law enforcement officials are adversaries. Avoiding victimization and formal control are central concerns of all, or at least most, offenders (Jacobs 1996, 1999). The research reviewed above clearly demonstrates that offenders take steps to stop these costs from being incurred.

### A Typology of Prevention by Offenders

What the previously reviewed research lacks is a general, simple, and powerful classification scheme for organizing the various prevention techniques employed by offenders against their adversaries. Clarke's (2009) notion of prevention strategies allows for that behavior to be divided and organized in a way that is both conceptually clear and theoretically driven. Recall that strategies are theories about how to behave to achieve a given outcome, and that techniques are specific actions deduced from a theory. According to Clarke (2009:267), there are at least five broad strategies of prevention, each of which has its own set of techniques.

If we reason by analogy (see Abbott 2004), the work of Clarke (2009) suggests criminals' situational prevention techniques are designed to create unfavorable circumstances for potential victimizers and law enforcement officials. These techniques are motivated by at least one of five different strategies aimed at adversaries:

- Increase their efforts.
- Increase their risks.
- Reduce their rewards.
- Reduce their provocations.

- Reduce their excuses.

In the sections below, this paper draws on qualitative data obtained in interviews with drug dealers to show how offenders' prevention-oriented actions are motivated by and fit within these strategic distinctions outlined by Clarke.

## **METHOD & DATA**

Whereas quantitative data give a sense of theoretical significance, qualitative data are particularly useful for conceptual analysis and development achieved through “the in-depth description of cases” (Shadish, Cook, and Campbell, 2002:478) based on the “enormous amounts of information from their studies” (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994:46). A focus on conceptualization is important because “[i]t is pointless to seek to explain what we have not described with a reasonable degree of precision” (ibid.:44). Without precise concepts and explanations, the task of testing theory with quantitative research is difficult.

Given that prior research on prevention by offenders lacks a well-elaborated typology for organizing their tactics to block adversaries, the use of qualitative data to examine the relevance of Clarke's (2009) typology as one such organization scheme is the approach of the present paper. We will draw on detailed accounts obtained from an interview-based study of 50 un-incarcerated drug dealers (for details, see Jacques and Wright 2008b). Many of these persons were involved in other crimes as well; for example, some responded to their systemic victimization by committing retaliatory acts such as burglary, theft from an automobile, vandalism, and violence (see Jacques and Wright 2008c).

Half of the participants were middle-class and the others lower-class. At the time of the interview, all participants were selling drugs or had done so within two years of the interview.

Interviews lasted approximately an hour, were semi-structured, and conducted in an informal manner. The contours of each interview varied, but each addressed the pre-identified focal topics of the project. Regarding the focus of this paper, we asked participants questions about whether they were concerned about victimization or law enforcement, and whether they took any actions to prevent them from occurring. Note that the research was not conducted so as to understand situational crime prevention *per se*; the relevance of Clarke's (2009) typology occurred to us only after data collection had been completed. Thus, the qualitative accounts used to illustrate this typology are "naïve evidence", which is "arguably even superior to evidence expressly obtained to" examine a particular idea (Black, 1995:843); a major virtue of naïve data is they are less likely to come from leading questions that might distort responses.

The middle-class dealers were all white and between 18 and 23 years of age, and grew up in suburban Atlanta, Georgia. Each had graduated from high school, and a substantial majority of them were in college at the time of the interview. Drugs sold by sample members included marijuana, pharmaceuticals, ecstasy, cocaine, hallucinogenic mushrooms and LSD. These persons were recruited using a straightforward purposive sampling strategy (see Wright et al. 1992). We approached and asked for the cooperation of drug sellers we knew to be involved in this activity. After interviewing those 18 dealers, our network of direct contacts was exhausted. Therefore snowball sampling was used to recruit seven more middle-class drug sellers. The first 18 respondents were not compensated for participation, but the other 7 participants were paid \$20 each; the recruiters were given \$20 for each successful referral.

An additional 25 interviews with drug dealers took place with drug dealers who lived in lower-class neighborhoods in St. Louis, Missouri. These sellers were recruited through the efforts of a specially trained project fieldworker, known as "Smoke Dog". Smoke Dog relied on his personal

connections with sellers to recruit 25 of them for the study. Interviewees were paid \$50 for participation, and the recruiter was given \$75 per successful recruit. These participants reported selling crack-cocaine, powder cocaine, ecstasy, heroin, and marijuana.

It is only reasonable that a study using self-reports of criminal involvement will potentially face problems in terms of the data's truthfulness. This problem was addressed by promising participants confidentiality and making them aware of their rights as research participants through an informed consent protocol. In addition, comments by participants deemed unusual or unfounded were probed further to reveal and resolve inconsistencies. Despite these safeguards, it is possible that the data gathered do not entirely reflect reality.

The data were analyzed manually, meaning that transcripts of interviews were read and hand-coded. The use of interviewee quotes was determined by their ability to aid in the visualization and conceptual development of the offenders' perspective on situational prevention.

### **THE OFFENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ON PREVENTION**

The following pages describe some of the methods used by drug dealers to avoid victimization and law enforcement. Prior research demonstrates that drug market participants victimize each other and are targeted by predators such as burglars and robbers (Jacobs 2000; Wright and Decker 1994, 1997) and retaliators who feel disrespected (Jacobs and Wright 2006; Jacques 2010). It is also clear that drug dealing brings a substantial risk of arrest, prosecution, and formal punishment such as imprisonment and asset seizure (Baumer 2008; Sevigny and Caulkins 2004). Thus, drug dealers' high risk of incurring costs associated with victimization and formal punishment make them an ideal group in which to examine offenders' prevention strategies and techniques.

## INCREASE ADVERSARIES' EFFORT

One strategy of situational prevention is increasing the effort of adversaries. Victimizing or formally controlling a criminal takes effort – a cost. Thus, the more effort needed to perform these acts, the less they should occur. Drug dealers may recognize this and try to increase the effort required to victimize or enforce law. There are a number of techniques that correspond with the strategy of increasing adversaries' effort. An example is target hardening by storing drugs in a locked safe or the trunk of a vehicle. Another is “customer filtering” by dealers. By restricting business to a select group of trusted customers, the effort required to set up an individual for arrest, robbery, retaliation or fraud is increased (also see Adler 1993; Jacobs 1996; Johnson and Natarajan 1995).

Although lost sales are the cost of customer filtering, its utility is protection against victimization and law enforcement. A lower-class dealer explains how body language and gossip inform dealers of which customers to avoid:

**Lil' Homie:** [T]here's a certain lot of peoples that I wouldn't sell to... You ... listen to the rumors.... It's just that certain people you don't sell to 'cause when you get the word on the street about babblers snitching.... [You can see something is not right by] the way he came up here, the way he walked up here, the way he talks. You can tell a lot about people like that. I'm just looking at it like, “Okay, that money would have made me fatter, but not all money... good because money like that might be bad.” Straight up.

In the suburbs, “snitching” is perhaps less rampant but dealers are nevertheless cognizant and careful with whom they do business. To act otherwise is risky business. For example, a middle-class dealer described how he would handle unknown persons suspected to be victimizers or police:

**Jason:** If anyone had called me, like when people called me if I didn't really know who they were, they would say they got my number from somebody who knew me, then I would just

hang up.... I was at work one night and I had a cell phone call and this guy was like, "Hey, I'm a friend of John ... and he gave your number and said it was cool." I asked for his name and [I] had no idea who he was..., and I got a real weird feeling from it so I just hung up the phone. I mean at that point you just hang up. And another time a similar situation happened but I didn't just hang up the phone. I was just like, "I don't know what you're talking about dude, sorry I can't help you out 'cause I have no idea what you're talking about." I just kept saying that and he was like, "Whatever man", and I was like, "No dude, I don't know what you're fucking talking about", and just hung up the phone in the end.

**Interviewer:** What were you worried about happening?

**Jason:** I was just worried about either it was somebody that I didn't know and that they were trying to pull a quick move on me, and like snake some weed from me.... Like I get out [of the car] to drop the bag off and like the dude when he sees it, he just grabs it and takes off. I go to drop him the bag and two dudes come up out of nowhere, and like choke me or something. Seriously, I get beat up just thinking about it. Or maybe if I agreed to meet with that person and I didn't know who they were, they could be like an authority or something, you know, and at that point when they call you say, "I don't know what you're talking about", and that would cover the authority thing. "I don't know what you're talking about, I don't know who you are."

## INCREASE ADVERSARIES' RISKS

A second strategy of situational prevention is increasing risks for adversaries. As the risks of victimizing or formally punishing an offender increase, then those behaviors should decrease.

Therefore, drug sellers may take steps to increase adversaries' risks. This might be accomplished

through lookouts, alarms, and cameras that allow for detection or identification of adversaries and, in turn, countermeasures to be used against them (also see Johnson and Natarajan 1995).

The threat of retaliation is the most aggressive way to increase adversaries' risks. Drug dealers use it to protect themselves from victimization and law enforcement (Black 1983; Jacobs and Wright 2006; Jacques 2010; Jacques and Wright 2008c). Baby Girl, a lower-class seller discusses her use of prevention techniques – namely retaliation, stash spots, and safes – to guard against victimization:

**Baby Girl:** [M]otherfucker broke into my motherfucking house to steal my shit. We were brutal, kicking him... [S]o they had one motherfucker looking out and the other two broke into my motherfucking house but they couldn't get my shit... [I had w]rapped that shit up, put it in a steel wall [and] kept it hidden in there.... [A]ll you would have found was half an ounce in my dressing drawer but you didn't get the big shit.

So we kind of...stayed back and watched and got to know who it motherfucking was... They went all through my motherfucker drawers... [but] they couldn't find anything. We snuck up and [my friend] gave me like a "32" [revolver]. He had his shit,... We got [the lookout's] ass outside, took his car, threw him in the motherfucker trunk of the car and tied him up. Snuck in on them two motherfuckers [inside].... So I kind of shot the motherfuckers,... it didn't kill them or nothing like that.... We grabbed the motherfuckers,... roughed them up.

He even found one of my safes that I had and busted the motherfucker open. They had my money splattered around the motherfucking house, trying to put everything in their motherfucking pockets. We beat their ass, I got back my ... motherfucking money.

We made an example of them. The motherfucking in the trunk, we kept him and made an example out of him for the next motherfucker. You try this shit, this is what the fuck you'll get.... [W]e took everything he had and we just beat his motherfucking ass and tied his ass to a



motherfucking tree and told the motherfucker to go back and see his other motherfucking people and tell them not to fuck with us 'cause if they do this is what the fuck they gonna get.

**Interviewer:** Damn. Did they ever try to do anything back at all?

**Baby Girl:** Fuck no!

A separate issue is whether offenders threaten or use retaliation against law enforcement officials to prevent formal control. A prime example of such behavior comes from the present-day Mexican border, where hundreds of law enforcement officials have been murdered for retaliatory and preventative purposes (IHT 2009). There were no examples of this in the present study, but one lower-class seller used the threat of violence against a customer to deter that person from calling the police and mobilizing law:

**Pusher:** One dude said, “If you don’t treat me right I’m gonna turn you into the police man. I’m gonna call the police.” I say, “You know what? The first time you call the police, before they get to where they’re going, they’re gonna pick your ass up out of the gutter of the street.” “What you mean by that?”, [he said]. I tell him, “I’m gonna shoot you right in your motherfucking back of your head as soon as you walk out that door.” He kept looking at me and looking at me. I said, “Don’t look at me. Look at the gun 'cause I’m gonna hit your ass as soon as you walk out that door.” Then he’s like, “Damn, can we talk about this?” I said, “Yeah we can talk about it, but if you talking about calling the police you gonna get it in the head.”... He said, “Ok, I ain’t gonna do it.”

## REDUCE ADVERSARIES’ REWARDS

Still another strategy used by offenders to guard against victimization and law enforcement is reducing their rewards. If the benefits of victimizing or punishing a person are reduced then so too

should such occurrences. Techniques of reward reduction focus on blocking, or at least limiting, adversaries' exposure to items they are motivated to obtain or people they are motivated to punish. Examples include hideouts, removing serial numbers from firearms, wearing gloves or masks, and keeping profits at the home of a non-criminal family member or friend (also see Adler 1993; Jacobs 2010; Johnson and Natarajan 1995).

Stash spots are one common technique used by drug dealers. These are secret places for keeping one's drugs, guns, money, or another desirable object. It is advantageous for offenders to use stash spots because it reduces the potential rewards of victimizing or enforcing law; this is partially related to the increased effort required to find the item sought after. For example, a lower-class dealer known as Eazy hid his drugs under the porch of his home. A middle-class seller, Dave, reportedly kept his drugs and drug money stored in the ceiling of his bedroom; he did so by removing one panel and placing the items on top an adjacent one. Another such seller, Tom, sold drugs out of his car. Time on the road is an exposure risk because it potentially brings law enforcement officials into contact with dealers and their drugs. To mitigate this problem, Tom found a place in his vehicle that lowered the likelihood of police obtaining rewards from searches of it:

**Tom:** I wasn't necessarily concerned about getting busted from people because I had a really nice little space to hide my weed, and I couldn't get busted or anything.... I had a place in my car, a little secret spot, like the little console has a little opening in it, you can't really see the opening unless you look down below the steering wheel where the gas pedals are, and if you got a really fat hand you can't really fit your hand in that hole, and I have pretty skinny hands so I can fit it in there, and then you have to reach and pull open a flap and then pull it open yourself. It was pretty secure, I was never really worried about getting busted.

## REDUCE ADVERSARIES' PROVOCATIONS

Reducing provocations of adversaries is a fourth kind of prevention strategy. Instead of reducing adversaries' exposure to what they desire (i.e., potential rewards), the goal of provocation reduction is to reduce or delay adversaries' motivations to victimize – especially as relates to retaliation – or apply formal control in the first place. In other words, these techniques focus on reducing the impetus and incitements for adversarial behavior. In the drug world, examples include not carrying paraphernalia, counteracting social pressure against one's activities, and compensating a defrauded customer (Jacobs 1999).

The most famous method of this kind may be criminal codes of communication (Sutherland 1937; also see Adler 1993; Johnson and Natarjan 1995). Offenders are known to develop elaborate languages of their own that are difficult to understand by anyone unfamiliar with it. The lower-class dealer known as Shot Caller describes his own anti-law lexicon:

**Interviewer:** How does a deal go down [with your suppliers]? Do you call him? I mean how does the whole process work?

**Shot Caller:** Yeah, I call him on the cell phone. I might say, "We playing ball today?" If he say, "Yeah", then that means he's cool, he's got the work [i.e., drugs], but if he says, "No, I'm gonna lie low today, gonna chill with the kids", or something, that means it's all bad. If I say, "We playing ball today?", and he says, "Yeah, what park we gonna meet at?", park really means which street we gonna meet on, or a restaurant or something we might meet at. Or we might meet at "the park", [but] I ain't going by no park for real – that's [a local fast-food restaurant]. [T]hat's just to throw motherfuckers off. If you say you gonna come to his house he'll say "Meet me at the HQ". The HQ is his spot, so there's different shit we throw off on the phone 'cause the police could have the phones tapped up.

Whereas code is usually intended to deflect law enforcement, scales are used to reduce victimization. Drug traders – both customers and sellers – may have access to scales that allow them to know the exact amount of drugs they purchase and, implicitly, whether they have been defrauded. In some cases, a customer will perceive after the exchange that a rip-off has occurred. In turn, they may contact the dealer, complain, and perhaps threaten or commit retaliation. One way to handle such conflicts and to avoid retaliatory victimization is to show the customer that the rip-off did not occur. This is described by Phillip:

**Interviewer:** Did you ever have disputes with your customers over anything?

**Phillip:** Sometimes I did, when they didn't have any scales and they'd look at the weed and just by looking at it they'd think it was slack or something; maybe they were really dense buds and so the bag overall would be smaller looking. But [there was] nothing that could never have been worked out with digies [i.e., digital scales]. I'd just slap it [i.e., the marijuana] on there or something and they'd be like, "Oh".

It should be noted, however, that the irony of scales is they may reduce predatory or retaliatory victimization while simultaneously increasing the probability of law enforcement by providing formal officials with a provocation for control. This is so because scales provide indirect evidence of illicit drug dealing and a justification for formal punishment. Therefore scales are both a liability and friend of guarded drug dealers. Thus, some dealers choose to forgo the use of scales in order to reduce the odds of law enforcement. This might be combined with other provocation-reduction techniques, like limiting the amount of drugs kept on their person so as to only receive a misdemeanor rather than a felony charge if caught. Robert, another middle-class seller, discusses some of the techniques he employed:

**Interviewer:** What'd you do to avoid getting caught by the police?

**Robert:** [T]he only time that I was really at risk was when I had marijuana in my car and was driving. I'd always drive the speed limit, try to wear my seat belt, and I would try not to transport more than an ounce so if I did get caught I wouldn't be charged with distributing. I didn't carry scales in the car, and try not to carry a shit load of bags and stuff.

Still another way to reduce the provocation for arrest is to reduce control agents' opportunity to detect and reprimand other forms of deviance or offending. For instance, a middle-class dealer, Mark, explains he reduced provocations for formal control by not commit driving violations:

**Mark:** I was never really big enough for the cops to really fuck with me, but if I was driving when I was dealing ... I'd just go the speed limit, follow the rules of the road, try not to drive when you're all fucked up or whatever, and I'd try to be as smart as possible .... I just did everything I could to make sure I didn't put myself in a situation to get caught.

#### REMOVE ADVERSARIES' EXCUSES

A final way offenders guard against victimization or law enforcement is to remove excuses for it. The intent of this strategy is to negate or counter the legitimacy or excusableness of adversarial behavior. In other words, the goal is to take away the justifications and neutralizations that make some actions possible, including the denial of responsibility or injury of the victim; condemnation of adversaries; or appeal to higher loyalties (Sykes and Matza 1957; also see Topalli 2005). Among drug dealers, techniques of this kind include not selling to intoxicated or addicted persons, giving instructions to customers about what to say and not to say on the phone, not allowing police to search one's home without a warrant, and invoking the 5<sup>th</sup> Amendment (also see Adler, 1993).

A lower class-dealer known as Rollin' describes a case where a friend of his failed to follow their "number one rule": do not report your own victimization to police. The cost of asking the law for help is it might spark suspicion of one's own criminal activities and hurt the possibility of retrieving lost items or respect:

**Interviewer:** Have you ever heard of anyone from anywhere just calling the cops when they get robbed for 5 grand or whatever?

**Rollin':** Yeah, like somebody I know and somebody else we knew of he was messing, he got hit, got them all at the trap house. Dude watching all the shit, watching where he hid his shit at. He leave, him and the dude leave, dude drops him off and when the dude's gone he goes back to the house, broke in the house and took the shit. Well he took more than the dope, he took the money, he took the dope and the money, the TV, the VCR. He going to make a police report. I said, "Why did you make a police report? You bought all that shit hot [i.e., stolen] from the streets? Everything you got is hot, that was stupid". And he said I was just tripping man, saying "You know they stole my camcorder? My baby was born on that, my girl's pussy!" I'm like, "Man are you crazy? We need to get that dope back." You don't call no police! That's just my number one rule, me and my guys. If something happens on the streets, if a dope fiend does something to you or you get ripped off, we gonna go fuck that person up. Fuck the police, the police can't solve anything for real. We solve it ourselves.

This account demonstrates that offenders offer each other retaliatory support in order to increase compliance with the rule not to make police reports. Yet the problem with vigilantism – a way of increasing the risk for victimizers – is its potential to invite law enforcement against the retaliators. In the end, then, we can see that prevention from the offenders' perspective is complex: a technique useful in one respect may be detrimental in another. For this reason, the assessment of which

prevention technique to use must be guided not only by its potential benefits but also its potential costs for both victimization and subjection to formal control (see Clarke 2009:266).

## **DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION**

The study of offenders' prevention techniques is a worthwhile pursuit for academic and practical reasons. As relates to research, it (1) provides conceptual clarity about the ways offenders engage in prevention of victimization and law enforcement. In doing so, it (2) increases the conceptual generality of Clarke's (2009) notions of strategies and techniques of prevention. The long-term effect of this may be to improve SCP theory and practice. If researchers can determine the kinds of countermeasures used by criminals to reduce the effect of crime prevention techniques, then these countermeasures can themselves be countered by law-abiding persons and governments. A greater conceptual understanding of prevention by offenders may therefore allow for a better theory and practice of crime control.

The accounts of drug dealers examined above indicate that offenders use a range of prevention-oriented strategies and techniques to reduce opportunities for their adversaries. By increasing the efforts or risks of victimizers and law enforcement officials, and also by reducing their rewards, provocations, and excuses, adversarial behavior is reduced. Examples of these strategies include customer filtering, retaliation, using a stash spot or code, and developing rules of conduct. In table 1, we divide the 5 strategies of adversarial prevention into 20 opportunity-reducing techniques employed by offenders:

--TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE--

This list of techniques is not exhaustive but is simply meant to illustrate that a vast array of methods may be used by offenders against their adversaries.

What are the implications of this *typology of offenders' prevention techniques* for future criminological research? Typologies are useful insofar as they help to develop and test theories. The classification system presented above raises the question: What explains the prevalence and magnitude of prevention techniques and strategies used by offenders to block their adversaries? This broad question might be divided into two smaller parts: (1) How do they learn prevention techniques? (2) Why do or don't they implement these techniques? The notion of *bounded rationality* helps to answer these questions. Delineating the full implications of this perspective is beyond this paper's scope, but the basic thrust is as follows:

“Bounded rationality assumes a decision-making process in which offenders weigh only a few aspects of a limited number of alternatives and ignore the rest” (Jacobs and Wright 2010:1741). They take a satisficing action that is good enough and chosen from a repertoire of “rules of thumb” or “judgmental heuristics” (Clarke and Cornish 1985:160). The exact information considered and the heuristic employed are shaped by the person's culture, learned behavior and normative expectations, personality, risk sensitivity, intoxication, emotions, and immediate environment (Clarke and Cornish 1985; Jacobs 2010; Jacobs and Wright 2010). To reduce costs associated with formal sanctions or victimization, offenders may – if it is deemed rational to do so – create and use preventive measures, thereby increasing the overall utility of offending (Johnson and Natarajan 1995).

Bounded rationality, for example, sheds light on learning to take precautions, normal and deviant alike. Routine precautions are normal actions used to reduce risk, such as locking doors (Felson and Clarke 2010). The commonality of routine precautions among the general population suggests that a subset of the public – offenders – will employ these same techniques. Yet some routine precautions employed to avoid victimization may be ineffective in blocking law enforcement. Therefore offenders learn deviant precautions. Examples include the removal of serial numbers, the



threat of retaliation, discouraging “snitching,” using code and hideouts, not reporting victimization, and bribing government officials. Whether a specific routine or deviant precaution is taken depends on factors such as know-how, the kind of victimizer – e.g., burglar vs. robber – or law enforcement intervention – e.g., buy-and-bust vs. crackdowns – one is guarding against, and that precaution’s perceived utility as compared to other lines of action (also see Johnson and Natarajan 1995).

Related to this is the fact that preventing victimization and law enforcement may be at odds with each other and backfire (Felson and Clarke 2010:116). For example, drug dealers must weigh the relative costs and benefits of possessing a firearm to deter robbers, because doing so may provide police with a reason to arrest (Watkins, Huebner, and Decker 2008). Or, hot spots policing may lead criminals to contemplate offending in a different area – i.e., displacement – but this might increase the odds of victimization by strangers or competitors (Weisburd et al. 2006). How do offenders balance these kinds of conflicting choices? Do they choose one option over another? Find a compromise? Or desist?

As well, it should be kept in mind that situational prevention is probably more important for some types of offenders than it is for others. Criminals who are motivated largely by financial considerations, like drug dealers, might be especially cognizant of reducing “business costs” incurred from adversaries. Other types of offenders, such as heavily intoxicated barroom combatants, likely are less affected by the rational decision processes that guide situational prevention techniques.

On a practical note, this line of inquiry is important to criminology because greater knowledge of offenders’ prevention techniques will make counteracting them more feasible. Offenders, victimizers, law-abiding citizens, and government officials are playing a “strategic game” (Goffman, 1969, 1974; Schelling, 1960). Points are scored by and deducted from each player based on their abilities to outwit the other and achieve their respective goals. Knowing what one’s competitor will do

next and how to react need not be left to intuition or hunches; the best counter-strategies are based on sound scientific theory and findings. To beat offenders and victimizers in the long run, the “good guys” will have to learn the other team’s playbook, stay apace with changes in it, and adjust accordingly.

It is paramount to recognize, however, that crime prevention techniques may reduce some forms of offending at the cost of increasing others. The prohibition of drugs, for instance, is intended to reduce drug consumption, but this appears to increase victimization and retaliation among drug traders (Jacobs 2000). Future research may benefit from exploring both the intended and unintended consequences of prevention techniques aimed at reducing offending or law enforcement.

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**Table 1. Strategies & Techniques of Situational Prevention by Offenders**

| <b>Increase the effort</b>   | <b>Increase the risks</b>   | <b>Reduce the rewards</b>   | <b>Reduce provocations</b>   | <b>Remove excuses</b>   |
|--|---|---|--|---|
| <i>Target harden</i><br>*Use a safe<br>*Lock illegal items in trunk                          | <i>Extend guardianship</i><br>*Offend in groups<br>*Threat of retaliation                     | <i>Conceal targets</i><br>*Use stash spot<br>*Use hideout   | <i>Avoid disputes</i><br>*Show customer weight when doing fair deal<br>*Don't report victimization | <i>Set rules</i><br>*Use consistent pricing<br>*Devise and explain code                             |
| <i>Control access</i><br>*Don't talk about offenses<br>*Don't give your phone # away         | <i>Obstruct natural surveillance</i><br>*Offend in busy areas<br>*Offend in dark areas        | <i>Foster Anonymity</i><br>*Remove serial #s<br>*Wear gloves/masks  | <i>Reduce temptation/arousal</i><br>*Don't carry paraphernalia<br>*Use code during communications  | <i>Avoid compliance</i><br>*Invoke 5 <sup>th</sup> Amendment right<br>*Demand Search Warrant        |
| <i>Deflect adversaries</i><br>*Don't sell at home<br>*Filter customers                       | <i>Use place managers</i><br>*Employ lookouts<br>*Create managerial hierarchy of co-offenders | <i>Disrupt adversaries</i><br>*Bribe government officials<br>*Use lawyers                                     | <i>Counteract social pressure</i><br>*"Drugs aren't bad."<br>*"The law is racist."                 | <i>Assist avoidance of compliance</i><br>*Offer retaliatory support<br>*Offer legal advice          |
| <i>Control tools/weapons</i><br>*Use scale when buying<br>*Don't show weight when defrauding | <i>Strengthen mechanical surveillance</i><br>*Use cameras<br>*Install alarms                  | <i>Deny benefits</i><br>*Commit less serious crimes<br>*Keep profits at home of non-criminal family or friend | <i>Discourage imitation</i><br>*Brand labeling<br>*Check for counterfeit \$                        | <i>Control intoxication</i><br>*Avoid intoxicated offending<br>*Avoid high/drunk or addicted people |

*Note:* Adapted from Clarke (2009).