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An Attributional Analysis of Crime Prevention
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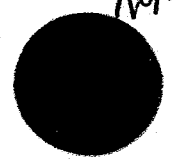
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Personal Theories about the Causes of Crime:
An Attributional Analysis of Crime Prevention Efforts

REACTIONS TO CRIME PROJECT

CENTER FOR URBAN AFFAIRS

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An Attributional Analysis of Crime Prevention Efforts

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Causal chains and networks

Where do we place the blame in a web of circumstances?

A radio mystery theater poses the problem: Who killed the maid? As the story begins, a maid servant talks to her employer of twenty-five years. The maid asks for a small favor; she would like the next day off because it is her birthday. The woman refuses, saying it would inconvenience the household, but she makes a counteroffer as a gesture of goodwill; she tells the maid to take a taxi to work the next day instead of her usual bus and gives her the necessary carfare. The following day as the maid rides to work in the taxi, two unemployed house painters rob a nearby bank. As the men run from the bank, a bank guard takes aim and shoots just as the maid's taxi passes the bank, killing the maid. That night the maid appears in a dream and accuses the mistress of killing her by making her come to work that morning. As the woman wrestles with her conscience, her husband tries to reassure her. He tells her that there are many other causes of the maid's death. The bank guard pulled the trigger. The robbers made him shoot. Unemployment led the men to rob the bank. The maid was not qualified for other work. As the story ends, the listener, the woman and we are left wondering: Who killed the maid?

We refer to such detective work when we speak of "personal theories" about the causes of crime. The purpose of this paper is to examine laymen's theories about the causes of crime and their crime prevention efforts. Although both experimental attribution researchers (See reviews by Pepitone, 1975 and Perlman, in press) and public opinion survey researchers

(Erskine, 1974; Hindelang, 1974) have studied people's beliefs about the causes of crime, they have not related these attributions to people's behaviors in dealing with the threat of crime victimization.

Social psychologists (Langer, 1975; Lefcourt, 1973; Wortman, 1976; Wortman & Brehm, 1975) suggest that personal theories about the causes of events reflect a desire to see the world as predictable and controllable. When seemingly innocent persons get hurt, onlookers try to find reasons for the accident--both to make it appear predictable and to reassure themselves that such unforeseen events will not happen to them (Lerner & Simmons, 1966; Lerner, 1970; Walster, 1966). Even faced with evidence that some events are truly random, people look for patterns and reasons, as though looking for an illusion of control (Langer, 1975; Lefcourt, 1973; Wortman, 1976; Wortman & Brehm, 1975). We will see how people's theories about the causes of crime and their efforts to prevent crimes relate to feelings of helplessness and control.

In the sections that follow, we will examine both the personal theories expressed by people when they talk about crime and the personal theories expressed by their actions when they do something about crime. We will also explore the feelings of control or helplessness that accompany these theories and acts. Finally we will see how social policy can be both a cause and a consequence of laymen's personal theories about crime.

The criminal and the victim: An attributional approach

Our approach to examining people's thoughts and actions about crime is different from that used by attribution researchers. We worked with a team

of researchers who went to the field to observe and interview people in a variety of settings (footnote). Sociologists are more acquainted with this research technique than psychologists, and they typically use it to generate rather than test hypotheses (Glazer & Strauss, 1967; Dean, Eichhorn, & Dean, 1967).

The field work was conducted in an anthropological style with participant observations and interviews conducted in a variety of settings. The researchers attended community crime prevention programs, civic association meetings, and city block meetings. They recorded the discussions much as a court stenographer would. They also talked with police officers, members of citizen's band radio clubs, merchants, civic leaders, housewives, children, and the ever present "person-on-the-street." These observations and interviews were recorded in more than a dozen communities in three cities, which we shall simply refer to as Westside, Eastside, and Midwestern. To complement the qualitative data gathered in the field work, we also examined quantitative survey data gathered by other groups (footnote).

Experimental studies of laymen's personal theories about the causes of success and failure have developed and tested a model which identifies three dimensions of causal attributions: internal versus external, stable versus unstable, and intentional versus unintentional causes (Frieze & Weiner, 1971; Weiner, Frieze, Kukla, Reed, Rest, & Rosenbaum, 1971). The same model has been applied to laymen's theories about the causes of specific crimes (see reviews by Pepitone, 1975 and Perlman, in press). Before discussing the model we derived from the field notes, we will review some of the experimental studies of conditions that make victims and offenders

seem responsible for their actions.

Experimental studies of offenders' and victims' causal roles.

To see what factors in victims' and offenders' chains make them seem accountable for their actions, researchers asked raters to read descriptions of crimes that varied qualities of the victim or offender. Then the rater judged how responsible the victim or offender was for the crime and what a suitable punishment should be. Rather than varying the qualities of victims and offenders together, these studies have focused on either one or the other (with the exception of Landy & Aronson, 1969). Laypeople and professionals in the criminal justice system seem to agree about the conditions that make offenders seem responsible for their actions (Carroll, chapter in this volume; Carroll & Payne, 1976, 1977a, 1977b; Shaw & Reitan, 1969; Sosis, 1974). Offenders who are morally unattractive, have a prior record, and seem mentally competent are held responsible for their actions more than offenders who do not have those characteristics (Landy & Aronson, 1969; Lussier, Perlman, Breen, 1977; Pepitone, 1975). Offenders who intended to commit the crime and who did it for reasons that appear to be internal, stable qualities of the person are held more responsible for their actions than are offenders who did it unintentionally and for external reasons (Rose & Jerdee, 1974; Shaw & Reitan, 1969; Carroll & Payne, 1976, 1977a, 1977b). When judges either laypeople, policemen or parole officers--regard offenders as responsible for their actions, they also recommend harsher penalties and expect them to be repeat offenders.

Experimental studies of the victim's role in causing crime have dealt primarily with rape. Several variations in descriptions of a victim's background and appearance make her seem more or less guilty of having perpetrated the crime. A woman who refuses to disclose her previous sexual experience seems more responsible than a woman who says she is a virgin; a divorcee seems more responsible than a married woman (Feldman-Summers & Lindner, 1976; Jones & Aronson, 1973). Physically unattractive rape victims seem more responsible than attractive ones (Seligman, Brickman, & Kowak, 1977), perhaps because we assume that the unattractive woman must have behaved seductively. If a woman has been raped previously, she is blamed more than if she was never raped before (Calhoun, Selby, & Warring, 1976). Regardless of the circumstances, men blame rape victims more than women do (Calhoun, Selby, & Warring). While blaming the victim seems to be adding insult to injury, there may be some kinds of blame that point to workable solutions. Bulman (1978) has argued that blaming the victim is dysfunctional if it is characterological blame, but functional if it is behavioral blame.

Rape prevention programs focus on such behavioral factors. If both men and women believe that rape victims are responsible for their misfortune by virtue of their appearance, their ignorance, their carelessness, or their unwillingness to defend themselves, then they should presumably try to change some or all of these. Many rape prevention efforts (e.g. Walker & Brodsky, 1976; Goldstein, 1976) teach women how and where to walk, what to carry, and how and when to fight to reduce their chances of being raped.

These experimental studies have the advantage of being able to manipulate a limited number of variables at a time. They show that certain variations have affects on people's perceptions of offenders' and victims' responsibility, all other things being constant. The field work that we report in the remainder of this chapter does the opposite. It holds no factors constant but shows instead what causal attributions arise in naturally occurring conversations, community meetings, and crime prevention programs. As a result, we develop a different model of people's personal theories about the causes of crime.

Personal Theories about the Causes of Crime as a Social Event: Revealed in what people say and so about crime.

In the following section, we will examine people's beliefs about the causes of crime as a social event. We will see where people focus their attention and efforts both when they talk about crime and when they decide to do something about crime, and we will look at factors that influence their choice. We introduce some other ways of looking at personal theories about the causes of crime. We derived our model inductively from field notes. We do not know whether this is a scheme that laymen use when they

talk about or act on crime. The model is useful, however, in organizing what people say and do about crime. The categories represent our way of coding the attributions that appear in people's statements and actions. Whether they also represent a schemata that laymen possess and recognize still remains to be tested.

The categories are defined by two dimensions. The first is the victim-offender dimension. With the exception of so-called victimless crimes, we can characterize crime as a social event, requiring at least two persons - the victim and the offender. In talking about the causes and prevention of crime, people may focus on the role of the victim or the role of the offender. In reality, it may not always be clear who was the victim and who was the offender. As with two children fighting, we may not always know "who started it" and who was innocent. Studies of dispute settlement show that negotiating blame and deciding who was guilty is not always straightforward or based on fact (e.g. Gulliver, 1973; Kidder, 1973). Since we are concerned not with facts, however, but with what people think the facts are, we can classify their statements as statements about victims or offenders.

The following examples of conversations in the field notes locate the causes of crime in the victim's chain. They suggest that the victim is at fault:

"...in a bar, she's asking for it. People are careless, I don't mean to dwell on this sex, but take rape. Girls are asking for it. If you conduct yourself in the right way, you wouldn't be victimized."

(EV Eld)

"They (victims) don't use discretion in the manner of associations with other people. They get lost in talk. They walk along aimlessly. Criminals are not dummies. They pick on stupid people." (Ev. Eld. 4/15/77 p. 12).

"I think they (victims) are careless as a rule. They leave their lights on. They don't lock their doors." (Ev. Eld. 4/15/77 p. 12)

"It is an unfortunate fact of life that senior citizens are an easy target." (S. P. 2/16/77 141324)

Other people, in talking about the causes of crime focus on the offender's chain:

"...I think it's those drugs that are causing all this...That's how I feel about drugs and drinking, you just don't know what they might make a person do." (S. P. 7/16/77 p. 7)

"You do see more and more younger people getting into stealing, purse snatching and mugging. It's because they don't have any recreation that they can afford...I mean, they just have lots of time on their hands. Nothin to do." (E., 7/21/76 p. 6)

"The projects are the cause of most of our problems...I'm scared." (VV, 7/16/76 p. 12).

Clearly people do speak about both the victim's and the offender's role in bringing about crime. What is of interest to us, however, is where people focus their attention, both when they talk about the causes of crime as a social problem and when they engage in crime prevention activity. They may work either on the causes of offenders' behavior, the causes of victims' availability, or both. Frequently both of these tactics are

referred to as "crime prevention" measures. We will distinguish between actions that lessen the likelihood that someone will become an offender and actions that lessen the likelihood that someone will become a victim. We call the former crime prevention and the latter victimization prevention (DuBow, McCabe & Kaplan, 1977; McCabe & Kaplan, 1976).

The second dimension of personal theories about crime distinguishes between distal and proximal factors that lead someone to become either a victim or an offender. This dimension includes several overlapping factors that could be pulled apart in further experimental work but will be combined in our model since we lack evidence about their separate functioning. Distal factors are those that are further removed from the crime in one of several ways. They may be further removed in time: a history of childhood neglect may seem to predispose people to become criminals, but it is something that took place long before the crime. They may also be further removed in a presumed chain of social conditions: bank lending policies that prevent people in some neighborhoods from getting mortgages or home improvement loans seem to be causes of neighborhood decline which in turn leads to abandoned housing which leads to drug addicts congregating in abandoned houses which leads to a high incidence of muggings. Proximal causes are close to the event, either in time or space. Inadequate locks, insufficient police patrols, and careless behavior on the part of a victim are all causes that we call proximal because they appear to be close to the occurrence of a crime, much like the last line of defense. We are currently conducting research to see whether laymen share our coding scheme and locate these factors close to the occurrence of crime (John, 1978).

By saying that some causes may be classified as distal and some as proximal, we are not commenting on the presumed strength of the causes. In some people's theories, distal causes may be viewed as powerful "root" causes of crime. In others, they may seem like remotely connected factors whose influence is weak by the time it trickles down through time or through the intervening steps. We are proposing simply that some causes may seem closer to the event than others.

In an experimental study of the relative impact of prior and immediate causes, Brickman, Ryan, and Wortman (1975) argue that

"...most accidents stem not from a single cause but from a combination of causal factors. Causes, in turn, also have causes. Furthermore, the prior causes may or may not be of the same type as the immediate cause. If the immediate cause is perceived as a situational force, it may have been brought into play by a prior personal decision, which may in turn have been made under even earlier situational pressures, and so forth. For example, an accident may be caused by steering failure, which is in turn caused by the driver's failure to have the car inspected...because he was erroneously led to believe that the previous owner had recently done so." (p. 1060)

This describes a causal chain for a single person. The distal and proximal causes we found in the field work are statements not about single persons but about conditions that make it possible or probable that crime will occur. In both instances, we can raise the question, how far back in time or space do people go when they talk about the causes and prevention of an event? And what are some of the factors that lead them to focus

on proximal or distal causes?

The classification of causes as either proximal or distal in the remainder of this chapter again reflects our own coding. Careless behavior on the part of a victim, such as walking alone at night, we code as an immediate precipitating cause and living in an area that "breeds crime", we call a prior condition. When people talk about offenders, we code their complaints that courts put criminals right back on the streets as an immediate or proximal cause and their talk of unemployment as a prior or distal cause of crime. Whether these are or are not in fact causes of crime is not at issue here; instead we are concerned with whether people talk about them as causes and which presumed cause they focus on when they engage in crime prevention efforts.

Table 1 gives examples of causal attributions that describe proximal and distal factors in the victim's or offender's chain.

Insert Table 1 here

The illustrations show that when people talk about crime as a social problem, they do acknowledge the roles of both victims and offenders and immediate (or proximal) and prior (or distal) conditions. Within either the victim's or the offender's causal chain, we can also find stable and unstable causes (cf. Weiner et al., 1971). The elderly seem to be easy targets by virtue of their age and not much can be done to change that. Age is a stable feature that cannot be tampered with. On the other hand, some people seem to be victimized by their carelessness, a presumably unstable cause that can be reversed by learning to take greater care.*

Table 1

Causal Chain for

	Victims	Offenders
Proximal Causes	<p>"You come in dressed up and looking affluent and you become a target" (LV, 8/10 p.2)</p> <p>"It's an unfortunate fact of life that senior citizens are an easy target." (SP, 2/16/77, 141324)</p> <p>"I think they (victims) are careless as a rule. They leave their lights on. They don't lock the doors." (Ev. Eld. 4/15/77 p. 12)</p>	<p>(Why do kids snatch purses?) "To buy their booze and drugs... actually, I think the booze is more than drugs..." (VV, 7/12/76, p. 8)</p> <p>(one cause of crime is that) "the judge lets 'em off too easy." (SP, 7/16/76 p. 6)</p> <p>"...the problem was not that the community wasn't organized against crime but that the court system put convicted criminals back on the street" (QV, 8/11/76, p. 6)</p>
Distal Causes	<p>"This area breeds crime. And it's very hard to organize because the population is so transient." (LV, 8/10 p. 1)</p> <p>"As soon as I'm able, I want to live in the country... This isn't the kind of place now that I'd like to raise a family." (L, 2/18, 121142)</p> <p>"The most important facet of crime prevention is neighborhood awareness. Unfortunately people don't want to get involved if a crime happens..." (EV. Eld. 4/5/77, p. 4)</p>	<p>"young adults...bumming around cuz they don't have jobs" (VV, 7/2/76 p.3)</p> <p>(one cause of crime is that) "parents don't care enough..." (SP, 7/16/76, p. 2)</p> <p>(the structure of society causes crime) "It should go more social-istic" (SP, 7/26/76, p. 2)</p> <p>"I'd say the main reasons for our problems are a) the projects... b) the lack of employment and c) welfare" (SP, 5/12/76, p. 3)</p> <p>"Sociologists say that's the root of crime anyway...Deteriorated housing and lack of jobs." (SP, 7/13/76, p. 7)</p>

Although laymen's theories about the causes of crime do cover the entire spectrum that we have identified in our model, we wish to know where they focus their attention. What seem to be the predominant causes? Erskine (1974) summarize some of the causes of crime that national survey respondents emphasize. Erskine reports that unrest, polarization, student protest, moral decay, drugs, and youth problems are (1974) seen as the major causes of crime. Hindelang/cites surveys which focus on the following causes: lenient laws or gentle penalties, drugs or drug addiction, lack of parental supervision, and poverty or not enough jobs.

More recent surveys (Kennedy & Associates, 1973; Market Opinion Research Company, 1973, 1974, 1975) conducted in Michigan and Oregon find similar causes of crime mentioned; unemployment and poverty, drugs and alcohol, insufficient law enforcement; lack of activities for youth; and lack of parental supervision. In our research, the field workers in East-side City (footnote) administered structured interviews to 151 respondents in seven communities. The sample included men and women and black and white respondents. In response to open-ended questions about the causes of crime, these respondents most often named the following four classes of causes:

- 1) the economic situation, poverty, and unemployment; 2) drinking and drugs; 3) kids having nothing to do and being neglected by parents;
- 4) insufficient law enforcement.

When we compare these surveys, we find a high degree of agreement, although the order of the causes may vary (see Table 2).

Table 2

The most frequently mentioned causes of crime in field work interviews
and two sample surveys (footnote)

	<u>Michigan Survey</u>	<u>Oregon Survey</u>	<u>Field Work Interviews</u>
1st mention	Drugs/Dope	Poverty	Economic situation; poverty, unemployment
2nd mention	Kids; lack of activities and parental guidance	Environment	Drinking/drugs
3rd mention	Unemployment; poverty	Alcohol	Kids; lack of activities, parental neglect
4th mention	Law enforcement; need for stricter laws	Insufficient law and order	Insufficient law enforce- ment

The causes are all factors that fall in the offender's chain and include more social conditions than personality dispositions. For instance, although laziness, lack of religion, mental disorder, kicks, lack of moral standards, and attitude toward the government were included in the survey lists, these were not endorsed as causes of crime, nor were they mentioned frequently in the free responses obtained in the field work interviews. Drug use and drinking came closest to being personal dispositions or habits, and in our model we regard these as proximal causes in the offender's chain. Insufficient law enforcement is also a proximal cause in our scheme, since it is a failure of the last line of defense. In some respects, it spans the distal-proximal continuum, however, because people may regard stricter laws and stricter enforcement as capable of creating an atmosphere of deterrence and not simply a last line of defense. The economic situation,

the lack of activities for kids, and the general designation "environment" are all distal in our scheme and all in the offender's chain. What is interesting about these surveys and interviews, therefore, is the absence of causes in the victim's chain. Apparently when asked to speak about the causes of crime (which we define as the conjunction of the offender's and victim's causal chain), the respondents focus on the offender's causal chain. If we take the alleged causes of crime seriously, they prescribe the appropriate solutions for crime. Straightforward logic would dictate that people direct their efforts to reduce unemployment and poverty, provide more activities for children, enforce drug laws (or legalize drugs) and improve law enforcement generally.

It is important to distinguish, however, between what people think the solution should be and what people actually do. We have evidence from our field work data that when people act as individuals or as participants in "crime prevention" programs, they focus most of their actions on the causal chain for victims, to reduce the likelihood that they will become victims themselves.

Taking action against crime.

To understand the relationship between people's theories about the causes of crime and their responses to crime, we must first examine the range of responses people are instructed and encouraged to perform. Just as a rat on a shock grid must learn to escape or avoid shock, people learn how to respond to crime. With the exception of ducking to avoid a swinging fist or running when being pursued, there are no "natural" responses to the threat of crime. They are all taught, acquired, and socially

constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

To facilitate our discussion of crime prevention efforts, we will describe a variety of activities and classify them according to our typology of causes. A thorough review of the literature on reactions to crime (DuBow, McCabe, & Kaplan, 1977; McCabe & Kaplan, 1976) provides fuller descriptions of the variety of responses to crime.

Avoidance: staying indoors and away from seemingly dangerous areas

Escort services: citizens escorting children and elderly people

Personal property protection: purchasing or using locks, dogs, guns, burglar alarms, house lights, engraving tools.

Crime reporting: calling the police about crimes in progress or the appearance of suspicious people or activities

Citizen patrols: patrolling neighborhoods, usually at night, by area residents, with or without citizens' band radios

Block organizing: calling a meeting of residents in a small area to become acquainted, watch one another's homes and organize some protective activities, such as use of loud whistles or horns

Police-community relations programs: acquainting residents with their police department.

Street lighting programs: improving lighting

Victim-Witness assistance: instructing and encouraging witnesses or victims to process their cases through the courts

Youth-services: providing summer jobs and recreation for young people

This is a partial description of a longer list with many variations on these themes (e.g. DuBow, McCabe and Kaplan, 1977; McCabe & Kaplan, 1976).

It suffices, however, to demonstrate an important point--these efforts focus either on factors in the victim's causal chain or on proximal factors in the offender's chain. The authors comment on this and speculate about the reasons:

"During the 60's, the issue of crime was often discussed as a symptom of some larger social problem such as poverty, inequality, or racial injustice. It was these broader social problems which captured political interest and program funding. It was felt that such problems contained the determination of crime and that programs should be directed at the solution of the more fundamental problems. More recently, concern about crime has become manifest in a more direct manner with emphasis shifting from concern about the perceived determinates and their effect on offenders to the consequences of crime for victims and society. Emphasis shifted from curing poverty or social injustice to preventing victimization." (McCabe & Kaplan, 1976, p. 54).

These authors dramatize this shift in focus by reporting the budget allocation for the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, an agency that sponsors many victimization prevention programs. In 1969, the appropriation was \$63 million and in 1976 it was \$810 million (McCabe & Kaplan, 1976, p. 54). Although they are called "crime prevention" programs, many of the activities funded by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration focus on the conditions that lie in the victim's causal chain. They instruct people to organize neighborhood patrols, to install

better locks, to mark their valuables, and generally protect their own persons, property, and neighbors. When we classify the variety of responses to crime in the same scheme we developed to characterize the causes of crime we find the responses that fall within the victim's causal chain are spread across the distal-proximal continuum but those in the offender's chain are primarily proximal. We label actions which are intended to make a neighborhood safer so that it does not "breed crime" distal responses. These include improved street lighting, neighborhood patrols, block organizations, and the use or distribution of piercing whistles or horns. Whistles and horns for victims and observers are sold as nonviolent solutions to the threat of violence. In areas where these noisemakers are widely disseminated, each resident is instructed to carry one and sound it either at the sight of a crime in progress or at the sound of another warning whistle. They reportedly serve to scare away the attacker and alert someone else to call the police.

We classify actions which serve only to protect the property or person of the actor proximal responses. These include marking valuables, installing locks, and avoiding dangerous places. They do not make an area safer but try to protect one person in a dangerous environment. In summary, there may be reasons for focusing on the proximal causes of the victim's chain rather than the distal causes of the offender's chain. Yet, as the following section of the chapter demonstrates, many of the actions taken to reduce victimization do not produce a sense of efficacy or optimism, primarily because they do nothing to reduce the likelihood of people becoming offenders. Victimization prevention may succeed in

altering one's chances of becoming a victim, but it does nothing to change the acknowledged dangerousness of the environment. It is like the avoidance learning of laboratory animals - they are safe provided they remain vigilant and continue pressing the lever or running across the shuttle box. Let them drop their guard for a moment, and they get shocked all over again. Nothing has changed "out there."

We can illustrate this point by analogy with a caged animal. Suppose we place a rat in a shuttle box that has a shock grid with a few safe corners plus a lever that will terminate shock. If the rat learns to escape shock by pressing the lever, running to a safe corner, or staying in the safe corners forever, we will characterize this cluster of behaviors as victimization prevention (defensive, saving-its-own-skin). Were we to interview the rat about the causes and prevention of shock, we would expect to hear a theory about the existence of dangerous places and the utility of pressing levers and staying in safe corners (cf. Campbell, 1963). We would also expect the rat to rate the environment in the cage as a whole as dangerous, since he can do nothing about the fact that his cage is wired to a shock apparatus except remain vigilant. Alternatively, if the rat could learn to negotiate with the experimenter, to disconnect the grid and eliminate the conditions that produce shock in the first place, its behavior would reflect a different theory about the causes and prevention of such pain. The theory would focus not on the location of safe and dangerous places but on the external causes of shock. We would also expect to find an animal in a different psychological state--feeling efficacious instead of helpless, and not eternally vigilant.

Feelings of efficacy and helplessness accompanying various solutions.

In many respects, people who seek security with locks, dogs, guns, or freon horns act like the rats trained to avoid shocks by pressing a lever on signal. Victimization prevention is analogous to escape and avoidance learning in psychology laboratories (Hiroto, 1974; Hiroto & Seligman, 1975; Seligman & Maier, 1967; Richter, 1957; Seligman, 1975). Rats caught in such situations are in no position to disconnect the shock grid, argue with the experimenter, protest against aversive conditions, or tear down the walls of the Skinner box. The subjects in most escape and avoidance learning experiments have limited options. If some crime prevention efforts promote vigilance and limit the options to escape or avoid crime, they may not reduce fear but simply remind the actors of the danger that lurks outside when they leave their safe corners. DuBow (1978) speaks of this as a "fortress mentality" and contrasts it with the more active and possibly less fearful stance that accompanies some community organizing activities and collective crime prevention efforts.

Whereas both human and animal subjects in experimental studies of learned helplessness actually give up trying and eventually do nothing, people rarely do nothing about crime. They at least lock their doors, stay in at night and avoid strangers (Biderman, 1967; Ennis, 1967). While people may gain some sense of control over a limited portion of their environment or their fate by taking such action, they may also experience little sense of control over the larger environment which remains untouched. In the following pages we examine the sense of control or helplessness that accompanies the various types of crime prevention

efforts.

A. Efforts to control the proximal causes of offenders' behaviors:
reliance on the criminal justice system

Several studies suggest that fear of crime and a feeling that the police are ineffective are significantly related: Kim (1976) found that people who say (a) reporting incidents to the police is a waste of time, (b) the police do not respond quickly, and (c) they do not try to do their best, also exhibit significantly higher levels of fear of crime than do those who express more faith in the police. O'Neill (1977) found similar patterns and in addition suggests that people who view the police as ineffective are less likely to report incidents to the police. Such little faith in the ability of the police to control crime may in fact not be so irrational, for Ennis (1967) reports that only about 2% of victimizations result in successful prosecution and Skogan (1976) finds that citizen perceptions that "nothing can be done" about various types of crimes are in line with actual FBI clearance rates for those crimes. If we use these outcome measures as estimates of what in fact can be accomplished by reporting crimes to the police, the lack of faith may not be so irrational. This perceived ineffectiveness of the official agents of control contributes to laymen's sense of helplessness with regard to crime as seen in the following comments:

(Question: Is there anything that could stop that kind of thing from happening again?) "No, I don't see what...Awhile back on our block we were getting a whole lot of burglaries. The houses were being hit, two, three times...The police arrested him one time, but he was out

right away again. You can't really get them unless you catch them in the act." (BOY, 10/14/76, p. 10-11)

"We've caught a couple of them (kids), but nothing ever happens," (VV, 7/12/76, p. 5)

(So the cops don't do much around here?) "No, we take care of them. The cops lock guys up and they're out the next day. People deal drugs on every corner and the cops don't do nothing." (K, 7/21/76, p. 2)

Sometimes the reluctance to call the police results from a fear of retaliation or simply of becoming involved:

"I had my window busted with a BB gun. (Question: what did you do?) We even saw who did it. What could we do? These days we're scared to do anything...and even if we're not scared...it don't do no good to do nothin' anyway." (VV, 7/23/77, p. 12-13)

"People are afraid to call the police..." (VV, 7/8/76, p. 4)

Frustration is also expressed about the "leniency" of judges after offenders are convicted?

"The judges let 'em off too easy...There aren't enough facilities for kids who break the law, so they let 'em go." (SP, 7/16/76, p. 2)

"Makes you feel like you're not safe anywhere. Especially when somebody you know should be locked up is out...The law is more for the criminal now. There are all these loopholes that people can be let out on" (SP, 7/16/76, p. 3).

Ironically, there is a prevailing belief that insufficient law enforcement is a cause of crime, but adding more police does not always appear to

be an effective solution because "The cops lock guys up and they're out the next day" or "more police won't do nothing." These beliefs are not mutually exclusive; complaints about insufficient law enforcement may refer not only to the police. There may be weak links at any point in that system. If more police apprehend more offenders but judges let them off easy, the policemen's efforts appear ineffective. To prevent crime by improving law enforcement would require a foolproof system of apprehension, conviction, sentencing, and either imprisonment or rehabilitation. Loop-holes anywhere in the system may make people feel "you're not safe anywhere" if they attempt to rely on that system as a last line of defense.

B. Efforts to control the proximal causes of victimization: reliance on individual protective measures.

Strictly individualized protective measures, such as using special locks, guns, dogs, or marking valuable possessions are efforts directed at the proximal causes of victimization. Such fortifications make only one person or household safe. We have evidence from both our field work and survey data that individualized protective measures are associated with fear and feelings of helplessness. Respondents in a survey conducted in Hartford in 1973 and 1975 (Fowler and Mangione, 1974) were asked whether they took any of a variety of personal precautions, including not walking out at night, using special locks, and engraving their valuables. Those who said they did none of these things were the least fearful, those who took one such precaution were next least fearful, and those who took 2, 3, or 4 precautionary actions were most fearful (Kim, 1976).

The field work provides similar evidence. The following comes from a woman whose solution was to lock herself in as soon as she got home:

"My neighborhood's not safe, but I have to put up with it. My husband comes to pick me up after work. We go shopping...when I get home, I close the door and don't go out no more." (Question: Is there much difference in the day?) "At least I can see who I'm dealing with. I been here 33 years, so I know the characters around here. I know who's doing the numbers. I recognize stolen articles on the block. I'm aware of the drug traffic. But I don't say anything. I'm afraid to. I don't want my house all painted up. If a guy doesn't come back on you, he'll get a friend to do something. People know what's going on but they don't want to say...(SP, 6/23/76, p. 6).

There is further evidence that individual protective measures do not appear to solve the problem. Victims of home burglaries said they became more cautious after the break-in, but they actually did not use locks or take protective measures more than non-victims did (Scarr et al., 1973; Miransky & Langer, 1978). Perhaps they reasoned that locks had not safeguarded them in the first instance and had little hope that they would in the future.

In contrast to the sense of helplessness that seems to characterize the descriptions of individual efforts to prevent victimization, there is a sense of optimism and newly discovered efficacy that accompanies the description of collective efforts to reduce victimization. We propose that this is so because the collective efforts seem to operate on the distal

factors, making a locality safer.

C. Efforts to control the distal causes of victimization: reliance on neighbors and collective actions.

Reliance on one's neighbors takes many forms, ranging from formalized citizen patrols to the use of piercing whistles or horns to informal street and house watching (cf. Reed, 1977). Regardless of the actual crime prevention value of such efforts mentioned above, we have numerous testimonials about the "good psychological value" of programs sponsoring whistles and horns.

"Before I was concerned but I didn't know what to do. Now I react to screams if I hear them...(because I have a whistle)...

In the past it would have just been apathy. It's not that people were unfeeling but a feeling of being inadequate." (LV, 8/5/76. p. 1)

In addition to enhancing a sense of personal efficacy, such programs engender the feeling that the official agents of control may become more reliable too.

"I like (this whistle program)...It has good psychological value. The police where it is in effect have been very pleased with it and respond even faster than they would for a woman just calling help." (LV, 8/10/76, p. 2)

"It (the whistle program) is effective because the police know that the neighborhood is involved and they'll react more quickly if they know they'll have support from the people." (LV, 7/29/76, p. 1)

Survey data again support the field work. Respondents in Hartford who described their neighbors as concerned about others, as willing to help

the police, and willing to watch neighboring homes were significantly less fearful than those who regarded their neighbors as unreliable in these matters (Kim, 1976). These data do not prove that individual actions raise fear levels and neighborly actions reduce fear--the data are one-shot correlations and the causal direction could be reversed or non-existent. They do show, however, that actions directed at the causes of victimization are not accompanied by a sense of security unless these actions are collective and involve neighborly reliance and participation.

The real effectiveness of such citizen alert techniques in reducing crime or victimization is unclear (e.g. Maltz, 1972; Weidman, 1975). For this reason, the leaders and participants in such programs often claim other forms of success and emphasize the psychological benefits derived from providing a means for responding and rekindling a sense of community (e.g. Knopf, 1970; Nash, 1968). In lieu of reporting actuarial data, the participants in such programs tell "success stories." These stories sometimes appear in local newspapers, and are retold many times by the organizers and favorably impressed participants. The following story was told independently by two women and reported in the local newspaper of a community in Middletown:

"A young girl with a knife tried to attack someone and steal the victim's groceries. The victim blew a whistle and whistles started blowing all over the neighborhood. A passerby threw a book at the attacker and knocked her down. The police arrived before she could escape." (LV, 8/21/76, p. 3)

One of the most important features of such collective activities is their visibility. If one whistle blows and 50 others start, these are signs that something will happen if a person acts. Even if no statistics are forthcoming to prove that such programs eliminate crime, there is clear evidence that when one person blows a whistle, others will respond. These programs do what Seligman (1975) recommends to ward off feelings of helplessness; they let people feel effective, if not in reducing crime at least in producing a response in neighbors and policemen. By involving more than one person, they also act on what we have called distal causes of victimization - they make a locality or neighborhood seem safer, because the neighbors are involved in collective action (cf. DuBow, McCabe & Kaplan, 1977).

Strictly individualized measures, however, which make one home secure but leave the locality and the larger world full of danger, seem to do little to promote a sense of security. They operate at the most proximal level - at the doorstep of the potential victim, and if they fail, their possessor can fall prey to all that lurks outside. There are no guarantees that any locks, burglar alarms, dogs, or other measures will work. Each one is presumed to lower the probabilities that their possessor will become a victim, but none offers certainty. Moreover, by locking themselves behind closed doors and never venturing into the streets, people are in effect imprisoning themselves. There are some protests to this effect in the field work:

"I'm not going to be made a prisoner in my own house!!!" (VV, 7/22/76, p. 9)

"I don't like people putting restrictions on me. I have a friend who...tells me I am going to get murdered one of these days. Well that kind of pessimism I can do without...I don't like putting limits on my life." (M, 9/12/76, p. 7)

Both our field work data and survey data indicate that efforts to work on the proximal causes of victimization are associated with fear rather than perceived efficacy. Efforts directed at distal causes and making a locality safer at least have "good psychological value" even if crime statistics do not demonstrate their success. What about efforts directed at the distal causes of crime - the causes that survey respondents acknowledge are important but that crime prevention programs ignore?

D. Efforts to control the distal causes of offenders' behaviors: reliance on social programs

Since few crime prevention programs address the social conditions that we call distal causes in the offender's chain, evaluators have not studied the effects of such programs on fear of crime and actual crime reduction. We can only speculate^{about} the sense of efficacy or helplessness that would accompany such efforts. We do know that the community organizations and federal programs that work for social change show far fewer "successes" than the victimization programs (e.g. Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). We also know that they have taken on difficult tasks: they have worked to change the policies of banks to provide loans to neighborhoods previously denied money; they have petitioned city agencies to enforce building codes and require landlords to repair buildings that contribute to a neighborhood's deterioration; they have tried to hasten the removal or sale of abandoned

buildings which become centers of drug dealings. Such action-oriented programs settle for far fewer success stories. Both grass roots organized efforts and federally sponsored programs to create a "great society" encounter problems in implementation when they try to accomplish significant social change.

Since the crime prevention programs studied in our field work did not include social action as a major part of their crime-related agenda, we cannot assess the impact of such efforts on citizens' sense of control and fear of crime. We do have evidence, however, that people respond with fear to signs of poverty and community deterioration such as abandoned housing (Baumer, 1977; Hunter, 1977; DuBow, 1978). They also think places where young people congregate are dangerous (Kidder, 1977). This means that programs that succeed in removing abandoned housing and providing work or other activities for otherwise idle men and young people ought to give a sense of safety. Whether such programs would really reduce crime and whether they can be implemented are separate issues. According to laymen's theories about the causes of crime, however, these are the solutions.

Conclusions and implications

Our observation that people talk about one set of factors as the causes of crime and act on another set when they choose to do something about crime is in accord with an observation made by Furstenberg (1971, 1972) when he analyzed national surveys. Furstenberg reports a discrepancy between people's concerns with crime as a social problem and their fears or perceptions of their own risk. He found that people living in areas with relatively low crime rates report a high concern with crime as a

social problem, but a low fear of personal victimization. People living in high-crime areas, on the other hand, report a low concern with crime as a social problem and a high fear of personal victimization. It may also be the case that when people talk about crime as a social problem, they attribute it to social conditions, such as poverty, unemployment, neglect of children, and other factors that appear to be linked with high crime rates. When, however, they choose to do something in response to their own fears, they act to reduce their personal risk. Consequently, their intervention into the causal network when they take action does not fit with their identification of causes when they discuss the social problem.

We have argued that people talk about one thing and do something else. They talk about social conditions that cause crime, such as unemployment, poverty, drug addiction, and neglect of children; but when they engage in crime prevention efforts, they work closer to home and try to protect their own bodies, homes or neighborhoods by staying in at night, installing locks or joining neighborhood patrols. Conklin (1975) speaks of these actions as "avoidance" measures and "hardening the target." We have called them "victimization prevention" instead of crime prevention measures (cf. DuBow, McCabe & Kaplan, 1977; and McCabe & Kaplan, 1976). It is as though they operate with two sets of theories -- one about the causes of crime and another about the prevention of victimization. Perhaps crime is not unique in this respect. If we looked at people's theories about the causes of mental illness, we might find they identify one set of conditions as causes but operate on another set when they look for solutions. The exis-

tence of social programs and institutions for handling problems like mental illness, juvenile delinquency, and crime may shape people's responses to these problems by offering a more immediate solution that bears little relationship to the laymen's analysis of the causes. Andrew Gordon and his colleagues argue that some social service institutions often serve their own interests more than those of their clients (e.g. Gordon, et al. 1974, 1976). Programs for "problem children," for instance, locate the problem within the child and thereby create a large body of clients who need the agency's help. If the agency's diagnosis included other causes, such as the housing and employment conditions of the child's family, it would open another avenue of action, but one which that agency is not equipped to handle (Gordon, et al.).

Crime prevention seems to operate the same way. The existing programs and prevailing beliefs concerning crime prevention focus on the more immediate factors within the potential victim's control. These efforts may seem more practical because they are easier to implement. They do not, however, appear to promote a feeling that the world is now safer or that crime rates have been reduced, for they were not directed toward the conditions that people say cause crime. Nonetheless, in their search for a sense of control, people appear to be ready to accept what is offered: solutions that promise to reduce their risks of becoming victims.

The most striking feature of the variety of crime prevention activities is that with the exception of summer employment and recreation programs for young people, none of the programs or actions address the social conditions

that people name as the primary causes of crime. Social programs do exist to reduce unemployment, to revive declining neighborhoods, and to redress the social conditions that constitute distal factors in the offender's chain, but these actions are not done in the name of "crime prevention." Instead, people talk about these as the causes of crime but they switch their emphasis when they do something about crime. According to some community organizers, most crime prevention programs "avoid the basic causes of crime, the problems with youth and unemployment, education, and so on." (M, 1/21/77, 311176). Why?

Both individual responses and crime prevention programs may be guided by considerations of efficacy - not in actually reducing crime but in showing some measurable results. Without signs of success or efficacy, people give up trying; their efforts become extinguished and they conclude they are helpless (Seligman, 1975; Wortman & Brehm, 1975). In addition to making individuals feel frustrated or helpless, failure to produce the desired effects actually threatens the survival of programs whose funds were granted on the basis of a promise of success. Therefore program administrators often use measures that make their programs look successful (Campbell, Gordon, & Cochran, 1977). The collective wisdom among community organizers who have worked in the area of crime prevention and victimization prevention is that "crime is not a good organizing issue because it's a difficult issue on which to show obvious results" (LV, 6/29/76, p. 5). Consequently, program administrators often measure the numbers of blocks organized, numbers of horns or whistles distributed, numbers of engraving tools used to mark valuables, or numbers of Operation ID stickers passed out. These statistics

are easy to collect and report. They also provide impressive numbers.

By contrast, the community organization programs that focus on the distal part of the offender's chain report far fewer successes. These programs try to effect changes in unemployment rates, abandoned housing, or the delivery of city services. They regard themselves fortunate to complete two such "actions" in six months.

We can compare these two different approaches to two sports. The whistle-selling, valuables-marking approach produces scores like a basketball game, with large numbers of successes. One organizer reported that approximately 100 blocks in his area were organized after six months of hard work. Another reported he was ordering freon horns in large quantities because he felt he could distribute them easily. The "action" oriented approach, on the other hand, produces low scores, like a hockey game, because a good action takes a long time to organize. It is not coincidental that "action" oriented programs are often funded by charitable groups, grass roots support, and local parishes or philanthropic groups. The high-scoring programs that promote devices for victimization prevention, on the other hand, are often funded by distant agencies, where funding decisions are made on the basis of easily tabulated and multiple "successes."

Our attributional analysis of crime prevention efforts raises several issues that have implications for social policy and social action. Were we to evaluate crime prevention programs, we could assess them from several perspectives. We could ask the obvious question: do they effectively prevent crimes from occurring to those persons or groups who participate in

the programs or efforts? In addition, we could ask: do they raise or lower the participants' fear of crime? If we found the programs reduced victimization, but increased fear, we would have to weigh the relative gains and losses in some formula that compared the quantity and quality of life that such programs produce. Some of our respondents in the field and other writers concerned with the quality of life have said that some acts of prevention may not be worth the sense of imprisonment they create (e.g. DuBow, 1978). Finally, we can ask: what is the theory of crime and victimization that any one crime prevention program promotes? Is it a theory that locates the causes of crime in personal behaviors or in social conditions, in the loss of control by criminal justice agents or in the loss of community. We have argued that crime prevention efforts do imply causal analysis, and they purport to identify critical links in a causal network--links that are practical points of entry. We think it important to ask what happens not only to victimization rates but also to community life and social attitudes when people adopt a crime prevention measure, and its theory. Some collective crime prevention efforts reportedly rekindle a sense of community and promote greater trust at least in the circle of people who cooperate to protect one another. Others may do the opposite. These are all side effects that follow from the theories and actions about crime.

From a psychologist's point of view, these side effects become main effects and we want to assess them along with victimization rates when we judge the worth of crime prevention efforts.

As a final note, causal chains may be applied to other areas of the criminal justice system. One may combine crime studies which focus on the offender's chain (see reviews by Pepitone, 1975; Perlman,^{1977,} in press) and rape studies which focus on the victim's chain (e.g. Jones & Aronson¹⁹⁷³) to study factors influencing judicial sentences of imprisonment, rehabilitation, or resitution (Cohn, Kidder, & Brickman, 1978). Many of the same causes which influence people's reactions to crime operate on judges' decisions.

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