An Analytic Framework for Integrating

Developmental, Opportunity and Environmental Approaches

to Controlling Crime

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(Based on Discussions in Sweden, Sept. 1994)

1.0. Introduction

The purpose of this model is to develop an integrated and differentiated model that can hold different ideas about crime causation in a way that makes clear where distinct opportunities for crime prevention might lie. It seeks to integrate what have variously been considered environmental, developmental, and situational approaches to crime causation and prevention. It is based on conversations held in Sweden in September, 1994.

2.0. The Basic Idea

The basic idea of this model include the following propositions:

1) Individuals size up opportunities to commit crimes according to characteristic individual utility functions. If, in some particular situation they encounter/find it looks more valuable to them to commit a crime than to refrain, they will commit the crime. Individuals differ in terms of their enthusiasm and restraint for committing crimes; but the differences are changeable--at least to some degree.

2) Individuals also have different capabilities for committing crimes and for sizing up opportunities. They also differ in terms of their willingness to invest in prepartions for committing offenses.

3) Individuals encounter/find opportunities to commit crimes as a function of the "target" distribution in the environment, and as function of their movements (motivated either by routines or strategic calculation).

4) Target distribution is a function of individually chosen self-defense and governmentally supplied defense instrumentalitis. It is influenced by both the physical and social environment and by the ways in which each influences the others

5) Overall crime rate in the city is determined by the number of criminal opportunities found and exploited by individuals in the environment given rules of movement around the society.

Each of these points can be broken down further.

3.0. A Model of Individual Motivations for Criminal Offending

3.1. Individuals size up opportunities to commit crimes by comparing the utility of committing crimes and succeeding (which means that they secure the utility associated with the commission of the act and are not punished for their actions) with the utility of committing the crimes and failing (which means that the crime fails to yield what they want, or that they are punished in some way for their actions).

Note that there are two separate parts of this calculation: the valuation part has to do with what people like and don't like, and how much; the empirical part has to do with the way that the person sizes up situations in terms of the prospects of any particular action.

(Note that I am not assuming that individuals are "rational" in the sense that the things they are value are things that everyone values such as more money. They could value things such as power or expressiveness as well as material returns. I am assuming they are rational to some degree in terms of their ability to imagine at some level the difference between the likely consequences of committing a crime in a particular situation versus not. How rational they are in the empirical dimension can be more or less.)

3.2. The individual utility functions include some way of weighting the immediate returns from crime commission (both expressive and instrumental); some way of weighting the unpleasantness of committing the crime even without external punishment (guilt or inhibition); and some way of weighting the unpleasantness associated with punishment (a complex valuation of different attributes of punishment including lost status, lost freedom, unpleasantness of conditions, etc.).

3.3. The utility functions may also include some characteristic "discounting rate" and some "degree of risk aversion" (including the possibility that some people will be "risk favoring"). (Note: important to distinguish idea of risk aversion from distaste for bad consequences.)

3.4. It may be useful to imagine that these utility functions have a deep structural component that, once established, is fairly consistent over time; and a more volatile temporary component that can be powerfully influenced by immediate circumstances. For example, a person may on average be more or less excitable. But even the least excitable person can sometimes be provoked to rage and fury by circumstances. (Perhaps this could be accommodated by imagining that a person's utility function was really an envelope that accommodated not only many different attributes, but also many different relative valuations of those attributes. An "emotional" person might have a highly variable utility function; a phlegmatic person might have a low variability utility function.)

3.5. We can think of the deep structural aspects of these characteristic utility functions as the product of many things: inborn characteristics, biological characteristics that are affected by environmental factors (such as in utero exposure to drugs, early mal-nutrition, lead poisoning), other early developmental influences on psychology and temperament, and "learning" that happens through experience accumulated individually but interpreted and extended by others. It may seem inconsistent to view "utility functions" (a concept from economics and seeming to imply rationality) with "biological or psychological characteristics," but one could (to some degree) think of the biological or psychological characteristics as giving a certain weighting, charge, or salience to some particular parts of an individual's utility function. (This ignores the impact of these factors to influence other aspects of a person's calculation: namely, ability to size up situations accurately, to learn from experience, etc.)

3.6. We can think of the momentary component of these utility functions as more or less sensitive to environmental events such as drug use, provocation, etc. How variable a person's utility function is, and what particular things knock this out of kilter could be thought of as part of a person's deep structure, and subject to the same things that influence that deep structure.

3.7. To some degree, even the deep structure of these characteristic individual utility functions are changeable. It may be that there are different moments when these characteristics are more or less changeable, however. For example, many people think that there is more flexibility on many of these characteristics relatively early in life than later. (I suspect that this ignores the rather substantial changes that happen in the mid-forties, fifties and sixties, however).

3.8. Individuals will differ from one another in the utility they derive from the benefits of committing crime, and from the disutility they experience from the same act (guilt) and the experience of punishment (stigma and humiliation and loss of status as well as daily discomfort and loss of liberty). At any given moment, a population has a distribution of people with these (individually) characteristic utility functions. Some people may be relatively highly "socialized" (with tempered demands for material goods, strong empathy for others and little desire to exert power over them, a well developed sense of guilt about violating moral and legal norms, a strong desire to protect their reputation for virtue, long time horizons, and a distaste for risk). Others may have the opposite characteristics.

3.9. Map these ideas onto notions such as impulsive, intentionally, crazily, etc.

4.0. A Model of Individual Capacity to Commit Offenses

4.1. Capacity could include a particular kind of individual utility function. Strong enough drive. Not enough inhibitions. Where there's a will there's a way. But that is discussed above.

(Nota Bene: Offenders could manipulate their utility functions by making themselves angry or disinhibited through drugs alcohol, nurturing their anger, justifying their actions. That idea may belong in discussion of building capacity)

4.2. Capacity here means having the two different kinds of skills including: 1) ability to size up; and 2) means to carry out. There's an interaction here: when cognitive skills come into play, meager means may be parlayed into an effective capacity for action, and vice versa. Conscious preparation (in general or specific) v. having capabilities (in general or specific).

4.3. Capacity to size up is probably a function of experience at least as much as cognitive skills. Could also be a function of access to teaching. (Situations may give more or less opportunity to size up and case)

4.4. Capacity to carry out may be a function of physical characteristics of offender and setting and fit between those. Among most important may be access to getaway strategies, weapons, a reputation for violence that can intimidate witnesses and victims.

4.5. Discuss in relationship to "modus operandi"

5.0. "Target" Distribution\ Formal and Informal Social Control

5.1. Imagery of "targets" is more appropriate for a portion of potential offenders (for a portion of their time). Better might be thought of as opportunities. Targets are things that are particularly tempting or particularly provocative.

5.2. Opportunities can be "provoking" as well as "tempting" as well as "vulnerable."

5.3. Opportunities exist in combinations of physical and social space. Social space includes private and public efforts.

5.4. Target reduction or hardening operates on physical characteristics that reduce value of crimes, or increase chance of being caught. Noisier things are, more time things take, more vulnerable they come to social intervention.

5.5. Whether intervention occurs depends on social characteristics: willingness of citizens to act, willingness of citizens to trust police, patrolling practices of police.

6.0. Rules for Encounters/Routine Activities Theory

6.1. Again, have to make distinction between predators, opportunists, and others.

6.2. Crimes can emerge from routine encounters between oppotunists and ordinary people as they encounter opportunities as well as from predators pursuing their hunting (as opposed to regular) routines. (Their regular routines may be partially shaped by hunting and vice versa).

6.3. These patterns are hard to see in advance, but might become visible after the fact. Intervention could reduce.

6.4. What are the "markets" that bring potential offenders together with potential opportunities? Note role of frustrating relationships as a quality that structures a market; encounters between young and old, rich and poor; places where money is exchanged.

7.O Overall Crime Rate Determination

7.1. In short run, crime rate emerges from encounters of potential offenders with opportunities.

7.2. Over longer run, can make a difference by changing number and distribution of potential offenders, opportunities, ways that they come together.

7.3. What is casually called environment plays an important role in several different parts of model: 1) impact on individual orientations; 2) production of opportunities; 3) ways in which markets for crime are created (how offenders encounter opportunities).

7.4. Note that individual orientations can be affected by lots of things: 1) background factors; 2) learning opportunities.

7.5. Note also that ordinary people in terms of inclinations to offend could end up as dangerous offenders both through chance encounters with opportunities, and that plus the learning that goes on. Alternatively, people who start off as dangerous offenders can be discouraged, and transformed. This implies that observed lambda is not a measure of long run individual propensity alone.

7.6. Systematic ideas of crime prevention include: 1) factors shaping individual orientation (in advance, through learning); 2) factors shaping individual capabilities (including access to weapons); 3) factors shaping distribution of opportunities (physical and social; private and governmental); 4) factors influencing emergence of "crime markets" (including frustrating situations, bars, street level drug markets)