PROBLEM-ORIENTED POLICING
AND
CRIME PREVENTION

by

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From among the many developments in the past two decades relating to the improvement of policing and, more broadly, the prevention of crime and disorder, two clusters of activity hold special promise. One is the movement within policing to analyze the specific behavioral problems that the police are called on to handle in the community, and to use the results of these analyses as a basis for developing more effective responses to those problems. The other is the progress made by researchers, almost all of whom are located outside police agencies, in gaining new insights into the nature of crime and disorder and in producing findings about the effectiveness of different preventive strategies.

The two developments are obviously interrelated. They are, in many respects, interdependent. But in practice, they are not sufficiently connected. The major contribution of this book is in the effort the author makes to strengthen that connection; to build bridges between the initiatives of the police and the work of the researchers.

Much of the effort within policing has been accomplished under the umbrella of problem-oriented policing. That concept calls for the police to examine, anew and in-depth, groups of similar incidents to which they most likely have responded in a generic, routine manner in the past; to explore alternatives for responding to these grouped incidents or problems (with a priority on preventive action); and to test the relative value of these new responses. We now have a substantial collection of work, largely the product of individual police officers, that demonstrates the value of adopting this inquiring posture. But fuller development of the concept has been limited by a number of factors. Chief among these has been our failure to build an institutional capacity within policing to engage in in-depth research that could then be used to inform police practices. Part of that effort would require that the police become more knowledgeable about relevant research, much of which has not been easily accessible to them.

In the research field, the relevant development has been in the emerging field of environmental criminology. Building on routine activ-
ity theory, rational choice theory, and situational crime prevention, re-
searchers have produced a substantial body of findings that are relevant to the police. These studies provide new insights into common problems of crime and disorder and evaluate the effectiveness of various preventive strategies. But while the volume, quality, and relevance of this research has increased rapidly, the studies are rarely used by the police. Moreover, further advances in this type of research in both volume and refinement require a greater number of people with the requisite research skills. They also require closer col-
laboration between researchers and the police. Researchers need to take advantage of the untapped insights of operating police personnel and the vast amount of data that they acquire.

Thus, while the accomplishments to date with regard to both devel-
opments of the initiatives of the police and those of the researchers are significant and substantial, they are just evolving. They are uneven in their quality. And they are relatively small compared to the ultimate need and, excitedly, the potential. Speeding them up will require a greater in-
vestment of resources and skills, and an intensified commitment of both police practitioners and researchers. But progress also requires connect-
ing the two developments especially by making already available re-
search findings accessible and comprehensible to police personnel. It is to that need that the author of this volume has addressed himself.

Having completed a comprehensive review of the relevant literature, Anthony Braga synthesizes that literature in a way that communicates clearly to police practitioners and to other interested parties. He is well positioned to bridge the existing gap. Braga has an in-depth understand-
ing of problem-oriented policing. He is thoroughly familiar with recent developments in criminology enabling him to explain clearly how each research effort is grounded in current criminological theories. He knows the literature on crime prevention. And he has the direct ex-
perience of having had a key role in one of the most ambitious efforts to bring police practitioners and academic researchers together in an ex-
tended collaboration aimed at addressing a specific problem youth

gun violence in Boston.

Given the substantial accumulation of research, the author faced a major challenge in deciding on how best to organize his synthesis of it. He neatly solved this problem by grouping his descriptions of relevant
research findings under the three dominant focuses that have emerged in that research: (1) preventing crime at problem places; (2) controlling high-activity offenders; and (3) protecting repeat victims. His three central chapters—the essence of the book—correspond to this grouping. Each of the three terms and the research findings and methods they embrace will have meaning to the police. Presenting the material in this way itself has the potential for positively advancing the way in which police think about their work.

The more police practitioners and researchers can join in thinking productively about the specific problems that constitute police business and the more they join in testing the value of different preventive strategies, the greater is the likelihood that they will acquire the evidence to support good practice. And ultimately, it is such evidence that will enable the police to resist being pressured to resort to traditional, but questionable methods of operating; to resist being buffeted about by trends and fads. They will have a more solid basis on which to appeal for a more enlightened form of policing—a form of policing that is effective, and also achievable within democratic constraints.

Herman Goldstein
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Anthony A. Braga
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Society has long looked to police departments to deal effectively with crime. Our ideas about how the police should go about dealing with crime have evolved over time. For a long time the public was content with police departments whose primary role was to apprehend offenders, so society could hold law breakers accountable for their crimes (Wilson and McLaren, 1977). The primary technologies to fulfill this goal were preventive patrol, rapid response, and retrospective investigations (Sparrow et al., 1990). As the limits of these approaches are by now well known, the police became more interested in preventing crime through more aggressive preventive tactics and hoped this thicker response would deter crime. These aggressive tactics included directed patrols and patrols targeting particular individuals (Pate et al., 1976), field interrogations and searches (Moore, 1980), decoy operations (Moore, 1983a), and sting operations (Klockars, 1980; Marx, 1988). Although these differed from past tactics in other words, the new tactics were now focused on anticipating crimes rather than simply reacting to crime; they were primarily intended to produce deterrent effects through arrests.

Recently, police departments have been experimenting with a much broader idea of crime prevention. Proactive efforts to prevent crime were advanced by the publication of Herman Goldstein’s seminal article on problem-oriented policing (Goldstein, 1979). He argued that police departments were much too focused on how they were organized to do their work rather than on the crime problems they needed to solve. Goldstein further suggested that greater operational effectiveness could be accomplished through detailed analyses of crime problems and the development of appropriate solutions, rather than by effecting improvements in organization and management. The problem-solving process requires identifying these problems in more precise terms, researching each problem, documenting the nature of the current police response, assessing the adequacy of existing authority and resources, engaging in a broad exploration of alternatives to present responses, weighing the merits of these alternatives, and choosing from among
them" (Goldstein, 1979:236). Since Goldstein’s article many police departments have experimented with this "problem-oriented" approach, and the available evaluation research suggests that problem-oriented policing is effective in dealing with a wide range of crime problems, including thefts and burglary (Eck and Spelman, 1987), street-level drug markets (Kennedy, 1993; Hope, 1994), and violent crime hot spots (Braga et al., 1999). Another example is in Boston, where an interagency working group crafted a problem-oriented strategy that has shown much promise in reducing a seemingly intractable problem—youth gun homicide (Kennedy et al., 1996a; Braga et al., 2001).

This book represents a modest attempt to enrich the practice of problem-oriented policing. As others observe (e.g., Read and Tilley, 2000; Eck, 2000; Clarke 1998), there are many avenues through which the practice of problem-oriented policing can be improved. These include creating better classification systems for problems, improving the capacity of police departments to analyze data on problems, and developing response guides that reveal the conditions that are necessary for interventions to be successful. This book attempts to contribute to improving practice by systematically assembling research and experience on successful problem-oriented policing and "situational crime prevention" projects, linking the crime prevention mechanisms at work in these projects to theoretical concepts, and drawing out the lessons to be learned from these experiences so these insights can be more easily incorporated into the everyday practice of problem-oriented policing. This book is also based on the idea that one often gets more inspiration and more useful ideas from looking at concrete examples of problem-oriented policing and situational crime prevention than one gets from understanding the general principles of the processes. The development of effective crime prevention techniques depends on a great deal of creativity and imagination from police practitioners. The need for creativity may be partly due to the fact that the field has not adequately developed a knowledge of prevention methods. But it also could be true that the work of problem-oriented policing will never be entirely routinized. It is quite possible that even after we have had long experience with the techniques of problem-oriented policing, developed a high degree of self-consciousness about the methods, and even learned about how particular kinds of problems are best solved generally, effective
crime prevention may still require a great deal of imagination and creativity to deal with the peculiarities of a new situation (Kennedy and Moore, 1995). As such, this book should be regarded not as a cookbook on effective crime prevention, but, hopefully, as a text that will help inspire creativity in dealing with real world crime problems.

Organization of This Book

The chapters in this book are organized around the well-known problem analysis triangle (see Figure 1-1) that breaks crime down into the features of places, features of offenders, and features of victims (see, e.g., Hough and Tilley, 1998; Leigh et al., 1996). This analytic device was intended to help analysts visualize crime problems and understand relationships between the three elements. Moreover, research suggests that crime tends to cluster among a few places, offenders, and victims. Spelman and Eck (1989) examined several studies and estimated that 10 percent of the victims in the United States are involved in 40 percent of victimizations, 10 percent of offenders are involved in over 50 percent of crimes, and 10 percent of places are the sites of about 60 percent of crimes. As such, these broad categories of crime problems are useful ways to think about focusing limited police resources. In practice, the underlying conditions that give rise to crime problems and the resulting interventions to alleviate crime problems are likely to overlap these areas and, quite possibly, not fit nicely into the three areas. For example, analysis of a gang violence problem may well reveal that much gang violence is retaliatory in nature (Decker, 1996) and that today’s offenders are tomorrow’s victims and vice versa. Analysis may also reveal that gang violence tends to cluster at particular places in the city (Block and Block, 1993; Kennedy et al., 1996a). As such, the resulting problem-oriented interventions to reduce gang violence may well address relevant features of places, offenders, and victims. Nonetheless, the crime triangle provides an easy-to-understand framework around which to organize examples of effective problem-oriented policing and situational crime prevention efforts.

Each chapter begins with a few examples of effective crime prevention projects, which are followed by a discussion of criminological research and theory that provides some insight on why these measures were effective. Additional interventions and research are also discussed
as each chapter unfolds. The final chapter in this book presents a few administrative arrangements in police departments that could facilitate effective problem-oriented policing. Since many of the projects included in this book were not designed to explicitly make a link between particular theories and observed crime prevention gains, the discussions of crime prevention mechanisms at play are based to some extent on speculation. As such, this is not an exercise in theory testing, but an exercise in applying theoretical knowledge to illuminate crime prevention processes that could enrich practice.

**Figure 1-1. Problem Analysis Triangle**

Features of the victim

Features of the location

Features of the offender

Reprinted with permission from Hough and Tilley, 1998.

Readers who are familiar with the wide range of criminological theories will undoubtedly notice that certain theories and perspectives are privileged over others. Most criminological research focuses on why some people become persistent offenders (Felson and Clarke, 1998). However, as Eck (2000) observes, by the time a problem comes to the attention of the police, the questions of why people offend are no longer
relevant. The most pressing concerns are why offenders are committing crimes at particular places, selecting particular targets, and committing crimes at specific times (Eck, 2000). While police officers are important entry points to social services for many people, they are best positioned to prevent crimes by focusing on the situational opportunities for offending rather than attempting to manipulate socio-economic conditions that are the subjects of much criminological inquiry and the primary focus of other governmental agencies. Theories that deal with the "root causes" of crime focus on interventions that are beyond the scope of most problem-oriented policing projects. Theories that deal with opportunities for crime and how likely offenders, potential victims, and others make decisions based on perceived opportunities have greater utility in designing effective problem-oriented policing interventions (Eck, 2000; Felson and Clarke, 1998).

The Police and Crime Prevention: A Brief Historical Overview

The police developed as a mechanism to do justice by apprehending offenders and holding them accountable (Wilson and McLaren, 1977). Since their primary practical goal was to reduce crime victimization, police long believed that they were in the business of crime prevention (U.S. President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, 1967b).

Police strategists relied upon two ideas to prevent crimes: deterrence and incapacitation. The imminent threat of arrest was their main strategy to generate general deterrence to dissuade the general public from contemplating crimes. The police attempted to generate specific deterrence by apprehending criminals with the intent to discourage them from committing crimes in the future. The police also believed that arrests would prevent crime by incapacitating criminals, through their removal from the street and subsequent placement in jail or prison. In particular, the police sought to prevent repeat offenders from continuing their careers through specific deterrence, incapacitation, and, to some degree, rehabilitation (as part of their subsequent incarceration or community supervision). The police were reliant on the other parts of the criminal justice system to pursue these goals, but they could at least start the process by arresting offenders and building credible cases against them. As many observers have pointed out, these police crime prevention efforts
were, in reality, reactive (see, e.g., Goldstein, 1979); they only began after a crime was committed.

In addition to preventing crime through deterrence and incapacitation, prevention, in policing circles prior to 1965, also conjured up the work of a unit handling juvenile cases (often referred to as the "crime prevention unit") or a unit of officers assigned to conducting educational "out-reach" programs in the schools. These programs were neither department-wide nor large in size, but were significant in that they were often seen as segregating and compartmentalizing the "prevention" work of the police.

Since the early 1990s, the police have become much more interested in a broader idea of prevention and the use of a wide range of crime prevention tactics (Roth et al., 2000). The search for greater citizen satisfaction, increased legitimacy, and more effective crime prevention alternatives to the traditional tactics used by most police departments led to the development of problem-oriented policing and "hot spots" policing (see chapter 2). The operational paradigms of many modern police departments have steadily evolved from a "professional" model of policing to a community-oriented, problem-solving model (Roth et al., 2000; Greene, 2000). Growing community dissatisfaction and a series of research studies that questioned the effectiveness of the professional model's basic tenets served as catalysts for the shift. Professional policing was itself a reform of the deplorable policing practices before the 1930s during the so-called "political era." Corruption, widespread abuse of authority, scandals, and a lack of professional standards were pervasive problems; these considerable shortcomings resulted in public outcry for better policing. Criminologists such as August Vollmer, the reform-minded chief in Berkeley, CA from 1905 to 1932, and O.W. Wilson, Chicago police chief in the post-World War II period, were pivotal figures in the development of "professional," also known as "reform," policing. These police leaders were the architects of the dominant paradigm, between the 1940s and 1960s, which remained influential through the 1980s. The professional model emphasized military discipline and structure, higher education for police officers, adoption of professional standards by police agencies, separating the police from political influence, and the adoption of technological innovations rang-
ing from strategic management techniques to scientific advances such as two-way radios and fingerprinting.

The corrupt policing practices of the "political era" were slowly eliminated during the 1940s and 1950s as departments changed operational strategies to the reform model. The more rigorous standards and professionalism of the reform model successfully controlled much misbehavior and maintained policing as a viable profession. During the post-World War II period, the police role as "crime fighter" was solidified (Walker, 1992). Policing focused itself on preventing serious crimes and advanced three operational strategies to achieve this goal: preventive patrol, rapid response, and investigation of more serious cases by specialized detective units.

During the 1970s, researchers sought to determine how effective these policing strategies were in controlling crime. Preventive patrol in radio cars was thought by most police executives to serve as a deterrent to criminal behavior. Contrary to this consensus, however, an early British experiment concluded that although crime increases when police patrol is completely removed from beats, the level of patrolling in beats makes little difference in crime rates (Bright, 1969). The well-known Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment further examined the effectiveness of varying levels of random preventive patrol in reducing crime. The study revealed that crime rates and citizen satisfaction remained the same no matter what the level of radio car patrol whether it was absent, doubled, or tripled (Kelling et al., 1974). Replications followed and obtained similar results. In Nashville, Tennessee, a level of 30 times the normal amount of patrol for selected districts was found to be successful in reducing crime at night, but not during the day (Schnelle et al., 1977). However, permanent long-term increased preventive patrol of an entire district is neither cost-effective, economically feasible, nor practical for a department's operations. Other studies revealed that preventive patrol’s inefficiency might be due to the fact that many serious crimes occur in locations (homes, alleys, businesses) not easily visible from a passing radio car (see Eck and Spelman, 1987; Skogan and Antunes, 1979).

In addition to high levels of manpower on patrol, police departments have placed a great emphasis on reducing response time in the belief that it would increase the probability of arrest. However, "several studies
found that rapid response has little effect on clearance rates (e.g., Spelman and Brown, 1984; Kansas City Police Department, 1978). Only about 3 percent of crimes are reported in progress; thus rapid response to most calls does not increase the probability of arrest (Spelman and Brown, 1984). The problem is that police departments have no control over two key elements between the time a crime is committed and the time a police officer arrives on the scene: the interval between the commission of a crime and the time it is discovered; and the interval between discovery and the time the citizen calls the police (Walker, 1992). Most crimes are discovered after the fact and for most "involvement" crimes where the victim is present (e.g., assault) there is some delay between victimization and the subsequent call to the police.

The third component of the professional "crime fighter" model successful investigations rests on the reputation of detectives as possessing special skills and crime-solving abilities. However, this image is largely perpetuated and romanticized by the media. Several researchers have described the reality that criminal investigations largely consist of routine, unspecialized work that is often unfruitful (Walker, 1992). Studies by the Rand Corporation (Greenwood et al., 1977) and the Police Executive Research Forum (Eck, 1983) documented that investigations involve mostly paperwork, phone calls, and the interviewing of victims and witnesses. Only 21 percent of all "index crimes" are cleared, and patrol officers at the scene of the crime usually make these arrests. In fact, most crimes are solved through the random circumstances of the crime scene, such as availability of witnesses or the presence of evidence such as fingerprints, rather than by any special follow-up investigations by detectives.

This series of studies, conducted in the 1970s and 1980s, challenged the three basic tenets of the professional model and raised many questions about proper crime control methods. An even more powerful harbinger of change was the growing community dissatisfaction with the activities of the police departments that served them. During the 1940s and 1950s, many reform-era police departments attempted to improve response times and clearance rates by moving police officers from walking beats into radio cars. This practice had the unfortunate effect of distancing the police from their constituencies. During the 1960s and early 70s, the police officers were called on to quell many conflicts that
revolved around larger social issues, such as the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War. College students, minorities, and disenfranchised communities clashed with police departments, which symbolized and enforced the norms of a society that did not represent them. The police were viewed as part of the problem and not a solution (Weisburd and Uchida, 1993; U.S. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968; U.S. President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Criminal Justice, 1967a, 1967b). The responding tactics of the police were viewed as draconian, and there was public outcry over a force that resembled and acted like "occupying armies" rather than civil servants (Kelling and Moore, 1988). Equally important, the crime rate soared and public satisfaction with the police decreased between the late 1960s and early 1970s; the legitimacy of the police was deeply questioned (Kelling and Moore, 1988).

Other research in the 1970s and 1980s pointed the police in promising directions. Frustrated by the shortcomings of the professional model, police administrators tested different strategies designed both to control crime and to bring the police and the public closer together. The Newark Foot Patrol Experiment revealed that although foot patrol did not affect the rate of serious crime, citizens perceived their environments as safer and their opinions about the police improved (Police Foundation, 1981). In Houston, a multifaceted fear reduction project was implemented. The components of this project included community stations, citizen contact foot patrol, community organizing teams, and a victim re-contact program. The evaluation of the program found generally positive results. Although serious crime did not decrease, communication between police and citizens increased and fear of crime was reduced (Pate et al., 1986).

Another important finding of these projects was that a large gap existed between the serious crime problems that professional departments attacked and the day-to-day concerns of citizens. Frequently, the police officers who staffed these programs were called upon to deal with less serious complaints, such as abandoned cars, raucous neighborhood youth, and barking dogs (Trojanowicz, 1983). Disorder in the community was more of an ongoing concern for the average citizen than the risk of being the victim of a serious crime. Police agencies soon learned that social incivilities (such as unsavory loiterers, loud music, public
drinking, and public urination) and physical incivilities (such as trash, vacant lots, graffiti, and abandoned buildings) had a definite impact on the quality of life in communities (Skogan, 1990).

A police focus on controlling disorder has been hypothesized to be an important way to reduce more serious crimes in neighborhoods. Wilson and Kelling’s (1982) "broken windows" thesis suggests the link between disorder and serious crime. Signs of deterioration in a community indicate that no one in authority cares and that rules no longer apply; disorder signals potential or active criminals that offenses will be tolerated, and thus serious crime rates increase (Wilson and Kelling, 1982). Research has established that incivilities generate fear (LaGrange et al., 1992; Ferraro, 1995) and are correlated with serious crime (Skogan, 1990). Collectively, this body of research suggested that if the police wanted to be more efficient at controlling crime, police departments should redefine their role to become more involved in communities and improve the neighborhood environment.

**Problem-oriented Policing**

The reactive methods of the professional model are often described as "incident-driven policing." Under this model, departments are aimed at resolving individual incidents instead of solving recurring crime problems (Eck and Spelman, 1987). Officers respond to repeated calls and never look for the underlying conditions that may be causing like groups of incidents. Officers become frustrated because they answer similar calls and seemingly make no real progress. Citizens become dissatisfied because the problems that generate their repeated calls still exist (Eck and Spelman, 1987). In 1979, Herman Goldstein, a respected University of Wisconsin law professor and former aide to Chicago police chief O.W. Wilson, proposed an alternative; he felt that police should go further than answering call after call, that they should search for solutions to recurring problems that generate the repeated calls. Goldstein described this strategy as the "problem-oriented approach" and envisioned it as a department-wide activity. This proposition was simple and straightforward. Behind every recurring problem there are underlying conditions that create it. Incident-driven policing never addresses these conditions; therefore incidents are likely to recur. Answering calls-for-service is an important task and still
must be done, but police officers should respond systematically to recurring calls arising from the same problem (see Figures 1-2 and 1-3). In order for the police to be more efficient and effective, Goldstein (1990) said they must gather information about incidents and design an appropriate response based on the nature of the underlying conditions that cause the problem(s). As summarized by Eck and Spelman (1987:xvi):

Underlying conditions create problems. These conditions might include the characteristics of the people involved (offenders, potential victims, and others), the social setting in which these people interact, the physical environment, and the way the public deals with these conditions. A problem created by these conditions may generate one or more incidents. These incidents, while stemming from a common source, may appear to be different. For example, social and physical conditions in a deteriorated apartment complex may generate burglaries, acts of vandalism, intimidation of pedestrians by rowdy teenagers, and other incidents. These incidents, some of which come to police attention, are symptoms of the problem. The incidents will continue as long as the problem that creates them persists.

And in Goldstein’s words (1979:236), the problem-solving process requires:

Identifying these problems in more precise terms, researching each problem, documenting the nature of the current police response, assessing its adequacy and the adequacy of existing authority and resources, engaging in a broad exploration of alternatives to present responses, weighing the merits of these alternatives, and choosing among them.

The developing field of situational crime prevention has also supported the problem-oriented policing movement since its genesis in the British Government’s Home Office Research Unit in the early 1980s (Clarke, 1992). Instead of preventing crime by altering broad social conditions such as poverty and inequality, situational crime prevention advocates changes in local environments to decrease opportunities for crimes to be committed. Situational crime prevention techniques comprise "opportunity-reducing measures that are, (1) directed at highly specific forms of crime (2) that involve the management, design, or manipulation of the immediate environment in as systematic and permanent way as possible (3) so as to increase the effort and risks of crime
and reduce the rewards as perceived by a wide range of offenders" (Clarke, 1992:4). The situational analysis of crime problems follows an action-research model that systematically identifies and examines problems, develops solutions, and evaluates results (Clarke, 1992; Lewin, 1947). The applications of situational crime prevention have shown convincing crime prevention results to a variety problems ranging from obscene phone callers (Clarke, 1990) to burglary (Pease, 1991) to car radio theft (Braga and Clarke, 1994). This simple but powerful perspective is applicable to crime problems facing the police, security personnel, business owners, local government officials, and private citizens. Indeed, Goldstein's (1990) formulation of problem-oriented policing shares many similarities to the action-research underpinnings of situational prevention (Clarke, 1992).

During the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, problem-oriented policing and community policing have been heralded as revolutionary alternatives to the professional model. The terms have become political buzzwords, and scores of books and articles have been written on these new strategic concepts. The terms are sometimes referred to as essentially the same strategy (Walker, 1992; Kennedy and Moore, 1995), however others maintain a distinct separation between the two concepts (Goldstein, 1990; Eck and Spelman, 1987). Problem-oriented policing (POP) is typically defined as focusing police attention on the underlying causes of problems behind a string of crime incidents, while community policing emphasizes the development of strong police-community partnerships in a joint effort to reduce crime and enhance security (Moore, 1992). Indeed, community-oriented police officers use problem solving as a tool and problem-oriented departments often form partnerships with the community. The term "problem solving" is often conceptualized as what an officer does to handle small, recurring beat-level problems, and it is distinguished from problem-oriented policing based on its rudimentary analysis of the problem and lack of formal assessment (see, e.g., Cordner, 1998). In short, some observers suggest the term "problem solving" does not adequately capture the substance of problem-oriented policing as envisioned by Goldstein (1990). Scott (2000) reports that Goldstein himself has been especially careful to avoid the term "problem solving" because many, if not most, problems the police confront are too complex for anything approaching a final solution; reduc-
ing harm, alleviating suffering, and/or providing some measure of relief are ambitious enough aims for the police.

Figures 1-2 and 1-3. Incident-Driven Policing versus Problem-oriented Policing

THE PRACTICE OF PROBLEM-ORIENTED POLICING

The problem-oriented policing approach was given an operational structure in Newport News, Virginia. Researchers from the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) and a group of officers selected from the various ranks of the Newport News Police Department crystallized the philosophy into a set of steps known as the SARA model (Eck and Spelman, 1987). The SARA model consists of these stages: scanning — the identification of an issue and determining whether it is a problem; Analysis — data collection on the problem to determine its scope, nature, and causes; Response — use of the information from the analysis to design an appropriate response, which can involve other agencies outside the normal police arena; and Assessment — evaluation of the response, whose results can be used to reexamine the problem and change responses or maintain positive conditions (Eck and Spelman, 1987). In practice, it is important to recognize that the development and implementation of problem-oriented responses do not always follow the linear, distinct steps of the SARA model (Capowich and Kochi, 1994; Braga and Weisburd, 2001). Rather, depending on the complexity of the problems to be addressed, the process can be characterized as a series of disjointed and often simultaneous activities. A wide variety of issues can cause deviations from the SARA model, including identified problems needing to be reanalyzed because initial responses were ineffective, and implemented responses that sometimes reveal new problems (Braga and Weisburd, 2001). It is also important to remember that the SARA model is only one way of operationalizing problem-oriented policing; as Read and Tilley (2000) remind us, it is not the only way and perhaps may not be the best way for police to address problems. Problem-oriented policing is an analytic approach, not a specific set of technologies (Kennedy and Moore, 1995). Interventions implemented as part of the problem-oriented process can be multiple and may evolve over time if field conditions change or offenders adapt to the original response.

Scanning

Scanning involves the identification of problems that are worth looking at because they are both important and amenable to solution. Herman Goldstein suggests that the definition of problems be at the
street-level of analysis and not be restricted by preconceived typologies. As he indicates (1990:68):

> It is not yet clear what significance, if any, there may be to the way in which problems are naturally defined. Nor is it clear for the purposes of analysis, one way of defining problems is preferable to another. It may be that none of this matters: that the primary concern ought to be to define the problem in terms that have meaning to both the community and the police.

Goldstein specifies what is meant by a problem as:

“a cluster of similar, related, or recurring incidents rather than a single incident; a substantive community concern; or a unit of police business (1990:66).”

While this book mostly focuses on “crime” problems, it is important to note that a great deal of policing relates to non-crime problems, including regulatory problems (e.g., traffic), and very minor criminal matters. Problem-oriented policing, as a concept, is equally applicable to all of the community problems that the community looks to the police to handle. The research on “harder” crime problems described in this book has relevance, in the methodology, to the “softer” problems as well.

There are many ways a problem might be nominated for police attention. A police officer may rely upon his or her informal knowledge of a community to identify a problem that he or she thinks is important to the well-being of the community. Another possibility is to identify problems from the examination of citizen calls-for-service coming into a police department. This approach is implicitly recommended by those who advocate “repeat call analysis” or the identification of “hot spots” (Sherman, 1987; Sherman et al., 1989). The notion is that citizens will let the police know what problems are concerning them by making calls as individuals. By analyzing these calls, and grouping them in ways that point to common causes or common solutions, the police may be able to develop a response that ameliorates the problem that is generating the calls. With the recent proliferation of computerized mapping technology in police departments, there has been a strong movement in police departments to use these techniques in the identification of crime problems (Weisburd and McEwen 1997).

Another approach to identifying problems is through consultation with community groups of different kinds, including other government agencies. This differs from analyzing individual calls-for-service because
the demands come from groups, rather than individuals. If the police are interested in forging partnerships with groups as well as individuals, then it is important to open up channels through which groups can express their concerns, such as community advisory councils or regular meetings held by the police to which all members of a community is invited (Sko- gan and Hartnett, 1997). This approach has the advantage of allowing the community’s views about what is important shape the police views about what is important, rather than leaving the nomination of problems to police analysts. Obviously, the best approach to identifying problems would be to combine these efforts.

Analysis

This phase challenges police officers to analyze the causes of problems behind a string of crime incidents or substantive community concern. Once the underlying conditions that give rise to crime problems are known, police officers develop and implement appropriate responses. The challenge to police officers is to go beyond the analysis that naturally occurs to them, which is limited to finding the places and times where particular offenses are likely to occur, and then identifying the offenders who are likely to be responsible for the crimes. Although these approaches have had some operational success, this type of analysis usually produces directed patrol operations or a focus on repeat offenders. The idea of analysis for problem-solving was intended to go beyond this. Goldstein (1990:98-99) describes this as the problem of "ensuring adequate depth" in the analysis, and offers the following as an example of what he means:

A study of the problem of theft from merchants by shoppers illustrates the need. It is easy, accepting how we have commonly responded to shoplifting to become enmeshed in exploring new ways in which to increase the number of arrests — including more efficient processing by the police. If one digs deeper, however, it becomes apparent that shoplifting is heavily influenced by how the merchandise is displayed and the means used to safeguard it. The police often accept these merchandising decisions as givens and are resigned to processing as many shoplifters as a store chooses to apprehend and deliver into their hands. More in-depth probing raises questions about the effectiveness of arrests as the primary means to
reduce shoplifting and the proprietary of delegating to private interests the judgment of who is to be arrested. The police may then focus on ways to curtail theft and on use to be made of arrest, including criteria to be employed in deciding who to arrest. If the analysis of the shoplifting problem had been superficial, limited to exploring ways to increase the number of arrests, the whole purpose of the enterprise would have been lost.

Situational crime prevention has further developed the methodology of analyzing problems, and provided important examples of how crime problems may be closely analyzed. Situational crime prevention measures are tailored to highly specific categories of crime. As Clarke (1997) describes, distinctions must be made not between broad crime categories such as burglary and robbery, but between the different kinds of offenses that comprise each of these categories. For example, in their analysis of domestic burglary in a British city, Poyner and Webb (1991) revealed that cash and jewelry burglaries tended to occur in older homes near the city center, while burglaries of electronic goods, such as TVs and VCRs, generally occurred in newer homes in the suburbs. Analysis further revealed that offenders on foot committed cash and jewelry burglaries. In the electronic goods burglaries, offenders used cars that had to be parked near to the house, but not so close that they would attract attention. The resulting crime prevention strategies differed accordingly. To prevent cash and jewelry burglaries in the city center, Poyner and Webb (1991) recommended improving security and surveillance at the burglar's point of entry; in contrast, to prevent electronic good burglaries in the suburbs, they suggested improving the natural surveillance of parking places and roadways in the area.

Beyond providing important theoretical and conceptual insights on the dynamics of crime problems, environmental criminology has developed a number of data collection methodologies that can greatly enrich the understanding of crime problems and, in turn, result in more effective responses (Clarke, 1998). These data collection methods include (as discussed in Clarke, 1998:324):

• Victimization surveys, which provide more detail about the impact of the problem on people's everyday lives;
Crime audits, where interviewers walk around a neighborhood with people who live there or around a park with regular users, and record where they report being afraid; and

- Structured interviews with offenders to find out more about their motives and their methods of committing crimes

Response

After a problem has been clearly defined and analyzed, police officers confront the challenge of developing a plausibly effective response. The development of appropriate responses is closely linked with the analysis that is performed. The analysis reveals the potential targets for an intervention, and in turn, ideas about the type of intervention may suggest important lines of analysis. For example, the reason police often look at places and times where crimes are committed is that they are already imagining that an effective way to prevent the crimes would be to get officers on the scene through directed patrols. The reason they often look for the likely offender is that they think that the most effective and just response to a crime problem would be to arrest and incapacitate the offender. However, the concept of "problem-oriented policing" as envisioned by Herman Goldstein (1990) calls on the police to make a much more "uninhibited" search for possible responses and not to limit themselves to getting officers in the right places at the right times, or identifying and arresting the offender (although both may be valuable responses). Effective responses often depend on getting other people to take actions that reduce the opportunities for criminal offending, or to mobilize informal social control to drive offenders away from certain locations.

The responses that problem-oriented police officers develop may be close to current police practices or, in some instances, quite different. Goldstein (1990:102-147) offers the following suggestive list of general alternatives police may consider in developing responses to neighborhood crime problems:

- Concentrating attention on those individuals who account for a disproportionate share of the problem;
- Connecting with other government and private services through referral to another agency, coordinating police re-
sponses with other agencies, correcting inadequacies in municipal services, and pressing for new services;

- Using mediation and negotiation skills to resolve disputes;
- Conveying information to the public to reduce anxiety and fear, to enable citizens to solve their own problems, to elicit conformity with laws and regulations that are not known or understood, to warn potential victims about their vulnerability and advise them of ways to protect themselves, to demonstrate to individuals how they unwittingly contribute to problems, to develop support for addressing a problem, and to acquaint the community with the limitations on the police and to define realistically what may be expected of the police;
- Mobilizing the community and making use of existing forms of social control in addition to the community;
- Altering the physical environment to reduce opportunities for problems to recur;
- Increasing regulation, through statutes or ordinances, of conditions that contribute to problems;
- Developing new forms of limited authority to intervene and detain; and
- Using civil law to control public nuisances, offensive behavior, and conditions contributing to crime.

Ronald V. Clarke and Ross Homel (1997), working from the idea of situational crime prevention, develop a related but somewhat different list of techniques and specific programs including (see Table 1-1):

- Increasing the effort that offenders must make by hardening targets, controlling access to sites, deflecting offenders, and controlling facilitators of criminal offending;
- Increasing the risks that offenders would face by establishing systems for screening entry and exit, increasing formal surveillance, encouraging surveillance by employees, and facilitating natural surveillance;
• Reducing the *rewards* of criminal offending by removing targets, identifying property, reducing temptation, and denying benefits; and

• Removing the *excuses* used by offenders to commit crime by setting rules, stimulating conscience, controlling disinhibitors, and facilitating compliance.

Obviously, these lists are partially overlapping and the prevention measures are presented in somewhat abstract language. Moreover, despite the obvious effort to be systematic and comprehensive, there is a somewhat ad hoc quality to the way the lists are developed and presented. It is important to recognize that these lists present methods and ideas that are still developing as the relatively young fields of problem-oriented policing and situational crime prevention move forward. The purpose of these lists is to provide practitioners with useful abstract ideas and supporting concrete examples (Table 1-1) of alternative responses to crime problems that will help further their creativity in developing appropriate interventions.

**Assessment**

The crucial last step in the practice of problem-oriented policing is to assess the impact the intervention has had on the problem it was supposed to solve. Assessment is important for at least two different reasons. The first is to ensure that police remain *accountable* for their performance and for their use of resources. Citizens and their representatives want to know how the money and freedom they surrendered to the police are being used, and whether important results in the form of less crime, enhanced security, or increased citizen satisfaction with the police has been achieved. A second reason assessment is important is to allow the police to *learn* about what methods are effective in dealing with particular problems. Unless the police check to see whether their efforts produced a result, it will be hard for them to improve their practices.


Table 1-1. Sixteen Techniques of Situational Prevention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increasing Perceived Effort</th>
<th>Increasing Perceived Risks</th>
<th>Reducing Anticipated Rewards</th>
<th>Inducing Guilt or Shame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Target Hardening:</strong></td>
<td>5. <strong>Entry/Exit Screening:</strong></td>
<td>9. <strong>Target Removal</strong></td>
<td>13. <strong>Rule Setting:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>Access Control:</strong></td>
<td>6. <strong>Formal Surveillance:</strong></td>
<td>10. <strong>Identifying Properly:</strong></td>
<td>14. <strong>Strengthening Moral Condensation:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking lot barriers.</td>
<td>Burglar alarms.</td>
<td>Property marking.</td>
<td>&quot;Shoplifting is stealing.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fenced yards.</td>
<td>Speed cameras.</td>
<td>Vehicle licensing.</td>
<td>roadside speedometers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Entry phones.</em></td>
<td>Security guards.</td>
<td>Cattle branding.</td>
<td>&quot;Bloody idiots drink and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>drive.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>Deflecting Offenders:</strong></td>
<td>7. <strong>Surveillance by Employees:</strong></td>
<td>11. <strong>Reducing Temptation:</strong></td>
<td>15. <strong>Controlling Disinhibitor:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <strong>Controlling Facilitators:</strong></td>
<td>8. <strong>Natural Surveillance:</strong></td>
<td>12. <strong>Denying Benefits:</strong></td>
<td>16. <strong>Facilitating Compliance:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit card photo.</td>
<td>Defensible space.</td>
<td>Ink merchandise tags.</td>
<td>Improved library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caller-ID.</td>
<td>Street lighting.</td>
<td>PIN for car radios.</td>
<td>checkout.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gun controls.</td>
<td>Cab driver ID.</td>
<td>Graffiti cleaning.</td>
<td>Public lavatories.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Clarke and Homel, 1997.
The assessment of responses is a key element in facilitating an active exchange of "what works" in crime prevention among police departments. As Clarke (1998:319) suggests, "if law enforcement agencies do not have a mechanism to learn from others' mistakes and assist others to learn from their experiences, they will always be reinventing the wheel." The degree of rigor applied to the assessment of problem-oriented initiatives will necessarily vary across the size and overall importance of the problems addressed. Serious, large and recurrent problems, such as controlling gang violence or handling domestic disputes, deserve highly rigorous examinations. Other problems that are less serious, or common, such as a lonely elderly person making repeat calls to the police for companionship, are obviously not worth such close examinations. To meet the demands of measuring accountability and performance, problem-oriented police should, at a minimum, describe the scanning, response, and assessment phases by measuring inputs, activities, outputs, and, to the extent possible, the outcomes of their initiatives. In general, problem-oriented police should strive to conduct more rigorous assessments of their responses with due consideration to time and resource constraints. Depending on the availability of funds, police departments should consider partnering with independent researchers to conduct systematic evaluations of their efforts. In the absence of such partnerships, Clarke (1998) suggests that police should carefully attempt to relate any observed results to specific actions taken, develop evaluation plans while the project is still being developed, present data on control groups when available, and, as will be discussed below, measure crime displacement. While the degree of rigor applied to the assessment of responses may vary, what must not be sacrificed is the goal of measuring results. This will keep the police focused on results rather than means, and that is one of the most important contributions of the idea of problem-oriented policing.

The value of focused crime prevention measures, such as specific applications of problem-oriented policing and situational crime prevention, has been called into question by the threat of crime displacement. This is the notion that efforts to prevent specific crimes will simply cause criminal activity to move elsewhere, to be committed in another way, or even to be manifested as another type of crime; thus negating any crime control gains (Repetto, 1976). This perspective on crime pre-
vention developed from dispositional theories of criminal motivations, and the views of these skeptics were supported by early studies of crime prevention measures that reported ensuing displacement (see, e.g., Chaiken et al., 1974; Mayhew et al., 1980). Recent studies, however, have indicated that the purported inevitability of displacement was very much overestimated. Several reviews of situational crime prevention measures have concluded that crime displacement was absent or never complete (Hesseling, 1994; Eck, 1993a). In fact, some researchers have suggested that focused crime prevention efforts may result in the complete opposite of displacement that anticipated crime control benefits are often greater than expected and "spill over" into places and situations beyond the targeted opportunity. Generally referred to as "diffusion of benefits," these unexpected gains have been reported by a number of studies on problem-oriented policing and situational crime prevention measures (see, e.g., Clarke and Weisburd, 1994; Weisburd and Green, 1995a). Although measurement of displacement and diffusion effects can be complex (Barr and Pease, 1990), both rigorous evaluations and simple assessments of problem-oriented policing intervention should attempt to assess the possibility of displacement and diffusion. This is an important step in learning the true impact of crime prevention efforts and determining whether the targeted problem should be reanalyzed and alternative responses implemented. Displacement and diffusion effects are discussed more fully in chapter 2.

Current Issues in the Substance and Implementation of Problem-oriented Policing

Researchers have found problem-oriented policing to be effective in controlling a wide range of specific crime and disorder problems, such as convenience store robberies (Hunter and Jeffrey, 1992), prostitution (Matthews, 1990), and alcohol-related violence in pubs and clubs (Homel et al., 1997). Sherman's (1997) review of existing problem-oriented policing evaluation findings and methods suggests that this strategy is "promising" in preventing crime. Several recently published volumes on problem-oriented case studies provide a good sense of the work being done as well as the strengths and weaknesses of some of the better problem-oriented efforts (see, e.g., O'Connor Shelly and Grant, 1998; Sole Brito and Allan, 1999; Sole Brito and Gratto, 2000; Sampson
and Scott, 2000). The concept seems to have survived what Gary Cordner (1998:305) has identified as "first generation" issues:

- the view that problem-oriented policing was not "real" police work;
- the view that problem-oriented policing was a fine idea but not practical because of limited resources (e.g., time and personnel);
- the question of whether ordinary police officers had the analytic ability to conduct sophisticated problem-solving projects;
- the question of whether other government agencies had the capacity to meet police halfway in solving chronic community problems; and,
- the danger of falsely raising the community's expectations.

While these issues have not been completely resolved, the implementation of the concept has gone forward as more police managers grew more and more intrigued by the approach (Cordner, 1998).

Although the problem-oriented approach has demonstrated much potential value in preventing crime and improving police practices, research has also documented that it is very difficult for police officers to implement problem-oriented policing strategies (Eck and Spelman, 1987; Clarke, 1998; Braga and Weisburd, 2001). Cordner (1998) identifies a number of challenging "second generation" issues in the substance and implementation of many problem-oriented policing projects. These issues include: the tendency for officers to conduct only a superficial analysis of problems and then rush to implement a response; the tendency for officers to rely on traditional or faddish responses rather than conducting a wider search for creative responses; and the tendency to completely ignore the assessment of the effectiveness of implemented responses (Cordner, 1998). Indeed, the research literature is filled with a long history of cases where problem-oriented policing programs tend to lean toward traditional methods and where the problem-solving process is shallow. In his recent review of several hundred submissions for the Police Executive Research Forum’s Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-oriented Policing, Clarke (1998) laments that many recent examples of problem-oriented policing projects bear little resemblance to Goldstein’s original definition. Clarke suggests that this mis-
representation puts the concept at risk of being pronounced a failure before it has been properly tested.

Deficiencies in current problem-oriented policing practices exist in all phases of the process. During the scanning phase, police officers risk undertaking a project that is too small (e.g., the lonely old man who repeatedly calls for companionship) or too broad (e.g., gang delinquency), which destroys the discrete problem focus of the project and leads to a lack of direction at the beginning of analysis (Clarke, 1998). Some officers skip the analysis phase or conduct an overly simple analysis that does not adequately dissect the problem or does not use relevant information from other agencies, such as hospitals, schools, and private businesses (Clarke, 1998). Based on his extensive experience with police departments implementing problem-oriented policing, Eck (2000) suggests that much problem analysis consists of a simple examination of police data coupled with the officer’s working experience with the problem. Similarly, in their analysis of problem-oriented initiatives in 43 police departments in England and Wales, Read and Tilley (2000) found that problem analysis was generally weak, with many initiatives accepting the definition of a problem at face value, using only short-term data to unravel the nature of the problem, and failing to adequately examine the genesis of the crime problems.

In the response phase, many problem-oriented policing projects rely too much on traditional police tactics (such as arrests, surveillance, and crackdowns) and neglect the wider range of available alternative responses. Read and Tilley (2000) found that officers selected certain responses prior to, or in spite of, analysis; failed to think through the need for a sustained crime reduction; failed to think through the mechanisms by which the response could have a measurable impact; failed to fully involve partners; and narrowly focused responses, usually on offenders, among a number of other weakness in the response development process.

Finally, in the assessment or evaluation phase, Scott and Clarke (2000) observe that assessment of responses is rare and, when undertaken, it is usually cursory and limited to anecdotal or impressionistic data. Reflecting on these practical issues, Eck (2000) comments that the problem-oriented policing that is practiced today is but a shadow of the original concept.
Summary. The primary purpose of this book is to understand why problem-oriented policing interventions are effective, and, in doing so, to strengthen and enrich what is happening in practice. While examining promising problem-solving interventions, this book will assemble selected theories and research findings in a manner intended to be useful to practitioners. By understanding the theoretical mechanisms at work, practitioners may be able to develop more robust problem-solving interventions when dealing with real life situations in the field. Also, by linking policy to academic theory, this research will help theoretical criminologists think about what concepts are useful for police at the practical level.

NOTES

1. See: Kelling et al., 1974; Spelman and Brown, 1984; Greenwood et al., 1977.

2. Situational crime prevention is defined on pages 11-12 in this chapter, and further detailed in Table 1-1.


4. See: Goldstein and Susmilch, 1982; Buerger, 1994a; Capowich et al., 1995; Eck and Spelman, 1984; Read and Tilley, 2000.