

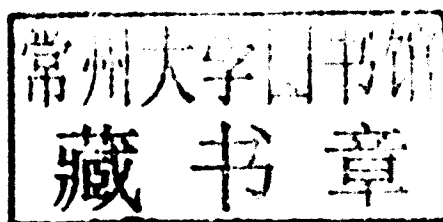
Crime Opportunity Theories

Routine Activity, Rational Choice and their Variants

Edited by

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Series Preface

Because of its pervasive nature in our mass mediated culture, many believe they are experts in understanding the reasons why offenders violate the law. Parents and schools come high on the public's list of who to blame for crime. Not far behind are governments and legal systems that are believed to be ineffective at deterring offenders – too many legal protections and too few serious sentences. Some learn how to behave inappropriately as children, while others are said to choose crime because of its apparent high reward/low cost opportunity structure. Yet others hang out with the wrong crowd, or live in the wrong neighborhood, or work for the wrong corporation, and may get their kicks from disobeying rules in the company of like-minded others. A few are seen as evil, insane or just plain stupid. While such popular representations of the causes of crime contain glimpses of the criminological reality, understanding why people commit crime is a much more complex matter. Indeed, for this reason the quest to establish the causes of crime has been one of the most elusive searches confronting humankind.

Since the mid-19th century, following the advent of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, those who sought scientific knowledge to understand crime abandoned philosophical speculation and economic reductionism. In its place they founded the multifaceted interdisciplinary field of criminology. Unlike criminal law and legal theory that explored the logic of prohibitions against offensive behavior, and in contrast to criminal justice that examined the nature and extent of societies' responses to crime through systems of courts, police and penology, criminology's central focus is the systematic examination of the nature, extent and causes of crime. Criminological theory as a subset of criminology, comprises the cluster of explanation seeking to identify the causes or etiology of crime. This *Library of Essays in Theoretical Criminology* is designed to capture the range and depth of the key theoretical perspectives on crime causation.

While there are numerous criminological theories, most can be clustered into 10 or 12 theoretical perspectives. Moreover, each of these broad theoretical frameworks is, itself, rooted in a major academic discipline. The most predominant disciplines influencing criminological theory include: economics, anthropology, biology, psychology, geography, sociology, politics, history, philosophy, as well as the more recent multi-disciplinary fields such as gender studies, critical race studies and postmodernist social theory.

Criminological theories are rarely discrete. Although they often emphasize a particular disciplinary field, they also draw on aspects of other disciplines to strengthen their explanatory power. Indeed, since 1989 a major development in criminological theory has been the emergence of explicitly integrative theoretical approaches (See Gregg Barak, *Integrative Criminology*; Ashgate, 1998). Integrative/interdisciplinary approaches bring together several theories into a comprehensive explanation, usually to address different levels of analysis; these range from the micro-individual and relational approaches common in biology and psychology, to the meso-level institutional explanations that feature in sociological analysis, to the macro-level geographical, political, cultural and historical approaches that deal with

societal and global structures and patterns. Recent developments in criminological theory have seen an acceleration of this trend compared with that of single disciplinary explanations of crime (See Stuart Henry and Scott Lukas, *Recent Developments in Criminological Theory*; Ashgate, 2009).

Although there are now over 20 English-language criminological theory textbooks and numerous edited compilations, there is a need to make available to an international audience a series of books that brings together the best of the available theoretical contributions. The advantage of doing this as a series, rather than a single volume, is that the editors are able to mine the field for the most relevant essays that have influenced the present state of knowledge. Each contribution to the series thus contains many chapters, each on a different aspect of the same theoretical approach to crime causation.

In creating this series I have selected outstanding criminologists whose own theories are discussed as part of the literature and I have asked each of them to select a set of the best journal essays to represent the various facets of their theoretical framework. In doing so, I believe that you will receive the best selection of essays available together with an insightful and comparative overview placing each essay in the context of the history of ideas that comprises our search to better understand and explain crime and those who commit it.

STUART HENRY

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Introduction

An important distinction in criminology is that between theories of criminality and theories of crime. Most criminological theories are in fact theories of criminality – that is, they seek to explain why some individuals or groups of people develop or acquire a propensity to become delinquent or commit crime. These theories encompass a bewildering variety of explanations drawn mostly from economics, biology, psychology and sociology, though they also include explanations rooted in interdisciplinary fields such as social constructionism, feminism and postmodernism (as indicated by the volumes in this series). Thus, the roots of criminality have been variously identified in heredity (most recently, genetics), in psychological make-up (including early upbringing and cognitive processes) and in social forces (from micro- to macro-level) resulting in deprivation and discrimination or preference and privilege. A variety of integrative theories have attempted to combine concepts and propositions from several of these different explanatory frameworks.

The second set of theories, explaining crime rather than criminality, has antecedents in some nineteenth-century treatments of crime, and some classical economic explanations but these theories are mostly of recent origin. They emerged in the 1970s/1980s and have undergone continuous development and refinement since that time. These recent theories are the focus of this book. They include Cohen and Felson's (1979) routine activity theory, the bounded rational choice perspective of Clarke and Cornish (Chapter 8; Cornish and Clarke 1986) and the Brantingham's (1984, 1991, 1998) crime pattern theory. While they differ in important ways, they all seek to explain the occurrence of crime, rather than the roots of criminal propensity. Criminologists have often failed to make this distinction and have tended to assume that crime can adequately be explained on the basis of propensity. As noted by Clarke (2010) and others, this tendency can be traced back to Edwin Sutherland who stated in his introduction to the *Principles of Criminology* (1947, p. 4), often considered the 'bible' of criminology, that 'The problem in criminology is to explain the criminality of behavior, not the behavior, as such'. In keeping with this dictum, many subsequent criminological theorists assumed that crime is sufficiently explained by explaining criminality. Part of the reason for this is that criminology was itself a reaction to classical theory, which had failed to consider criminality.

The Principle of Human Action

The assumption made by Sutherland and criminologists exploring the etiology of crime is the result of neglecting a fundamental principle of human psychology, which is that behaviour is the product of the interaction between the person and the setting. Most criminologists, especially with a background in sociology, have neglected this principle of human action. Instead, they have assumed, like Sutherland, that crime can be adequately explained by studying its 'root causes', the combination of biological, psychological and social factors that

motivate people to act in a delinquent or criminal manner. However, theories that are focused on root causes, are not theories of *crime* at all; rather, they are theories of *criminality* because they explain only why certain kinds of people are more likely to be involved in crime and delinquency which is why they were termed 'kinds of people theories' as opposed to 'kinds of situation theories' (Cohen, 1966, pp. 42-44; Cohen describes the interaction of both, kind of actor and kind of situation, as 'conjunctive theories', p. 44). While it is important to know what motivates people to act, it is not enough on its own to explain why crime occurs. As the principle of human action makes clear, the occurrence of crime can only be explained when we recognize the central role of opportunity in causing crime.

Because theories discussed in this book emphasize the role of situational factors in the commission of crime, including the opportunity to commit crime, they are sometimes described as crime opportunity theories. The common ground for crime opportunity theories is that any explanation of human action must encompass: (1) the person who commits the act, (2) the immediate setting in which the act occurs, and (3) the interaction between person and setting variables. The principle assumes that settings can elicit responses, just as much as persons can seek out settings to fulfill their purposes. It also assumes that individuals respond differently to the same setting and, therefore, one must understand the *interaction* between the person and the setting as the criminal or deviant act 'is the outcome of the interaction between actor and situation' (*ibid.*)

The principle of human action can be translated for criminology by stating that a criminal act is the product of the interaction between criminally motivated individuals and opportunities for crime, or, in shorthand:

$$\text{Crime} = \text{motive} \times \text{opportunity.}$$

According to this formulation, crime cannot be understood simply by studying offenders' motivations and how these arise, but also by understanding how people respond to the criminal opportunities in their everyday lives. Any satisfactory explanation of crime must therefore recognize that a criminal act is the product of an interaction between criminal dispositions and criminal opportunities – how these latter arise, and how they are perceived, evaluated and acted upon by those with criminal dispositions. In short, if criminologists are to explain crime and provide recommendations for its control, they must try to: (1) understand the rewards of particular offences and why these offences may be chosen in preference to other ways of achieving the same benefits; (2) discover how effort and risk are reduced and how anxiety is managed; and (3) uncover the rationalizations for offending and the excuses that offenders make to themselves or to those who know them.

This interdependence of motivation and opportunity exists at an immediate situational level – an open window can tempt a juvenile burglar to climb into a house– but it also operates at a systemic, societal level as when a lack of regulation may tempt an investment banker to purchase risky junk bonds with his client's money. Thus, the existence of many easy opportunities for crime draws people into committing crime. They become habituated to crime, always alert to criminal opportunities, and they might be enabled to lead a 'life of crime'. If easy opportunities are curtailed, people will not always be on the lookout for ways to benefit themselves illegally (Felson and Clarke, 1998).

While the crime theorists discussed in this volume recognize that propensity and opportunity are both of equal importance in explaining crime, they have generally focused their attention on situational and opportunity factors. One important reason for this is the need to compensate for criminology's relative neglect of these factors. Associated with this is that researchers are motivated by developing new knowledge and, at the present stage of criminology, there is much more to be learned about criminal opportunities and situations than about criminal propensities. The following are examples of the questions to be answered:

- How do crime opportunities arise in society?
- How does social and technological change lead to increases or reductions in opportunity?
- What determines the distribution of opportunities in time and space?
- How do offenders evaluate opportunities and choose to act upon them?
- What influences their decisions?
- Are criminal decisions different from other ones?
- Are they best described as rational or pathological?
- How do offenders cope with the fear of being caught?
- How do they deal with conscience and social disapproval?
- What factors produce changes in offending behaviours?

But it is not just the lure of the unexplored that explains the crime theorists' focus on opportunity. Rather, it is that, while opportunity and propensity might be equally important in explaining crime, they might not be equally important for its prevention or control. Criminology's preoccupation with dispositions has been matched by its focus on treatment and rehabilitation of the offender as the principal approaches to crime control. Sadly, it has proved very difficult to change criminal dispositions and reform offenders. On the other hand, it is proving less difficult to change situations and reduce opportunities for crime. Indeed, situational crime prevention (Clarke, 1980), which seeks these goals, and which is the practical expression of the new crime opportunity theories, has already achieved a remarkable record of crime control success (Guerette and Bowers, Chapter 25).

As explained, this compendium of essays covers criminological theories that seek to explain crime, rather than the existence of criminal dispositions. Because they focus on crime events and situations, they are sometimes known as crime opportunity theories. The three most prominent of these theories are Cohen and Felson's routine activity theory (1979), Clarke and Cornish's bounded rational choice perspective (1983, 1985; Cornish and Clarke, 1986) and the Brantinghams' crime pattern theory (1991). The focus here is mostly on the two former theories because the Brantinghams' theory is comprehensively covered in a companion Ashgate criminological theory series volume on geographic approaches to crime (Walker, 2011).

The 25 essays reprinted here were selected from more than 300 articles initially published in peer-reviewed, national and international journals. Many are classic pieces written by originators of the crime opportunity theories, while others provide a commentary on, or empirical tests of, the theories. The volume is arranged in six parts as follows:

- *Part I: Theorizing Situational Determinants of Crime.* The three essays included in this first part of the volume describe attempts to move from predominantly dispositional accounts of crime causation to ones that include situational and opportunity elements.

- *Part II: The Production of Criminal Opportunities: Routine Activity Theory.* The four essays in this part of the volume are classic statements of the ways that crime opportunities arise (and decline) in society and how these opportunities help to define crime patterns.
- *Part III: Deciding To Commit Crime: The Rational Choice Perspective.* The six essays in this part of the volume fall into two groups. The first two are classic statements of the rational choice perspective by its authors; the remaining essays apply their theory to a variety of crime problems, some commonplace, others more unusual.
- *Part IV: 'Bounded' Rational Choice: Good Enough or Not Enough.* The four essays comprising this part consist of commentaries on the rational choice perspective, of which the first two are highly critical, while the others are more complimentary.
- *Part V: Variants Beyond Rational Choice and Routine Activity.* The essays in this part of the volume represent three recent attempts to build upon the first generation of crime theories. Wikström's situational action theory seeks to link crime opportunity theories more directly with modern dispositional accounts of criminality. Ekblom's conjunction of criminal opportunity theory comprises a restatement of the routine activity approach with the intention of providing a comprehensive theory of preventive action. Wortley's theory of situational precipitators draws attention to the fact that situations do more than simply passively provide opportunities for crime; they can precipitate crime.
- *Part VI: Implications for Crime Prevention.* The five essays in this final part deal with the policy direction that so far has been most thoroughly developed by the situational crime prevention theorists discussed in this volume. The first two essays, respectively by Clarke and by Felson, are early formulations of situational prevention policy. The second two illustrate the application of situational prevention in two very different contexts, and the final essay comprehensively reviews the evidence on displacement, the assumed 'Achilles heel' of situational crime prevention.

These 25 essays provide a broad introduction not just to the original statements modern crime opportunity theory, but also to more recent developments in thinking. They show how a small group of criminologists became increasingly dissatisfied with dispositional accounts of crime that ignored the powerful influence of situational and opportunity factors. They also show how these theorists developed an alternative approach to criminological explanation, consisting of a number of distinct but complementary theories, which in an apt phrase, David Garland (2000, 2001) has called 'the criminologies of everyday life'. While these theories have often been dismissively treated, they have changed the face of criminology forever. This is attested to by the sheer volume, as well as the richness and the variety of work, that they have already generated. The remainder of this Introduction provides a more detailed overview of the essays reproduced in the volume.

Theorizing Situational Determinants of Crime

For many decades, criminological theorists devoted their attention to explaining the roots of criminality. They paid little attention to the interactions between motivated individuals and the surrounding social, economic, legal and physical environments. Beginning in the 1960s, a handful of criminologists began to recognize the importance of situational determinants of crime (for example, Briar and Piliavin, 1965) and that these determinants could be changed to

reduce the opportunity for crime and hence its commission (Newman, 1972; Jeffery, 1971). It should also be noted that a related and parallel approach was being developed by economists of crime but this too tended to focus on the economically rational actor seeking 'wealth maximization' (Becker, 1968; Tullock, 1969; Reynolds, 1973, Ehrlich, 1973; Sullivan, 1973) or 'time allocation' and perceived rewards (Heineke, 1978), although each of these can clearly be affected by available criminal market opportunities. According to Felson and Clarke, this shift of focus was liberating and energizing:

Criminologists no longer need be confined to abstractions or discussion of class or race or intelligence quotients. They can deal also with the here-and-now of everyday life – in particular those features of the world which govern our movements, give pattern and consistency to our lives, and structure our choices and decisions, including those concerning crime. (1998, p. 33)

Based on twenty years of British Home Office Research Unit work on crime control initiatives, Ronald Clarke describes in Chapter 1 how a basically 'dispositional' account of delinquent behaviour that emphasized individual psychological and social maladjustment gave way, first, to a theoretical model emphasizing the importance of current environment and learning, and later, to one emphasizing a bounded rational choice view of offending. This reflected a growing conviction that reductions in offending were more likely to be achieved by altering environments than by attempting to change inner dispositions. This progression of theoretical understanding paved the way for more emphasis to be placed on prevention, particularly situational crime prevention and police-community partnerships, in the crime reduction policies of the United Kingdom.

In Chapter 2, Christopher Birkbeck and Gary Lafree, provide an account of situational dimensions of crime and deviance including the role of situations, motivation and opportunity. They discuss the need to examine patterns of interaction between offenders and situations in the genesis of decisions to commit crime, and they emphasize the importance of understanding the offender decision-making process in accounting for the occurrence of crime events. Their discussion draws upon three distinct literatures: (1) experimental psychology that helped to identify situational correlates; (2) symbolic interaction that helped to explain how individuals define and interpret situations; and (3) opportunity theories that provide situational explanations of victimization.

From a starting point in dispositional theories, Wayne Osgood et al., in Chapter 3, seek to bridge the gap between these theories and the newer opportunity theories, particularly the routine activity approach. They argue that the inducements to deviance in any specific situation depend to some extent on the nature of the deviant act in question. Using longitudinal research design and data from 'Monitoring the Future', a national sample of 1,700, 18- to 26-year-olds gathered in 1977 through 1981, they attempt to identify which routine activities are most related to deviant behaviour and they examine the potential role of routine activities as a mediator between structural variables and deviance. Their results indicate that an individual's routine activities are strongly associated with criminal behaviour, use of alcohol, marijuana and other illicit drugs, and dangerous driving. Furthermore, routine activities accounted for a substantial portion of the association between these deviant behaviours and age, sex, and socioeconomic status.

The Production of Criminal Opportunities: Routine Activity Theory

Prior to the 1970s many criminologists believed that opportunity plays a passive role in crime, simply providing the means for criminal dispositions to be expressed. Consequently, they had little interest in opportunity and undertook few studies of its role. It was only when 'opportunity theorists' such as Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson began in the 1970s to give a more prominent role to opportunity in crime causation, through their routine activity approach, that more supportive evidence began to accumulate. Routine activity theory is now one of the most highly-cited theories in criminology and it is one of the few criminological theories to be founded implicitly on the principle of human action, which states that crime, like any other behavior is the outcome of the interaction between the person and the environment. Thus, routine activity theory postulates that crime cannot take place without the convergence in time and space of three essential elements: (1) a likely offender, (2) a suitable target, and (3) the absence of a capable guardian against crime. The latter two elements represent the opportunity for crime, whereas the 'likely offender' is Cohen and Felson's term for the criminal actor. Routine activity theory takes little interest in *likely offenders*, not only because they have been the focus of most other theories, but also because people willing to commit crime, or to seek perceived rewards in violation of the law, can always be counted upon to exist. Use of the term 'likely' rather than 'motivated' was quite intentional in describing offenders. This downplayed motivational concepts and it was consistent with Cohen and Felson's view that offenders are not just pushed into crime by their backgrounds. They may also be pulled into crime by the resources available to them, including physical capabilities.

Cohen and Felson (1979) used their theory to explain the rise in burglary in the United States and Western Europe during the 1960s and 1970s. They identified two important changes that combined to increase greatly the opportunity for burglary. First, there was a substantial rise in suitable targets because many people during this time began to buy lightweight electronic goods such as small TVs, VCRs and stereo systems. This meant that burglars were likely to find something worth stealing in most homes. Indeed, the best predictor of annual burglary rates was found to be the weight of the smallest television set sold each year. Second, there was a marked decline in capable guardianship because many more women entered full-time paid work. Consequently, many suburbs and apartment buildings were almost empty of residents for substantial periods of the day and burglars could operate with relative impunity at those times.

Although the routine activity approach begins with these ideas about minimal elements of crime, it ends up emphasizing changes in technology and organization on a societal scale. Building on their analysis of burglary, Cohen and Felson had argued that the most general explanation of crime rate trends is an indicator of the dispersion of activities away from family and household settings. Spending time away from home increases the risk of personal and property victimization. This is because homes are deprived of guardianship and, because people spend more time among strangers, they become targets for muggings and assaults.

We can now add that, because they are separated from intimate handlers, they also become more likely offenders themselves. In recent articles and chapters, Felson has expanded the basic elements of crime from the three original elements specified in routine activity theory (offender, target and guardian) to a total of six (Eck, 1993, 1995). Those added are as follows: the *intimate handler* is a person familiar with the likely offender who can help keep him or

her in check; the *place manager* is someone with assigned responsibility to oversee behaviour in his or her place of employment; crime *facilitators* are tools that make it easier to commit crime. These last are not merely weapons or the tools used by burglars to gain entrance to house, but they also include many everyday objects such as telephones, credit cards and automobiles. In fact, Felson's argument is that these additions considerably extend the range and versatility of routine activity theory in explaining the creation of crime opportunities. This is shown by the many examples collected in his book *Crime and Everyday Life* (2002).

In an early statement of their position based on Amos Hawley's human ecological theory (here Chapter 4), Marcus Felson and Lawrence Cohen examine the way in which community structure produces the circumstances for crimes to occur. Specifically they show how direct-contact predatory violations require the convergence in space and time of offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of effective guardians, and how various trends in the social structure can alter crime rates by affecting the likelihood of this convergence, without necessarily requiring changes in the criminal inclinations of individuals.

Though the routine activity approach was originally developed to explain direct-contact predatory crimes, it can also explain other forms of crime in various settings. In Chapter 5, Marcus Felson examines how offenders' routine activities allow them to seize a variety of criminal opportunities in the physical world. In doing so, Felson takes the further step of explaining how the production of crime in the various facilities of everyday life (industrial, retail, food production, medical, recreational and educational facilities) is structured by the nature of people's routine activities within the urban and rural landscape.

Nowadays more people go out at night and stay away from home for longer periods. In Chapter 6, Richard Felson shows, through interviews with a representative sample ($N = 245$) of the population aged 18 to 65, in Albany, New York, that an active night life has a direct effect on involvement in non-domestic violence, whether as a victim, offender or witness. For males, participation in nightlife is associated with witnessing violence as well as offending and victimization. Importantly, there was no relationship between participation in night life and domestic violence, which suggests that those males who go out at night are not more predisposed to commit violence, but they are more likely to encounter violent situations. Going out at night was also a risk factor for women, but for them a domestic relationship was usually involved.

Using economic principles of market transactions, Philip Cook postulates in Chapter 7 that, if crime rates are influenced by the quality and quantity of criminal opportunities and vice versa, then aggregate crime is determined by the interaction between potential offenders and the 'public' as providers of crime opportunities. This interaction is closely analogous to the relationship between supply and demand. According to Cook, the behaviour of criminals (who are attracted to targets that offer a high pay-off with little effort and risk) influences the nature and amount of self-protective measures taken by potential victims. In turn, these changes in self-protection make criminal opportunities more or less attractive. Cook further argues that these interactions help to explain victimization patterns.

Deciding To Commit Crime: The Rational Choice Perspective

Useful as it is, the law of human action leaves an important question unanswered: What does it mean to say that criminal acts are the product of an *interaction* between offender

and opportunity? How does this interaction occur and what is the mechanism by which it is achieved? Crime theorists would answer that the mechanism is the *choice* exercised by the offender who perceives and evaluates criminal opportunities and decides whether or not to take advantage of them. This is why choice is at the heart of crime theories. It ties together the two major classes of explanatory variables – person and setting – and provides the starting point for the rational choice perspective, an integrated theory of crime.

Focusing on choice has two particularly important consequences for theory. First, it helps divert attention from offenders' backgrounds to their current lives. No one can escape the past, but decisions are made here and now, and these have to be understood in the context of the opportunities of daily life for meeting various perceived needs and desires. Second, the focus on choice means that crimes can no longer be treated essentially as all alike, because the benefits they bring, and the costs they entail, are all very different. Without an understanding of these differences, criminal choices cannot be explained and effective interventions cannot be designed because costs and benefits cannot be manipulated in the same way for all crimes.

Searching for, setting up, and seizing opportunities for crime requires the offender to recognize which opportunities are viable and which are not. According to the Brantinghams, criminals develop 'templates' of good opportunities for testing the situations they encounter in the following manner: 'A person engaged in the process of committing a crime will be looking for details, conditions, a feeling of "correctness" that are related to that specific form of crime' (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1993, p. 263). However, criminal decision-making involves more than recognizing good opportunities. Thus, bank robbers must actually decide to rob a particular bank and must make at least some rudimentary preparations. Even when offenders seize a suddenly presented opportunity, they still must make a choice to act. Understanding the background to such choices and the way these are made is the business of the rational choice perspective.

Ronald Clarke and Derek Cornish developed the rational choice perspective specifically to assist thinking about crime control. They began by assuming that offenders commit crimes for the benefits these bring. These benefits vary with the nature of the crime. Thus, monetary gain may be the motive for fraud, thefts and robberies, but for rape it is either sexual gratification or gender domination. Even the amounts of money sought can determine the choice of crime. Someone wanting thousands of dollars is more likely to consider bank robbery, embezzlement or fraud, than purse snatching. Similarly, the factors that influence offenders' choices will vary considerably with offence type. For example, the situational context of a mugging is very different from that of a computer fraud. This means that models of criminal choice can only be developed for specific categories of crime. Broad legal categories such as auto theft or burglary are too general to model because they include many differently motivated offences, committed by a wide range of offenders, employing a variety of methods and skills.

In Chapter 8, Clarke and Cornish review major contributions to the notion of crime as the outcome of choice and they outline decision models to explain the processes of criminal involvement (initial involvement, continuance and desistance) and the commission of specific crimes. These models are in the form of flow charts that identify the main decision points and set out the groups of factors bearing upon the decisions made. Using the example of residential burglary, Clarke and Cornish emphasize the need to be highly crime-specific in understanding criminal choices, whether related to involvement or events. This specificity is

especially important when thinking about how to develop measures to make criminal choices more risky, more difficult and less rewarding to commit crime.

In Chapter 9, Cornish and Clarke expand their initial formulation of the rational choice perspective by adding the concept of choice-structuring properties, which they define as the constellation of perceived opportunities, costs, and benefits relating to specific kinds of crime. Again they emphasize the need to be crime-specific when analysing criminal choices and also the need to treat decisions relating to the various stages of criminal involvement in particular crimes (initial involvement, continuation, desistance) separately from those, such as target selection, relating to the criminal event itself. Decisions to offend are influenced by the characteristics of both offences and offenders, and are the product of interactions between the two. They show that some categories of choice-structuring properties are common to all crimes, while others reflect unique features of particular offence groupings. They show how choice-structuring properties can assist in predicting the likelihood of displacement of offending in response to crime prevention interventions. Displacement is only likely to occur when different kinds of offences share many of the same choice-structuring properties. Even in these cases, displacement might not occur because a highly specific property of the offence, considered essential by the offender, is absent.

When first introduced by criminologists, the rational choice perspective was applied mostly to conventional street crimes such as burglary, car theft and vandalism, but quite soon researchers began to use it in studying less common crimes of fraud or violence. In Chapter 10, Eric Beauregard, Kim Rossmo and Jean Proulx use interview data from 69 serial sex offenders incarcerated in Canada to provide a descriptive model of the decision-making surrounding their hunting processes. They sorted data collected on pre-crime factors, hunting patterns, modus operandi, post-crime factors and geographic behaviour into two categories: (1) victim search methods, and (2) offender attack methods. This model identified nine phases of the process: offender and victim routine activities; choice of hunting ground; victim selection; method of approach; attack location choice; method to bring the victim to the crime site; crime location choice; method to commit the crime; and the victim release location choice. This careful investigation of the decision-making process of these sex offenders helps in understanding the rationale of this 'seemingly irrational' behaviour. It also helps in identifying better ways to identify these offenders and better proactive strategies to prevent subsequent sexual assaults.

According to Bruce Jacobs, criminologists view offender motivation through static risk factors that create predispositions to crime, but which neither cause nor shape crime at the moment of offending. In Chapter 11, Jacobs examines how target selection can be an artifact of opportunity, specifically how offenders transform unfavorable developments into valued outcomes. Using interview data collected from un-incarcerated robbery offenders, most of whom specialized in either carjacking or drug robbery, Jacobs discusses their methods and motives, and their relationship with serendipity that requires that offenders both make, and let, things happen. Spontaneity may imply irrationality, but the spontaneity that drives serendipity is firmly rooted in reasoned calculation, a process clearly associated with rational choice. According to Jacobs, opportunities do certainly appear unexpectedly, but opportunities mean nothing unless or until they are perceived, recognized and acted upon by offenders. Serendipity bridges the gap between the emergence of opportunity and opportunity's exploitation through the offender's exercise of choice.