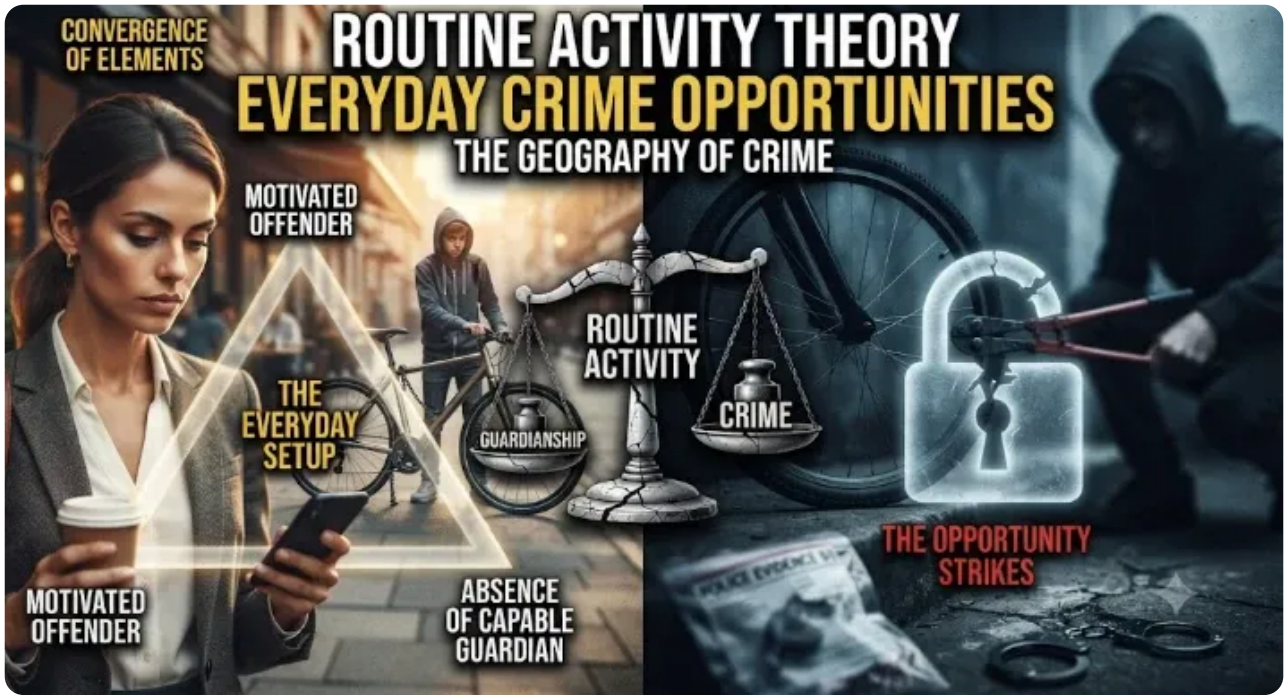
Routine Activity Theory and Everyday Crime Opportunities

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Abstract

Routine Activity Theory explains everyday crime by focusing on the situations in which opportunities emerge rather than on the deeper motivations of offenders. The article states that crime becomes more likely when three elements converge: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian. Suitable targets can include physical objects, people, digital accounts, information, packages, vehicles, or devices, while guardians can include neighbors, staff, police, cameras, locks, lighting, digital alerts, and secure design. Modern routines such as online shopping, hybrid work, smartphone dependence, and highly connected digital life have created new windows of vulnerability. The article also uses the CRAVED model to explain why items that are concealable, removable, available, valuable, enjoyable, and disposable attract offenders. Prevention therefore involves changing environments through better guardianship, secure storage, target hardening, active public spaces, and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design. The theory's key lesson is practical: many crimes can be reduced by disrupting the everyday conditions that make offending easy.



Crime in cannot be influenced solely through the mind of criminals, the institutional failures, or profound social disparity. In other cases, it is influenced by something much more mundane: the manner in which individuals act as they go about their lives. A coffee cup on a table next to an unguarded laptop, a package on a front porch and the owner is at work, a dark street behind a row of stores closing at a Friday afternoon, such little, everyday things are the quiet architecture of an opportunity. Routine Activity Theory is among the most viable and convincing descriptions of how crime occurs where and when it occurs due to its move to focus on the motives of grand and instead on the daily situations. It claims that a lot of crimes are not committed due to the tendency of society to generate more evil individuals, but because regular schedules provide occasions where one can commit a crime with ease, attractiveness and with minimum risk of repercussions. In that regard, crime can be commonly less dramatic pathological than a mere coincidence of occurrence.

Routine Activity Theory was created by Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson, and it was a significant change in criminology as it suggested that crime patterns could be explained by alterations in day-to-day activity, and not merely by alteration of poverty, morality, and psychological harm. This was an insight that was very strong since it made crime prevention seem less abstract. Rather than posing the question of why people become criminals, the theory poses the question of what circumstances need to be there in order to commit a crime. It suggests that the following three factors should converge at space and time, i.e. a motivated offender, an appropriate target, and the lack of an effective guardian.

The absence of any of these elements will reduce the probability of the crime being committed to a minimum. This model can be referred to as a triangle, however, it is more of a chemistry. As soon as the three components are mixed, crime can take place. The reaction is not possible when one is eliminated or

impaired. This is why the theory is so handy in . It provides the police, urban planners, business owners and an average citizen with a tangible means to reason about prevention. It effectively states that safety does not only consist in catching the offenders when they have committed a crime. It is also regarding disrupting the chances which enable crime to occur in the first place.

The initial component, the motivated offender is the least discussed of them all, and the reason is deliberate. Routine Activity Theory does not take too much time explaining why an individual is ready to steal, attack, vandalize, scam or trespass. It makes the assumption that there are motivated offenders in any society and that these are fairly fixed. That does not imply that the theory does not accept poverty, trauma, peer pressure and social inequality. It only brackets them to comprehend short term opportunities. That is, the theory does not require the knowledge of why a person is ready to commit crime so as to explain why crime occurs at the right place and time. One is contented with knowing that there are individuals who, under certain circumstances, are willing to be offensive provided that the context allows it to be well worth it. This is among the reasons why the theory is very appealing to practitioners. It does not demand the resolution of all the deep social issues prior to risk reduction. It starts with the less complicated question: what are we giving opportunities to those people who are already prepared to commit an offense?

The second factor, which is the appropriate target is where day to day life plays a particularly significant role. It could be an object, place, a person, a digital account or just a flow of information. What is important is that it is visible, apparent, and worthy of value. Target suitability of earlier decades used to be associated with physical goods like wallets, televisions, cars, jewelry, and bicycles. The concept has expanded radically in . One may be a smartphone with banking applications, a home delivery package on a door step, an e-scooter that is left unsecured, an understaffed office, a laptop on a cafe table, or a poorly secured online account that is prone to phishing. When it comes to suitability, it is not about weight anymore or resale value. It is being increasingly characterized by a high level of portability, access to data, the rate at which it can be resold and the ease with which the target can be monetized or exploited. A phone is not merely a product. It is a wallet, ID key, communication hub, and even gateway to personal and corporate sensitive systems. The fact that makes them both the target of attack and the target of danger peculiar to the offender and the victim respectively.

It is the third factor, the lack of a guardian capable of doing the job that makes temptation an action. A guardian may be a police officer, but it need not be. Actually, majority of guardians in Routine Activity Theory are not the official agents of state. They can be neighbors, people as they pass by, shopkeepers, suspicious colleagues, busy family members, surveillance cameras, smart locks, streetlights, secure delivery boxes, digital fraud warning, or even the design features that make people more visible and less concealed. The issue of guardianship is important as it transforms offender calculation. The target that appears weak in a deserted dark unmonitored place may be much less attractive in the presence of a observer, an electronic device is capturing images or the object is hard to reach. Notably, competent guardianship goes beyond

responding to crime. It is also concerning attracting attention. A lot of criminals do not have to be physically restrained in order to be discouraged. All they have to do is to suspect that they will be spotted, disrupted or recognized more than the reward is valuable.

This structure is more enlightening when it is applied to the reshaped routines of . The life in the present world is very networked, very mobile and is becoming very automated and hence the opportunities to commit crimes also tend to be networked, mobile and even becoming automated. The most obvious of the examples is package theft commonly referred to as the porch pirate phenomenon. Due to e-commerce, doorstep delivery has become a normal activity in the modern way of life. But each unattended parcel is a foreseen routine chance. The delivery man arrives at the right time and puts the package in an open area, captures a photograph and leaves.

The homeowner, in his turn, can work hours. This presents a routine and open window of opportunity to an ambitious offender. It is not always known, and may be large, the object of attack is not remote, and a strong guard is often wanting. The fact that this crime is so ordinary is what makes it particularly applicable to the Routine Activity Theory. No heavy planning or any advanced purpose is necessary. It only takes timing, visibility and low risk. Stealing packages in most of the suburbs does not happen because the criminals are inherently talented criminals; it is occurring because daily life presents them with easy, unsecured and easily accessible targets.

Another significant opportunity structure shift has been developed by hybrid work. The densely populated office districts that existed in most cities all week round are partly vacant now on Mondays and Fridays. Office corridors, coworking centers, and commercial buildings might seem busy on the outside but may in fact have much fewer people working indoors. Areas that were secure due to the presence of humans have reduced the natural surveillance. This has transformed the tempo of office breakages, office thefts, and an opportunity based crime in businesses. A structure that seemed too full in 2019 to shoot may now provide hours of inactivity, limited personnel control and predictable vacant windows. The Routine Activity Theory can be used to understand the significance of these changes. Opportunities to commit crime do not just arise due to the falling social values. They are created when the normal routines are disrupted so that guardianship is diminished and accessibility of targets is enhanced. In that regard, the shift in work culture can recalculate the crime map of the cities unwillingly.

The CRAVED model is commonly applied by criminologists to describe what makes a target particularly appealing. When it is concealable, removable, available, enjoyable, and disposable, then a target will be selected. This model is very applicable in due to the fact that most of the typical targets suit the model almost perfectly. Premium smartphones are portable, concealable, searchable, sellable in a legal or black market, a luxury to own, and can quickly sell through the Internet. E-scooters and e-bikes are also highly CRAVED and most are poorly secured. Tablets, wireless earbuds, designer accessories, and some delivery

packages are also in this category. Even digital credentials are applicable to the broader sense of the model. They are available, sellable, and movable, even when the theft occurs using phishing and not physical contact. The CRAVED logic demonstrates that the suitability of targets is not a chance. Certain items and resources are more welcoming compared to others as they are convenient to the criminal in addition to the fact that they are of value and at minimal risk.

It is in reaction to this that guardianship in has become more technological and more imbalanced. The smart-home ecosystems have become a form of online guardianship of millions of homes. Video doorbells, motion detection, facial recognition filters, package detection, remote intercoms, and built-in alarm networks give the impression of constant surveillance. Such systems fail to eradicate crime, but may make opportunity harder by making it appear more risky. A package that was placed on a porch under a smart camera is not that exposed compared with a package left in a blind spot. A car with immobilization installed, interior detectors, and GPS is not as attractive as a parked car when nobody can see what is deterring it in the dark. Still, the development of digital guardianship also poses challenging questions on the issue of inequality. The more affluent families and business districts tend to receive better protection in terms of technology, whereas the poorer communities might still be more vulnerable to the protection of human guardianship, and the underfunded infrastructure that they may still be more dependent upon. Routine Activity Theory describes the way crime is minimized due to guardianship, but it also silently explains the inequity of exposure to victimization by being inequitable in access to guardianship.

The presence of people is significant, and this is where one of the most famous concepts of Jane Jacobs, the so-called eyes on the street, continues to be applicable. People live, shop, walk and work in the same space in mixed-use neighborhoods and as such, it is likely to generate a greater natural surveillance as compared to single-use neighborhoods, which are devoid of people at specific times of the day. A street of all office buildings can be crowded during several hours and abandoned in the evening. An avenue of houses, stores, cafes, footways and evening traffic, is likely to possess casual observers all day long. This principle is still one of the most effective illustrations of how the built environment predisposes crime in . In contrast to the moral superiority of the population in mixed-use developments, crime rates tend to be lower due to routine activity producing constant, low-level guardianship. A dog walker, a shop worker, a rideshare pick-up, a resident watering plants on a balcony or a cafe worker cleaning the tables can all be capable guardians due to the mere fact of their presence and attentiveness.

It is due to this that Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design or CPTED has been so closely associated with Routine Activity Theory. In case crime is opportunity based, it can be minimized by altering the environment. Reducing the suitability of the target or enhancing guardianship can be done by better lighting, clipped hedges, sight lines, controlled access points, visible entrances, maintained open spaces, active frontages and secure storage. These principles have since moved into the physical and virtual world in . Kill switches on Smartphones render stolen phones less lucrative. Parcel lockers are secure, which

minimizes the exposure at the doorstep. The access systems which are based on key-cards and apps minimize the unauthorized access to the residential areas. The presence of cafes, mobile kiosks, or programmed activities in the form of a public park makes the human presence to be regular and to hinder predatory behavior. The same reasoning is borrowed even by the digital systems. The two-factor authentication, suspicious log-in messages and account lockouts are all types of access control and guardianship against cybercrime.

Among the strengths of Routine Activity Theory is that it empowers prevention without necessarily perfecting social transformation in the first place. It informs us that we need not abolish all inequality, all trauma, all motivated offenders before crime is decreased. The first ones to begin with are the difficulty in theft, the invisibility of targets, busying of environments, and smarter and more equitable surveillance. Such practicality has rendered the theory very powerful in policing, urban planning, campus security, transport design and security in retail. It is particularly beneficial since it describes why the crime pattern may shift rapidly when ordinary routines are modified. The convergence of offenders, targets, and guardians may change due to a transport strike, a festival, a new housing development, a delivery boom, or a change in remote work. Routine Activity Theory is not a standstill then. It is very sensitive to the contemporary life.

Nevertheless, there are some limitations to the theory and the limitations are not insignificant. Since it is concerned with opportunity, it is able to downplay underlying social circumstances that create motivated offenders in the first instance. It may inform us on why a package is stolen on a porch, but not the reason why the perpetrator is ready to steal. It can justify the fact that a dark parking house is a good target of car thieves, yet not why some youths believe stealing is a practical or even a needful solution. It is able to answer the question of when and where cyber fraud takes place, but not why labor, politics and social environments in general, and push individuals into online criminal economies. On that note, the Routine Activity Theory works best when combined with more comprehensive strain, inequality, social disorganization, addiction, or organized crime theories. Opportunity is important but opportunity does not make it all. Unless the prevention is done by strengthening the targets and widening the range of surveillance without the issue of more profound exclusion, then it may only increase the criminal activity by transferring it to other areas or targeting societies that are already unequal.

The other issue in is the increasing scope of guardianship into surveillance styles that could serve the interests of few individuals and infringe on the privacy and freedom of the other individuals. AI-based cameras, biometric door locks, and predictive security systems may work well to limit the opportunity, though they may also result in over-surveillance especially in already marginalized populations. A too mechanized society using Routine Activity Theory may come to the conclusion that the more there is watching, the more there is safety. However, it is not always the case. In the event communities are perceived to be continuously watched, singled out or stripped of dignity, distrust of institutions can lead to a decline of some property crimes at the same time. The dilemma, therefore, is to put the theory into smart

practice. We must have guardianship that is not oppressive and prevention that is fair and not merely transfer of protection to the able purchasers.

Despite those constraints, Routine Activity Theory provides one of the most understandable approaches to the emergence of opportunities to commit everyday crimes. It teaches us that even simple everyday things are not simple. Patterns are formed by them. Those trends dictate the time when homes are vacant, offices silent, parcels delivered, parks busy, trains full and people focused. Those patterns are learned by the offenders. They take advantage of the time, visibility, and absence. That does not imply that crime is unavoidable. This implies that crime is situational. As more opportunities grow challenging, conspicuous, and less productive, numerous offenses are less probable. It is not a glamourous piece of insight, but a strong one.

In , the only way to define safety is through the number of the police in the streets, and the harshness of the law available. Geometry of everyday life also defines it. It is influenced by the fact that neighborhoods are either active or empty, buildings are designed in such a way that they are visible or concealed, digital systems are there to secure the users or to expose them, and communities develop a sense of collective custodianship that is continuous. Routine Activity Theory is important in the sense that it demonstrates that prevention can be integrated into the routines of everyday life. A street illuminated, a gate that is locked, a busy road, a responsive application alert, a secure parcel locker, a neighbor who would detect an abnormal activity, a cafe that would keep a common space active can do the trick. Convenience is another factor in crime. Comfort can be lost to good design and interested communities.

Finally, the Routine Activity Theory is a pragmatic and even optimistic approach. It does not assert that design can prevent all crime and it does not reject the influence of structural issues. Nevertheless, it does demand a point: lots of crimes are not enigmatical. They occur due to the availability of opportunity. There is no way that societies are helpless provided that is the case. They are able to create safer places, reinforce guardianship, lessen exposure to targets and reconsider those routines that unwittingly welcome offending. The moral is clear, yet very deep. We not only make ourselves into habits. Our risks are determined by our habits. And as communities get tighter, more permeable and more sensitive to the smallest cracks through which crime leaks in, they do not simply decrease the crime. They establish a greater daily culture of safety.