PART 1
THEORY

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Introduction: Crime prevention and community safety in Australia

Crime prevention has a long history in Australia, and in other parts of the world. In all societies, people have tried to protect themselves and those close to them from assaults and other abuses. Every time someone locks the door to their house or their car, they practise a form of prevention. Most parents want their children to learn to be law abiding and not spend extended periods of their lives in prison. In this country, at least, most succeed. Only a small minority of young people become recidivist offenders. In a functioning society, crime prevention is part of everyday life.

Why, then, have three Australian criminologists written a book about crime prevention and community safety? There are several reasons. The first is that while prevention can be all-pervasive at the grassroots, it is oddly neglected in mass media and political discourses. When politicians, talkback radio hosts and newspaper editorialists pontificate about crime and possible remedies, it is comparatively rare for them to mention prevention. Overwhelmingly, emphasis is on policing, sentencing and other 'law and order' responses.

One aim of this book is to understand, and explore ways to overcome, this apparent conspiracy of silence. At various times over the last four decades governments in Australia and other western countries have 'rediscovered' crime prevention and committed resources to its development and implementation. Many jurisdictions still have schemes in place. Despite these efforts, prevention and community safety remain background tasks, as far as the mass-media and government crime policy are concerned. Police and other criminal justice reactions to crime continue to command the lion's share of attention and budget allocations.

Throughout this volume, we will strive to rectify the imbalance by reiterating the message that prevention is 'do-able'; that it works, and that it can be far more cost effective than criminal justice responses. We will show how prevention theory, properly applied, not only reduces offending but can help make cities, towns, suburbs, streets, shopping centres and homes more liveable. We will argue that governments, businesses, community groups and other key stakeholders should learn from and add to the success stories.

However, we also acknowledge that ensuring prevention captures the public imagination will require more than building the evidence-base. One of the key arguments of this book is that there is a political dimension to the development and implementation of strategies. Making crime prevention 'work' in political contexts entails more than ensuring that it is practically effective. It must also succeed at the symbolic (or, as Freiberg (2001) terms it, 'affective') level. Law and order dominates policy and media discourses and helps political parties garner votes because of the powerful messages that the apprehension, trial, punishment and other associated shaming of offenders conveys. Durkheim (1912) argued that punishment rituals redefine and reinforce a society's 'collective consciousness': the shared values and rules that help bind its members together. Crime prevention policy makers and practitioners in Australia have tended to gloss over the symbolic dimensions, treating prevention as purely instrumental. We try to rectify this deficiency, and discuss ways prevention programs and practices might both feed into and help reshape the ways Australians see themselves and their society.

This will involve locating Australian experience in broader international contexts (see below and Chapter 6). As a number of researchers (e.g. Crawford 1997; Hughes 1998; Sutton 1997) have made clear, Australia was not the first country to endeavour to introduce crime prevention to the policy mix. Attempts by Australian state and commonwealth governments to develop and implement prevention strategies in the late-1980s and 1990s were inspired by, and drew upon, experience during the early 1970s and 1980s in the US, the UK, France, the Netherlands and other parts of Europe. An important theme of this book is whether, and how, we can learn from these other jurisdictions.

When comparing Australia to other countries, it is important to be mindful of broader pressures affecting governments. It is no accident that in Western democracies crime prevention began to emerge as a distinct policy theme during the final third of the 20th century. This is the time when 'welfare' models of governance have come under pressure, with central states urged to rein in taxation and public sector expenditure in order to ensure that national and regional economies can compete globally. Theorists such as Garland (2000) and O'Malley (1994) in fact see crime prevention as part of attempts by central authorities to divest themselves of direct social control roles, and shift more and more of the burden to individuals and groups at the local level. Drawing on Foucault (1991), they see this trend towards individual and community 'responsibilisation' as

characteristic of the indirect and dispersed ways power is exercised in the late-modern era.

We are not convinced by their thesis. It is true that, in most Western jurisdictions, a key factor prompting governments to explore crime prevention has been the hope that it will help curb escalating outlays on police, prisons and other criminal justice institutions. However, Garland and O'Malley go too far when they imply that there is no more to contemporary crime prevention than an attempt by the centre to back away from aspects of its protective role and compel individuals, organisations and communities to take greater responsibility for their own safety and security. Such a one-dimensional account glosses over significant differences in the ways prevention policy has been articulated and applied in various countries, Australia included (see Chapter 6). Moreover it ignores the fact that, as mentioned earlier, 'ordinary' individuals, families, businesses and communities always have had to take the lead in this sphere. Rather than being something entirely new, we argue the 'rediscovery' of crime prevention also involves belated acknowledgment of an ongoing reality.

Part of this reality, of course, is that some sections of society are far more likely to benefit from prevention than others. Australian data consistently reveals disproportionately high rates of violent and other victimisation among the economically and socially disadvantaged, in many Indigenous communities and for some other ethnic minorities. Governments that genuinely want these groups to be more effective in prevention need to find ways to ensure that they are not deprived of the material and cultural resources and skills they need to make their lives more secure and their communities more liveable. At various points in this book we argue that this requires reassessment of the classic neo-liberal doctrine that competitive market forces invariably generate the best social outcomes. For high crime areas in particular, commitment to crime prevention and community safety also involves recommitment to investing in physical infrastructure and social capital.

Law and order attracts people because it seems to tackle crime at its most direct and obvious source, the offender. In Chapter 2 we point out, however, that factors contributing to the occurrence of any single offence are multiple and complex. One of the advantages of prevention policy is that it moves beyond a fixation with deviants and deviance and begins to address all the contributing elements. This is why, as criminologists, we are convinced that governments would be well advised to spend more of their resources on prevention. However, our commitment is based on more than technical assessment. Democratic societies that devote excessive resources to the 'tough on crime' approach risk more than wasting money. They also risk damaging the social fabric.

In our view, law and order's domination of contemporary policy and media discourses threatens a 21st century equivalent of the 'tragedy of the commons' fable: the tendency for 'rational' choices made by individuals in isolation to combine to destroy an invaluable and irreplaceable collective resource (Hardin 1968). In the

crime policy case, however, the collective resource is social as well as physical. In many parts of the world there is a growing tendency for citizens to live in gated communities (Atkinson and Blandy 2005), work in secured office blocks and find leisure and recreation in similarly controlled and patrolled enclaves (Davis 1990); while their governments rely more and more on aggressive policing tactics to maintain order in what remains of the public domain. For individuals exposed to the benefits and disciplines of the market and with access to economic and other resources, physical segregation from – and lack of tolerance for – potentially disruptive 'outsiders' might well seem a rational choice. For some members of the stigmatised and excluded 'communities of fate' generated by such choices, however, an equally rational response may be to strike out through crime and other predatory behaviour (Jordan 1996; Wilkinson 2005). The burgeoning of private security and increased emphasis on law and order in market-based democracies characterised by significant levels of inequality can lead, therefore, to heightened levels both of unease and fear (Atkinson 2006, p. 180; Low 2003) and of crime itself (see Chapter 8).

Crime prevention can help break this cycle. This is one reason why, throughout this book, we follow the Dutch researchers Van Dijk and de Waard and define it as:

> The total of all private initiatives and state policies, other than the enforcement of criminal law, aimed at the reduction of damage caused by acts defined as criminal by the state.
>
> (Van Dijk and de Waard 1991, p. 483)

Readers should be aware that in defining prevention this way we make a value judgment. Not all, perhaps not even most, criminologists and policy makers accept our view that crime prevention should be treated as a conscious alternative to policies that emphasise the privatising of policing and other security and harsher criminal justice responses to crime. As noted, Garland and O'Malley's responsibilisation thesis assumes that prevention simply will complement increased punitiveness in late-modern states. At a more pragmatic level, researchers such as Ekblom (1994) and Weatherburn (2002) point out that the Van Dijk and de Waard approach ignores research evidence that arrest, imprisonment and other criminal justice-based initiatives also deter and reduce offending.

A problem with these objections is that they fail to locate the renaissance of crime prevention and community safety policy in relevant historical, cultural and political contexts. As Chapter 6 will point out, one of the key reasons governments in Western democracies such as France and the Netherlands began to develop relevant strategies during the 1980s – and Australian state governments began to emulate them – was concern about the economic and human costs of over-reliance on law and order. Policy makers who advocated crime prevention in these countries were not simply looking for forms of social control that would 'work' better in a pragmatic sense. They were striving to develop policies and programs that were more compatible with their ideals of a good society. Experience over

the last three decades has shown, moreover, that once the vision faded, and governments in these and other countries began to treat crime prevention as a purely administrative challenge, even the most generously-funded programs lost impetus and direction (Hough 2006).

Commentators like Weatherburn are empirically correct when they argue that it is possible for crime prevention to be deployed as an adjunct to law and order. Indeed, the Republic of Singapore has been pursuing just this approach since the mid-1960s (Quah 1992; Clammer 1997; Singh 2000). Our point, however, is that criminologists who want to assess prevention purely on an instrumental basis and ignore its expressive and political dimensions gloss over the fact that decisions relating to social control are critical for determining the quality of life any community enjoys (see also Chapters 7 and 8). Closer consideration of the Singapore example will help explain why we see this issue as important.

This city-state of 4.5 million people has made no secret of the fact that it is 'tough on crime'. Its rate of imprisonment for adult offenders is three times higher than Australia's (Walmsley 2003), mandatory corporal punishment (caning) is prescribed for a wide range of offences including vandalism and graffiti (World Corporal Punishment Research 2007), and Singapore has one of the highest rates of state-authorised executions in the world (Amnesty International 2004). Many people, including the government itself, portray Singapore's zero tolerance stance – and in particular its preparedness to invoke the death penalty – as the main reason for low rates of crime:

> The relatively safe and crime-free environment is one important attraction of Singapore to tourists and investors . . . Our crime rate has generally been falling for more than a decade now . . . Singapore has some of the toughest laws in the world such as for drug trafficking and the use of firearms offences, both of which attract capital punishment.
>
> (Speech in 2000 by Singapore Minister for Law and Foreign Affairs, quoted in Amnesty International 2004, pp. 1–2)

As Clammer (1997, p. 140) points out, however, such statements tend to understate the extent and effectiveness of the country's parallel investments in prevention. Over the last 40 years, Singapore has implemented an unprecedented array of programs to 'ensure, by a range of means and by force if necessary, the integration of absolutely everyone into the modernist state system'.

Many schemes have been implemented and coordinated by police working in partnership with a National Crime Prevention Council (Singh 2000, p. 142). From the 1980s onward, policing in Singapore has moved away from a centralised, reactive 'watchman' style towards a more decentralised and proactive approach. Key reforms in this context have included:

- introduction of a system of Japanese koban-style neighbourhood police posts in high density public housing estates, with staff expected to formally visit and assess each household in their area at least once a year (Quah 1992, p. 165);

- use of a network of housing estate based residents' committees to promote crime prevention awareness and activities;
- active promotion of a neighbourhood watch scheme that works closely with residents' committees and other associations to resolve disputes, build 'community spirit' and 'civic consciousness' and promote crime prevention awareness and activity;
- liaison with industry groups to establish prevention schemes for commercial, shopping and industrial complexes; and
- formation of a system of Boys' Clubs aimed at providing 'boys between 12 and 18 years who are premature school-leavers and juvenile delinquents with a means of channelling their excess energy into creative and healthy pursuits instead of engaging in criminal behaviour' (Quah 1992, pp. 160–1; see also Singh 2000).

Crime prevention also has been made part of the education system through school security committees, the use of dedicated crime prevention textbooks, videos and CDs, and by appointing teachers as honorary volunteer special constables (Singh 2002, pp. 146–8).

These police and education programs are just part of a series of pervasive and deep-seated institutional mechanisms used to minimise deviance and promote social integration and inclusion. Other relevant strategies have included:

> the compulsory registration of every member of the population all of whom are citizens or permanent residents and must carry at all times an identity card carrying the name, address, race, blood group and national registration number of its possessor together with their photograph and thumb print; compulsory military service for males; an active and pervasive internal security apparatus; [and] a range of social policies designed to organize and monitor the population . . .
>
> (Clammer 1997, p. 140)

Public housing strategies have been critical in this context. When full independence was achieved in 1965, accommodation for the majority of Singapore's population was primitive. One of the first acts of the new government was to initiate a massive construction program to rectify the situation. The Housing Development Board responsible for oversight of this scheme have managed it:

> . . . down to finest detail (car parking, colour of doors, permissibility of certain kinds of air-conditioners and water heaters, ownership of pets, placement of pot plants, provisions of playgrounds and latterly even the ethnic mix allowed in individual housing estates). Estates themselves were furthermore not only managed by direct bureaucratic means, but also through a set of politically-controlled institutions and networks, including community centres and residents' associations.
>
> (Clammer 1997, p. 142)

In addition to helping drive economic growth, the housing program has played a key role in ensuring social stability and engendering loyalty to the government that engineered the rise in living standards. Residents can purchase

their units using loans available from a Central Provident Fund and repayable through income deductions matched by employer contributions. Loyalty has been further enhanced by a political program of 'nation building' reinforced through common institutions such as the state schooling system, and emphasising allegiance to the Republic of Singapore rather than to countries of ethnic origin.

Few would debate that Singapore's long-term strategy of combining major penalties and humiliations for those who break the law with high levels of state intervention to forestall delinquency and promote social integration has succeeded in producing an extremely law-abiding society. However its citizens have paid a price for this success, not just in terms of individual rights and liberties but politically and culturally.

Singapore governments justify strict anti-crime policies on the basis that the country is 'small, vulnerable, and subject to the machinations of enemies and envious rivals both without and within' (Clammer 1997, p. 142). Economic growth and social stability are portrayed as fragile, with their maintenance requiring ongoing vigilance and a preparedness to sacrifice individual privileges for the collective good. Extensive controls are imposed on the mass media and popular democracy is suppressed. Reverence for human rights and respect for diversity are dismissed as aspects of Western culture that are not relevant to 'Asian values'. Crime and other deviance are treated not just as infringements of individual personal or property rights but as 'paradigmatic of the dark forces of chaos lying just beyond the tightly-maintained boundaries of the state, psyche and society' (Clammer 1997, p. 142).

Readers can decide for themselves whether these perceptions and associated decisions are justified. Our main purpose in presenting the Singapore example is to explain why, throughout this book, relationships between prevention and other dimensions of social control policy are treated as more than technical. In advising on and devising ways for human behaviour to be restrained and redirected, it is not just appropriate but obligatory that researchers and policy makers always also consider the types of communities that might result (Hughes 2007). Singapore's elites have used both crime prevention and law and order to produce and sustain a society that is highly prosperous and consumerist, but at the same time distrustful of outsiders and with minimal tolerance even for comparatively minor deviance. We do not see such an approach as appropriate for other countries.

Our view is that when governments make prevention part of their crime control repertoire, they should avoid doing it in ways that simply try to suppress every symptom of difference, diversity, surprise and disorder. Our preference for defining prevention as a distinct alternative, rather than as a mere supplement, to law and order should be understood in this context.

So should our disregard for much of what seems to have become conventional academic wisdom in this field. Reams of paper, for example, have been devoted to debating whether it would be better to focus on environmental – or as Clarke (1997) terms it 'situational' – or social prevention. Situational prevention,

which in essence focuses on reducing opportunities for crime rather than trying to change the disposition to offend, has long been criticised by advocates of social prevention as 'commodified control' (Garland 2001, p. 200), more likely to simply displace crime than eliminate it (Halsey 2001). After reading our summary of relevant approaches and frameworks in Chapter 2 and our more detailed assessment of various schools in Chapters 3 and 4, we hope readers will realise that taking sides in this debate is neither necessary nor helpful. 'Commonsense' assumptions that social prevention schemes are more likely to generate outcomes that are consistent with ideals of social justice simply are not supported by the research evidence. In fact, unless carefully managed, even the best intended social programs are likely to have stigmatising and damaging effects (see Chapter 3), while situational initiatives can be implemented in ways that avoid these problems and generate broad social benefits (Chapter 4).

Readers should also be aware that throughout the book we use the term 'environmental' to refer to any approach to prevention that focuses on modifying the physical environments in which offences can occur (e.g. by making targets less accessible or by improving guardianship – see Chapters 2 and 4). We do not use the term 'environmental prevention' to refer to attempts to reduce offences against the environment (e.g. air or water pollution).

A key theme of this book is that crime prevention and community safety policy must involve more than simply reducing crime and other harms and increasing people's sense of security. Equally important is how these goals are achieved. Chapter 5, on evaluation, argues that the traditional 'what works?' approach fails to take account of this dimension. Conventional evaluations also ignore the need for prevention to offer political and symbolic alternatives to law and order. Our argument is that to know whether a prevention strategy or program 'has worked?' we need in fact to ask and answer a series of sub-questions such as: 'worked for whom?'; 'worked in what circumstances and in relation to what problems?', and 'worked in what ways?'. Evidence-based approaches to crime prevention and community safety involve systematically unpacking and responding to each of these demands.

In deciding on ways to improve crime prevention and community safety, context is as important as technique. This is the principle informing Chapter 6, which moves from crime prevention and community safety theory to politics and practice. We commence by reflecting on experience since the 1970s in the US, the UK, other European countries and of course Australia. Various lessons can be drawn from this history. One is the need for prevention to be implemented through local or regional plans rather than as discrete projects. Another is that to avoid problems such as program drift, large-scale crime prevention and community safety strategies require more than technical expertise. They also must be informed by a strong sense of vision and purpose, and must facilitate dialogue between central and local about priorities and resource allocations. In the absence of such vision and dialogue, local implementation invariably becomes dogged by conflict and division.

Chapters 7 to 10 discuss ways our vision of inclusive crime prevention and community safety might translate into grassroots practice. The key is to embrace difference, spontaneity, the unexpected and the ambiguous rather than to reject every apparent symptom of disorder as 'threatening'. Chapter 7, on the social dynamics of place, focuses on ways these principles can revitalise the ways local authorities and businesses respond to activities by young people whose urge to use environments in unstructured and innovative ways (e.g. through graffiti writing, skateboarding or simply 'hanging around') often makes them the object of exclusion.

Chapter 8 analyses ways notions of 'danger', 'disorder' and 'harm' are constructed at the local level, and how our preferred approaches to prevention and safety might help reconfigure these concepts. Consistent with our view that crime prevention should be treated as a distinct policy alternative to current tendencies to 'commodify' security services and promise tough 'law and order' responses to crime, this chapter gives comparatively little attention to private policing. However it acknowledges that in shopping centres and other venues private sector-based guards and other officers can help develop and implement programs that are consistent with crime prevention's emphasis on more inclusive social control. Chapter 9 discusses ways that the approaches to crime prevention and community safety planning developed and analysed in this book might be employed by a (not so hypothetical) 'city of the future', and discusses the new notions of community that relevant practices might draw upon and help forge.

Successful crime prevention requires vision as well as science. It needs to be part of what Hughes terms a 'public criminology' that contributes to much needed debate about the 'politics of crime and community relevant to our present times' (2007, p. 194). Like Hughes, we reject the idea that our discipline is 'intellectually exhausted': incapable of thinking beyond state-defined problems and tied to a modernist governmental project whose course has been run (Garland 1996). We hope that by the end of this book readers will agree that crime prevention draws upon and generates knowledge and practice that transcends these boundaries, and will be as relevant in the future as it has been to the past.