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Situational and Social Approaches to the Prevention of Disorder in Long-Term Prisons*

Anthony E. Bottoms, William Hay, and J. Richard Sparks**

This paper arises from research conducted in two prisons for adult men serving long sentences in England. The research was commissioned by the Home Office as part of a wider program of research studies focusing in various ways on issues of control and order in long-term prisons in England, and on the management of long-term prisoners deemed to be "control problems" (for a fuller understanding of this policy background, see Home Office 1984, 1987; Bottoms and Light, 1987).

Our research was designed as a sociological study, in which a central concern was to understand how "control problems" in long-term prisons were related to the everyday life of the prison, including the nature of its regime. The research was carried out in Albany Prison on the Isle of Wight (inmate population, c.350) and Long Lartin Prison in the southwest of England (inmate population, c.400). Both prisons are specifically designated as maximum security institutions for men serving long terms of imprisonment, and both are part of the so-called 'dispersal system' in England.1

These two prisons have similar origins, but significantly different subsequent histories and current regimes. Both were originally built in the 1960's, and were at that time designed for low-security inmates. The first governors of both prisons were renowned in the English prison service for their liberal policies. Long Lartin has largely retained this liberal ethos, and has deliberately tried to keep, so far as possible, some of the features of its original regime, despite the early upgrading of the prison to a maximum security institution and the influx of a markedly different population (see Jenkins, 1987). At the time of our research, it had had no riot or other major control incident in its twenty-year history. Albany on the other hand, had been less fortunate, and had suffered major disturbances in 1972, 1983, and 1985.2 Following the 1985 incident, a "restrictive regime" was put in place to enable staff to regain and retain effective day-to-day control of the prison. A key feature of this regime is that it places more pronounced restrictions on the freedom of movement of prisoners, to reduce the total number of prisoners out of cell at any time, and hence to reduce opportunities for disorder.

At the time of our research, the regimes of these two prisons therefore differed in a number of respects, despite the essential similarities of the two institutions in security status, formal privilege list, and so on. In practice, the main regime differences were:

1. Each prisoner at Albany was allowed out of his cell for "evening association" for only two nights out of every three; at Long Lartin, 'evening association' was available to all inmates every night.3 At other times of the day, numbers of inmates out of cell at any one time (for receiving meals, showering, etc.) were also more tightly controlled at Albany than at Long Lartin.

*The research in Albany and Long Lartin Prisons which is drawn upon in this paper was carried out in the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, under a research contract with the Home Office.

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2. Prisoners' movements outside the wing were more stringently regulated and supervised at Albany than at Long Lartin.

3. 'Cell association' (two or more prisoners mixing informally in an inmate's cell) was permitted at Long Lartin, but not (or at any rate, not officially) at Albany.

4. There was no access to night sanitation at Albany, by contrast with Long Lartin.

5. Prisoners at Long Lartin had more access to gymnasium and sports facilities (linked to the more liberal rules of association). Albany, on the other hand, delivered more time in formal regime activities, including work.

6. At Long Lartin, prisoners were paid in cash, using ordinary coin of the realm, and they were able to use cash for canteen purchases, etc.; at Albany, there was officially no cash in the prison, and payments and purchases were handled on a credit basis.

Reflecting on these regime differences, it occurred to us that in many different emphases of these two prisons resembled two styles of contemporary approaches to crime prevention in the outside community, namely the "situational" and the "social" (see Rosenbaum, 1988; Bottoms, 1990). Although very frequently employed in the wider crime prevention literature this terminology has not, to our knowledge, been previously applied to custodial institutions; nor, more generally, have analogies between "control problems" in prisons and other varieties of offending been sufficiently well explored. "Situational crime prevention" has been helpfully defined in the following way:

(i) measures directed at highly specific forms of crime;

(ii) which involve the management, design or manipulation of the immediate environment in which these crimes occur;

(iii) in as systematic and permanent [a] way as possible;

(iv) so as to reduce the opportunities for these crimes' (Hough et al. 1980, "Opportunity-reduction" and manipulation of the immediate environment" are, therefore, the key concepts in this kind of crime prevention. "Social" crime prevention measures, by constrast, rely on more general changes in social relationships or socialization to achieve their intended crime-preventive effects (e.g., through community action, or changes in the social climate of a school). The constrast between the two styles of crime prevention can be effectively illustrated with a simple example from domestic life — some parents may lock cupboards and drawers to prevent their young children from stealing loose cash or chocolates from around the home (situational prevention); others will prefer, from as early an age as is possible, to socialize their children so that they will not take cash even if it is left lying around in the home (social prevention).

The regimes of Albany and Long Lartin are not polar examples of "social" and "situational" approaches to the prevention of disorder in the prison context; both, in fact, employ elements of both styles, with, for example, both placing the usual restrictions on the availability of knives and sharp tools (situational prevention), and strong emphasis in both prisons on fostering good relationships between uniformed staff and inmate (social prevention). Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the two prisons do differ in emphasis on the situational/social aspects of the preservation of order in their respective institutions. Long Lartin, proud of its riot-free history and liberal traditions, emphasizes the so-called 'Long Lartin ethos' in which as much freedom as is thought possible is allowed to the inmates, close staff-inmate relationships are encouraged, and there is an explicit recognition that the regime may entail a degree of negotiation and the creation of "informal contracts" (see Jenkins, 1987). Albany, on the other hand, believes that at any rate in it situation and for its population, a more liberal regime would carry an unacceptable level of risk not only for staff but for other inmates, and that to maintain
adequate order a significant degree of opportunity restriction is important and necessary. As one member of the senior management team in the prison put it:

If you run a relaxed regime in a penal institution then you need to be eagle-eyed about what is really going on... and I have no confidence in the ability of the Prison Service to run a regime in the long term which is relaxed and unoppressive and all those things, [and] at the same time to control it so that [some] inmates are not abused. I think it would be a wonderful trick if one could do it, but I have no confidence in our ability to do it.

The full results of the Albany-Long Lartin study will be published elsewhere. In this short paper, we want to elaborate more fully, and more generally, the concepts of “social” and “situational” prevention which that study drew to our attention, and to discuss their relevance to the prison setting. We do so because we believe that a careful analysis of the contrast between these two concepts offers much of value both to the prison theorist and to the prison manager. Before tackling this task, however, it is important to interject a brief note on our general theoretical approach.

**Structuration Theory and the Prison**

In a series of important publications in recent years, Anthony Giddens has developed a general sociological approach known as the ‘theory of structuration’ (see especially Giddens, 1984). It is impossible within the space of this paper to provide a full summary of this approach, but among its features are:

(i) An emphasis on human subjects as knowledgeable agents, though this knowledgeability is bounded on the one hand by the unconscious, and on the other hand by unacknowledged conditions and/or unintended consequences of actions.

(ii) The need for sociologists to acknowledge the significance of ‘practical consciousness’ in everyday life: since if one restricts what agents “know” to what they can say about what they know, a wide area knowledgeability is excluded.

(iii) “Routine” is a predominant form of agents’ day-to-day activity: most daily practices are not directly motivated, and routinized practices are a prime expression of the ‘duality of structure’ in respect of the continuity of daily life.

(iv) Structuration theory seeks to escape from the traditional dualism in sociological theory between “objectivism”, on the one hand, and “subjectivism” on the other hand. Thus structuration theory accepts concepts of “structure” and “constraint” (associated with “objective” sociology) but insists that they be understood only through the actions of knowledgeable agents; on the other hand (see above) it believes that “subjectivist” sociologists have over-emphasised the degree to which everyday action is directly motivated.

(v) The theory argues that there are not and will not be any universal laws in the social sciences, because “the causal conditions involved in generalizations about human social conduct are inherently unstable in respect of the very knowledge (or beliefs) that actors have about the circumstances of their own actions” (Giddens 1984, xxxii).

(vi) For similar reasons, the theory is sceptical about general sociological theories of social change, believing that such theories are mistaken about the types of account of social change that are possible.

It should be evident from this brief resume that structuration theory has relevance for the study of prisons. The emphasis on “knowledgeable subjects,” “practical consciousness” and “routines” must surely strike chords with anyone who has ever spent time observing prison life, or who has talked at length with prison staff and inmates, especially long-term inmates. We would argue that Giddens’ understanding of routines
and routinization is particularly salient in relation to prisons: as we discuss more fully below, structuration theory regards routine activity as crucial both to the reproduction of social life, and to the fending away of personal anxiety and insecurity. On a more academic note, the attempt to overcome the objectivist/subjectivist division in sociology is also of considerable importance to the prison sociologist, given the early theoretical dominance of the field by “objectivist” structural-functional writers (see e.g., Sykes, 1958), subsequent attempts at ‘subjectivist’ approaches (e.g., Cohen and Taylor, 1972), and relative absence of recent innovative theorizing in the field.

It is from a perspective grounded in the theory of structuration that we propose to elaborate the importance of ‘social’ and ‘situational’ approaches to the avoidance of disorder in prisons. Among other things, this implies that we do not claim any element of ‘universal social law’ about the generalizations that follow; but, equally, adoption of structuration theory does not imply relinquishing all general concepts in social analysis (Giddens, 1984).

Situational Approaches to the Prevention of Disorder in Prisons

Hough et al. (1980:5-10) have provided a helpful typology of various difficult kinds of situational measures that might be attempted in the general field of crime prevention. We will use an adapted version of this typology to consider possible situational approaches to disorder in prisons.

Target Hardening

In the crime prevention field, this familiar concept refers to programs such as the strengthening of doors and windows in houses and apartments, or the toughening of cash boxes in public telephone booths. Most day-to-day prison disorder (or at least the disorder of most concern to prison officials) is of an interpersonal kind, and, therefore, this kind of situational approach is of less relevance in the prison setting than outside. However, some target hardening measures may still be possible in the prison context. For example, a favorite tactic for prisoners during disturbances in British prisons in the last few years has been to climb on to the prison roof, and then to use tiles and bricks from roofs and chimneys as weapons with which to repel attempted invasions. “Target hardening” situational measures making it more difficult to gain access to the roof could therefore potentially make an important contribution to the limitation of disorder.

Target Removal

An interesting British example of target removal in the general crime prevention field has been the removal of domestic cash pre-payment meters for fuel consumption (i.e., household electricity and gas), and their replacement by token-operated meters. This measure has been successful in reducing property crime, including burglaries (see Home Office, 1988; Forrester et al., 1988). In prisons the abolition of an official cash economy might also be a form of target removal, though the main benefits of such a strategy would probably be of a somewhat different kind (see further below). Another kind of target removal practised in many prison systems is the isolation of prisoners vulnerable to attack (e.g., sex offenders or prisoners who are in debt to fellow-inmates). This example, however, also illustrates a potential difficulty with the “target removal” approach — for should one, morally, accede to prisoners’ threats by deliberately isolating “targetted” offenders? This dilemma is especially acute if the “isolation” accommodation offered is of a sub-standard nature (see generally Prestley, 1980; H.M. Chief Inspector of Prisons, 1986; Home Office, 1989).
Removing the Means to Crime

A standard example of this kind of situational crime prevention is the screening of baggage by airlines to try to prevent guns and other weapons being taken aboard. Similar weapon-removal examples are routinely applied in the prison context, and require no elaboration here.

Restriction on the Movements of Potential Offenders

This kind of situational crime prevention is not usually mentioned in general crime prevention discussions, though it clearly fits the definition of situational crime prevention (see above), involving as it does a manipulation of the immediate environment resulting in opportunity reduction. Despite the absence of comment in the crime prevention literature, however, practical examples of this kind of measure in the general community are not unknown, for example in electronic monitoring schemes.

In the prison context, restriction of offenders’ movements can be a powerful tool for preventing disorder, for an inmate alone in a cell obviously has restricted scope for causing trouble. Hence the standard resort to a “lockdown” (locking all inmates in cells) when a threatening situation looks like developing. There may also, however, be other and more indirect intended benefits from the restriction of offenders’ movements. We have already seen that, at Albany Prison, two of the main features of the restricted regime were (i) the restriction of evening association to two-thirds of the population at any one time, and (ii) the restriction of inmates’ general movements in the wing and around the prison. The main purpose of these restrictions was not so much deliberately to restrict offenders’ movements, but rather to restrict the number of inmates in the open at any one time, so that (given fixed staffing resources) more effective surveillance could be effected upon those inmates who were allowed out of their cells. The extreme end point of this kind of restriction on movement is perhaps to be found at Marion Penitentiary in Illinois, where, under lockdown conditions, prisoners are only allowed out of their cells when in handcuffs and legirons and accompanied by guards (Ward and Breed, 1985; Ward 1987).

At this point we may return to structuration theory. The standard general literature on situational crime prevention tends to be associated with a theoretical standpoint in rational choice theory (see e.g. Cornish and Clarke, 1986); that is to say, it assumes that situational crime prevention works because, for example, the potential offender rationally realizes that the house is now too heavily defended to enter easily, or that (given zip-coding of property) the payoff from the crime will be reduced, etc. Yet there has not always been much close empirical investigation of the offender’s own views in the context of discussions on situational crime prevention (but see Bennett, 1986); in other words, rational choice is sometimes assumed rather than investigated. In the prison context, it is vital to consider how prisoners, as real human subjects and as knowledgeable agents, react to situational restrictions on movement, and what are the unintended consequences to the prison of their reactions. Suppose, for example (as seems not unlikely), that prisoners resent a regime which significantly restricts their movements; this could increase their frustration and make them more likely to commit assaults when they are out of their cells, or, under certain conditions, it could cause their relationships with uniformed staff to deteriorate markedly, again with unintended consequences for the state of order in the prison.

Surveillance

Human and electronic surveillance is also a form of situational crime prevention, because by altering the immediate environment, it can reduce offenders’ perceived
effective opportunities to offend. It is clear from the general crime prevention literature that measures of this kind can have a crime reductive effect, as seen in, for example, experiments which have increased the number of supervisory personnel on public transport (van Andel, 1989).

In the prison context, surveillance is closely associated with architectural issues; it is well known, for example, that some architectural designs provide better "sight-lines" (and hence natural surveillance) than others. In contexts where natural surveillance is difficult, it can be boosted by, for example, television cameras in prison corridors, or by uniformed staff patrolling into areas of the prison which are non-visible from standard staff vantage points. But again, whilst tactics such as these might indeed reduce the perceived opportunities to offend, they might also enhance resentment and/or alienation among prisoners, with possible unintended effects; prisoners, for example, could very easily be irritated by what they would probably regard as unreasonable frequent staff intrusions into the semi-private space of a wing television room. Part of the apparent advantage of so-called new-generation architecture (see Home Office, 1985) is precisely that it provides surveillance unobtrusively, though that is not to say that it is a magic solution in the prevention of prison disorder (see Rutherford, 1985).

Environmental Management

The final kind of situational crime prevention to be discussed here is that of environmental management, which, as Hough et al. (1980:9) point out, has "some but not all the characteristics of the situational approach," in particular because measures of this kind are "opportunity reducing only in an extended sense". An example given by these authors is the organization of soccer matches in England:

Good liaison between the police, the two football clubs and supporters' clubs can reduce the opportunities and temptations for vandalism and violence; arrival and departure of supporters can be better managed so as to avoid long periods of delay; within the grounds routes of access to stands and occupation of stands can be coordinated so as to minimise contact between rival supporters... (1980:10).

In the prison contest, the single most important example of environmental management that we have encountered is the existence or otherwise of a cash economy. It is not so much that cash economies provide targets for theft (see above); the issue is the indirect impact of a cash economy. It is much easier for prisoners to run various kinds of racket if a cash economy exists, not least because in a cash prison economy the money supply can be fairly easily increased (illegitimately) by the smuggling-in of additional cash. In a non-cash economy, cash in the prison is immediately suspect to the staff; and, while other currencies will inevitably develop (tobacco, chocolate bars, etc.) there are limits to the extent to which most prisoners wish to acquire goods of this sort. A cash economy, in short, indirectly encourages racketeering, and its abolition should reduce the scale of racketeering. That in turn could make an important contribution to the reduction of violence and disorder in the prison, since there is clear evidence that interpersonal violence and threats in long-term prisons are not infrequently associated with conflicts generated by racketeering activities.

Social Approaches to the Prevention of Disorder in Prisons

Just as there are different kinds of situational approaches to the prevention of disorder, so too there are different kinds of social approach. Let us take just two examples.
The Barlinnie Special Unit is a small special unit for long-term male prisoners who have proved disruptive in the mainstream Scottish prison system. It was originally designed on therapeutic community lines, to which it no longer adheres in full; nevertheless, the notion of the community within the unit (embracing both inmates and staff) remains an important one, and community meetings are regularly held (see Whatmore, 1987 for a description of the unit, and Boyle 1984 for an inmate’s account). Another extremely important feature of life in the unit is its high level privileges, which are significantly greater than those available to most long-term inmates. Special Unit privileges include: virtually unlimited visiting facilities for families and friends; the right not to work if one does not wish to do so; the opportunity to cook and eat non-prison food; and access to in-cell television. Of these, it is quite clear that the visiting privilege is particularly valued by prisoners, not least because (i) visits may, for most inmates, be taken in cells, and (ii) the prison is situated in the heart of Glasgow, the city in which most of the inmates’ families live.

Cooke (1989) has shown that the level of assaults and other serious incidents committed by prisoners in the Special Unit is very much less than for the same inmates in the years in prison before their unit experience; and his analysis also indicates that post-unit behavior, while worse than behavior in the unit, is a considerable improvement on pre-unit behavior. Cooke (1989:139) postulates that the reason for the immediate drop in the level of incidents on entering the unit is largely a situational one (living conditions in the unit are radically different from those in the mainstream, and this change, it is suggested, affects prisoners’ behavior. Cooke argues that a main situational factor in operation is that of greater autonomy for the prisoner; that is, prisoners have much more say in their choice of daily activities in the unit than in mainstream prisons, and more say also about the way that the unit is run. A further situational mechanism suggested (1989:141), which others might regard as more important than the autonomy factor, is the level of privileges: that is, prisoners greatly prefer the Special Unit environment (especially the visits), and they are aware that a serious incident in the unit will result in immediate expulsion, which they are very anxious to avoid. (The unit has a strict rule disallowing physical violence).

Cooke’s (1989) use of the term “situational” is broader than the definition of ‘situational crime prevention’ offered by Hough et al (1980) (see above), because of course the Special Unit is not opportunity-restricting, but rather the reverse. The suggestion that a radical change in situation has nevertheless produced a marked and immediate change in inmate behavior is however of great interest, not least because the mechanisms postulated for the effect produced emphasise the importance of the prisoners’ reaction to the altered environment—an emphasis very similar to our own (see above).

Cooke (1989) goes on to argue (although not using these terms) that the apparent long-term effect of the unit on prisoners’ behavior is largely the product of social processes rather than the changed situational context (which of course no longer exists once inmates have left the Special Unit). He suggests three main possibilities for this long-term effect, though these are not themselves empirically investigated in his study:

First, that prisoners living in the unit over a number of years learn new (non-aggressive or at least non-physical) ways of coping with frustration and anger. Cooke (1989) notes in particular that the verbal fluency of many inmates has improved as a result of regular attendance at community meetings.

Secondly, that some prisoners have been able to develop from the unit a new and non-criminal social network (the unit is regularly visited by a range of non-criminal contacts), and thus to absorb different values.

Thirdly, that certain prisoners have been able to develop talents (especially artistic talents: see Carrell and Laing, 1982) which have provided them with new skills and interests of positive value to them after leaving the unit.
Whilst this interpretation is not wholly uncontroversial,\textsuperscript{11} most observers would probably agree that, on the limited available evidence, at least some of these ‘social’ processes postulated by Cooke (1989) have occurred at Barlinnie. In that sense, the unit can be regarded as a genuinely successful example of ‘social crime prevention’ in the prison context. More generally, the study illustrates the interesting possibilities that may arise from the interaction between changed situational features (not necessarily of an opportunity-reducing kind) and changed social relationships (e.g., community meetings, a different relationship between inmates and staff, greater contact with non-criminal outsiders, etc).

But the Special Unit is a very unusual kind of prison setting, and it caters to a very small number of inmates. Can one also see a use for social crime prevention in a more general and more normal prison context?

An important recent policy committee on long-term imprisonment in England, the Control Review Committee, certainly thought so. Set up to improve conditions of order in English long-term prisons, the committee went out of its way to make the following remark:

\ldots our package of specific proposals is only part of the story. At the end of the day, nothing else that we can say will be as important as the general proposition that relations between staff and prisoners are at the heart of the whole prison system and that control and security flow from getting that relationship right. Prisons cannot be run by coercion: they depend on staff having a firm, confident and humane approach that enables them to maintain close contact with inmates without abrasive confrontation. Nothing can be allowed to qualify the need for staff to be in control at all times, but we are sure that the very great majority will agree with us that this is best achieved by the unobtrusive use of their professional skill at involvement with prisoners’ (Home Office, 1984, para. 16).

The majority of prison managers and staff at both the prisons we studied agreed in subscribing to this viewpoint. The viewpoint was, however, particularly strongly held by staff at Long Lartin, reflecting the more ‘relaxed’ regime which had been developed there.

In discussions of crime prevention (or analogous measures in prison) it is always important to specify the relevant preventive \textit{mechanisms} —that is, exactly how is this or that particular measure supposed to reduce crime or contribute to social order? We have already examined this question in the context of situational crime prevention (various kinds of opportunity reduction) and of the Barlinnie Special Unit (Cooke’s (1989) various suggestions, discussed above). But how might the Control Review Committee’s approach be expected to work?

To answer this question, we think it is best to return to structuration theory. Giddens (1984:60) emphasizes the great importance of \textit{routines} in everyday life. At the level of the ontological security of individual actors, he points out (through a discussion of Bettelheim’s (1960) description and analysis of life in the concentration camps of Dachau and Buchenwald) the need that most individuals have for a level of predictability in daily encounters —it was precisely the unpredictability of life in the concentration camps that produced radical personal insecurity. Equally, at the level of societal analysis, it is vital to recognize that the institutions of society \textit{are} such only through their continued reproductions by knowledgeable actors (Giddens, 1984:60). That is, social structures themselves depend upon routines, continually re-enacted by social actors. Hence:

\begin{quote}
An examination of routinization \ldots provides us with a master key to explicating the characteristic forms of relation between the basic security system [of individuals] on the one hand, and the reflexively constituted processes inherent in the episodic character of [social] encounters on the other (1984:60).
\end{quote}
What are the implications of this, translated into the prison context? First, prisoners are (at least potentially) in a deprived and dependent state, suffering the pains of imprisonment (Sykes 1958, ch. 4) and to an extent dependent on the staff to at least alleviate those pains (Mathiesen, 1965). The existence of some routines and predictability in prison life operates to reduce personal insecurity. However, that is only half the story, because obviously routines which prisoners regard as reasonable and acceptable are more likely to achieve a reduction in insecurity than are routines regarded as merely tolerable, or downright dreadful.

So what kind of routines do prisoners find reasonable and acceptable? Individual prisoners obviously differ in this respect, but as a broad generalization something like the following list would perhaps be regarded as important by most prisoners:

(a) Delivery of an acceptable level of provision for the basic necessities of life, together with the retention of links with significant others outside the prison (e.g.) reasonable food, reasonable clothing, reasonable arrangements for family visits, etc).

(b) Being treated as an autonomous person, with an element of staff respect for privacy, personal feelings etc, and a certain freedom to choose what activities to pursue within the inevitable confines that the prison environment creates.

(c) Elements of fair treatment from day to day, so that today’s rule-enforcement will be more or less the same as yesterday’s, unless reasons for a change are clearly explained.

(d) Fair treatment vis-a-vis other inmates.

If a regime is delivered which prisoners regard as reasonable in all the circumstances, they are (in general likely to perceive themselves as deriving some benefit from it.¹² This in turn means that such a regime will be more likely to receive a level of endorsement, or in sociological terms legitimation, from the prisoner.

This line of reasoning, we would suggest, implicitly lies behind the important and now common concept of dynamic security (i.e., the delivery of security and order in the prison through relationship-based and activity-based regimes: see Dunbar, 1985); though in our view that concept is incomplete because it pays insufficient attention to perceived fairness in regime delivery (see especially Mathiesen, 1965). The reasoning adopted also clearly suggests that attention to the services offered to prisoners, the way they are personally treated in the institution, accountability systems, grievance procedures, and the like, are all important not simply as a matter of humaneness or of inmates’ rights, but also in the reproduction of social order in the prison (see also Davies, 1982).

There are, however, also some risks in taking this approach. If one delivers good services and runs a relaxed and fair regime, the legitimation accorded to the prison and the prison staff will probably be greater —but there are potential difficulties, because the very liberalism of the regime will in all likelihood allow greater opportunities for some inmates to commit unacceptable acts such as assaulting other inmates. A simple example of this point can be seen in the practice of cell association. This privilege, where available, is greatly appreciated by most long-term prisoners, because it allows them to invite their friends in to their cell (the nearest equivalent to “home” in prison) and to hold private discussions there. On the other hand, in most prisons activities in cells are notoriously difficult to monitor,¹³ given the simple facts of sight lines and standard staff patrolling tactics. Since long-term prisons, by definition, contain a proportion of inmates who are not angels, it is obvious that cell association does increase the level of opportunity for some pre-planned assaults to take place in private.¹⁴
Conclusion

In Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, M. Jourdan asks his mentor whether, when he says “Nicole, bring me my slippers and give my my nightcap,” that is prose. On receiving an affirmative reply, he exclaims: “By my faith! I’ve been talking prose for the last forty years, and I’ve never know it!”

We realize that, in a way, this paper has some similarities with M. Jourdain's discovery. Prisons everywhere, it can certainly be said, have for many years been practising both situational and social control without using that terminology — so is there any point in introducing the terminology? We believe that there is. The use of explicit terminology, we would suggest, helps one conceptually to disentangle exactly what is being attempted in a given prison; and the emphasis on the precise explication of mechanisms when discussing crime prevention measures forces one to be explicit about exactly how, for example, improving relationships between staff and prisoners is supposed to reduce disorder in prison.

Is it possible to offer any broad conclusion to this essay? We think it is, and that this can be encapsulated in four main propositions.

First, unless one is prepared to run a regime based on virtually total inmate confinement (as in the Victorian “separate system” (Ignatieff, 1978) or in the modern special context of Marion (Ward, 1987)), then *some measure of social crime prevention in long-term prisons is essential*. That in turn means that serious attention has to be paid to the issues of *legitimation*, which itself requires attention to the daily routines of the prison, the level of services offered to prisoners, accountability and grievance procedures, etc. These concerns are, in our view, inescapably entailed in a serious focus upon social crime prevention.

Secondly, in most prison settings, *social crime prevention has its cost* (see above), notably in increased opportunities. Close attention therefore needs to be paid to situational methods of reducing opportunities for disorder, while maintaining the maximum commitment to social crime prevention and its emphasis on legitimation.

Thirdly, it must be recognized that *situational measures are reacted to by sentient and knowledgeable actors*. These actors will vary in their reaction to different situational measures; in general, measures which directly restrict the daily life of the prisoner will be regarded more negatively than less personally restrictive measures. For example, abolition of a cash economy is likely to be less unpopular than increased time locked up in a cell; more liberal situational changes, such as the enhanced visits and other privileges at Barlinnie, are likely to be particularly popular.

Fourthly, therefore, it follows that in trying to use opportunity-reducing situational measures to restrict the possibilities for offending which social crime prevention otherwise tends to create, *there are advantages in employing (wherever possible) less personally restrictive rather than more personally restrictive situational measures, since the former will threaten legitimation less than the latter*.

These conclusions are supported by our empirical study of Albany and Long Lartin Prisons, which will be published at a later date. But that study also suggests, as do the principles of the theory of structuration, that every prison has its own unique features, linked among other things, to its history, its architecture, the composition of the prisoner population, and the prior experiences and memories of staff and inmates as knowledgeable agents. Every prison, therefore, can only properly be understood in its own context. Hence, anyone interested in applying the principles we have suggested in this conclusion to a particular prison setting should do so only in the context of a thorough understanding of the specific features of that setting.
1The dispersal system refers to the main prisons within which long-term “Category A” (maximum security) men may be held. The system is so called because within each dispersal prison there are only a small proportion of Category A prisoners (usually about 15%); hence the Category A’s are dispersed among Category B men.


3“Evening association” means informal mixing of prisoners in their residential unit: they may talk together, watch television, play games, cook additional food, etc.

4As compared with Long Lartin, Albany has a higher proportion of younger prisoners under 25; more serving determinate sentences of less than 10 years; and more with previous convictions for robbery and firearms offenses.

5“Practical consciousness” is defined by Giddens (1984:375) as “what actors know (believe) about social conditions, especially the conditions of their own action, but cannot express discursively; no bar of repression, however, protects practical consciousness as is the case with the unconscious.”

6“Duality of structure” means “structure as the medium and outcome of the conduct it recursively organizes; the structural properties of social systems do not exist outside of action but are chronically implicated in its production and reproduction” (Giddens 1984:374).

7Occupation of the roof is also strategically and symbolically useful to rioting prisoners because from the roof they can convey messages to television crews and other observers outside the prison.

8“Reducing payoff” is another distinct from of situational crime prevention discussed by Hough et al (1980:7), of which property marking schemes are a prime example. We have not discussed it separately here because of it limited applicability in the prison context.

9It should be noted that Scotland has a separate legal jurisdiction within the United Kingdom, and the Scottish prison system is completely distinct and separate from that of England and Wales.

10Given this fact, there have been suggestions that inmates may misbehave elsewhere in order to qualify for the Special Unit. However, this is unlikely because of: (i) the substantial amounts of extra prison time for misbehavior usually acquired before an inmate is admitted to the unit, and (ii) the very small size of the unit, and the long average stay of each inmate, which together mean that vacancies are infrequent and difficult to predict.

11Given the long average stay in the unit, aging/maturation processes might be at least partly relevant in explaining the post-special unit diminution of violence as also might proximity to the end of the sentence (on which see Cooke 1989:149).

12One difficult point here is that to an extent it may be comparative regime features (is this prison better than a nearby one?) rather than absolute features which are regarded as important by inmates. The full implications of this point cannot be explored here.

13Especially in England, where cells have doors, not open grilles.
The Barlinnie Special Unit, where cell associations is freely allowed, could be regarded as an exception to this rule: but note that (i) there are no 'targetted' prisoners, such as sex offenders, in the unit; (ii) the prisoners have a degree of say about who is allocated to the unit; and (iii) violence results in immediate expulsion to the much less agreeable conditions of the mainstream prison system.

References


