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# CURTAILING YOUTH: A CRITIQUE OF COERCIVE CRIME PREVENTION

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by

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***Abstract:** This paper provides a critical review of crime prevention measures involving coercive control over the activities, behaviors and public visibility of young people. Drawing on examples and trends in the U.S., Australia and the U.K., the paper reviews four major areas of coercive intervention in youthful activity: reconstructing of public space in ways that basically exclude and/or contain the young in particular ways; extending police powers in regulating the street life of young people; making use of youth curfews; and emphasizing the need for parents to police their offspring. It is argued that adoption of a developmental crime prevention strategy is both possible, and more desirable, than reliance on coercive measures.*

## INTRODUCTION

Juvenile crime is big news. Throughout the advanced industrialized countries today, the media are saturated with accounts of youthful wrongdoing and the threats posed to the social order by unruly, antisocial young people. Media hype has been more than matched by tough-talking politicians who have seized upon the "law-and-order" agenda in efforts to enhance their electoral standing. While the problem of juvenile crime has often been exaggerated well out of proportion to actual crime trends and actual levels of social harm, this has not prevented legislators and criminal justice officials from introducing strong measures to combat the perceived juvenile crime wave.

The intention of this paper is to review some of the measures currently in vogue or being mooted for introduction in various jurisdictions in the U.S., Australia and the United Kingdom. More specifi-

cally, the concern is to outline and critique those measures that can be described as predominantly coercive in nature, constituting generally repressive forms of control over the activities, behaviors and public visibility of young people. They include: attempts to reconstruct public space in ways that basically exclude and/or contain the young in particular ways; the extension of private and public police powers in regulating the street life of young people; the use of youth curfews; and greater emphasis being placed on parents to police their offspring. I wish to counterpose to these types of interventions a different approach to youth crime prevention — one that focuses on young people as legitimate rights-holders in society and that stresses the developmental rather than coercive in institutional relations with young people.

Crime prevention can be conceptualized in a number of different ways, and in its wide definition can include almost any sort of measure directed at deterring crime. For the purposes of this paper, the term will be used in a much more circumscribed way to refer mainly to those types of interventions that attempt to stop juvenile offending before it begins. This can involve a wide range of intervention measures, including changes to the physical environment, multi-agency service provision and various citizen-participation programs.

Our concern, however, is with those actions that involve coercion as a central element. In this context, coercion refers to elements of compulsion that are generally imposed upon a particular population group (e.g., young people and their parents) from the top-down, with little consideration given to social consequences or to the participation of these groups in the decision-making process. At the heart of coercive approaches is the use or threat of force as the key means of citizen protection or crime prevention. Coercion does not equal the application of criminal law. However, the interventions associated with coercive approaches do constitute a form of criminalization insofar as certain activities and people are continually subject to the scrutiny of the criminal justice system, and remedies are sought that attempt to severely restrict the behavior and presence of young people generally.

In some cases, the crime prevention measures adopted may not be specific to young people (as with some "zero tolerance" policing strategies). However, because of their disenfranchised social position, public visibility and tendency to hang around together in groups, teenagers are especially vulnerable to the disproportionate enforcement of such measures. In other cases, crime prevention is explicitly constructed in youth-specific terms (as with youth curfews). Generally speaking, however, the framework of intervention is very similar,

as are the effects. The context for the adoption of crime prevention measures is discussed in the next section.

## **REGULATING SPACE**

Making city streets safer has involved attempts to directly repress so-called undesirable elements from the public domain; it has also involved reconfiguring public space in a manner that excludes certain groups of people. This involves a combination of both street policing, and new architectural and urban planning strategies. Here issues of crime prevention are constructed as part of a technical problem that can be dealt with by recourse to new urban planning techniques, the adoption of sophisticated surveillance technology and the innovative use of legislative mechanisms.

One measure associated with this type of approach is to consciously construct designated zones of safety and public security. In the U.S., the building of urban fortresses and gated suburbs and the drift to rural sanctuaries are illustrations of attempts to purchase security by creating private exclusion areas. Exclusive entry and restricted access are the hallmarks of this type of crime prevention strategy. They are often linked to the privatization of what might previously have been open publicly owned and publicly accessible community space (White, 1996a).

At the local level, the answer to crime for some is to establish security checkpoints as a means to dissuade potential offenders from entering an area. For example, in Rosemont, IL, the local government passed an ordinance mandating police checkpoints at the two entrances to the village's largest residential area. All drivers who pass through checkpoints are stopped and questioned (National Crime Prevention Council, 1996). The emphasis is on deterring would-be offenders by having restricted access to potential targets, and by having a highly visible anti-crime presence. In a similar vein, many towns and cities in the U.S., Australia and Britain now have an extensive array of closed-circuit television cameras in inner-city business districts.

Such strategies appear to be based on "opportunity reduction" theories, which argue that the solution to crime is to increase the cost and reduce the opportunities for the commission of crime and to increase the likelihood of detection. This is commonly linked to both "situational crime prevention" and "Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design" (see, for examples Clarke, 1992, and Felson, 1994). It is generally argued that crime is basically a matter of choice and opportunity, and therefore open for anyone to pursue given the right circumstances. The prevention of juvenile crime, in this frame-

work, is thus premised on increasing surveillance in the public domain (e.g., through stepped-up police patrols) and ensuring better protection of businesses, homes and persons by innovative, locally based design and community initiatives (e.g., neighborhood watch schemes). The message is one of heightened awareness of strangers, and of preemptive action to reduce the presence of potential offenders in particular city locales.

In practice, the creation of private exclusion zones (generally for the wealthy and better-off) is sometimes accompanied by concerted efforts to set up "containment" zones for the dispossessed and economically marginalized. Davis (1994), for example, describes how a "homeless containment zone" has been created in downtown Los Angeles — an overcrowded Skid Row area known as Central City East — into which the poorest and most disadvantaged are literally herded by the Los Angeles Police Department, with the approval of the city.

The strategy of containment, according to Davis (1994), is part of a larger picture based upon "the ecology of fear." Within this framework operate a multitude of overlapping crime control measures that both heighten the fear of crime as they simultaneously appear to offer solutions to it at a local level. The crime control map in this case consists of everything from restricted entry suburbs, to gang-free parks, to narcotics and prostitution abatement zones. The focus on local solutions to issues of crime and crime prevention has spawned a wide array of measures that are now currently in use across the U.S. (see National Crime Prevention Council, 1996). However, as Davis (1994) alerts us, the overall consequence of these kinds of local interventions is to create an intricate web of security and social exclusion that is redefining and reshaping the urban landscape.

Not only is this a matter of concern from the point of view of basic social justice and human rights (e.g., to freedom of movement), but the effects of situational or locally based crime prevention strategies premised upon social exclusion and extensive surveillance may be socially detrimental or, at the extreme, explosive, in their own right. Fundamentally, such strategies generally ignore the basic socioeconomic causes of crime by concentrating on issues of crime control. The imposition of ever-restrictive and, in some cases, harsher, measures to reduce opportunities for crime generates pressures for the displacement of crime in terms of times, places and offenses. It also ignores the creative ways in which people will adapt to and adjust their activity in response to attempts to control their movements, behaviors and appearances. Crime prevention measures of this kind thus lend themselves to the adoption of more subterranean ways to circumvent surveillance and containment (e.g., use of secret hand signals in the case of gang membership).

More generally, the widespread commodification of protective and surveillance devices — and the ability to buy security in regard to both a single residence and whole neighborhood areas — is not a socially neutral process; it emerges from and reflects massive economic and social differences in the general population. The social polarization apparent in the U.S., Britain and Australia is translating into varying forms of spatial apartheid, with some sections of the city or community able to secure a modicum of apparent safety while others are relegated to life in increasingly divisive and hostile environments. Economic exclusivity is not a good basis for meaningful and just crime prevention. And, as the Los Angeles riots in 1992 remind us, the potential for explosive situations is heightened by the combination of the overpolicing and underresourcing of high-rental, low-income neighborhoods.

Attempting to design crime out by introducing new architectural and civic design measures (e.g., thinking about how, or whether, to provide public toilets or comfortable seating in high-transit areas), or by introducing proactive "anti-gang" measures (e.g., via the use of civil injunctions against alleged gang members that ban their use of parks or the wearing of certain types of clothes), often begs the larger question of who the targets of crime prevention actually are and why they are singled out for attention. While such prevention measures may appear to be neutral in application (i.e., the law is to apply to everyone the same way), the technical exercise of reducing opportunities for crime does have major social and political consequences. Invariably, the most vulnerable and marginalized sections of the population benefit the least from such strategies and are, in essence, further penalized and ostracized — not because they are necessarily "criminal", but because they are poor.

To make this observation about unequal applications and outcomes is not, however, to argue that opportunity reduction and situational crime prevention programs and techniques are inherently class-biased. Indeed, as argued by Sutton (1996), such approaches can have significant value in helping to expose social inequities and unmasking power relations. The possibility certainly exists for a more politicized understanding of such approaches, for example, their application as part of the social empowerment of more powerless and vulnerable groups and communities (White, 1996b). There is some merit to the idea of engaging people in disadvantaged areas in discussions of how best to adapt specific crime prevention technologies and techniques to their own needs. But there are limits to how far we might wish to go, and what direction we see crime prevention taking.

For instance, it is arguable whether or not stepped-up surveillance and preventive measures — at their extreme involving the fin-

gerprinting and photographing of all local children (see Davis, 1994) — are particularly helpful or healthy for any society. As expressed elsewhere (White, 1996b), it may well be the case that, at least theoretically, it is possible to prevent crime given the availability of sufficient tools, resources and powers. But do we really want to create, and live in, a kind of "surveillance state" where we all may be free from crime but prisoners of our own security systems?

In addition to this kind of self-imprisonment, and the emotionally and socially debilitating fearfulness that can envelop parents, children and whole communities — the message we tend to currently send to the poor and unemployed will hardly engender good will across the rich-poor divide. The construction of "us" and "them" is achieved through a constant process of stereotyping, and state-sponsored intimidation and criminalization. Drawing new lines in the urban map, however, does nothing to remedy the basic reasons why some young people congregate where they do, engage in certain kinds of both legal and illegal activities and develop modes of being that bear little resemblance to mainstream definitions or aspirations regarding what is "good and decent." The abrogation of social responsibility for underlying problems of inequality, poverty and social injustice is mirrored in attempts to find selective private or local answers to what appears to be a "law-and-order" problem. A coercive response to youth behavior or criminal offending will not contribute to the creation of a more humane, less fearful society.

## **POLICING THE STREET**

Perhaps the most evident and pervasive form of crime prevention pertaining to juveniles is that of street policing. The main objective here is to target young people on the street (including shopping malls, beaches, train stations, etc.) before they can possibly engage in offending behavior. This type of approach is clearly reliant upon the coercive apparatus of the state — namely, the police — and is sustained by and reinforces the notion that crime prevention is basically about crime control.

At a theoretical level, impetus for the adoption of this kind of intervention has been fostered by arguments such as the "broken window" hypothesis of Wilson and Kelling (1982). Commenting on crime strategies in the U.S., Wilson and Kelling (1982) argue that we must suppress the symptoms of disorder by taking vigorous action to clean up the streets (i.e., act strongly now, as one broken window soon leads to two). In practical terms, this has translated into a high, and highly visible, level of police presence in specifically targeted urban areas.

Street policing effectively sees juvenile crime prevention as a matter of deterrence. Proactive strategies are designed to exclude the young from certain types of activities and from certain parts of the public domain. Such strategies take several different forms (Cunneen and White, 1995). For example, in the Australian jurisdiction of New South Wales, legislation was introduced in 1994 allowing the police even greater scope to remove young people from the streets beyond a certain time. Simultaneously, the police in Western Australia — in this case, drawing on existing welfare legislation as the legal basis upon which to act — were engaged in a campaign called 'Operation Sweep' that was intended to forcibly remove young people from the streets of Perth and Fremantle.

While the legislative basis for action varies from state to state, the general trend around Australia has been for police services to be granted extensive new powers vis-a-vis young people. These range from the casual use of name-checks (e.g., requesting names and addresses), and "move-on" powers (e.g., the right to clear designated areas) to an enhanced ability to obtain the fingerprints and bodily samples of alleged offenders.

In the state of Queensland, this kind of street-policing strategy has been extended to include private security personnel as well. Thus, behavior at the South Bank Parklands in Brisbane is covered by legislation granting security officers the power to stop people, ask for their name and address, and direct them to leave the site for 24 hours if the officer considers that the person is causing a "public nuisance." Further exclusionary powers are available upon written notice, or application to a court if the security officers wish to ban someone for up to one year (White et al., 1996).

The systematic harassment and regulation of young people in public spaces has long been a key aspect of the maintenance of public order as conceived by authority figures. Importantly, no actual wrongdoing or criminal act need have been committed. The emphasis on crime control and public order maintenance precludes any consideration of young people's needs and desires for space of their own. Moreover, in many cases the degree and type of intervention is highly discriminatory and often brutal, with greater scrutiny of the most marginalized, vulnerable groups of young people (see White and Alder, 1994).

One outcome of such campaigns, and indeed of the persistent clashes between young people and the police over the use of public space, is that more youths are vulnerable to the criminalization process than might otherwise be the case. This is because the constant harassment of young people by authority figures can set in motion further conflict (such as youth harassment of law enforcement offi-

cials), which periodically surfaces in the courts as "offensive behavior," "resisting arrest" and the like. A consequence of street policing as crime prevention, therefore, is the creation of "criminals."

A recent British study (Loader, 1996) suggests that the police often have an ambivalent attitude toward policing the young: they understand some of the problems experienced by young people in their use of time and space, but they are under organizational pressures to do something about the youth presence. Similar tensions have been noted in the Australian case (Alder et al., 1992; White and Alder, 1994). At least part of the problem stems from the ways in which public-order policing has been construed, both operationally and legislatively, as resting upon notions of coercive intervention. Police contact and intervention in the lives of young people is inevitable; the crucial issue is whether or not that intervention will exacerbate or diminish antisocial behavior and criminal activity.

An assessment of this style and type of street intervention must acknowledge that the principal recipients of police attention tend to be sociologically very distinctive. There is ample evidence to show that street policing is overwhelmingly directed at the least powerful and most vulnerable social groups in society. This kind of intervention thus impacts most negatively on homeless young people, the unemployed, indigenous young people and ethnic minority young people. Very often the intervention involved is characterized by heavy reliance upon force, intimidation and maltreatment. The racist character of street policing is also an issue of much concern to minority groups in the U.S., the U.K. and Australia (see Cook and Hudson, 1993; White, 1996c).

Furthermore, given the lack of economic and social resources available to many of these young people, important questions can be asked regarding where they can find space of their own outside of the family home. Similarly, the social vulnerability of these youths is often matched by a vulnerability to criminal victimization. Yet, ironically, the general trend is for youths who are subject to overpolicing to also suffer underpolicing when it comes to their needs and status as victims of crime (see Loader, 1996; Cunneen, 1992).

## YOUTH CURFEWS

Juvenile crime prevention is increasingly being constructed in terms of detailed restrictions on the movement and presence of young people outside of the family home. A key mechanism here is that of the youth curfew. The use of curfews is extensive in the U.S., with curfew ordinances in effect in a majority of the largest American cities (Bilchik, 1996). Support for the imposition of curfews has been

highlighted in recent debates and political rhetoric on how best to deal with juvenile crime in both the U.K. (Jeffs and Smith, 1996) and Australia (White, 1996d).

Youth curfews represent yet another method by which to clear the streets of young people — again, regardless of whether or not they have done anything wrong, much less illegal. The nature of specific curfew regulation varies considerably, according to such criteria as:

- age (e.g., under 18, under 16, under 10);
- hours of operation (e.g., midnight to 5 a.m.; 10:30 p.m. to 6:30 a.m.; daytime curfews during school hours);
- location (e.g., self-contained local government areas such as country towns, local council areas within a metropolitan area, citywide or statewide curfews);
- primary rationale (e.g., protection of children; dealing with youth crime);
- implementation (e.g., relying solely on fines and court orders; linked to youth social and community programs); and
- enforcement (e.g., rigorous and systematic police intervention, discretionary use with regard to particular locations and target groups).

The logic of the youth curfew is basically centered on the problem of displacement. This relates to the issue of how best to reduce the street presence of young people, particularly in circumstances where they are relatively free from adult supervision and control, by forcing them into situations of close monitoring and where their activities and movements will be subject to stricter regulation (the parental home or structured youth pursuits such as recreation or social clubs).

The use of youth curfews would in some cases simply formalize and extend what is already occurring via existing state policing practices and private security-guard interventions. As with these approaches, the use of curfews is built upon the idea of, in effect, criminalizing non-criminal behavior and thus also increasing the likelihood of some young people being drawn even further into the criminal justice net.

The legal basis of curfews has been the subject of much discussion, as well as a number of significant court cases in the U.S. Issues of freedom of speech, religion, movement and peaceful assembly, for example, have been weighed in several jurisdictions, with the result that legislation is now often narrowly tailored to address the specific needs enumerated by the jurisdiction by the least restrictive means possible (see Bilchik, 1996; Jeffs and Smith, 1996). In Australia, questions have been raised regarding: the lack of legislative authority

for police to enforce curfews of a general nature (rather than those tied to bail or community-service order conditions); and the ability of local councils to introduce curfews without prior legislation at the state government level, which would extinguish existing common-law rights relating to the right to move freely around the community (Simpson and Simpson, 1993).

Measuring the effectiveness of youth curfews is highly contentious. Proponents point to data on youth offending and victimization rates, which appear to demonstrate a decline in social harm associated with the imposition of curfews. Opponents, however, are likewise able to point to data suggesting that little is achieved by such measures (see Jeffs and Smith, 1996). Part of the problem with any quantitative analysis is the considerable variation in the actual implementation of curfews in terms of local conditions, legal parameters, community resources and style of criminal justice intervention.

In global terms, however, two recent U.S. surveys provide important observations regarding the use and effectiveness of curfews. Bilchik (1996) provides an overview of the legal challenges to curfews and presents profiles of jurisdictions with comprehensive curfew enforcement programs. It is observed that "The initial evidence offered by the seven communities profiled in this Bulletin is that community-based curfew programs that offer a range of services are more easily and effectively enforced, enjoy community support, and provide a greater benefit in preventing juvenile delinquency and victimization" [Bilchik, 1996:9].

The important point here is that the "success" of the youth curfews is seen to reside not in their coercive aspects (i.e., aggressive street policing), but in the developmental accompaniments to the imposition of the curfew (i.e., recreation centers, counseling services). The presence or absence of additional community supports for young people in the context of the use of curfews is a central factor in how they are put into operation and perceived by residents and young people themselves.

Another concern is that, if the prime policy concern is with the welfare of the young (e.g., the 12-year-old who is roaming the streets after midnight, the plight of the young homeless person), the use of a curfew as such is inappropriate (being linked directly to the personnel, operation and logic of the criminal justice system). A more suitable strategy is to expand the range and availability of local social welfare services, including the number of community outreach workers, and to provide the police with information and training on where to take young people who need assistance.

From the point of view of crime control, a major study on violent offending in the U.S. (Snyder et al., 1996) points out that crimes will

be committed by those young people who simply ignore the curfew. The report comments that curfews appear to have little impact on some crimes, and may even increase the incidence of offenses such as those committed in the home against family members. Furthermore, the research finds that a greater proportion of all violent juvenile crime occurs between 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. on those days when school is in session than occurs during an entire year's curfew period. The frequency of violent juvenile crime is also about four times greater in the after-school period than during curfew hours (Snyder et al., 1996).

Measuring the effectiveness of youth curfews in narrow statistical terms (e.g., crime rates) is not sufficient, however, if we are to gauge adequately the social meaning and impact of such prevention measures. For example, from a youth rights perspective, there are inherent difficulties with measures that arbitrarily and unnecessarily discriminate against young people on the basis of their age (see the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child). Regardless of moral panics about youth crime, the fact remains that most youthful offending is trivial and episodic in nature, and hardly worthy of a big-stick approach. Additionally, it is also important to recognize that the operationalization of youth curfews, as with street policing generally, is often characterized by highly selective targeting and discriminatory intervention according to the social background of the young person.

Similarly, dealing with issues of the potential victimization of young people in this manner — that is, in a way that penalizes all young people solely on the basis of their age — is manifestly unjust and misconstrues the actual patterns of victimization (e.g., that which takes place within the context of the family home). Alternatively, if we were to accept that the liberty of potential perpetrators ought to be curtailed, then this would require that all young men under the age 30 be subject to curfew conditions, not teenagers as a group.

## **CONTROLLING PARENTS**

A phenomenon closely associated with youth curfews is that of making parents more responsible for the actions of their offspring. This is seen in terms of both the street presence of young people and the ways in which some jurisdictions are responding to youthful offending that has already occurred.

Youth curfews do not take into account different family and parenting contexts, even though they are intended to reinforce the responsibility of parents to control their children. The concept of childhood varies greatly according to cultural and class norms, however,

and these often involve quite different degrees and types of adult supervision and parental control over children. In Australia, for example, there is a marked difference between Anglo-Australian forms of parenting (and conceptions of childhood) and that practiced by many indigenous communities (see Johnston, 1991). In the latter, for example, there is frequently encouragement of self-direction and independent action in a manner quite at odds with conventional middle-class notions of child rearing. Thus, youth curfews may indirectly penalize some social groups due to differences in parenting practices relative to the mainstream ideal.

Differences in social and economic resources at the household level can also impact on the capacity of some parents to regulate their offspring's behavior even where this is deemed desirable or warranted. Again, in reference to indigenous people in Australia, it has been observed that in many instances poor educational background and social and economic circumstances contribute to poor self-esteem, and that "against this background, parental authority is undermined as the children observe their parents being placed in an inferior position" (Johnston, 1991:285).

The poor material circumstances of sizeable proportions of indigenous and ethnic minority communities in the U.S., Britain and Australia, and the particularly disadvantaged position of many sole parents in the class structure, means that the enforcement of a universal rule regarding parental responsibility will necessarily have unequal application. Nevertheless, the threat of fines for parents who do not "control" their children, together with recent public discussion about the deteriorating quality of parenting, places the focus of responsibility for youth behavior squarely on the backs of the parent. The idea here is that crime is essentially a matter of poor parenting and that ultimately the issue is a moral problem. Attention is therefore directed at making the parent more accountable for their child's criminal offending or antisocial behavior, even if the parent is not directly involved in the activity.

In the U.S. for example, there are various parental responsibility laws which attempt to require parents to control their offspring by making them liable for any damage caused by their children. The California Civil Code makes parents liable for damages of up to \$25,000 for each incident in which their child willfully harms property. In Silverton, OR, parents can be charged with failing to supervise a minor in the event of his or her illegal acts and be fined as well as directed to undertake a parent effectiveness program (see National Crime Prevention Council, 1996).

Similar types of legislative provisions are now emerging in the Australian context, particularly in the state of Queensland. Thus, the

Juvenile Justice Act 1992 in Queensland sets out provisions for parental restitution in cases where willful failure on the part of a parent to exercise proper care of, or supervision over, a child was likely to have substantially contributed to the commission of an offence. It is apparent that across most state jurisdictions, there is a renewed push to make parents responsible for compensation payments and to ensure that their children comply with the law as well as stay off of the streets (see Hil, 1996a, 1996b).

In Britain, a useful summary of the debates over parental responsibility is provided by Slapper (1997a, 1997b). Slapper points out that the rhetoric of the major political parties in that country is replete with references to morally deficient parenting as the cause of crime among young people. The solution, as argued by proponents of this view, is to enhance educational and support services for parents, and to penalize poor parenting through the use of fines.

This type of approach is reminiscent of the control theory put forward by Hirschi (1969) and by Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), which argues that the central issue in explaining crime is that of self-control. The problem is constructed primarily as one of ineffective childrearing. Such a perspective tends not to analyze the specific social divisions (e.g., class, gender, ethnicity) that frame the parenting process, but to rest upon a conception of human nature that sees all people as driven by essentially the same kind of universal tendency to enhance their own pleasure. In practical terms, this translates into policy that attempts to redress the defective social training that apparently characterizes offenders who have in some way "lost control."

But, as Slapper (1997b) argues, the major socioeconomic problems that generate family difficulties are far too deep and entrenched to be overcome simply by ad hoc parent support and/or parent-penalty types of schemes. As Slapper (1997b) puts it:

Anyone serious about being tough on the causes of crime must not just take one step back from the offender to look at his [sic] domestic upbringing and to berate apparently feckless parents. Another step must be taken to go behind the family to address the deep structural defects in our political economy, for it is problems like chronic unemployment, the lengthening of the working week, and high stress levels at work which are the cause of so much bad parenting [p. 70].

Hence, focusing on parents as the key site of juvenile crime prevention misconstrues the nature of the problem. It places the burden of care and responsibility on the individual, while simultaneously dismissing the impact of the retreat of the state from assisting those families and young people who have been placed in precarious eco-

nomic and social circumstances. The demise in social responsibility on the part of government (at all levels) has gone hand in hand with the further penalization of those most disadvantaged by broader economic restructuring.

Again, if we are serious about the promotion of "good parenting" then it is essential to take seriously the diverse social, economic and cultural contexts of the task. Arbitrarily punishing the parents or imposing parenting classes in cases where the parents are left to struggle in basically unchanged social circumstances is a stop-gap measure at best. And, as the Australian experience with indigenous people has demonstrated, intervention on the part of the state in attempting to control and modify Aboriginal family relationships has done more damage than good, and led to the further breakdown and fragmentation of these communities (Johnston, 1991). Parent support as a concept certainly deserves close attention. However, how, by whom and under what conditions parents are to receive advice, training and support remain crucial issues that have yet to be satisfactorily answered within a criminal justice framework.

### **COERCIVE CRIME PREVENTION**

The inequalities in application and the negative consequences of coercive crime prevention strategies are worthy of careful consideration and critique. But critique does not mean adoption of a "nothing works" philosophy when it comes to juvenile crime prevention. On the contrary, its importance is in helping to shape the kinds of questions we need to ask in reconstituting crime prevention practices and policies at a grassroots level.

The essence of a critique of coercive crime prevention can be summarized as follows:

- Generally speaking, coercive crime prevention strategies emphasize control and containment of young people, rather than addressing the deep structural causes of youthful offending or antisocial behavior.
- Coercive strategies portray young people generally, and specific groups of disadvantaged young people in particular, as "outsiders," who are perceived as threats to the community and not as part of the community.
- Such strategies undermine, both philosophically and literally, the idea that young people are bona fide rightsholders who, as such, should not be subject to measures that limit their rights and freedoms arbitrarily regardless of whether or not any law has been broken and any wrongdoing engaged in.

- Coercive strategies involve the active criminalization of young people who otherwise may not come into short or long-term contact with the criminal justice system, and furthermore can exacerbate tensions between youths and other members of the community due to youths' perceptions of unfair treatment, excessive restrictions and unnecessary intervention in their daily affairs.
- The discriminatory application of coercive measures, both geographically in terms of protected places for the privileged and socially "in terms of which groups are targeted for special attention, entrenches major class and ethnic divides but does little to alleviate core problems of poverty, unemployment and racism.
- Coercive crime prevention tends to be premised upon varying kinds of social exclusion, a process that intrinsically alienates young people from decisionmaking and that can lead to their displacement from selected areas and the adoption of alternative lifestyles, some of which may include deviant and antisocial behavior.

This critique does not advocate a retreat from the use of any coercive measures whatsoever, under any circumstances. Rather, it points out that the general contours of the approach — with its emphasis on coercion, control and containment — is fraught with major problems when it comes to how teenagers are positioned in society. In addition, the critique demonstrates that crime prevention itself is framed in such a way as to be manifestly unjust, unfair and, ultimately, unworkable.

## **YOUTH-FRIENDLY STRATEGIES**

From a theoretical viewpoint, it is useful here to make a distinction between coercive crime prevention and developmental approaches (see Polk, 1997). Description of the former has constituted the main part of this essay. The latter is best characterized as an approach that is directed at enhancing the opportunities of young people through encouraging their participation in activities that reflect their interests and needs. The guiding idea, as Polk (1997:196) explains, is that "young people are given some ownership of solutions to youth problems and that young people, local agency representatives and local community residents work together to advocate for the wider involvement and participation of all youth, including the alienated." In other words, it is important to involve young people them-

selves in any crime prevention strategy — to see them as part of the community, not as merely threats to it.

This is not the place to discuss the pros and cons of a developmental versus coercive approach to crime prevention. However, in keeping with the substantive focus of much coercive crime control on issues of young people and public space, it is useful to contrast the previous descriptions with an example of a developmental approach to these issues.

Much public and private regulation of young people's lives has been directed at their presence and activities in the public domains of the street, shopping centers and malls. Recent Australian work has highlighted the conflicts associated with these areas, and possible ways in which to intervene in a manner that does not involve coercion and social exclusion. Philosophically, such an approach is premised upon the idea of youth rights. Youth rights in this context refers to, firstly, broad human rights, that are deemed to be intrinsic to the individual and, as such, are non-negotiable. They include the rights to be protected from exploitation, physical and emotional harm, and practices that denigrate youths as human beings. Secondly, youth rights refer to a wide range of prescriptive benchmarks pertaining to the social, educational, cultural and economic development and well-being of children (see United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child). Thirdly, youth rights also include rights accorded by a nation-state, such as freedom of speech, which imply some kind of reciprocal responsibility on the part of the rightsholder, such as adherence to laws relating to noise and public disturbances.

Youth crime prevention approaches need to take into account these different types of rights and the implications they hold for various program initiatives. It is thus essential to acknowledge the basic human rights of young people, to be sensitive to the special needs of young people and the obligations of society to address these needs in a responsive and responsible manner, and to examine the particular social contexts within which certain rights and responsibilities can best be exercised. Accordingly, it has been argued that it is possible to: "develop crime prevention measures which offer a positive alternative to coercive regulation of youth behavior and to do so via techniques of opportunity reduction (e.g., improved street lighting), opportunity enhancement (e.g., diversionary activities such as basketball and netball) and social empowerment (e.g., incorporating youth into decision-making processes)" (White et al., 1996:15).

Strategically, this approach springs from the idea that young people are important. They ought to be treated with dignity and respect, and their rights, needs, aspirations and opinions need to be taken seriously.

In terms of practice and policy, recent Australian cases illustrate that the creation of youth-friendly public space is not only possible, but that such an approach can have significant positive ramifications when it comes to crime prevention. The best example of this is a shopping center complex in Perth, Western Australia (see White et. al., 1996). The management of this complex had reported that it was experiencing considerable difficulties with large numbers of young people at the shopping center. There were reports of young people hanging around in groups, vandalism, graffiti, damage to staff cars and evidence of drug use in the parking lot. Initially management hired more security guards. However, this only increased the conflicts between young people and others in the center, and the manager observed that it became a "cat and mouse" game in an "us and them" situation.

Management finally approached a local youth organization and together they established a committee with members representing the shopping center, the community, the youth service, local council staff and some young people. As a consequence of discussions and a needs analysis survey, the shopping center jointly funded a youth worker position and allocated an office in the shopping center for the worker. The role of the youth worker has been to link young people to support and information services, and to provide a voice for the young people in identifying current gaps in general community services and their particular needs in relation to the shopping center itself. Some of the young people have been employed part-time collecting trolleys, gardening and doing general maintenance.

The shopping center management has noted a significant change since this approach was adopted in 1989, with a dramatic decrease in vandalism and violence. Notably, while the center has a list of 180 young people it says have caused trouble, these individuals have not been banned. When a situation gets out of hand, the youth worker talks with the young people involved and, if necessary, drives them home. The role of the youth worker is not one of quasi-security guard or to "police" the young people. However, the youth workers have been involved in developing general center policies and in conducting training with security officers so that officers know when to approach young people, when to call the youth worker and when to walk away.

From the point of view of the young people, there was the perception that they were being listened to, and that they now had certain recognized rights to hang out in the shopping center. Their changed behavior and attitudes were built on a foundation of open lines of communication, the provision of appropriate youth support services and greater knowledge of how shopkeepers and older customers felt about their activities. The young people became more aware of other

users of the shopping center, and how and why their actions could sometimes be interpreted as rude, thoughtless or threatening. They also began to feel that they were now part of a community that included different groups of people with different needs and interests. What this shows is that young people who are consciously allowed to exercise their rights in a supportive environment can and will act responsibly — it all depends on whether or not they have the voice, resources and knowledge to do so.

Crime prevention in this instance has been constructed around the ideas of youth engagement in decision-making processes, and with an acknowledgement of the importance of certain public spaces in the lives of many young people today. It is an inclusive approach, one that depends upon active participation by members of the local community, including young people themselves. Conflict and crime still occur, of course, although to a much lesser degree. But the general climate of the shopping complex is no longer characterized by customer fear, shop-owner complaint, security guard aggression and young people's resentment.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has provided a brief, but critical, examination of coercive crime prevention measures as these affect young people. It has been argued that in many instances such an approach is unnecessary, unduly penalizing of all young people and ultimately socially discriminatory. Coercive measures may need to be used in particular circumstances to protect and defend persons and property from actual instances of criminal behavior. However, as argued here, the adoption of coercion as a strategy and as the main policy plank of juvenile crime prevention carries with it major problems from the point of view of youth rights, the fundamental causes of crime, moral panics about perceived youth "crime waves" and economic and social inequalities.

Juvenile crime prevention is always a complicated issue, characterized by constant debate over the choice of immediate tactics and strategies to reduce offensive behavior in the here and now, and ongoing concern (at least among some criminologists) to link concrete action proposals with consideration of how best to tackle the wider social causes of offending (see, for example, O'Malley and Sutton, 1997). At best, I would argue, crime prevention is but a very limited means by which we might be able to minimize the social fallout arising from the broader inequalities and dislocations of the new world political economic order. Nevertheless, how we engage in crime prevention has real consequences for real people, and it does matter in

their lives how the issues are constructed and dealt with by criminal justice officials, politicians and criminologists. In this regard, as I have tried to indicate throughout this chapter, my preference is for a strategic vision that takes into account the rights, dignity and voice of the targets of conventional, coercive crime control measures. For to treat the young with disrespect and fear, and to base policy on the controlling impulse, is to create a social body that relies upon repression rather than liberty as its guiding rationale and lifeblood.



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