

REPEAT AND NEAR-REPEAT BURGLARY VICTIMIZATION IN ROCHESTER, NY

LITERATURE REVIEW: MOTIVATIONS TO COMMIT BURGLARY AND TARGET SELECTION

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A burglary occurs when an offender, "...knowingly enters or remains unlawfully in a building with the intent to commit a crime therein"¹. Although it does not require it, one common feature of burglary is theft². Burglary was the second most commonly reported Part I crime and accounted for nearly a quarter (23.4%) of all property offenses committed within the United States in 2012³. Estimated average dollar loss per burglary was \$2,240, with a total loss estimated at \$4.7 billion⁴. Just shy of 13% of burglaries (12.7%) were cleared by arrest or exceptional means in the United States in 2012⁵.

The United States National Crime Victimization Survey indicated that same year that an estimated 3.7 million burglaries occurred throughout the country ($n = 3,764,540$)⁶. Of those, 2.1 million were reported to police ($n = 2,103,787$), which indicates that just over half of all estimated burglaries to occur within the United States are reported (55%)⁷.

The following paper serves as an introduction to burglary research. In this paper we focus on the motivations to commit burglary and why certain targets are selected. This paper is in no way intended as comprehensive; rather it provides a primer on the topic. For additional information please review the reference page.

Motivations to Commit Burglary

Money. Money routinely is cited as the greatest motivating factor driving offending⁸. In a landmark survey of over one hundred active offenders, it was found that over 90% burglarized when they needed money⁹. More often than not, this money goes towards maintaining a lifestyle known as "life as party"¹⁰.

Life as Party. Offenders are disproportionately young, male, and chronically poor¹¹. They want a lifestyle that many young men may want, but few can afford: one of hedonistic pleasure¹². This lifestyle is typified by an emphasis on entertainment (e.g., drinking, drug use, gambling,

women, and status items) and emphasizes the pursuit of entertainment to the detriment of obligations and commitments external to the party lifestyle¹³.

Given the emphasis on the non-stop pursuit of pleasure, life as party conflicts with and erodes an individual's ability to maintain a life within the dominant culture. The heightened importance of self-sufficiency hampers an individual's adherence to legitimate employment. Legitimate work may seem an abhorrent alternative to burglary in that it is poorly paid, the work structure deprives an individual of autonomy and independence, and the offender would have obligations to meet¹⁴.

The behavior promoted by life as party also depletes legitimate economic employment opportunities¹⁵. With this depletion, an offender may turn to legitimate social ties for financial support; however, borrowing money from individuals is only a short-term solution that does not allow an offender to maintain the lifestyle he desires¹⁶. Further, the unreliable behaviors of a person brought on by non-stop party pursuits make him unreliable to repay these loans, which in turn sever many of the legitimate social ties he once had¹⁷.

Individuals in a life as party subculture may turn to crimes like burglary, initially, to continue the party¹⁸. The party life is enjoyed in the company of others through group alcohol or drug use and the ostentatious display of wealth¹⁹. To offend, then, is to maintain appearances of wealth, prosperity, and status²⁰.

With life as party's emphasis on group drug and alcohol use, many develop addiction. The substances once used socially for recreation instead become desired primarily to stave of the inevitable withdrawal symptoms²¹. As addiction takes hold and financial and social capital is depleted, the reasons for burglary shift. An offender cannot turn to legitimate resources to maintain the party lifestyle or withdraw from it, as these resources have largely been depleted, so

instead he turns toward increasingly risky ventures: once a remote possibility, getting caught becomes an inevitability²².

Sustenance. While burglars say that they steal for basic sustenance (e.g., food, shelter, bills, and clothing), any perceived nobility in this theft is suspect: once basic needs were met the majority of offenders spend the remaining funds on status items or drugs²³.

The Sneaky Thrill. Criminologist Jack Katz argues that crime is seductive: that some, especially younger offenders, are motivated to burgle by the intrinsic psychological rewards of crime²⁴. A burglar may perceive the act as a euphoric demonstration of competence, his control over his surroundings and environment, and his ability to play the system and win²⁵. To these persons, the stolen goods matter less than the act itself; it is important to recall, however, that the number of offenders motivated by psychological rewards are dwarfed by the number of offenders motivated for extrinsic reasons²⁶.

Target Selection

A burglary will not occur unless an offender considers a location a suitable target for victimization²⁷. Multiple factors determine the perceived suitability of a target, including:

- Familiarity – most offenders do not travel very far to offend²⁸. Although this may increase their risk of being identified, it is advantageous for several reasons. Committing a crime can be stressful, and familiarity with surroundings can reduce stress²⁹. Limited access and transportation can restrict movement out of familiar locations, as too can the fear of appearing out of place (most offending is intra-racial)³⁰.
- Occupancy – occupancy is routinely cited as the most important factor in considering target selection: burglars prefer unoccupied targets³¹. Burglaries committed on unoccupied homes (e.g., houses vacant during the day or for long periods of time) are most likely to be

successful³². Occupancy proxies (e.g., dogs, alarms, a vehicle in the driveway) can sometimes deter burglars³³. A small percentage of burglars do not mind occupancy – if residents are asleep – as it means that valuable items are certain to be within the home; yet such burglaries are risky, as residents may successfully thwart the offense³⁴.

- Visibility or Surveillability – the extent to which an offender can see or is seen from a location is important to consider: visibility increases the chance of witnesses³⁵. For this reason many burglars tend to avoid well-kept neighborhoods with elderly residents, or enter dwellings from the rear³⁶.
- Seclusion – seclusion is a component of visibility³⁷. Examples of seclusion include dwellings that are spread far apart, those surrounded by vacant properties, locations on a corner or in a cul de sac, and those with cover (e.g., dwellings located in the woods or with concealing architecture)³⁸. Offenders also consider light levels. In the day, properties with cover are targeted to reduce visibility. When night descends, the darkness makes cover less important, altering the properties that are targeted³⁹
- Accessibility – if a property is accessible it poses little challenge in its entry⁴⁰. Dwellings can be accessed most easily through windows and doors, with or without the use of force⁴¹.
- Vulnerability – Inexpensive and easily broken window and door locks, a lack of security devices, and careless upkeep of security features are all linked with an increase in burglary risk⁴². Conversely, security doors and storm windows, dogs, and alarms have all been cited as deterrents to entry⁴³.
- Potential Rewards – no matter how suitable a dwelling is otherwise, if it does not appear to contain anything worth stealing it will likely not be targeted⁴⁴. The size and condition of a home, its yard size and maintenance, and the car in the driveway all are indicators of

wealth⁴⁵. These external cues indicate internal wealth; despite this, many of the most commonly stolen items (e.g., jewelry, money, weapons, and electronics) may be found in homes across all economic strata⁴⁶.

Conclusion & Future Papers

The above pages have served to provide an introduction into literature on the motivation to commit burglary and what offenders look for when selecting targets. In future papers, we will turn towards the topic of repeat and near-repeat victimization – particularly burglary. This will culminate in an examination of repeat and near-repeat burglary within Rochester, NY, across five-years' of data.

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¹ NYS PENAL Code 140 §§ 140.20-140.30

² Roth, 2013; Catalano, 2010; Conklin & Bittner, 1973

³ Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2013

⁴ Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2013

⁵ Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2013

⁶ Truman, Langton, & Planty, 2013; Catalano, 2010

⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2013; Truman, Langton, & Planty, 2013

⁸ Shover & Copes, 2010; Shover, 1996; Grabosky, 1995; Wright & Decker, 1994; Shover & Honaker, 1991; Nee & Taylor, 1988.

⁹ Wright & Decker, 1994

¹⁰ Shover & Copes, 2010; Shover, 1996; Wright & Decker, 1994; Shover & Honaker, 1991

¹¹ Wright & Decker, 1994

¹² Shover & Copes, 2010; Shover, 1996; Shover & Honaker, 1991

¹³ Shover & Copes, 2010; Cromwell & Olson, 2004; Shover, 1996; Wright & Decker, 1994; Shover & Honaker, 1991; Bennett & Wright, 1984

¹⁴ Cromwell & Olson, 2004; Wright & Decker, 1994; Shover & Honaker, 1991

¹⁵ Shover & Honaker, 1991

¹⁶ Wright & Decker, 1994

¹⁷ Wright & Decker, 1994; Shover & Honaker, 1991

¹⁸ Shover & Copes, 2010; Shover, 1996; Wright & Decker, 1994

¹⁹ Cromwell & Olson, 2004; Shover & Honaker, 1991

²⁰ Cromwell & Olson, 2004; Wright & Decker, 1994; Bennett & Wright, 1984

²¹ Shover & Copes, 2010; Cromwell & Olson, 2004; Shover & Honaker, 1991

²² Shover & Honaker, 1991

²³ Wright & Decker, 1994

²⁴ Cromwell, 1994; Katz, 1988; Bennett & Wright, 1984

²⁵ Cromwell, 1994; Katz, 1988

²⁶ Shover & Copes, 2010; Shover, 1996; Wright & Decker, 1994; Cromwell, 1994; Shover & Honaker, 1991; Katz, 1988

²⁷ Cohen & Felson, 1979

²⁸ Weisel, 2004; Palmer, Holmes, & Hollin, 2002; Buck, Hakim, & Rengert, 1993; Hough, 1987

²⁹ Wright & Decker, 1994

³⁰ Cromwell & Olson, 2004; Wright & Decker, 1994; Cohen & Felson, 1979

³¹ Roth, 2013; Nee & Meenaghan, 2006; Cromwell & Olson, 2004; Weisel, 2004; Nee & Taylor, 1988; Wright & Decker, 1994

³² Weisel, 2004; Hough, 1987

³³ Roth, 2013; Snook, Dhami, & Kavanagh, 2011; Weisel, 2004; Wright, Logie, & Decker, 1995; Wright & Logie, 1988; Hough, 1987

³⁴ Nee & Meenaghan, 2006; Hough, 1987

³⁵ Roth, 2013; Weisel, 2004

³⁶ Wright & Decker, 1994; Palmer, Holmes, & Hollin, 2002; Hough, 1987

³⁷ Weisel, 2004

³⁸ Weisel, 2004; Buck, Hakim, & Rengert, 1993

³⁹ Coupe & Blake, 2006; Cromwell & Olson, 2004; Hough, 1987

⁴⁰ Cromwell & Olson, 2004

⁴¹ Roth, 2013; Weisel, 2004

⁴² Weisel, 2004

⁴³ Roth, 2013; Weisel, 2004; Wright, Logie, & Decker, 1995; Wright & Decker, 1994; Wright & Logie, 1988

⁴⁴ Cromwell & Olson, 2004

⁴⁵ Weisel, 2004

⁴⁶ Roth, 2013; Weisel, 2004