

Repeat and Near-Repeat Burglary Victimization in Rochester, NY

Literature Review: Burglary: The Criminal Act



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In New York State a burglary has occurred when an offender, "...knowingly enters or remains unlawfully in a building with the intent to commit a crime therein¹." While not a requirement of it, one common feature of burglary is theft². This paper represents the second in a series of papers focusing on repeat and near-repeat burglary victimization in Rochester, NY. The first paper (see: "Motivations to Commit Burglary and Target Selection") introduced general statistics on burglary rate and prevalence, as well as discussed offender motivation and target selection. In this present paper we turn attention to the commission of the burglary (entry, search pattern, and exit) as well as what types of items are stolen by offenders and what methods of disposal are utilized. This paper is not intended as a comprehensive review; instead, it provides a primer on this topic. For additional information please refer to the reference page.

Entry

For many offenders illegal entry into a dwelling is an action fraught with tension as, until entry has been attempted, no criminal act has been committed³. Because of its stress-inducing nature, offenders may mentally prepare themselves to commit the act in multiple ways, including⁴:

- Consuming excessive amounts of drugs or alcohol prior to the burglary (see: "Motivations to Commit Burglary: Life as Party" for more information)⁵.
- Approaching the burglary in increments. An offender may walk up to a home, enter a yard, and ring a doorbell to determine occupancy well before anyone could argue that he is committing a crime⁶.
- Employing duplicitous methods. An offender may act as a delivery person or mover in the hopes that this act would reduce his likelihood of getting caught⁷.
- Redefining the act. An offender could reduce fear by redefining the criminal act from "fear-inducing" to "thrilling" (see: "Motivations to Commit Burglary: The Sneaky Thrill" for more information)⁸.

- Focusing on the rewards or downplaying the potential negative outcomes⁹.
- Having a partner. A partner in crime can serve as a means to pass responsibility onto. The offender may try to take the less blameworthy offense, such as lookout or driver¹⁰.

If an offender is confronted prior to entry into the dwelling he will often give up on the offense¹¹.

Following this, the offender may look for another dwelling or return to the chosen target at a later point in time¹².

Search Pattern

Almost 60% (59.7%) of reported burglaries in the United States in 2012 involved forcible entry; the remaining 40% involved unlawful entry (33.9%) or attempted forcible entry (6.3%)¹³.

The most frequent points of entry are doors or windows¹⁴.

Once in a dwelling, a burglar can prepare his exit by opening a door or window on the opposite side of the property; this provides two means of escape should he be interrupted¹⁵. With an escape route planned, many burglars begin searching the home in a routinized manner; this search pattern allows the burglar to commit the crime in an automatic, quick, and methodical manner that provides the best return on their effort¹⁶. A typical search pattern includes the following steps:

- The offender affirms occupancy by calling out, visual, or auditory inspection¹⁷.
- Once the dwelling is determined to be unoccupied, the burglar will head to the master bedroom, where expensive lightweight goods are in ready supply (i.e., money, jewelry, weapons)¹⁸.
- After searching the master bedroom, the offender may search the kitchen, bathroom, and other bedrooms for additional money, prescription drugs, and goods¹⁹.
- Given the weight of the objects therein, the living room is typically the last room searched before exiting the premises²⁰.

Exit

Once the burglary has been successfully committed and the burglar has left the premises, his goal becomes not to be seen with evidence²¹. While smaller items fit in pockets, it is hard to remove large-scale items without detection²².

Depending on the size of the property stolen, the goods may either be immediately disposed of or stowed away; larger items can be hidden in an alley or dumpster, where they can be picked up later²³.

Items Stolen

Certain items have recurrently been targeted by burglars: money, drugs, alcohol, guns, jewelry, and popular electronics are routinely stolen²⁴. These “hot” items are CRAVED, meaning that they are:

- Concealable. They are easily hidden in pockets, pillow cases, and bags²⁵.
- Removable. They are easy to transport (e.g., laptops, jewelry, and cellular phones)²⁶.
- Available. While common, frequently stolen items are not ubiquitous to the point of worthlessness²⁷.
- Valuable. Stolen goods are routinely sold for one-third to one-fourth of their total value²⁸. Thus, it behooves thieves to steal expensive items²⁹.
- Enjoyable. Not all stolen items are sold; drugs and alcohol are commonly stolen by thieves because they are consumable and enjoyable for their lifestyle³⁰.
- Disposable. Thieves take valuable items, but not rare ones³¹. The primary goal of burglary is often to obtain money; stolen items are usually items that can be disposed of quickly and without drawing attention³².

Methods of Disposal

Burglaries are primarily committed for money³³. While cash is an ideal target for theft, it is not the only item stolen³⁴. Non-consumable goods stolen during the commission of a burglary

need to be converted into cash; they are typically disposed of through several avenues, usually within twenty-four hours of the theft³⁵. Methods of disposal include:

- “Professional” Fences. Offenders with knowledge of the stolen goods market may use professional fences, persons who knowingly buy and sell stolen goods³⁶. These fences can play a critical role in the development of a burglary; they may teach the burglar to identify valuable goods, how to deal with the police, and identify the best targets³⁷. With fences vested interest in ensuring secrecy, they are perhaps the safest way for a burglar to dispose of stolen property; however, few burglars use professional fences, mostly because identifying and establishing contact with them is so challenging³⁸.
- Pawn shops, second hand goods stores, and jewelry stores. Given the types of goods stolen, many burglars choose to dispose of stolen property to jewelry stores, second hand goods stores, small-store owners, or pawn shops³⁹. Although these businesses are subject to both law and police scrutiny, not all are immune from the allure of stolen goods; while many of these stores are required to keep a legal record of each transaction, stores who purchase stolen goods tend to not record certain transactions⁴⁰.
- Drug Dealers. Given that the lifestyle of many burglars frequently involves heavy drug use, it should come as no surprise that drug dealers often play a pivotal role for many burglars in the disposal of stolen goods⁴¹. By taking stolen property in exchange for drugs, drug dealers provide the most direct route for many burglars to achieve their end goal⁴².
- Family members, friends, and strangers. Burglars can sell their stolen property to friends, strangers, acquaintances, and relatives⁴³. While this may help the burglar get a better price than they would from a fence, pawnbroker, or drug dealer, the risk of getting caught is inherently greater when selling stolen goods to strangers⁴⁴.

Conclusion & Future Papers

This second review provides a conclusion to examining burglary from a general standpoint. In future papers we provide an introduction to the concepts of repeat and near-repeat victimization, focusing particularly on burglary. We will also review several dominant theories used to explain burglary, repeat burglary, and near-repeat burglary. Building upon this foundation we will then present a series of analyses on repeat and near-repeat burglary patterns 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 Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ⁴ Hochstetler & Copes, 2006; Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ⁵ Hochstetler & Copes, 2006
 - ⁶ Hochstetler & Copes, 2006; Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ⁷ Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ⁸ Katz, 1988
 - ⁹ Hochstetler & Copes, 2006; Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ¹⁰ Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ¹¹ Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ¹² Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ¹³ Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2013
 - ¹⁴ Weisel, 2004; Budd, 1999; Hough, 1987
 - ¹⁵ Cromwell & Olson, 2004
 - ¹⁶ Nee & Meenaghan, 2006; Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ¹⁷ Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ¹⁸ Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ¹⁹ Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ²⁰ Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ²¹ Cromwell & Olson, 2004; Weisel, 2004
 - ²² Weisel, 2004
 - ²³ Cromwell & Olson, 2004
 - ²⁴ Nee & Meenaghan, 2006; Clarke & Eck, 2005; Wellsmith & Burrell, 2005; Cromwell & Olson, 2004; Weisel, 2004; Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ²⁵ Clarke & Eck, 2005; Weisel, 2004
 - ²⁶ Nee & Meenaghan, 2006; Clarke & Eck, 2005
 - ²⁷ Clarke & Eck, 2005; Wellsmith & Burrell, 2005
 - ²⁸ Sutton, 1998
 - ²⁹ Clarke & Eck, 2005
 - ³⁰ Clarke & Eck, 2005; Shover, 1996
 - ³¹ Clarke & Eck, 2005
 - ³² Clarke & Eck, 2005; Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ³³ Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ³⁴ Cromwell & Olson, 2004
 - ³⁵ Cromwell & Olson, 2004; Weisel, 2004; Sutton, 1998; Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ³⁶ Sutton, 1998; Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ³⁷ Sutton, 1998; Wright & Decker, 1994; Cromwell, 1994; Klockars, 1973
 - ³⁸ Weisel, 2004; Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ³⁹ Weisel, 2004; Sutton, 1998; Wright & Decker, 1994; Klockars, 1973
 - ⁴⁰ Sutton, 1998; Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ⁴¹ Shover & Copes, 2010; Shover, 1996; Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ⁴² Cromwell & Olson, 2004; Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ⁴³ Wright & Decker, 1994
 - ⁴⁴ Wright & Decker, 1994