# Is Prevention Inherently Good?
## A Deconstructionist Approach to Prevention Literature, Policy and Practice[1]

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**Abstract:** *Framing deconstruction as a useful tool prior to engaging in research and practice, this paper views the notion of "prevention" through a deconstructionist critique. By exploring prevention as a value-laden rather than value-neutral discourse, the paper illustrates the implications of the routine practices of professionalization, risk calculation and responding to the "other." It asks readers to cautiously engage in praxis so as not to re-inscribe dominant hegemonic discourses, and instead to become comfortable with tentative, emergent and ever-changing forms of knowledge related to prevention issues. The paper suggests that by opening up our field to a deconstructionist critique we acknowledge its importance while recognizing our own contribution to the open architecture of knowledge.*

**Keywords:** crime prevention; deconstruction; evidence-based policy; neo-liberalism; prevention; postmodernism; post-structuralism; risk society

## INTRODUCTION

The practice of "prevention" carries with it immeasurable rhetorical power. Although it is itself an elusive notion (Haggerty 2003; Gilling 1997), being in favor of prevention and thus in opposition to harm evokes one of the most powerful binaries in both Western society and throughout the larger global terrain. Consequently, labeling or framing any course of action as preventative carries with it implications of goodness, moral righteousness, ethical justness and all of the power associated with being on the "right" side of the binary. Prevention, however, should be recognized as a broad and unwieldy notion – a tangle of values, beliefs and perspectives complete with all-encompassing moral undertones. While the concept is held to have a self-evident definition – the anticipation of harm produces pro-active solutions that then reduce or eliminate the threat of harm – the discourse of prevention is necessarily laden with values and binaries. Although the connotations of prevention, indicative of its moral value, hold that prevention is an ethical, humanitarian, and even cost-

effective goal, this commentary sets out to ask how the postmodernist deconstructionist critique might begin to unsettle and destabilize the hegemonic aspects of prevention to inform those who wish to research and practice within the crime prevention discourse. The paper analyzes the specific ideas that inform the discourse on prevention (power, professionalization, state-versus-individual responsibility and risk assessment) incorporating ideas from Jacques Derrida's conceptual tool of deconstruction and also drawing on the theoretical work of Michel Foucault (social control, anti-essentialism, power/ knowledge), Emmanuel Levinas (ethics of the other), and Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze (rhizomes and fractal ontology).

Referring throughout to crime prevention strategies and their coinciding evaluations on local, national and international fronts, some important and widely relevant considerations include: (1) What is meant by *prevention-ism* as both a culture and a discourse? (2) How is the "other" constructed and maintained throughout the prevention discourse? (3) What are the moral and ethical components embedded within notions of "doing good,"

through "preventing harm"?, and (4) How is power used and re-inscribed in the prevention discourse? Prior to engaging in, theorizing upon, and practicing crime prevention, and programs bearing that label, theoreticians, researchers and practitioners should consider the importance of each of these questions, and recognize this commentary as an expression of the uncertainty surrounding meanings, agenda, and the political and ethical content of prevention.

The themes espoused here are designed to be relevant to a wide audience, to apply to the preliminary thoughts of academics pursuing research on prevention, to remind researchers that we are all implicated in the ideologies beneath our research, and to spark debate and thoughtfulness on the eve of practice. For these reasons this commentary will explore the ethical character of prevention through a discussion of responsibility to the other: Why should we care for and about the other? Some important considerations to be elaborated are: the necessity of "risk," the coupling of crime prevention with evidence-based practice (EBP), and the ideology of "community."

To investigate these matters, the following analysis is divided into four areas. First, the theoretical and practical framework of crime prevention is presented. Second, a summary outline of both affirmative postmodern thought and the deconstructionist critique is provided. Third, deconstruction is applied to the discourse on prevention, and finally, an alternative approach to the status quo is offered.

# CRIME PREVENTION: A THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to grasp what is at stake as we research and critique crime prevention, it is important to first become familiar with the emergence of the concept of prevention. What follows is not a taxonomy of the area, but instead a summary to help frame the following discussion. Crime prevention itself has many varying definitions, shaped not least by what is counted as crime and on that the production of crime is based on positivist assumptions about causality. Restricted legalistic definitions of crime lead to a focus on "street" crime or "crimes of the powerless," whereas more expansive definitions of crime include corporate and state crime or "crimes of the powerful" (Henry and Lanier 2001; Canadian Law Commission 2003). Some definitions of prevention focus on actions that reduce actual levels of street crime and fear of crime (Lab 2007), while others focus on the reduction of risk factors known to lead to harm, such as criminality and social disorganization within communities, schools and families (Sherman et al. 2002) or regulation of corporations and states that create insidious injuries to their consumers, clients or public (Alvesalo et al. 2006). Still other definitions focus on reduction of harm as a positive

measure of crime prevention, and some equate restrictions on the exercise of power with a reduction in harm production (Henry and Milovanovic 1996; Milovanovic and Henry 2001). Among these varying definitions, however, there is agreement that crime prevention is understood with reference to its consequences to the wellbeing of others rather than its intentions to limit negative effects upon them. Moreover, the concept of prevention, whether restricted or expansive, is set within a positivist analytical framework that assumes that scientific analysis can identify the factors, whether, micro-, meso- or macro-level, that produce harm, and that intervention strategies can be designed to limit the negative impact of these factors and, therefore, reduce harm production. As shall be discussed later, this positivist underpinning of prevention discourse is itself limited.

## Emergence of Crime Prevention

Crime prevention is not a new social strategy of intervention. Prevention techniques, based on some vague notion that antecedents lead to outcomes and that by changing the antecedents we can change outcomes, have always been at the center of criminal justice policy. Even prior to formal systems of social control such as the police, communities focused on deterrence of "crime" by believing they were eliminating the benefits of criminal behavior through retribution and revenge, just as non-western communities focused on contests, ostracism, dispute resolution and other settlement directed talking designed to defuse or de-escalate future harm production by removing or rechanneling the relational activities that produced the offensive outcomes (Roberts 1979). Once police forces emerged as the norm in twentieth century Western societies, they too held crime prevention as their main goal (Lab 2007). Indeed, the Metropolitan Police Act of 1829 states "The primary object of an efficient police force is the prevention of crime" (quoting Sir Richard Maine, 1829; Metropolitan Police, 2010).

Coupled with the emergence of police forces, the application of scientific inquiry to the etiology of crime during the latter half of the 20th century began to identify patterns in the commission of crimes to the point that social, in addition to individual, causes were identified in the tradition of positivist thinking that dominated much of the century. This changed measures of prevention from deterring offenders who were seen as making the choice to commit criminal acts, to a focus on the criminal whose individual pathology *drove* them to commit such acts, to a focus on community problems such as poverty and lack (or low levels) of education–problems that were mainly associated with the lower class (Brantingham and Faust 1976), and then to a consideration of the structural causes of power that facilitated patterns of harms by both the lower and upper classes, as well as systems and social processes that resulted in harmful outcomes (Quinney,

1977; Young, 1999). The result was a shift from a focus on criminal acts to a focus on the pathology of the individual (e.g. substance abuse, mental illness) and later, to a focus on social pathology concentrating on social and environmental contexts that produced criminals, and then to a focus on criminogenic social systems and power structures that produced widespread harm from fraud to environmental pollution.

Consistent with the theoretical change in the scope of crime and its perceived cause, the focus of intervention and public policy also shifted: practice moved from a deterrence model to a treatment/rehabilitation model, then to a prevention model through social engineering, ranging from physical to social intervention aimed at designing out crime, and finally to a macro-social intervention model advocating widespread systemic societal changes designed to reduce the power differentials that privileged some forms of harm production while criminalizing others. Again, regardless of the level, positivist discourse framed a villainous causal agent to be condemned and exorcised, with the resultant reduction in harm. Absent was any sense that positivist thinking about crime and its prevention might contribute to its constitution as a social reality. That would come later through a postmodernist critique of modernist criminology with implications for the de-construction of prevention.

In the spirit of early prevention measures based on a deterrence philosophy, a look at the nascent juvenile justice system demonstrates a drive toward punishing behaviors that were thought to lead to conventional criminal behavior later in life; such as curfew violation, incorrigibility and substance abuse (Lab 2007). The juvenile justice system did not, however, address how white collar, corporate and state agency offenders arrived at their harm producing behavior and, therefore, represented a myopic view of prevention (Alvesalo et al. 2006). An example of this early crime prevention based on the social pathology philosophy is found in the community development project described by Shaw and McKay – the "Chicago Area Project" of 1931 (Lab 2007; Welsh and Hoshi 2002). To reverse the lack of social ties and high residential transition observed within the spatial zones surrounding the central area of Chicago, the Project aimed to build social control through community enhancement and pride. The underlying idea was that a thriving and connected and organized community could provide its own informal behavioral controls among residents and visitors (Sherman, Farrington, Welsh and Mackenzie 2002). This, of course, assumed the only crimes that needed to be prevented were those found in the "zones of transition" identified by the Chicago School sociologists, based on police data of crimes that occur in public (or street crimes). Absent from such analysis was any sense that crimes were abundant in places such as the meat packing yards, the corn exchange or the Chicago mercantile exchange, let

alone in the form of political corruption in the city of Chicago. This limited concept of harm prevention did not extend to prominent city officials, who were accused, and in some cases convicted, of contract fixing, bribery, and related activities. Prevention was very much tied to a "street" concept of crime rather than a "suite" concept; even less was there much awareness of the inter-relationship between the two, other than a minimal recognition of the role of slum landlord's lack of investment in the very properties that created the squalor of the areas of the city that they controlled. As Alvesalo et al. state, the concern is with the "narrowly constructed terrain of 'crime prevention,' a terrain which focuses upon, as criminal justice systems (and criminologies) have almost always focused upon, the crimes and incivilities of the relatively powerless" (2006:2).

## Community Crime Prevention

Community based prevention strategies, a variation of the social pathology approach to intervention, focus on development at the community level to change the social conditions that were thought to give rise to crime and other harmful behavior (Welsh and Hoshi 2002). Consider the definition of the National Crime Prevention Council "Crime prevention is a pattern of attitudes and behaviors directed at reducing the threat of crime and enhancing the sense of safety and security, to positively influence the quality of life in our society, and to develop environments where crime cannot flourish" (Crime Prevention Coalition 1990:64).

Community institutions such as schools, after-school programs, family programs and youth clubs are often the settings for such interventions, especially since many target children and youth. More recently, crime prevention categories have been developed to discuss situational crime prevention and social crime prevention. While situational prevention relates to changing the physical environment within a community, the latter refers to changing characteristics of members in a community to decrease their propensity to commit crime. Social crime prevention might include delivery of educational resources, health treatment and an enhanced employment policy (Gilling 1997). Community crime prevention – whether situational or social – is, within the prevention discourse, thought of as a participatory approach "community-based and community-focused, representing a true partnership between the government and local residents" (Rosenbaum, 1988:380). These social pathology approaches and the community model are often limited to micro- or at best meso-level interventions and are rarely applied to address wider macro-level forces (Cherney 2001), let alone the forces that allow crimes of the powerful to remain outside the purview of prevention (Alvesalo et al. 2006).

## Prevention Models: Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary

Another way to conceptualize crime prevention strategies is through the public health model, which seems to be the common organizational format featured in the literature (and which has specific implications for evidence-based practice, which will be discussed later). The conceptual model of crime prevention put forth by Brantingham and Faust (1976), based on the public health model, divides crime prevention into three overarching approaches – primary, secondary, and tertiary. Primary prevention focuses on the social (people and relationships) or physical (spatial characteristics and organization) environment, the characteristics of which are said to provide opportunities for, or precipitate, criminal events (Brantingham and Faust 1976). There are multiple levels of prevention within the primary category. While police presence and increased community and individual mechanisms of surveillance fit within this category, so do social prevention measures for reducing poverty and other social ills. The common feature of primary prevention techniques is their efforts to avoid initial crime and harmful behaviors (Lab 2007).

Secondary crime prevention measures, reflecting the individual pathology model, attempt early intervention and work by identifying and responding to the needs of potential offenders or victims who may become involved in crime (Brantingham and Brantingham 2005). An example of this type of intervention is drug and alcohol treatment, where illicit substance use is assumed to lead to a propensity for crime, or an after-school program designed to keep children at risk of victimization in a safe place after classes (Brantingham and Brantingham 2005).

Finally, tertiary crime prevention is concerned with intervention once a crime has been committed (and identified), and thus falls predominantly within the scope of the criminal justice system to reduce repeat offending (Brantingham and Faust 1976). Tertiary approaches may include, for example, physical modifications to buildings that have been the target of property crime, offender rehabilitation programs, or programs designed to improve the conditions of marginalized people (Brantingham and Brantingham 2005).

As Brantingham and Brantigham (2005) argue, many traditional approaches to crime prevention have suffered due to their focus mainly on offenders without viewing crime as "a complex phenomenon with a complex etiology" (2005:272). Situational crime prevention (Clarke 1983) aims to take account of these complexities and is able to direct intervention at all of the three (primary, secondary and tertiary) levels of prevention. Through a process of embedding "what works" and developing evidence-based policy, it is suggested that situational crime prevention will become established and secure ongoing funding (Brantingham and Brantingham 2005).

# A CRITICAL/POSTMODERN AGENDA FOR TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CRIME PREVENTION

Chunn and Menzies (2006), in their discussion of the changing nature of the discipline of criminology in Canada, link crime prevention technologies to the (new) paradigm of "applied criminal-justice policy" (2006:672) amid increased risk-based concerns and governed by the neo-liberal, neo-conservative political movement of the twenty-first century. Criminology, they argue, is now dominated by a marked alignment with state politics such that a grand narrative espousing a "mastery of human problems of all kinds" (2006:672) is delivered. Furthermore, criminology's movement to focus on technologies, including crime prevention, "contribute to the ideological and discursive hegemony of the idea that 'social' problems can be more quickly, cheaply, and effectively addressed through criminal law and criminal justice than through social policy and social justice" (2006:673). To this end, they illustrate that the discipline of criminology, at least in its mainstream form (and its more recent criminal justice focus), has taken on qualities that have been seen as necessary in maintaining its own existence, but also as a factor in maintaining the hegemony of criminal justice as a state project. Crime prevention, as outlined so far, fits squarely beneath this new umbrella. However, critical criminology in a variety of forms, including those designated as radical, feminist and postmodernist, takes a different stance. A few aspects of the critical paradigm are worth clarifying before moving to a discussion of deconstructionism that forms part of a postmodernist critique of prevention.

## Critical Theory, Poststructuralism, Postmodernism and Deconstruction

Mainstream criminology, whether operating at a micro-, meso- or macro-level of analysis has embraced a positivist methodological stance in that it treats social phenomenon such as "crime," as social facts whose causes can be determined. Much of criminology is a positivist enterprise comprising of theory formation and testing to determine the veracity of the causes on which to base policy designed to prevent the problem of crime (state defined). In contrast, critical theory, post-structuralism, and postmodernism each situate positivism as an inadequate "grand narrative" through which to understand our social world (Agger 1991); they expose and question the validity of the assumptions that propel the positivistic discourse. Agger (1991) suggests that most academic and professional research and writing are prepared in adherence to the positive paradigm (striving for the illusion of objectivity). In contrast, critical, post-structural, and postmodern theorists set out to critique "the optimistic

assumptions of modernist thinkers" (Henry and Milovanovic 1996: 4). They framed positivism as "the most effective new form of capitalist ideology" (Agger 1991:109) – an ideology that arose in the Enlightenment and that maintains social control from within by re-creating values and assumptions as "truths." Ultimately, postmodernists suggest that positivism is the new governing mythology encouraging us to accept the status quo as unchangeable truth (Agger 1991).

The most enduring part of critical theory is its attention to the biases beneath social science "knowledge" and its re-framing of knowledge as provisional and a product of history. Appreciating that modernist social science is founded on assumptions that are open to question, leads us to be more critically aware of assuming any inherent value in professional concepts such as "prevention" and "preventionism."

Acknowledging the connection between post-structuralism and postmodernism, Agger (1991) suggests that the former can best be described as "a theory of knowledge and language" (1991:112), while post-modernism directs focus more towards culture, history, and society. Derrida, one of the leading post-structuralist writers, introduced the concept of deconstruction – a method designed to critique the truth claims implied by textual objectivism by exploring the biases and assumptions embedded in traditional understandings. More recently, Derrida's deconstruction has begun to play a part in some criminological analyses of cultural practices and the discursive production of harm. Henry and Milovanovic (1996) assert that deconstruction "of texts" is one of the foremost ways by which postmodernists critique the truth claims of modernists. From their perspective, "texts" include narrative accounts (reports, stories, as well as gestures) as well as discourses (written, spoken, or illustrated communication). Before considering their analysis in relation to the issues of prevention I will outline some key constructs that I have drawn on from the postmodernist critique.

Amid the diverse definitions of postmodernism and deconstruction, my analysis is formed with specific attention paid to the poststructuralist ideas of Derrida, as well as the postmodern ideas of Levinas (1989), Foucault (1977), and Deleuze and Guattari (1987). As indicated, I will use deconstruction affirmatively. However, instead of explicating the nuances explored by each of these authors, I will identify some of the relevant main themes in their work.

Several of Derrida's (1997) key propositions related to the epistemology of deconstruction center on the "metaphysics of presence." This concept explains a hierarchy embedded in language where the first term in a binary is understood as presence, and the last one is implicitly de-valued as in absence (Arrigo, Milovanovic and Schehr 2005), (for example: white over black, man over woman). Derrida demonstrates that when the order is

reversed attention switches to the importance of the previously dominating term. The concept of "logo-centrism" – the tendency in Western thought to hold the central idea as most true or important – is especially problematic for Derrida, specifically because it maintains and glosses over marginalization. Three interconnected principles in this perspective include: *differance*, reversal of hierarchies, and arguments that undo themselves (Arrigo, Milovanovic and Schehr 2005). First, *differance* indicates the dependence of terms in a binary on one another for clarity in meaning; each term includes remnants of the other, thus making it possible to deconstruct the discourse to reveal the fragility of the truth of the meaning it creates. Second, reversal of hierarchies occurs where the marginalized term and the powerful term in a binary are switched in their positions, to reveal the structure of domination. However "Deconstruction does not consist in passing from one concept to another, but in overturning and displacing a conceptual order, as well as the nonconceptual order with which the conceptual order is articulated" (Derrida 1985:329). Third, arguments that "undo" themselves, refers to the deconstructive reversals of given doctrines that privilege certain conceptions of human nature. Thus it is shown that "the reasons for privileging one side of an opposition over the other, often turn out to be the reasons for privileging the other side. The virtues of the first term are seen to be the virtues of the second; the vices of the second are revealed to be the vices of the first" (Balkin 1987:755). Through such "un-grounding" of preferred conceptions they are revealed not to stand as self-sufficient or self-explaining.

In postmodern theory, reality is considered a social construction within which meanings are negotiated through social interactions built from such discursive oppositions which have no foundation, in spite of how real they appear. Lather, for example, states "the essence of the postmodern argument is that the dualisms which continue to dominate Western thought are inadequate for understanding a world of multiple causes and effects interacting in complex and non-linear ways" (1991:21). Because power is unevenly distributed, age, race, sex, class, intelligence and other categorical boundaries exclude some people. Lather, in her argument for postmodern praxis (theory in practice), extends the critique beyond positivist theory stating: "not only positivists, but also existentialisms, phenomenologies, critical theories: all seem exhausted, rife with subject-object dualisms, teleological utopianisms, totalizing abstractions, the lust for certainty and impositional tendencies tainted with colonialism and/or vanguard politics" (1991:88).

Given this kind of critique, that suggests our certainties are uncertain fictions of our discourse, what are postmodernist deconstructionists suggesting instead, and how does the postmodernist agenda translate to doing something to prevent the harm that some cause to others? Is it enough to simply deconstruct these narratives on

which policy and practice is founded, or is something more required? In evaluating the postmodernist agenda, some feel that critique alone, is inadequate.

## Critiques of the Critical/ Postmodern Agenda

The postmodern critique, particularly in the social and human sciences, has often been discarded by some as an overreaction to the limits of the positivist epistemologies of the Enlightenment and its resulting practices. White (2007), exploring postmodern development within the human and social sciences, cogently proposes that unease with positivist epistemologies has caused some to express "concern with the limitations of rule-based formulations and so-called 'value neutral' approaches to practice and have called for more personal, embodied, narratively informed and situationally immersed understandings of practice" (2007:228). But others have been less empathetic in their criticism.

There are three main discernable criticisms of the postmodern analysis. First, postmodernism has been narrowly characterized as a perspective necessitating a relativist standpoint and for rejecting dominant theories naively, without offering new alternatives (Russell 1997; Schwartz and Friedrichs 1994). The conclusion is that postmodernists' tendency for abstract thought may detract from the reality of actual violent experiences; furthermore, such a process is claimed to make little sense in the realm of policy, since we have no way to either move forward or to progress.

Second, the dense and even impenetrable conceptual language within postmodern texts is often itself the subject of criticism. The paradox lies in the discontinuity between postmodernism as a freeing discourse, ready to question marginalization and oppression, yet composed in a language and style that is inaccessible to many. However, as Schwartz and Friedrichs (1994) acknowledge, while the style may undermine the relevance of postmodernism in the field of criminology, the point of postmodern writing is not to spoon-feed its readers, but instead to write in a way that is open to interpretation, such that readers may construct their own meanings which is one of the goals of postmodernism (Henry and Milovanovic 1999). However, does this new and emergent discourse ultimately operate any differently from modernist writing?

Indeed, the third main criticism argues that postmodernism is hypocritical, as it re-creates the master narratives and binaries it proposes to reject simply with a new discourse. For example, Schwartz and Friedrichs (1994) ask whether postmodernism is removed from reality in a similar fashion as modernist writings. Some deconstructionist thinkers, however, acknowledge this trap and seek to be aware of their own values and assumptions. For example, in using deconstruction to interrogate meaning and practice, Lather, cautions us against "dissembling the master narrative, especially those of

Marx and Freud," to simply replace them with "Foucault, Derrida, Baudrillard, Lacan, etc., as new master discourses" (Lather 1991: 49). Furthermore, postmodern scholars are aware that they are adopting a position that disavows claims to objectivity and warn that while the postmodern task provides valued knowledge and insight, it does not do so under the guise of neutrality.

Since the 1990s, some scholars have tried to stretch the postmodern critique of modernism into a more "affirmative" version while trying to avoid the dangers of lapsing into a new fangled modernism. This has been especially prominent in the field of criminology where some scholars have proposed that deconstruction is followed by reconstruction in an attempt to demonstrate the value of an open architecture of knowledge that allows for transformation without ossification; allows a self-conscious reconstruction that is open to further trans-formation. For example, Henry and Milovanovic (1996; 1999) distinguish between "skeptical post-modernists" who limit their analysis to deconstructructing discourses in order to reveal inner contradictions, assumptions and claims to truth, and "affirmative postmodernists" who not only deconstruct but "reconstruct a replacement text/discourse that goes beyond the nihilistic limits of the skeptical position" (Henry and Milovanovic 1996:5). In other words, affirmative postmodernists do not believe that critique should only involve infinite deconstruction that challenges claims to truth, but also that it should be concerned with reconstructing a replacement discourse, or discourses, that are contingent and constitutive of less harmful outcomes.

As a result, Henry and Milovanovic's constitutive criminology (1996) is not so easily subject to the same criticisms of relativism or nihilism that may be launched at skeptical versions of postmodernism. They argue that the creation of "replacement discourses" is important in the study of criminology through a postmodern inspired lens, meaning that only through new constructions of reality can the oppressed seek expression. To further characterize the emergence of constitutive criminology, Henry and Milovanovic (1996) unpack several popular debates within postmodern literature. First, they suggest that the binary of modernist and postmodernist might be better conceived as points on a continuum, indicating that some modernist theories are more open to postmodern thought and vice versa. Second, they disagree with the simplicity of the action-versus-theory binary, stating that to privilege one over the other, or to suggest that one can occur to the exclusion of the other, is to misunderstand their inter-relationship. In light of this, they introduce the concept of "transpraxis, a movement toward the never completed" (1996:14), a vision of the open architecture of knowledge production that is not frozen at various points of truth but which can transform and even undermine itself.

Clearly the criticism of nihilism is easier to level at skeptical postmodernists than at affirmative post-

modernists, but once postmodernists wade into the realm of reconstruction, are they not simply substituting new truths for old, and thereby becoming just another disguised version of modernism? Or is the openness of their architecture of knowledge sufficient to render their analysis "Beyond Postmodernism"? In order to explore this possibility I will subject prevention and preventionism to an affirmative postmodern influenced critique.[2]

## PREVENTION*ISM*: THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF PREVENTION

Each of the models of crime prevention discussed earlier are not only outcomes of positivist analytical logic but carry an ideological context that is power inscribing and disciplining, a context that is reflected in the profession of prevention. This section of the paper encourages a deeper critical look into the professionalism of prevention, and the related concept of "preventionism," "the belief that social problems can be prevented rather than resolved" (Billis 1981:375), to argue that prevention is not as apolitical as it appears.

Prevention has now grown to include at least 15 different disciplines (Durlak 1997 in Kenny et al. 2002), which are empowered by their disciplinary claims to involvement in the discourse. While multi-disciplinary involvement is not a problem in itself, it becomes problematic when each is invested in, and competing for, legitimacy. Rose (1998) uncovers similar troubles in his genealogy of the "psy" disciplines where, in order to legitimize their own field's powers, theorists and practitioners tend to lay claim to particular (esoteric) knowledge. Reflecting the power of professional investment psy-experts employ disciplinary technologies not only as remedies, but also to construct ailments – the solving of which buttress their own positions. As Haggerty (2003) reminds us, many "experts" are financially, politically, or ideologically invested in the problem of crime and they endeavor to maintain this status quo. Jock Young (2007) offers us some insight into why, in the present era, we are particularly susceptible to the allure of anything fixed and secure. He alludes to the business of crime control through his concept of "vertigo" that leaves us striving for certainties:

> vertigo is the malaise of late modernity: a sense of insecurity of insubstantiality, and of uncertainty, a whiff of chaos and a fear of falling. The signs of giddiness, of unsteadiness, are everywhere, some serious, many minor; yet once acknowledged, a series of separate seemingly disparate facts begin to fall into place. The obsession with rules, an insistence on clear uncompromising lines of demarcation between correct and incorrect behaviour, a narrowing of borders, the

decreased tolerance of deviance, a disproportionate response to rule-breaking, an easy resort to punitiveness and a point at which simple punishment begins to verge on the vindictive (Young 2007:12).

The cause of this vertigo is none other than "insecurities of status and of economic position" (2007:12), causing the public and the professional to grasp any and all means of status stabilization symptomatic of their own middle-class insecurity.

Moreover, some have argued that not only has preventionism become an anchor for stabilizing the helping professions, but that in the process, it has expanded its strategies into new areas while simultaneously expanding control over them. In 1981, Billis (in Gilling 1997) indicated that the concept of "preventionism" had resulted in a public interventionist expansion into areas that might more fruitfully be looked after by the voluntary or private sector – an expansion due in part to the undeniable logic of prevention work and the negative brand ("reactionary") that is given to those in disagreement. Similarly, Gilling (1997) suggests that we take a closer look at the beneficiaries of such prevention activities, even in settings where they fail (which is often). He indicates that gain is experienced not solely by target communities, but especially by professionals holding specific expertise maintained through prevention activities, and also by the state. While professionals in the helping disciplines seek to entrench their role by being able to identify areas of intervention, the state is able to re-legitimize its own existence by managing such attempts. We might add that all of this activity also distracts us from seriously problematizing the concept of crime and the resulting harms that remain outside the gaze of the preventionist's lens. How does community crime pre-vention, for example, address corporate crime or environmental pollution?

Secondary prevention – whereby certain kinds of risk are identified and addressed – further entrenches professionalization, expanding and legitimating a body of expertise. With increased professionalization prevention, as a strategy, is explored exclusively by experts expanding its discourse almost infinitely. In considering the ecology of knowledge, we must make evident the tendencies of specific disciplinary discourses to make knowledge inaccessible to others while working to preserve their own survival (similar themes are discussed in Crow, Levine and Nager 1992). Confronted with the languages held within various discourses, we are faced with re-constructing the *Tower of Babel* laboring in silos, failing to comprehend the foreign tongues and actions of others, concerning ourselves instead with our own sophistry. Further, the basic logic underlying professionalization is troublesome for its disincentive to actually produce widely effective prevention techniques, or those that might challenge the power structure within which we are comfortably located.

Self-preservation dictates that a balance between minor effectiveness and complete effectiveness must be struck, since an over-reliance on the latter will dry up the market for professionals (Gilling 1997). Further, expanding the scope of prevention to include those with power rather than the relatively powerless might result in the loss of funding for any type of prevention professional. How, then, do we deconstruct power and view the status quo through a critical lens when we are simultaneously invested in continuing its present arrangements? How do we move beyond our academic diatribe to face our pragmatic realities?

## Preventionism: Decentralizing or Downloading Responsibility?

A clearer demonstration of the ideology of prevention, used by governments as a power inscribing and disciplining discourse, is the observation that primary prevention is being used by the state as a mechanism of social control, where downloading the responsibility for prevention from the state to individuals is evident (Haggerty 2003). For example, if a specific primary prevention technique focuses on education as a prevention mechanism, it becomes straightforward for governments or their agencies to blame the victim for negligence in failing to protect her/himself against a known threat. This has been a feminist criticism of routine activity explanations of crime which accepts the gender structured nature of predatory sexual offenses being predominantly male and promotes prevention policies advocating that women change their routine behavior or appearance to reduce their probability of being a suitable victim. Failure to do so becomes the fault of the victim through choosing to ignore the threat. This would be similar to suggesting that members of a neighborhood are at fault because they do not move out of an area known to be toxic because of wastewater contamination by a local chemical company. The ideological positioning of such preventionism that focuses attention on the victim's failure is part of an uncritical preventionism that often unwittingly accommodates to existing power structures: "Neo-liberal governments concern themselves with facilitating the global movement of capital, and producing wealth…" instead of promoting social capital and supporting populations in need (Callahan and Swift 2007:159).

"Actuarial" or risk-based projects are perhaps the newest technologies of power designed to identify and correct certain risky individuals (and, in situational crime prevention, risky *spaces*) and are a mechanism of neo-liberal governance (moving away from the welfare state) that regulates populations and spaces rather than organizations and structures that coproduce those risks. Where children are concerned, both consensus and actuarial assessments of risk are used to determine and prevent the *potential* of harm rather than to define and respond to the present state of the child (Callahan and Swift 2007) or to address the conditions that create such children at risk.

The neo-liberal shift in governance implicated by community crime prevention is heralded by some as a productive move away from the hegemonic discourses of authoritarian crime control; for rationality to succeed over a law and order approach (c.f. Clarke's situational crime prevention, 1983). While the efforts of local crime prevention specialists are admirable, for others (c.f. Garland 2001), decentralized risk assessment has not led to enhanced community safety, but rather, has created an illusion of support while downloading the state's responsibilities onto individuals in a time of economic stress. Haggerty (2003) suggests that the result is a paradox where community crime prevention "introduces a deeply anti-social dimension into precautionary anti-crime decisions that works against the more communitarian focus of other approaches to crime prevention" (2003:211). This is especially pressing given Hastings' (2005) proposal that the inverse relationship between community capacity and need undermines the effectiveness of community crime prevention measures. Since local measures are not supported with the same fiscal attention devoted to state interventions, it is in the economic best interest of states to participate in this shift. The contradiction evolves when one considers that education, social cohesion, and security are still considered the property of the state. Accordingly, local crime prevention measures cannot include these social elements in prevention measures, diverting the spotlight from social explanations and on to the disorder problem (Sutton and Cherney 2002).

Crime prevention has also been seen as a way to justify the commodification of security moving towards a society of surveillance (Hughes 1998, in Sutton and Cherney 2002). This critique sees crime prevention as producing decentralized power and discipline under the guise of increasing individual participation in community safety. In this view, individuals, families, and communities, rather than the state are burdened with the responsibility for their own safety. Although partnerships in crime prevention are developed to improve efficiency, the differential power between governments and communities means that governments will continue to exercise control and set the agendas, focusing on state interests over local concerns (Hastings 2005).

What is the result when, through a neo-liberal de-centering of governance, we download responsibility of crime prevention to smaller community groups and individuals? What is our ethical responsibility when researching these approaches? I suggest that while community governance seems attractive from the perspective of increased participatory democracy, the result in practice forces protection from, prevention of, and intervention in harm to be underscored by a charitable approach. It is no longer the *responsibility* of the state to

take care of people and institute macro-social change, but rather the responsibility of smaller community organizations and faith-led groups. These groups, simply due to their community status, are limited in that they can only work toward micro-level change. Community-based prevention does not reach far enough to change the totality or to address the conditions it creates for the meso-level (communities and neighborhoods). Failure of these programs does not reflect poorly on the state as a traditional approach might hold, but rather inscribes blame on the communities themselves (who hold little more than superficial power) for failing to address the needs of their members. Again the case of corporate crime is instructive. Instead of working to regulate and limit the manufacture and sale of faulty products, a community-based prevention model would place the onus on the consumers at risk to organize to protect themselves against harm from such purchases. Clearly, in widespread cases private citizen action could result in a class-action suit against the offending corporation, but why isn't government involved more heavily in supporting and promoting socially responsible corporations?

To simplify the problem, neo-liberal governance and the effects on prevention practice is analogous to parents making broad, overarching (and sometimes oppressive) rules for their children and then downloading the responsibility on them to advocate for their own emancipation without changing any of the over-riding structures. Choice in this model is depicted as an elusive figment of our imaginations when in fact we now hold a *stake* in our own oppression. Rose (1998) discusses the illusion of unbridled freedom; subjects are obliged to be free and to form their own existence in a plurality of others, thus being responsible for self-governance. It seems prudent to consider Rose's proposal that we "open up our contemporary regime of the self to critical thought . . . that can work on the limits of what is thinkable, extend those limits, and hence enhance the contestability of what we take to be natural and inevitable about our current ways of relating to ourselves" (Rose 1998:2). This proposal asks that we reach into the very practices that orient the discourse of prevention, not to destroy the foundations upon which they lie, but rather to become more intimately familiar with the ways we form our assumptions. Upon revealing these ways, we need to be ready to shed those technologies we find oppressive and to continue to stretch and complicate, rather than narrow and simplify, our ways of knowing that influence our practice.

While a counter-hegemonic opening up of our values (as values and not as truths) will not automatically transform the processes and technologies that we use, this might be an appropriate contretemps in the discourse of prevention. It also poses the question to researchers and academics alike: how can we proceed while retaining complexity and flexibility within the technologies of prevention, yet refrain from re-inscribing the binary of

ethics in this manner? In other words, how can we move forward with an open architectural model that is sensitive to emerging contingencies but does not recreate the existing structures?

## Preventionism: The Rise of Risk and Actuarial Assessments

We cannot miss the critical discourse that points to the "calculability of individuals" – the ability to rationally predict and know actions, thoughts, and behaviors of the human entity – as a recent manifestation of the technology of power and domination. "We have entered, it appears, the age of the calculable person whose individuality is no longer ineffable, unique, and beyond knowledge, but can be known, mapped, calibrated, evaluated, quantified, predicted, and managed" (Rose 1998:88). Thus, what Colin Gordon (as cited by Rose 1998:89) has called "institutional epistemology" refers to the production of knowledge from these organized and administrative managerial systems. A Foucauldian account proposes that social control is generally exerted through non-invasive, routinized mechanisms of surveillance and discipline (Foucault 1977). Tied firmly to notions of rationality, "knowledge, here, needs to be understood as itself, in a crucial sense, a matter of technique, rooted in attempts to organize experience according to certain values" (Rose 1998:89). Like the "psy" disciplines, actuarial methods normalize to the extent that they are unable to recognize difference as anything other than negative risk.

We also soon forget that errors in risk assessment affect individual people since they are easily represented with numbers in our analyses. Part of the beauty in assessing risk is that we never need to admit mis-calculations upon false-positives. In this case we never need to face the fact that predicted harm did not occur because we were wrong to assume with certainty that it would. Instead, we might herald our intervention or prevention measures as being successful in preventing this harm. There are two necessary conclusions that flow from the argument above: first, we are more likely to make the latter conclusion when we are in doubt, and second, that there is an incentive to be careless about false-positives rather than be in the position to make the error of false-negatives, thus widening our net of risk.

The combination of risk and preventionism also serves to increase the professionalization of prevention as discussed above. For example, while prevention was largely developed in the disciplines of public health and community safety, developmental psychology has risen to discover preventative measures that respond to the differences between normal and abnormal developmental processes (Kenny et al. 2002). To contextualize what can seem overly philosophical, we need to inquire into the result of such calibration of individuals. The discourse of prevention, as a ready example, necessitates the calculation

of risk to determine where interventions are needed, how they should be implemented and where our costs are best allocated. None of the answers to these questions can be asserted with certainty since the equation asks us to predict – to look into the future and make a well-informed gamble. A problem arises when, due to the systematic nature of managerial science, we forget that our prediction capabilities are fallible.

### Preventionism: Best Practice and Evaluation

As mentioned above, crime prevention measures are often directed by evidence-based practice (EBP) and "what works" principles (Cherney 2000). The integration of EBP (with roots in epidemiology) into state social policy, particularly with regard to crime prevention, was long awaited in the social science community to justify federal funding (c.f. Sherman 1997); however, governments' utilization of EBP has morphed into a power-maintaining tool. Searching through the contemporary critiques of EBP, it is not difficult to find assessments that describe it as a practice that re-inscribes the power of the hegemonic discourse. For instance, Cherney's (2000) fear "is that the pursuit of an identifiable set of 'what works' principles may overshadow a range of critical issues that need to be considered" (2000:93), separating crime prevention technologies and the experts that employ them from broader social and political issues. Based on a postmodern critique of singular and best notions of truth and reality, EBP is criticized as but one mechanism in the machinery of the world: constructed and constructing rather than providing a mirror of reality (Abma 2002). In this power-laden environment, some discourses have power (abstract, disembodied discourses) while others lack power (embodied ones). Some take community-based prevention measures to signify a more inclusive approach to Western governance, shifting away from an emphasis on "law and order" toward efforts to preserve democracy. The preservation of democracy is coupled with movements towards evidence-based practice and a renewed rationality, where methodical approaches to identifying "what works" are more widely implemented (Cherney 2000; Sutton and Cherney 2002).

Unfortunately, EBP, as we know it, is marred by the surrounding bureaucracy. The characteristics of Popper's scientific "truths" as provisional and temporary, open to falsification –perhaps "the best that we have right now" – are pushed aside in the current managerial setting. Efficiency becomes synonymous with quality; systematic, immediate, and widespread application is the norm. The dramatic failures of youth crime prevention programs within prisons (e.g., Scared Straight) and schools (e.g. The DARE program–drug abuse resistance education), to name a few, have also added to the fear of proceeding in absence of evidence (Welsh and Farrington 2005).

## ALTERNATIVE POSTMODERNIST APPROACH

Congruent with Henry and Milovanovic's (1996; 1999) constitutive criminology, the aim of postmodernism should be affirmative rather than nihilistic. Affirmative postmodernism disagrees that promoting the conceptual position of the oppressed at the expense of that of the powerful will lead to justice – rather, this only entrenches a new dominant discourse. Instead, Arrigo, Milovanovic and Schehr (2005) and Henry and Milovanovic (1996; 1999) focus on the creation of provisional relational truths as a part of a dialogical exchange. This perspective resonates with Deleuze and Guattari (1987) who, through their schizoanalysis, argue that the critical philosopher is always engaged in deconstruction *and* reconstruction, contending that fractal, provisional knowledge represents possibilities that cannot be met with modernist thought. Thus, from a deconstructionist perspective "what works" is opposed to a set of practices that "do not work" or fail to work. Here "work" is privileged and carries affirmation for one set of prevention practices over others. The EBA is seen as a deciding factor in what works. However, since prevention success is based on recidivism measures or re-arrest rates, after a variety of interventions, we omit to consider a whole range of interventions, particularly those at the meso- and macro-level, that might also have "worked" had they been implemented. Since such an approach to crime prevention threatens to miss the macro-sociological picture (for example, that crime and safety differentials correlate with socially disadvantaged communities and individuals) extending its focus mainly towards micro- or meso-level problems (Cherney 2000), it is imperative to direct some effort towards a discussion of an alternative approach – and to do so in a reflexive way creating a replacement discourse. This is not to say that a macro-level theoretical and practical approach would be a panacea to improve all social conditions, but instead to make the point that a new approach to guide thought and action is necessary, and one that does not come to a final truth, but is open to ongoing transformation as an emergent discourse continually open to rewriting.

Thus, in deconstructing the discourse of prevention and researching prevention programs, we should acknowledge the infinity of our subjective understanding, working upon and within itself, never yielding a separate or detached core, essence, or truth, but only more *folds* of different shapes and sizes (Deleuze 2006). What Gilles Deleuze calls the *fold* has been applied widely as a constructivist philosophical perspective and represents a humble approach concerning what we can know. His philosophies allow for the understanding and grasping of knowledge, space, and time, while allowing for flexibility. He re-defines reality as dynamic, a continuum lacking rigid essential qualities, and open for infinite new and evolving understandings.

While my overly terse summary of Deleuze does no justice to his extended epistemological metaphor, it is important for the fact of maintaining the provisional nature of reality (a notion that may be contrasted directly with the rigidity of professionalization); important to allow us the agency to act in a moment of time while recognizing the possibility of a new moment in time. "Deconstructive thinking [pre-empting research on prevention] is a way of affirming the irreducible alterity of the world we are trying to construe" (Caputo 1997).

I have in the past considered myself overly romantic in believing that we can collect systematic evidence as *provisional* truths rather than absolute, and also work toward action in the policy setting (the open architecture approach). However, I think the agenda of post-structuralism *invites* us to be romantic (fully aware of the romantic/rational binary I am implicated in) and to resist settling what is a persistently unsettled world even in light of the difficulties therein.

## GATHERING THE STRANDS

Deconstructive thinking in reference to prevention does not negate its utility, but asks us to unravel and then continuously re-build the notion of prevention as we partake in it (see Henry and Milovanovic 1996). Once we cease this process, the underlying assumptions become regarded as truths and we forget their provisional nature. The process of deconstructing prevention must happen on a variety of levels. When we think about and conduct research on prevention, we must deconstruct; when we use techniques of prevention in our practice, we must deconstruct; when we transfer and receive knowledge about prevention, we must deconstruct. The most difficult part of it all – the part that Lather (1991) refers to as "working the ruins" – is the continuity of the process – the deconstruction of deconstructions.

In my deconstruction of prevention, I have attempted to destabilize power within the prevention discourse, un-inscribe the traditional dualisms, and have tried to be comfortable with the instability left in their place. I suggested we maintain flexibility in our analyses, assumptions, and actions, paying close attention to deconstructing not by bringing everything to a standstill, but by questioning our actions as we take them and by opening up the discourses within which we work. All the while, I have suggested that we can partake in this deconstruction without destructing positive science altogether.

The intention of this commentary is not to provide answers, but instead to inspire questions and to establish the utility and necessity of taking a postmodern stance in developing criminological research and practice. As researchers, academics and practitioners alike, we can no longer deny our own implications in perpetuating the ideologies and discourses into which we inquire. We are not passive bodies who can work and inquire from a distance, but instead our integrity demands that we approach our work from a critical stance. In sum, a few important questions remain. How do the politics and professionalization of prevention affect our work? How does neo-liberal governance change the nature of prevention work, and how, in light of this, can we research ethically? How can we work and research while maintaining flexibility and provisionally accepted ideas? How can we avoid re-inscribing the "other" as a charitable case? We might consider moving forward with an open architectural model that is sensitive to emerging contingencies but does not recreate the existing structures.

## Endnotes

[1] Originally presented at the inaugural Critical Criminology and Justice Studies Conference, San Diego, CA, 2009. I thank Stuart Henry, and the anonymous external reviewers for helpful suggestions in revising this paper.

[2] My efforts here to problematize prevention should not be confused with an argument that prevention as a strategy should be abandoned, but rather as an argument that prevention is *so* important and so widespread that it is worthy of the critical effort to see if it stands up to the challenge of a deconstructionist critique.

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