Changing perspectives on guardianship against crime: An examination of the importance of micro-level factors

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Abstract

This paper focuses on how the narrative around guardianship as a crime prevention strategy has evolved from its original roots in macro-level theory and examination predominantly in residential places with a focus on property crime. It first highlights the ways in which some of the most useful insights about how guardianship functions to protect against crime have been illuminated by micro-level studies which have built on macro-level trends. Recent scholarship is used to illustrate how criminological understanding about guardianship against crime has been significantly developed through a focus on micro-level environmental factors and, most recently, individual factors. Perhaps one of the most significant developments in guardianship research in recent years has been its application beyond the residential context to extend to interpersonal crimes (sexual crimes in particular) and to cybercrime (cyberabuse in particular). Conclusions are drawn about how these new developments can be interwoven to advance the theoretical underpinnings of guardianship.

Introduction

Since its inception 20 years ago, over 40 articles dealing with guardianship have been published in *Crime Prevention and Community Safety*. These range from theoretical papers (eg. Hollis-Peel, Felson & Welsh, 2013), to empirical papers examining the role of guardians in the prevention of a range of crime-related problems, including property crime (eg. Reynald, 2009), stranger child abduction (Collie & Greene, 2016), sexual victimisation of women in transit (Ceccato, 2017), sexual victimization on college campuses (Palmer, 2016), and online victimization (Reyns, Randa & Henson, 2016; Reyns, 2010). This paper will examine the various ways in which criminological perspectives on guardianship have developed over the decades, with special focus on the ways the concept has evolved in terms of definition, operationalization and measurement. Key advances in the application of the concept for the purposes of crime prevention and control will be discussed, and important debates these have given rise to will be highlighted with a view to clarifying promising future directions for guardianship research.

Conceptual Issues around Guardianship

Two dominant theories of criminal victimization emerged around the same time in the 1970s—the lifestyle-exposure theory of victimization (Hidelang, Gottfredson & Garofalo, 1978) and the routine activity approach (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Both theoretical frameworks point to similar factors that explain the risk of victimization. Lifestyle-exposure theory purports that differences in lifestyle explain why some are more or less likely to experience personal victimization than others, and they define lifestyles as routine daily activities comprised of both

vocational and leisure activities (Hindelang et al, 1978). According to the theory, individuals whose lifestyles include more time away from home and family, more time in public, at night, and in closer proximity to high offending groups, have a higher risk of personal victimization (Hindelang, et al, 1978). The routine activity approach also explains the likelihood of victimization as the result of differences in people's routine activities. However, it focuses explicitly on how these routine activities create crime opportunity structures by leading to spatio-temporal convergences between offenders in search of criminal opportunities and vulnerable victims/targets who/which lack protection by capable guardians (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

While lifestyle-exposure theory focused on personal victimization that results from individuals being more exposed to risk due to risky lifestyles, the routine activity approach has focused on explaining predatory and property offences. Both theories highlight the role of the intersection of offenders and targets/victims in their own way, but the concept of guardianship and the absence of it being central to the "chemistry for crime" is unique to the routine activity approach (Felson & Eckert, 2016). Felson and Cohen (1980: 392) first defined guardianship as "any spatio-temporally specific supervision of people or property by other people which may prevent criminal violations from occurring". Moreover, this original conceptualization of guardianship focused on informal citizens providing supervision over potential targets/victims as a natural consequence of the course of carrying out their routine activities.

Cohen, Kluegel and Land (1981) were the first to propose merging the lifestyle-exposure theory with the routine activity approach to introduce the hybrid lifestyle-routine activity theory (LRAT) which was aimed at integrating RAT's macro-level perspective of the criminal opportunity structure with LET's perspective on differential risks of victimisation. This hybrid theory identified five key factors for explaining victimization risk, taken from both

lifestyle/exposure theory and the routine activity approach: exposure, guardianship, proximity to potential offenders, attractiveness of potential targets, and definitional properties of specific crimes themselves (Cohen et al, 1981). In their original hybrid formulation of LRAT, they define guardianship as: “the effectiveness of persons (e.g., housewives, neighbors, pedestrians, private security guards, law enforcement officers) or objects (e.g., burglar alarms, locks, barred windows) in preventing violations from occurring, either by their presence alone or by some sort of direct or indirect action” (Cohen et al, 1981; p. 508). It is within the context of this hybrid lifestyle/routine activities theory (LRAT) that we can first identify a fundamental alteration in the conceptualization and definition of guardianship. Unlike the proposition and definition from the routine activity approach by Cohen & Felson the year before in 1980 which focused on guardians as people who provide supervision specific to places and times, Cohen, Kluegel and Land’s (1981) LRAT explains that guardianship can be provided by people or objects. Miethe and Meier (1994) explain that this LRAT conceptualization of guardianship has social dimensions inherent in the presence of the human element (friends, police, neighbours), personal dimensions encompassed in self-preservation skills and self-protection measures, and physical dimensions reflected in the use of tools and target hardening techniques such as locks, alarms etc.

These very different conceptualisations and definitions of guardianship have led to current debates in the literature about what guardianship is and what it is not. Reynald (2011b) and Hollis-Peel, Reynald, van Bavel, Elffers and Welsh (2011) argue that guardianship and target hardening are two related but distinct concepts. Treating them as such is more useful both conceptually and empirically. While guardianship focuses on the protection of targets or victims through the presence of others, supervision and intervention when necessary, target hardening focuses on making a target harder to breach through physical reinforcements alone. It may be argued that if an individual puts physical reinforcements on their home to protect it

from victimization, while this is clearly target hardening, by doing so the individual is also exercising guardianship over that target as they are attempting to protect it from victimization. This is true according to the LRAT definition of guardianship, but not so according to the RAT definition. We still maintain that the original RAT definition is clearer and more useful both conceptually and for empirical research as it makes a clear differentiation of guardianship hinged on supervision and protection, versus target hardening which is hinged purely on physical reinforcement as a means of protection.

A similar debate continues over the inclusion of self-protection measures as a form of guardianship. Again, according to the LRAT definition, self-protection equals guardianship but the RAT definition is about the protection of people or property by others, which relies on an entirely different set of mechanisms than self-protection. A clear empirical distinction between guardianship behaviours and tools guardians may use for protection has been established from data acquired through interviews with available guardians themselves (see Reynald, 2010). Again we argue that the LRAT conceptualization and definition of guardianship is muddled as it attempts to fuse several related but quite distinct concepts into one apparently homogenous concept, which is problematic when it comes to systematic operationalization and measurement. In their appraisal of guardianship definitions, Hollis-Peel, Felson, and Welsh (2013, p. 76) set forth the most recent definition of guardianship to date as “the presence of a human element which acts - whether intentionally or not - to deter the would-be offender from committing a crime against an available target”. Even more recently, Felson and Eckert (2016) set forth three criteria which make guardians effective: (1) they are located next to/near the area they wish to supervise, (2) there is good visibility to area they wish to supervise, and (3) they feel a personal responsibility for supervising such an area.

Another conceptual issue around guardianship is the fact that it is often treated in the literature as the same as informal social control. However, Hollis-Peel, Felson and Welsh (2013) argue that guardianship is definitively not informal social control. Reynald (2018) highlights the similarities and points of overlap between the concepts, as well as the notable points of departure.

Early empirical guardianship research: macro & micro proxy measures

Empirical findings have generally shown support for the idea that increased guardianship is associated with lower levels of personal and property crimes (see Reynald, 2011b). Early empirical studies using routine activity measures used macro-level proxy measures of household availability (i.e. time residents spend at home) as indicators of guardianship as the routine activity approach identified that the mere presence of a guardian could discourage offending. For example, Cohen and Felson (1979) developed the ‘household activity ratio’ which added the number of married, husband-present, female labour-force participants to the number of non-husband wife households—and dividing this sum by the total number of households in the United States. This calculation estimated the proportion of households that would be at greatest risk of victimization due to two factors: (1) members of those households would have increased activity away from home, and (2) a higher probability of those households owning valuable items more likely to be stolen. Several studies that followed adopted similar measures with the idea that measures of household availability provide an approximation of the level of guardianship at places by providing an estimate of guardian presence. In this vein, other common proxy measures used to estimate guardianship include employment (e.g., Wickes, Zahnow, Schaefer & Sparks-Carroll, 2017), the number of household members (e.g., Cohen & Cantor, 1980; Miethe & Meier, 1990), time spent at home

(e.g., Lynch & Cantor, 1992; Sampson & Wooldredge, 1987), and marital status (e.g., Massey, Krohn, & Bonati, 1989; Moriarty & Williams, 1996).

In keeping with the LRAT conceptualization of guardianship, other studies utilized additional measures of guardianship which are indicators of security and personal/self-protection, such as the presence of alarms, dogs, or other target hardening measures (Garofalo & Clark, 1992; Tseloni, Wittebrood, Farrell, & Pease, 2004; Wilcox, Madensen, & Tillyer, 2007). Most of these studies used these measures from national crime and victimisation surveys (e.g., British Crime Survey), and aggregated these household level indicators to neighborhood, city, or national levels to determine what effect guardianship had on levels of crime.

Several of these studies examining the effect of guardianship generally found a negative association between levels of guardianship and various types of crime. Cohen and Felson (1979) found positive and significant associations between the household activity ratio and all five crime types included in their analyses (non-negligent homicide, forcible rape, aggregated assault, robbery, and burglary). Such results show that changes to daily routine activities that increase vulnerability to risks of victimization and decrease levels of guardianship are associated with higher levels of crime. Similarly, several studies have found that the absence of guardians increased opportunities for predatory and property crimes (Cohen & Cantor, 1980; Cohen, Felson, & Land, 1980; Felson & Cohen, 1980; Sampson & Wooldredge, 1987), while others found that the risk of burglary was lower when residents were present (Garofalo & Clark, 1992; Miethe, Stafford, & Long, 1987).

However, the results of other studies were more complicated. For instance, Moriarty and Williams (1996) found that guardianship explained more variance in high crime areas than low crime areas. Further, they reported that high levels of guardianship at the neighbourhood level in this study enabled residents to act as capable guardians at the individual level, suggesting

that the context in which people live needs to be considered to understand guardianship behaviour.

Guardianship in Action (GIA): From proxies to direct measures of guardianship

Using these important macro-level findings as its foundation, more recent work has focused on examining more direct measures of guardianship in lieu of approximations (Reynald, 2009; 2010; 2011a; 2011b; Hollis-Peel et al, 2011). The validity of the commonly used proxy measures rest on two core assumptions: first, that if you are unemployed (for example), you will spend more time at home, and second, that if you spend more time at home, you are more likely to provide guardianship over your residential space. Reynald (2009) argued that traditionally used proxies of guardianship such as measures of employment, number of household members etc. provide approximations of how much time people may spend at home, which, although fundamental, is only one dimension of guardianship. Moreover, research has shown these indicators are not always valid approximations of time spent at home (see Reynald & Elffers, 2015 for discussion of the validity of guardianship proxy measures).

As a means of advancing the measurement of guardianship, Reynald (2009) argued in favour a return to the drawing board and the original definition of guardianship as spatio-temporally specific supervision which prevents criminal violations. Based on the original ideas of Cohen and Felson (1979) and Felson and Cohen (1980), Reynald (2009) put forward the guardianship in action (GIA) model which explicated three basic dimensions of guardianship: availability or presence of guardians, supervision or monitoring by guardians, and intervention by guardians when necessary. She argued that this multi-dimensional measure of guardianship fits more closely with the original conceptualisation and also provided a more ecologically valid measure of guardianship that could be observed directly.

Results showed that the intensity of guardianship provided by residents on streets could be observed, and the GIA model provided a valid measure of guardianship (Reynald, 2009; 2011). These studies have since been replicated in the United States (Hollis-Peel & Welsh, 2014) and Australia (Moir, Stewart, Reynald & Hart, 2017). Results also showed that property crime decreases as guardianship intensity at properties increases (Reynald, 2009; 2011; Hollis-Peel & Welsh, 2014). Moreover, this body of work on guardianship in action provided empirical evidence to show that the availability or presence of a guardian does not automatically translate into supervision. Even though people are at home and available they may not actually engage in supervision (intentionally or not) over their surroundings, therefore, cannot function as capable guardians.

To date the observational GIA studies have been conducted in The Hague, the Netherlands (Reynald, 2009; 2011), Boston, U.S., (Hollis-Peel et al 2012; Hollis-Peel & Welsh, 2014) and Brisbane, Australia (Moir et al, 2017). This has facilitated the first cross-national comparison of active guardianship in the field. Further, these studies have also measured physical and spatial characteristics of properties and street segments associated with guardianship, facilitating the development of knowledge about environmental influences on guardianship at micro-places. Results showed some clear similarities and differences across contexts. While there was a similar pattern in that levels of direct intervention were fairly low across the sites, meaningful differences in levels of visual availability of guardians and monitoring by available residents emerged. Overall, residents of The Hague were more easily observable and there were higher levels of monitoring and intervention by residents. Brisbane residents were observed to be more active guardians than Boston residents. While Boston recorded the highest levels of availability of residents at home, they were the least engaged with monitoring and intervening with the observer/s on the street (see Moir et al, 2017 for further details on the international comparison of GIA). Further results show that levels of availability, monitoring and

intervention across time are dynamic, as we would expect. For instance, Reynald (2011a) found that observable levels of guardianship intensity were significantly higher during night-time. Further, Moir et al. (2017) examined differences in guardianship intensity across the time of day and day of week. Significantly more Brisbane residents were observed at home on the weekends than weekdays, in line with routine activity patterns.

These GIA studies also investigated the relationship between guardianship intensity and the physical characteristics of observed properties and streets to explore the factors that facilitate or inhibit active guardianship by residents (Hollis-Peel et al., 2012; Reynald, 2009; 2011a). Field observations of 814 properties in The Hague showed that higher levels of opportunities for surveillance, image, and social interactions were positively and significantly correlated with guardianship intensity, while territorial definition emerged as a negative correlate (Reynald, 2009). A replication study in Boston of 888 properties identified similar trends in the environmental features that correlates with guardianship intensity (Hollis-Peel et al 2012). However, one notable difference was that in Boston, social interaction between residents was not observed and had no significant relationship to guardianship while the opposite was the case in The Hague.

A larger study in The Hague of 2,874 properties across 21 neighborhoods examined the spatio-physical and socio-demographic features related to guardianship intensity (Reynald, 2011a). While direct comparisons should be cautioned due to differences in measures used in this study to earlier GIA research (Reynald, 2009; Hollis-Peel et al., 2012), this study found five spatio-physical features significantly correlated with guardianship intensity: territoriality, surveillance opportunities, image, and social interaction all positively correlated, while activity levels was negatively correlated with guardianship intensity. Likewise, five socio-demographic factors were significantly related to guardianship, with distance to the city centre, home ownership, and family households associated with increased guardianship intensity, with ethnic

heterogeneity and residential turnover hindering residents' abilities to act as effective crime controllers.

Importantly, each of these GIA studies investigated the relationship between guardianship intensity and crime. Reynald (2009) found that as guardianship intensity increased, the mean count of property crime decreased. Similarly, the larger study in The Hague found that guardianship intensity was a negative predictor of property crime (Reynald, 2011a). In Boston, the expected property crime count decreased as guardianship intensity increased (Hollis-Peel & Welsh, 2014). Together, these results show that the surrounding environment has a significant influence on opportunities for residents to act as capable guardians against crime. These results also reinforce the thesis that the design of residential areas can foster/inhibit guardianship behaviour by residents. While macro-level findings have been essential in establishing the importance of the relationship between guardianship and crime, these recent findings highlight that the micro-contexts in which people carry out supervision need to be considered when examining guardianship patterns.

Guardians on Guardianship: Interview Studies

Having observed active guardianship behaviour and the environmental factors associated with this, the focus in guardianship research shifted to factors which motivated guardian decision making and behaviour. In an interview study with residential guardians who were at home, Reynald (2010) interviewed guardians about a number of factors related to their ability to detect suspicious behaviour in their surroundings, the supervision habits, the crime-related incidents they witnessed as guardians on their street, and their decision to intervene or not. Results showed that residents used five overarching cues to identify suspicious behaviour and offending. These included: (1) antisocial behaviours (such as drug and alcohol use,

shouting), (2) secretive behaviours (eg. hiding), (3) aimlessness (eg. hanging around with no apparent purpose), (4) nervous response to being monitored, and (5) eyeing potential targets (eg. looking into property windows, or checking whether car doors were open). The most common response to witnessing suspicious behaviour in both high crime and low crime neighbourhoods was indirect intervention (eg. calling the police), however, both types of intervention (direct or indirect) were more common when residents lived in a low crime neighbourhood. Interestingly, only residents who lived in high crime neighbourhoods reported that they would not take any action when they observed suspicious or crime-related behaviour in their surroundings. Further, when deciding whether to take action in response to an event witnessed on their street, residents highlighted six common factors related to perceptions of capability and safety which they considered: (1) sense of responsibility, (2) perceptions of their residential area, (3) prior (safety and/or security) training, (4) risks to personal safety, (5) availability of tools for protection, and (6) physical competence.

Moir, Hart, Reynald, and Stewart (2018) did a similar interview study with suburban Brisbane residents about their guardianship behaviour. Data from this study suggested that the drivers of guardianship behaviour in suburban residential areas are dynamic and are supported by personal motivation, opportunities generated by the physical environment and daily routines. Results revealed a typology of guardians with four groups being identified: (1) *active monitors* who felt a personal responsibility to monitor their space, (2) *opportunistic monitors* who were able to monitor their surroundings as the physical design of their house provided clear lines of sight over surrounding areas; or their daily routines afforded opportunities for them to conduct surveillance, (3) *responsive monitors* who surveyed their surroundings in response to unfamiliar stimuli, and (4) *non-monitors* who generally did not engage in guardianship behaviours due to a lack of motivation or physically could not view their surroundings due to poor design. Additionally, residents' micro routines at home influence

when, and how, they act as capable guardians and supervise their surroundings (Moir, Reynald, Hart & Stewart, *forthcoming*). Opportunities for guardianship are maximised when residents' daily activities at home take place within "active rooms" (rooms in which residents spend a majority of time awake). What this collective research finds is that both individual factors and the built environment facilitate opportunities for residents to be active guardians.

Guardians on Guardianship: Survey Studies

The most recent body of research on guardianship has utilized survey methodology to develop an understanding of the extent to which residents engage in guardianship over their surroundings (Reynald & Elffers, 2015; Reynald & Moir, 2018). Based on a distillation of knowledge acquired from the observational GIA studies and the interview studies, the guardianship survey studies were designed to get an idea of large-scale trends in guardianship behaviours and attitudes. The survey asks residents about the amount of time they spend at home across seven days of the week, for four time-periods of the day. Residents are also asked how much time they spend keeping an eye out on their surroundings while they are at home. They are then asked about what crime-related events they witnessed on their street in the year preceding the survey, and how they responded to those witnessed events. Additional questions are also asked about related factors (i.e., factors which previous research has shown to be related to guardianship) such as perceptions of the police, perceptions of crime in their area, perceptions of neighbours etc.

Based on a representative sample of 4824 Dutch residents, Reynald and Elffers (2015) focused on comparing whether traditional proxy measures of household availability provide valid estimates against self-reported guardianship availability and supervision when available at home. Residents were asked '*when you are at home on mornings, how often do you look out*

of the window to see what is happening in your surroundings?' This question was then repeated for afternoon, evening, and late night periods when residents were at home. Survey results demonstrated that levels of monitoring intensity while at home fluctuated over the course of the day: more people reported actively monitoring their surroundings in morning and afternoon periods compared to evening and late-night periods. Further, approximately 13% of residents reported never keeping an eye out while at home. Similar patterns were found by Reynald and Moir (2018) showing that between 30-40% of residents reported monitoring their surroundings some of the time in morning and afternoon periods, respectively. As expected, very few residents (between 4-7%) reported high levels of supervision in the evenings and late-night periods. As a result, these findings suggest that using static measures of availability are unlikely to be appropriate measures of guardianship capability.

Wickes, Zahnow, Shaefer and Sparkes-Carroll (2016) take a macro approach by measuring guardianship at the neighbourhood level using survey items from the Australian Community Capacity Survey (ACCS). Based on a sample of 4403 respondents, they measured three dimensions of guardianship: guardianship availability, guardianship expectations and guardianship actions. Their neighbourhood level guardianship availability measure was based on the proportion of residents who reported leaving their neighbourhood for jobs. Guardianship expectations were measured by capturing residents' willingness to intervene in neighbourhood problems, derived from collective efficacy literature. And finally guardianship action measures followed the logic of the GIA model and were derived from items asking residents about intervening in what they assessed to be community problems in their neighbourhood. Included in their data were several socio-structural variables which previous research has shown to affect guardianship and crime, including factors such as neighbourhood disadvantage, resident instability etc. These were included to control for their effect on the dependent variable property crime.

Results showed that their measure of neighbourhood guardianship availability was directly associated with property crime. Their measures of guardianship expectations and actions were only associated with property crime under certain neighbourhood conditions. For instance, results showed that guardianship action was positively associated with property crime in more affluent neighbourhoods, while the opposite was the case for more disadvantaged neighbourhoods. And neighbourhoods characterised by higher ethnic heterogeneity (measured using language diversity as the indicator) had higher property crime rates associated with higher guardianship expectations, while guardianship expectations were associated with lower property crime in areas lower on ethnic heterogeneity (Wickes et al, 2016).

Alongside the importance of socio-physical environmental or contextual factors in explaining the effect of various dimensions of guardianship on crime, recent scholarship has highlighted the importance of individual factors in explaining guardianship behaviours. Reynald and Moir (2018) revealed that a number of personality characteristics and attitude variables are significant predictors of supervision habits by residents. Using self-report measures from Dutch residents, those who believed crime in their surroundings to be high, had previous security training, believed they had a responsibility for and were capable of controlling crime, and believed courage and national security were important values, engaged in higher levels of supervision than those who did not. Residents with low trust and high self-esteem reported significantly lower levels of supervision. Another study using survey measures found that a number of individual characteristics were positively associated with residents taking action against local crime problems, including prior police contact, prior victimization, and the frequency with which residents had contact with their neighbours (Schaefer, Mazerolle, & Kapnoulla, 2017). However, if residents believed that the police were effective at controlling crime, they were significantly less likely to take informal action against a crime problem occurring near them.

Taken altogether, results from this group of interview and survey studies suggest that personal characteristics and attitudes, along with the context of the space people inhabit serve as important factors which determine how guardianship behaviour is facilitated in residential areas. As such, they highlight the importance of taking a holistic approach to explaining and understanding crime control behaviour by guardians: the individual and their surroundings seem to be equally important. As Hollis-Peel et al. (2013) state we cannot understand guardianship as a process without paying attention to the people who act as guardians. It is this focus on the individual and micro-level contextual factors that has opened new doors for guardianship research. As we have explicated in the paper until this point, guardianship research has been dominated by a focus on guardianship against property crime in residential contexts. One of the most significant developments in recent guardianship scholarship is the recent focus on the micro-level. This has spawned extensions to guardianship research which focus on the role of guardianship in the context of very different types of crime and varying situations. Two of the most promising areas in which the crime preventive effectiveness of guardianship has recently begun to be explored within the context of other micro-situational contexts include guardianship against sexual violence and abuse, and guardianship in cyberspace and specifically against cyberabuse.

New directions of Guardianship Research

Guardianship against Sexual Offences

Micro-level guardianship research has revealed the significance of a number of situational factors which influence guardianship behaviours and outcomes. Wortley & Smallbone (2006) first highlighted the importance of situational factors, including guardianship, to protect against sexual offending against children. There is a growing body of

research which shows that capable guardianship is also a fundamentally important crime control mechanism in the disruption of sexual offending in certain situations. Under the right conditions, guardians appear to destabilize the opportunity structure of sexual offending by increasing perceived risks and the subsequent assessment of cost versus benefit (Cook, Reynald, & Leclerc, submitted a). Recent work exploring the influence of guardianship on the severity of child sexual abuse, for example, identified that when a potential guardian was nearby the scene of the offence, the overall severity of the abuse reduced (Leclerc et al., 2015). Drawing on offender self-report data collected through a crime script framework, Cook and colleagues (submitted a;b) similarly found that capable guardianship, which they identified is characterised by higher levels of guardianship intensity through active guardianship (including supervision and intervention), is one of the dominant mechanisms operating in the disruption of sexual offence opportunities. This aligns with the work of Chiu and Leclerc (2016) on completed events of acquaintance rape, where it was found that while a guardian was often present either initially or during a sexual offence, there were few reported situations in which the guardian intervened.

In the same way guardianship intensity affects rates of property crime (see Reynald, 2009) these findings point to the possibility that guardianship intensity may be similarly predictive of sexual offence outcomes. While the availability of a guardian may be critical for *preventing* crime opportunities in the context of sexual offending, the action dimensions of guardianship may be what determines if *disruption* occurs (Cook, Reynald, & Leclerc, submitted b). This is because contextual factors, beyond the dichotomous observation of guardian's availability, appear to bear differently on the offender's decision-making in sexual crimes. The recent work of Cook and colleagues (submitted b), for example, suggests that we need to consider both *who* the guardian is, and *what* the guardian does when defining capable guardianship in the context of sexual offending. As they argue, there is a question of whether

children should be considered on par with adults when promoting capable guardianship against sexual offending. The convergence of a child's developmental vulnerabilities with the physical settings in which they are typically present may likely diminish the opportunities that they have to supervise and/or intervene/disclose, which, recent work suggests is the critical mechanism for sexual offence prevention (Cook et al., submitted b).

In building our understanding of the complex ways guardianship operates as a preventative mechanism in sexual violence and abuse, we therefore argue that it is critical to consider the micro-situational context of the offence by differentiating between guardians who are nearby and those who witness and/or intervene. The preliminary model of bystander intervention for sexual offences against adult women, presented in a recent study by Cook and Reynald (2017), develops this line of thinking by proposing situationally-specific strategies which align with the relative strengths and weaknesses of male compared to female adult guardians. In recognising that differences exist in the strategies these two groups of potential guardians are likely to employ in an emergency situation, this paper shows that, moving forward, we need to be a lot more nuanced in defining capable guardianship in the context of sexual offending – there is no “one size fits all” approach to the role which guardians’ play (Cook & Reynald, 2017).

Guardianship in Cyberspace

In the past decade a growing program of research has focused on theoretical re-appraisal and operationalisation of capable guardianship in the new context of cyberspace (Bossler et al., 2012; Holt & Bossler, 2008, 2014; Marcum et al., 2010; Ngo & Paternoster, 2011; Reyns et al., 2011; Vakhitova et al., 2016). As previously discussed, within the original formulation of the routine activity approach, a guardian was conceptualised as being able to prevent crime simply by being present at the scene by serving “as a gentle reminder that someone is looking”

(Felson, 2002, p. 22). This of course meant that to prevent crime, a guardian would have to be visible and/or be in a close physical proximity to the potential offender, making the transposition of capable guardianship to cyberspace, where both visibility and physical proximity are largely irrelevant, a significant challenge.

Several studies have attempted to re-conceptualise guardianship in relation to new technological types of criminality like cyber abuse. For example, Vakhitova and Reynald (2014) took a broad view of guardianship as involving “the presence of others in the online context who can deter or prevent crimes from occurring” (Reyns, 2018, p. 50; see also, Vakhitova and Reynald, 2014)). A Facebook user who witnesses an incident of cyber abuse and intervenes to stop it by reporting the incident to the administrators of the site would be a good example of a capable guardian against cyber abuse².

Despite some progress in adapting capable guardianship to the environment of cyberspace, its operationalisation remains a challenge. A review of existing studies where capable guardianship was measured in the context of cyberspace (Vakhitova et al. 2016) reveals a variety of divergent proxies for guardianship ranging from the use of antivirus software, spyware, and firewall software (Ngo and Paternoster, 2011), having computer skills and education on cybercrime (Ngo and Paternoster, 2011), and peer deviance (Bossler et al., 2012; Reyns et al., 2011), to presence of others while using a computer and parent/guardian monitoring the use of a computer (Marcum et al., 2010). To date these measurements for online guardianship have not found a strong empirical support (Bossler et al., 2012; Holt & Bossler, 2008, 2014; Marcum et al., 2010; Ngo & Paternoster, 2011; Reyns et al., 2011). Vakhitova and colleagues (2016) proposed that an in-depth examination of new technological types of crime

² While some suggested that in this scenario a web site administrator who, for example, suspends the account of the abusive user, is also a guardian (Reyns 2010; Reyns, Randa and Henson, 2016), this type of activity best fits the role of a place manager.

and the way people interact within the environment of cyberspace is critical for identifying protective factors against cyber abuse and should further situate capable guardianship in the context of cyberspace.

Conclusion

Through this examination of the evolution of guardianship research since it was first introduced in Cohen and Felson's (1979) work, it is evident that significant developments have been made starting with the clarification of distinctions in the definition and operationalisation of the concept. These clarifications about important differences have been critical to the improvement of measures of guardianship, and consequently, for the implications empirical evidence has for the application of guardianship as a mechanism for crime prevention and control. Different ideas about what guardianship is or is not are fine, once clear definitions of the concept are highlighted, and distinctions from other definitions and conceptualisations are explained. Scholarly debates about such issues are welcome and are an important part of what has helped advance research on guardianship over the years. Macro-level research on guardianship like the work done by Wickes et al (2016) is important, so too is work that explores the points of similarity and departure between related concepts such as guardianship and informal social control (eg. Reynald, 2018). When it comes to crime prevention and crime control, though, some of the most promising avenues for facilitating the continued development of our knowledge around how guardianship works, the conditions under which it is more or less effective, and what we can do practically to facilitate its most effective functioning, have emerged through micro-level research. Building off of important macro-level patterns, it is this micro-level focus that has triggered the expansion of guardianship research into other crime contexts which are very different and varied compared to the property crime lens through which

guardianship had traditionally been examined. It is through a more refined, nuanced understanding of guardianship agents, mechanisms and processes, and how these interact with a range of different socio-structural, spatio-physical and situational contexts, that we will continue to make sense of broader patterns of guardianship and how these relate to various types of crime trends.

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