

## Routine Activity Theory and Research Ethics

*A criminological approach*

**Kenneth D. Pimple, Ph.D.**

**Keeping the Pool Clean:**

**Prevention and Management of**

**Misconduct-Related Retractions**

Colorado State University, July 2016

For these slides...

<http://tinyurl.com/TeachRCR>

**Acknowledgement** This talk is adapted from "A situational approach to research integrity: A proven method" by myself and Douglas Adams, Ph.D., University of Arkansas (Pimple and Adams 2011). I dedicate this presentation to Doug. Everything I know about criminology, I learned from him. Flaws and foolishness are mine.

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## Words of wisdom

**Brian Martinson**

- Let's stop bobbing for bad apples and start looking upstream
  - paraphrased from Martinson 2014

**Ken Pimple**

- Every apple has the potential to go rotten but among properly handled apples, putrefaction is minimized or prevented.

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## Outline

- Routine Activity Theory (RAT) and Situational Crime Prevention (SCP)
- Examples
  - Plagiarism
  - Enforcement
  - The power of situation
- A different conclusion

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## Routine Activity Theory (RAT)

Most criminal acts occur in a favorable setting. Criminal acts have three *almost-always elements*:

- A likely offender
- A suitable target
- The absence of a capable guardian against the offense

Felson and Boba 2010:28, emphasis in original

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## Situational Crime Prevention

- Focus on situations where crime is common (*aka* the Willie Sutton Rule)
  - High-spirited crowds plus alcohol / drugs
  - Lucrative businesses
- Prevent / diminish antisocial behavior
  - Reduce number of likely offenders
  - Harden prospective targets
  - Increase capability and/or number of guardians

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## Theory and application

Routine Activity Theory	Situational Crime Prevention
A likely offender	Reduce the number of likely offenders
A suitable target	Harden prospective targets
The absence of a capable guardian against the offense	Increase capability and/or number of guardians

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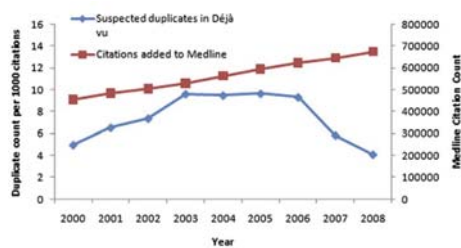
## Capable guardians in science

The key to nipping as many infractions in the bud as possible is to reassure people of the potential effectiveness of informal intervention, and to educate them in how best to do it.

Koocher and Keith-Spiegel 2010:438

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## Plagiarism



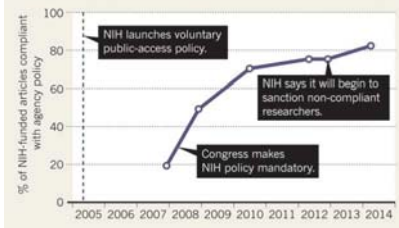
Garner 2011

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## Enforcement

### OPENING UP

More researchers are abiding by the open-access policy of the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) since enforcement was stepped up. It requires articles to be publicly available in PubMed Central within a year of publication.



Van Noorden 2014

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## The power of situation

- National Public Radio's *This American Life*, April 1, 2011 (Kestenbaum 2011)
- The clip and transcript begin around 53:22 on the playback bar at <http://bit.ly/RATandSCP>

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## Background

- David Kestenbaum interviews his cousin, Dan Weiss
- Weiss volunteers in the 1970s at the new Kennedy Center's gift shop
- 300 volunteers, mostly retirees
- Losing money, a.k.a. **shrinkage** – the “percentage of overall sales that you [are] losing” – is 40%
  - Typical shrinkage: 3%

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### Transcript 1



*Kestenbaum:* Dan sets up an inventory system. He posts price lists in the gift shop – hats cost **this** much, t-shirts **this** much. He tells the retirees volunteering in the gift shops, “When you sell something, write it down.” In other words, he basically reinvents, on his own, what any normal retail business would call “record keeping.”

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### Transcript 2

*Kestenbaum:* And lo and behold, the leaking stops. The mysterious losses, that 40% shrinkage, began to steadily shrink. He got in Macy’s territory, down to single digits.

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### Transcript 3

*Kestenbaum:* At the gift shop, Dan was a hero. But his victory meant something kind of unsettling. It meant the problem hadn’t been a thief, it was **lots** of thieves. In fact, as best as Dan could figure, in that sea of 300 volunteers, those elderly art lovers, a bunch of them were taking stuff. And the paid staff, who worked in other parts of the building, they were grabbing stuff, too.

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### Transcript 4

*Weiss:* People would walk by, and pet the cat, and see merchandise, and pick it up, because it was just stuff on a table, that people thought it was okay.

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### Transcript 5

*Kestenbaum:* And people weren’t just grabbing t-shirts. Some had been taking cash, mostly small amounts like a cab fare home. After all, they’d just worked three hours for free, it’s just a few dollars, what’s the harm? But still, they put their hands in the cash box, took some bills out, and put the money in their pockets.

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### Transcript 6

*Weiss:* That’s stealing. They were all stealing.

*Kestenbaum:* There were retired volunteers there, taking money out of the cash box?

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## Transcript 7

*Weiss:* There were some volunteers who were taking money, there were some young employees who were taking money, there were lots of people who were taking merchandise, at **every** level. People were all stealing from this wonderful, uplifting organization because they **could**, because it was easy and it was available.

## Transcript 8

*Kestenbaum:* If this population, these people, well-meaning, community-minded, classical music fans – if some of them were stealing, it meant anyone would. For Dan, that was a sad thing.

## Transcript 9

*Weiss:* And I guess that's the lesson I learned in 1979. We are going to take things from each other if we have a chance. I never understood that; it didn't feel okay to me then, and it doesn't feel okay to me now, and it wasn't a terrifically optimistic lesson – that many people need there to be controls around them for them to do the right thing.

## Transcript 10

*Weiss:* And if there aren't any controls around them, or any supervision, they may not do the right thing.

## A different lesson

- The volunteers, those petty thieves, were rehabilitated by simple, unobtrusive techniques.
- And no one had to be scolded, fired, or imprisoned.
- Why couldn't this work in labs?

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Slides and talk

<http://pages.iu.edu/~pimple/events/CSU2016.html>

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