

**Theory to Practice as an Application of
Temporal Crime Theory: The 2010 SWACJ Presidential Address**

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Good afternoon, and welcome to the Southwestern Association of Criminal Justice (SWACJ) business meeting. I call this meeting to order and would like to follow the order listed in the program please. I must say that it is amazing to see the people in this room who are dedicated to addressing criminal justice in terms of theory to practice, which is our theme for this year's conference. Already during this conference, we have had some outstanding presentations which embody our theme. We have also had some outstanding roundtables as well, with only more great things to come tomorrow.

When I look back on this year, a lot of different realities have transpired, not only in our country, but in our southwest region as well. We have had serious economic issues; we have had serious environmental issues. We have even had issues dealing with technology in terms of not only how it is used, but debate over appropriate use; RFID technology and even FaceBook are clear examples.

Our region of the United States consists of Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. In this last year we have seen Arkansas deal with a significant increase in teens abusing prescription medication. In Colorado, we saw a diplomat cause an international incident for smoking in a plane's rest room and joking about trying to start a fire; all while on his

way to visit a convicted terrorist connected to 9-11. In Texas we had an army psychiatrist accused of going on a shooting spree against his fellow soldiers.

Why bring this up? Our theme of theory to practice is not only something that is obviously "catchy", it is a perpetual goal I assert our society must be willing to be brave enough to embrace in order to better address these multidisciplinary criminal justice realities. In essence, I assert we as educators and practitioners, need to maximize this relationship of theory and practice; however, I also assert that this process needs to keep "time", that is a temporal perspective, in mind with respect to this relationship. As you look around this room right now, you see a group of highly-educated people who actually care about the world around us. Moreover, these same people have the distinction of currently and/or previously serving in some professional capacity impacting the criminal justice system. Simply said, our organization is important in that our scholarship is applied, not simply theoretical.

A perspective to focus societal attention on applying theory to practice is something I call "temporal crime theory." Briefly, this theory is designed to ask the most relevant stakeholders on various criminal justice issues, to make the assessment and adjustment actions needed to appropriately address these criminal justice issues. Numerous scholars have made assertions with respect to the temporal connection with crime; some dealing with crime-only and some dealing with other variables as well, e.g. location/environment. Polat (2007) for instance uses a time series model to forecast crime occurrences based on data from crime cluster patterns. Walker et al. (2001) applied temporal analyses to understand the geographic nexus to crime dealing with sex offenders and victims. Ratcliffe (2010) tells us that a traditional focus on individuals is simply not enough in terms of addressing criminality; therefore society

must value technologies, e.g. crime mapping, in order to better address how we not only understand crime, but address it.

As a supplement to these theoretical assertions, which I happen to agree with, I think our policymakers need to also consider “time” in the context of an approach to make the most of the important spatial realities connecting time to crime. Put another way, it seems that as valuable as this technology to understand crime is, we as criminal justice practitioners and educators must also work to gain the buy-in needed for society to invest the needed resources in making the most of what is understood.

When I think of society thirty years ago, I think of the movie *Hot Tub Time Machine*, in which some adults go back to the 1980s and are faced with the possibility of changing the future based on their knowledge of the past (MGM Studios, 2010). Am I trying to have some fun with this topic? I actually am, but inasmuch as I am willing to approach presenting information in a different manner, policy makers dealing with crime issues need to be approached in a way that helps them appreciate why more strategic emphasis of resources is needed. Please also understand that I certainly do not assert our field has never focused diligently to urge policy makers to formulate crime policy which makes more appropriate use of said technology. A clear example of scholarship to illustrate this point is Clarke’s (1980) work on situational crime prevention which has had significant impact on the “respect” society gives toward crimes geographically around schools (Montague, 2007). Finally in terms of connection to what I will next describe as the assertions of temporal crime theory, I mention that political elasticity theory (Werlin, 1998) comes to mind as a vehicle to find a “common ground” for policy makers to not only discuss how to address crime, but how to facilitate discussion of

resources in a way to focus on actually addressing the crime and not the “politics” associated with that process.

Toward this end, what I’m calling temporal crime theory’s focus should be thought of in the context of how policy makers make decisions based on understanding about crime. The first assertion of temporal crime theory is that the past and the future are always relevant in addressing crime problems of the present. This assertion does not imply that the future informs the present, rather that knowledge of the past is crucial to understanding the present and how we consider our future on whatever crime issue is at hand. The second assertion of temporal crime theory is that in understanding a criminal justice issue, it is essential to understand the past of that issue in both broad and specific perspectives. Such understanding informs us about the present and the future. The third assertion of temporal crime theory is that it is not enough to simply have an idea about the future; significant effort must be made to address a crime issue with appropriate knowledge of the past and present in order to appropriately impact the future in the manner desired.

From a public policy perspective, this third assertion is the most problematic in that it requires all of the most relevant stakeholders to take a position which inevitably addresses two realities; “resources” and “ideology.” Resources become an issue for most applied researchers and practitioners simply because resources always have limitations, e.g. funding, or physical capacity. Ideology becomes an issue simply because it is usually rare that most leaders, whether appointed or serving as elected functionaries, will agree on all dimensions of a crime problem. In other words, it is not common that those with the authority to make

recommendations and/or decisions dealing with regulations and laws, will see the scope and impact of these crime problems in the same manner as their counterparts.

In terms of how temporal crime theory manifests itself, the indicators supporting this theory abound. First, at present, one cannot absolutely predict the future. This reality is important to all criminal justice professionals and criminologists alike, in that unlike the natural sciences, the likelihood of certain behavior repeating even under the exact same conditions can be at best a prediction, rather than something considered to follow the scientific method. This relegation to a standard of empirical application, while limiting, is obviously still of great importance to society. In essence, it is still worthwhile to attempt to understand a reality to the best of our ability even if we cannot, at present, know with absolute certainty that the prediction is even highly probable let alone a certainty. Therefore, there must be some understanding as to how reasonably intelligent people can make reasonable efforts to avoid crime, based on knowledge.

Applying these assertions about temporal crime theory, the next step should be an examination of how this theory can be seen using various crimes we have data on as empirical testing. It is believed that given the issues we as applied researchers deal with, this theory might help reinforce the need to use appropriate assessment and action toward these very real public problems. As your outgoing president, I feel this level of effort to provide appropriate assessment and action toward public crime problems is not only necessary, but simply good fiscal and ethical aspects our society deserves.

I believe that SWACJ's outstanding new slate of officers along with the strong activities SWACJ has in place, is an appropriate way to help see temporal crime theory applied in our

region. Toward that end, during this 2009 to 2010 year, our organization made it a priority to increase the visibility of SWACJ. Under the leadership of Dr. Claudia San Miguel working with Dr. Bill Stone, we saw an exponential increase in the amount of material on our website such that visitors and members could not only understand more about our organization, but also avoid any question about our activities. Applying temporal crime theory to this effort to inform our region, the SWACJ website could provide even more information dealing with our need to highlight faculty, student, and practitioner activities within our region, such as our annual Quiz Bowl, Student Paper Competition, or research and service projects of faculty. The importance of this is again simple, SWACJ is made up of people who come from what I like to call “the business,” and our membership is dedicated toward making efforts to address crime and criminal justice education the best that they can be. Therefore, SWACJ is not only saying it has “something” to address the future needs of criminal justice faculty, practitioners, and students; rather, SWACJ has paid attention to our past in order to create useful tools for today, which have longevity and flexibility toward future needs that are broad. In essence, this increase in visibility not only provided more information, but sent a clear message to our members and visitors that SWACJ’s website is a platform for staying informed. In some ways, a larger platform than some national level associations is needed. Surely, the increase in visibility will need to highlight other things, but one reality is that this platform is something that enabled a team of officers to be effective.

Additionally, this year, the executive board of SWACJ continued the new trend to hold free-access conference calls periodically. These calls proved important to make sure everyone had a chance to voice themselves as well as each matter of business being vetted in real-time.

Between this effort and the website, any short-range or long-range matters impacting our region were effectively addressed.

The other major effort this year by SWACJ which also connects to this theory, was led by Dr. George Eichenberg, who worked diligently to research the feasibility of an associate level of membership for secondary school students. This High School level of access was seen by SWACJ as important to not only continue mentoring college and graduate students, but to engender the values of our work in the criminal justice system at an even earlier age. So my hope is that temporal crime theory could be a bridge to connect the technologies we currently have that help us understand the connection of time and crime, with the political hardware and political software which shape the political realities making it difficult for appropriate efforts to be either formulated or modified in addressing crime. Therefore, it is hoped that our work temporally in the present, will not only have future impact in terms of the careers of these secondary school students, but show them the importance of making the appropriate effort(s) with stakeholders impacting criminal justice issues.

With these efforts up and running, I can only say that it has been an honor working with such an amazing team of officers and it has been a pleasure serving our southwest region of the United States this year as regional president under our parent organization the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences.

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