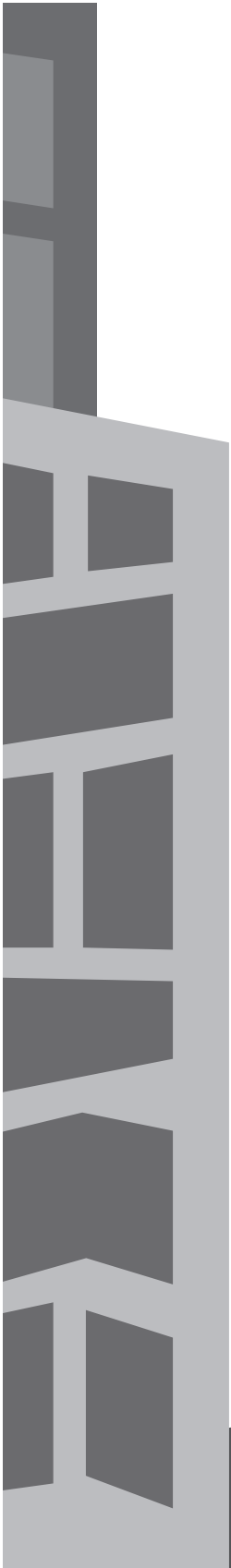


Chapter Eight.

Discussion and Conclusion



Discussion and Conclusion

Teenagers have annoyed adults for centuries, with their tendency to group on street corners, laughing, bragging, cursing, and squandering their time in idle ways (Den Heussen, 1657). Such behavior has indeed been shown to be related to undesirable outcomes, such as substance use (Thorlindsson and Bernburg, 2006), vandalism (Miller, 2013), gambling (Moore and Ohtsuka, 2000), shoplifting (Müller, Eisner, and Ribeaud, 2013), conduct problems (McHale, Crouter, and Tucker, 2001; Lam, McHale, and Crouter, 2014), and association with delinquent peers (Dishion, Andrews, and Crosby, 1995; Wong, 2005). In criminology, the relationship between unsupervised hanging out with friends (unstructured socializing) and deviance is generally contextualized within the routine activity theory of general deviance of Osgood et al. (1996), which focuses on the situational nature of delinquency and the concept of unstructured socializing.

The aim of this study was to elaborate on the relationship between unstructured socializing and adolescent delinquency. This aim was pursued by examining underlying processes to *explain* the relationship, applying an innovative data collection method to better empirically *investigate* the relationship, and by studying situational conditions to *specify* the relationship. Data were collected on the time use and deviant behaviors of over 800 Dutch adolescents (aged 11 to 20, derived from the SPAN project) and over 16,000 American adolescents (aged 10 to 17, derived from the PROSPER Peers project). These adolescents were approached through the secondary schools they attended. The two data sources (SPAN and PROSPER) each provided unique information to address specific research questions. The space-time budget data from the SPAN project enabled an improved operationalization of the unstructured socializing concept, as well as insights into the locations where adolescents spent their time in unstructured socializing. The sociometric information from the PROSPER Peers project allowed for the investigation of the friends with whom adolescents were engaged in unstructured socializing. In combining these data sources and integrating

the unstructured socializing perspective with classic criminological theories (e.g., social learning theory, social disorganization theory, and broken windows theory), the current study offers a thorough and detailed exploration into the criminogenic nature of teenagers 'hanging out and messing about'.

In this concluding chapter, I will recapitulate the findings, discuss their implications for theory, methodology and policy and reflect on the limitations of the study and issues that should be addressed in future research.

Involvement in unstructured socializing

The first finding of relevance is that the phenomenon of adolescents hanging out is indeed widespread. About 80 percent of the Dutch adolescents from the SPAN project and about 60 percent of the American adolescents from the PROSPER project engaged in unstructured socializing *on a weekly basis*. The frequency and amount of time they spent in unstructured socializing varied strongly among the respondents: 20 percent of the Dutch respondents and 15 percent of the American respondents did not spend time in unstructured socializing at all in the investigated period, whereas 15 percent of the Dutch adolescents spend more than ten hours in unstructured socializing in the examined week, and 15 percent of the American adolescents reported spending time in unstructured socializing almost every day. These findings are consistent with findings from an international study in 31 countries across Europe, the USA and Latin America (Steketee, 2012) and illustrates the common occurrence and popularity of this leisure activity among adolescents.

About one fourth of all hours spent in unstructured socializing, as reported by the Dutch respondents, was spent on the street. Other popular hangout locations were respondents' homes or friends' homes, entertainment or recreational facilities, and public transportation. Adolescents generally spent their hours of unstructured socializing at locations outside of their own neighborhoods and more often in disorganized and disordered neighborhoods than elsewhere. Data from the American sample suggested that adolescents did not necessarily 'hang out with the wrong crowd'; they generally spent more time in unstructured socializing with their non-delinquent than with their delinquent friends.

Unstructured socializing and adolescent delinquency

Research has repeatedly shown that adolescents' involvement in unstructured socializing is related to their involvement in delinquency (e.g., Haynie and Osgood, 2005; Maimon and Browning, 2010; Osgood et al., 1996). As illustrated by the literature review presented in Chapter 1, the unstructured socializing-delinquency relationship appears to be robust across countries, stages of adolescence, research designs, and types of delinquency. Findings of the current study confirmed that increases in involvement in unstructured socializing were related to increases in general delinquency, substance use, theft, and vandalism. The support for a relationship between unstructured socializing and violence was less extensive, which is consistent with findings from Müller, Eisner, and Ribeaud (2013) and Mustaine and Tewksbury (2000). It has been suggested that most forms of delinquency during adolescence are the result of psychological immaturity and external deviant influences but that more serious forms of delinquency stem from personality features or familial backgrounds (Moffitt, 1993). Therefore, it stands to reason that involvement in unstructured socializing is more predictive of minor forms of delinquency, such as vandalism and substance use, than of violence; unstructured socializing represents a situational factor that explains delinquent behavior with external influences and situational inducements. Despite the results regarding violence, unstructured socializing's relationships with general delinquency, substance use, theft, and vandalism were confirmed in the sample of Dutch adolescents from highly urbanized backgrounds, as well as in the sample of American adolescents from rural Pennsylvania and Iowa.

Why is unstructured socializing related to adolescent delinquency?

One of the studies in this book, presented in Chapter 2, was aimed at theorizing and testing potential underlying processes of the relationship between unstructured socializing and delinquency. The study integrated insights from social learning theory (Akers, 1998; Burgess and Akers, 1966) and situational peer influence approaches (Dishion et al., 1996; Warr, 2002) with the unstructured socializing perspective (Osgood et al., 1996) to formulate four potential explanatory processes. Findings of the empirical examination of these processes suggested that all of the four proposed processes contributed, directly or in sequential paths, to the explanation of the relationship. Involvement in unstructured socializing was found to 1) expose adolescents to temptations (perceived opportunities) to engage in delinquency and 2) to expose adolescents to delinquent peers, which subsequently 3) increased their exposure to delinquent group processes (delinquent reinforcement in particular) and 4) increased their tolerance toward delinquency. This is interesting, because it means that involvement in unstructured socializing has both short-term and long-term effects on delinquency. In the short-term, situations of unstructured socializing evoke temptations (opportunities) for delinquency and expose adolescents to pressure from their peers to engage in delinquency. These processes cease to exist if adolescents leave the unstructured socializing setting. Long-term processes arise because involvement in unstructured socializing evokes increased association with delinquent friends and altering of adolescents' moral values. These processes work long-term in influencing delinquency, because adolescents will bring their friends and altered values to future situations. Previous studies often implied that unstructured socializing, as a predictor of delinquency, mainly represented opportunities and short-term peer influence (e.g., Haynie and Osgood, 2005; Thomas and McGloin, 2013). The current study thus refines our understanding of how involvement in unstructured socializing affects adolescent delinquency. These findings are in line with statements made by Warr (2002) that socialization from peers occurs in a chain of situations: Adolescents learn what acceptable behavior is and what is not from peers' responses in particular situations.

What conditions strengthen or weaken the unstructured socializing-delinquency relationship?

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 each addressed situational conditions that potentially contribute to a crime conducive setting. Chapter 5 was concentrated on the functional locations where adolescents' spend time in unstructured socializing. Chapter 6 was focused on levels of disorganization and disorder in the areas where adolescents spend time in unstructured socializing. Chapter 7 addressed characteristics of the peers with whom adolescents engage in unstructured socializing.

With regard to the functional location (Chapter 5), the expectation was that unstructured socializing would be more strongly related to delinquency if it occurred at locations where social control was low. The extent to which social control is exerted at locations depends on the extent to which people feel responsible for those locations. People generally feel extremely responsible for what happens in their homes (private space) but much less for what happens on the street (public space). One might say that the more people have access to a location, the less they will feel responsible for what happens there. The responsibilities of places classification of Felson (1995; see also Eck, 1994) was integrated with the unstructured socializing perspective to theorize what locations would be specifically crime conducive. In line with the hypotheses, findings of the study indicated that unstructured socializing in private spaces was less strongly related to delinquency than unstructured socializing in semi-public and public spaces. In particular, unstructured socializing in public entertainment facilities, on the streets, and in open spaces was related to increased adolescent delinquency, more so than unstructured socializing in shopping centers, public transportation, and other semi-public settings such as schools and sports clubs. These findings are potentially explained with the supervision exerted by shop owners, employees at facilities for public transportation (e.g., a tram conductor), and employees at the other semi-public settings (e.g., concierge) who are assigned responsibility for a location as their primary job (Felson, 1995). Although this remains speculation, it is possible that such employees interfere if a nearby group of adolescents becomes too rowdy or noisy or when they show signs of initiating deviant behavior.

To assess the criminogenic nature of disorganization and disorder in the areas where adolescents hang out (Chapter 6), the unstructured socializing perspective was integrated with broken windows theory (Wilson and Kelling, 1982) and social disorganization theory (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls, 1997; Shaw and McKay, 1942). According to social disorganization theory, disorganization in a neighborhood is the inability or unwillingness of residents to establish social control in their neighborhoods. It follows then that, in neighborhoods with high levels of disorganization, residents are less likely to supervise groups of adolescents who are hanging out in that area. It was theorized that adolescents will, therefore, feel more free to do as they please, which includes participation in delinquent behavior. Similarly, signs of disorder can be viewed as cues that inappropriate behavior is tolerated in that area, that ‘nobody cares’ (Wilson and Kelling, 1982). Signs of disorder thereby provide signals to adolescents hanging out in that area that deviant acts will likely go unpunished. It was therefore hypothesized that unstructured socializing would be more strongly related to delinquency if it occurred in areas with high levels of disorder and disorganization. To examine these hypotheses, seven indicators of social disorganization were investigated (socioeconomic status, ethnic heterogeneity, residential mobility, family disruption, population density, structural density, and collective efficacy), along with an indicator expressing the level of physical disorder. Findings showed that, of all the investigated indicators, collective efficacy in the area was the only one with a robust effect on the unstructured socializing-delinquency relationship. Collective efficacy refers to “social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good” (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls, 1997: 918). Unstructured socializing in neighborhoods with low levels of collective efficacy was more strongly related to delinquency than unstructured socializing in neighborhoods with high levels of collective efficacy. This implies that when adolescents hang out in neighborhoods where residents are unable or unwilling to exert supervision, such activity is more strongly related to delinquency. In an attempt to disentangle the *situational (exposure) effects* from spending time in low collective efficacy area and the *socialization effects* from residing in such a neighborhood, analyses were conducted that only included the hours spent more than one kilometer away from home. These analyses confirmed the findings described previously.

Results on these first two conditions (functional location and collective efficacy) provide some indirect evidence that the broader environment, as defined by the locations where activities takes place, provides social control over teenagers 'hanging out'. The extent to which people feel responsible for locations (Eck, 1994; Felson, 1995) and the willingness and capability of residents to interfere (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls, 1997) both appear to strengthen the social control perceived by adolescents who are engaging in unstructured socializing in the location or area, which affects their involvement in delinquency. The findings do not allow for an understanding of whether the broader environment (e.g., shop owners, residents, passers-by) 'steps in' if no authority figures are present (in line with the assertions made by Sampson and Groves, 1989, and Shaw and McKay, 1942) or whether the broader environment will always add to the level of social control perceived by adolescents, regardless of whether authority figures are present. This would be an interesting issue for future research.

The role of the peers who are present in situations of unstructured socializing was explored in Chapter 7. The aim of this study was to determine whether unstructured socializing with some friends is more criminogenic than unstructured socializing with other friends. In total, four different friend characteristics were investigated: Friends' involvement in delinquency, friends' risk-seeking tendencies, friends' attitudes toward substance use, and age differences between the friend and the target adolescent. Findings suggested that it is particularly relevant whether friends are involved in delinquency: Unstructured socializing with substance using, stealing, vandalizing and violent friends enhanced adolescents' risk for engagement in similar behaviors. The risk was further enhanced if the friends were high frequent offenders (i.e., in the top ten percent of offending frequency). The other investigated friend characteristics (friends' risk-seeking tendencies, friends' attitudes toward substance use, and friends' age) were deemed to be of less importance. To isolate *situational effects* of spending time in unstructured socializing with delinquent friends from potential prior *socialization effects* of having delinquent friends, all models were controlled for the proportion of respondents' reciprocal friends that were delinquent. Additionally, analyses were replicated for subsamples: Adolescents who had both delinquent and non-delinquent friends. This offered a conservative control for potential selection effects that occur if past friendship selection is

predictive of present involvement in unstructured socializing. These analyses confirmed the initial findings.

The findings on friend characteristics provide indirect evidence that peers contribute to a deviance conducive environment. Delinquent friends may encourage an adolescent to deviance by 1) responding affirmatively to delinquent expressions (verbal or behavioral) and thereby provide positive reinforcement for delinquency (Dishion, Andrews, and Crosby, 1995; Dishion et al., 1996; Osgood et al., 1996); 2) instigating a deviant act (Warr, 1996); 3) provoking a (violent) response by threatening his or her status (Anderson, 1999; Short and Strodbeck, 1965); and 4) by merely being present and thereby contributing to a delinquency conducive situation because groups enhance risky decision making (Gardner and Steinberg, 2005; Warr, 2002). Future research should provide more insight into the situational processes through which adolescents influence each other because currently available data are insufficient to isolate them.

The findings on friend characteristics are also relevant to the debate in the literature about whether the association between unstructured socializing and delinquency exists independently from the effect of delinquent peers on delinquency (Haynie and Osgood, 2005). Some scholars, who found positive interactions between involvement in unstructured socializing and having delinquent peers, argued that the unstructured socializing-delinquency relationship was merely explained by association with delinquent peers and prior socialization by those peers (Bernburg and Thorlindsson, 2001; Svensson and Oberwittler, 2010; Thorlindsson and Bernburg, 2006). In the current study, an alternative situational explanation is proposed, relying on peers as motivators and facilitators of opportunities rather than viewing them as agents of socialization. It is argued that unstructured socializing is more strongly positively related to delinquency if delinquent friends are present because the presence of those friends shapes delinquent group processes. These processes have a direct effect on behavior and thus work situationally. This explanation is more in line with the original theory by Osgood et al. (1996).

In summary, the current study elaborated on, and thereby contributed to, the routine activity theory of general deviance (also referred to as the unstructured socializing perspective) of Osgood et al. (1996) by refining the conditions under which unstructured socializing is related to

adolescent delinquency. Findings of the study suggest that the relationship is stronger when unstructured socializing 1) takes place in public entertainment settings, on the streets and in open spaces; 2) takes place in areas with low collective efficacy; and 3) occurs in the presence of peers who are involved in vandalism, theft, violence, or substance use. The relationship is weaker or absent when unstructured socializing 1) takes place in private spaces (homes or friends' homes), public transportation, shopping centers, and other semi-public settings such as schools and sports clubs; 2) takes place in areas with high collective efficacy; and 3) occurs in the presence of non-delinquent peers.

Methodological implications

The concept of unstructured socializing is comprised of three conditions: The presence of peers, the absence of authority figures, and a lack of structure. As was illustrated in the introduction of this book, most of the previous studies into the unstructured socializing-delinquency relationship did not explicitly measure all three conditions. The current study improved upon these prior tests by applying time diary data to enable detailed and precise measurement of the unstructured socializing concept.

Time diary data allows for an operationalization that is closer in line with the original theoretical concept as proposed by Osgood et al. (1996). Evidently, one advantage was that it allowed for including all three conditions of the concept. However, the time diary approach had a second important advantage: It allowed for the inclusion of unstructured activities that would only be classified as unstructured socializing if peers were present and authority figures were absent. An example of such an activity is watching television. This activity qualifies as 'unstructured' according to the definition of Osgood et al. (1996: 640-641), who stated that unstructured activities leave time "available for deviance" and do not "place (...) individuals in roles that make them responsible for social control", which is applicable to watching television. However, Osgood et al. (1996: 643) do not include 'watching television' in their operationalization because this activity and three other activities "are more likely to occur in the home and are less likely to involve companionship." Most other studies similarly operationalized

unstructured socializing by only including unstructured activities that implied the presence of peers. This approach is understandable because their data did not allow for specification of whether peers and authority figures were present. Nevertheless, they were forced, in advance, to exclude activities that potentially comprised increased risks of delinquency. It is possible that watching violent YouTube clips together with a group of friends (without authority figures around) draws out crime favoring conversations that may result in rowdy behavior, especially when adolescents watch these clips on their smartphones while hanging out on the corner of a street. Time diary data allow for the distinction of who is present and participating in a given activity and thus enabled the inclusion of *only those situations* in which watching television occurred in the presence of peers and absence of authority figures. Therefore, the data enabled giving a more complete account of adolescents' involvement in unstructured socializing.

Generally, time use researchers have argued that time diaries are more suitable than stylized questionnaires (traditional questionnaire format) to measure daily activities. Most of all because individuals tend to underreport leisure activities if they are questioned about these activities over longer periods of time (Niemi, 1993; Robinson and Godbey, 1999), but also because stylized questionnaires are more prone to socially desirable answering and subjective interpretations of activities and locations. Furthermore, stylized questionnaires are unable to take into account potential secondary and tertiary activities and are more vulnerable to memory problems, such as overlooking brief activities and difficulties with estimating episode lengths (Robinson, 1999). The time diary method addresses these problems by questioning per time unit or activity episode and by letting respondents report their activities and whereabouts in their own words. These advantages of the space-time budget method for criminological research are discussed more elaborately in Chapter 3.

Using *space-time* budget data has another important advantage over the use of stylized questionnaire data because the information about the spatial locations of the activities can be combined with other information about that area. This enables a further specification of the context in which activities occur. Particularly, the study discussed in Chapter 6 applied data that was derived from community surveys, systematic social observations, and census data to scrutinize to what extent physical disorder and disorganization in the

surrounding area strengthened the unstructured socializing-delinquency relationship.

Constructing measures for this broader environment brings about its own set of methodological issues (Raudenbush and Sampson, 1999; Robinson, 1950). The current study made a modest contribution in addressing these issues with regard to the method of systematic social observation. In Chapter 4, an extension of the ecometrics model of Raudenbush and Sampson (1999) was proposed by taking into account the allocation of observers (who conduct the systematic social observations) over different neighborhoods. Findings showed that the application of this new model, which corrected for observer bias, had implications for the relationship between the observed disorder in an area and police recorded crime rates. Although perhaps to a lesser extent, this reliability problem may also arise when applying other data collection methods. For example, when collecting data based on community surveys that are conducted in face-to-face interviews and key informants interviews, it is practical to assign interviewers to one area to save time and money on travel expenses. However, as the findings from Chapter 4 showed, this can cause reliability issues if one intends to aggregate the collected information to construct higher level measures, which is generally the case for ecological research.

Finally, in the last empirical chapter (Chapter 7), social network data were applied on the frequency respondents reported to hang out with their nominated friends. This application offered unique information for the investigation of characteristics of the friends with whom adolescents were *actually* engaged in unstructured socializing. Nevertheless, involvement in unstructured socializing was measured in a stylized questionnaire format, of which I have just extensively argued the disadvantages. For future studies on these and related topics, it is recommended to develop a research design that combines space-time budget information on 'whom are engaged in what activities' with social network information about the relationships between the target respondents and their nominated friends, and about the behaviors that those friends reported themselves.

In summary, the current study contributed to previous research methodologically by improving the operationalization for unstructured socializing, by applying space-time diary data, and by combining that data with information about the broader geographical area. Furthermore, the

study used social network data to examine characteristics of the friends with whom adolescents were engaged in unstructured socializing. Finally, the study advanced the ‘science of ecological assessment’ (Sampson and Raudenbush, 1999) by proposing a refined econometrics model that takes into account the allocation of (systematic social) observers over research areas.

Beyond unstructured socializing: Specifying criminogenic behavior settings

The current study elaborated on the relationship between unstructured socializing and delinquency by distinguishing short-term and long-term underlying processes and by refining conditions that strengthen and weaken the relationship. These insights can be combined by applying an alternative and broader theoretical framework. Unstructured socializing is then perceived as a defining element within the concept of criminogenic behavior settings. In the remainder of this section, I will explain what behavior settings are; I will argue that situations of unstructured socializing approach the concept of behavior settings; and I will show how the unstructured socializing perspective can offer a point of departure for further scrutinizing *criminogenic* behavior settings.

The term *behavior setting* was proposed by Roger Barker, an ecological psychologist who sought to explain behavior, relationships, and everyday life of children. Behavior settings are specific units of the environment that incorporate both physical and social elements and have important influence over human behavior. They are “extra-individual units with great coercive power over the behavior that occurs within them” (Barker, 1968: 17). Examples of behavior settings are a soccer game, high school prom, church worship service, or PhD defense.

In an extensive fieldwork study, Barker and his associates divided up a town in Kansas into slices of time and space that were distinguished based on ‘standing patterns of behavior’ (Barker and Wright, 1955; Barker, 1963). The scholars discovered that children’s behavior could not be fully explained by personality or external social influences (from parents or school). Rather, the behavior appeared to be place specific: When in the drug store, children “behaved drug store” (Scott, 2005, about her personal

communication with Barker's associate and spouse Louise Barker). The scholars concluded that behavior of the children could best be understood by studying the environments in which the children participated (Barker, 1963). In scrutinizing the newly discovered unit, they found that the same location could host different settings at different times: A classroom could serve as location for an English class from 1.00p.m. to 2.00p.m. and for a parent-teacher meeting from 7.30p.m. to 8.00p.m. They further noted that behavior patterns existed independently of the people in the setting: Individuals could leave the setting and others could join while the behavior pattern remained intact. For example, in a supermarket, customers may come and go, but the behavior patterns of collecting and paying for groceries remain the same. The latter is an important feature of the theory as it underlines that behavior patterns are not characteristics of individuals within the setting. Behavior patterns are *extra-individual*; individuals are only elements within the greater setting.

Barker (1968; 1987; Barker et al., 1978) defined key attributes and properties of behavior settings that together formed the basis of his behavior setting theory. The list of key attributes is extensive and the theory quite complex, but in a simplified summary, the following important attributes can be distinguished: Temporal and spatial boundaries, standing patterns of behavior, behavior objects, and behavior-environment synomorphy. Every setting is made up of *temporal and spatial boundaries*. For example, the setting 'basketball game' is bounded within the walls of the sports hall, and ceases to exist once the game is over. A *standing pattern of behavior* is an "extra-individual phenomenon" that has "unique and stable characteristics that persist even when current inhabitants of the setting are replaced with other" (Schoggen, 1989: 31). Standing behavior patterns are bounded in time and place to a particular setting, and a behavior setting consists of one or more standing patterns of behavior. For example, in class, behavior patterns are teaching (the teacher) and listening (the students). *Behavior objects* within the setting can be human or nonhuman (social and physical); they can be buildings, park benches, or friends. Behavior objects differ in their impact on behavior. Some behavior objects are passive, others intrusive (Barker, 1987). *Behavior-environment synomorphy*; the different elements of the setting are similar in form (synomorphic) and the physical elements facilitate the behavioral elements. For example, in a classroom, the chairs face the blackboard in order for the children to face the teacher during class.

More recently, Per-Olof Wikström argued that behavior settings are the appropriate ecological units to examine environmental influences on individual *delinquent* behavior (Wikström, 1998; Wikström et al., 2010; Wikström et al., 2012a; Wikström and Loeber, 2000; Wikström and Sampson, 2003). He argued that individuals are affected in their actions by that part of the environment they can “access through their senses” and not by broader environments, such as the neighborhood or census tract, on which much of the ecological criminological studies still rely (Oberwittler and Wikström, 2009: 57). Wikström proposed a further investigation of *criminogenic* behavior settings: Behavior settings that are conducive to crime. He argued that “it is plausible that some types of behavior settings are more likely than others to create situations in which individuals may act unlawfully” (Wikström and Sampson, 2003: 125), so indicated by the unequal distribution of crime over time, space, and legal activities (Cohen and Felson, 1979). Particularly, he pointed at the criminogeneity of unsupervised and unstructured peer-oriented leisure activities, city centers, public entertainment settings, and areas with poor collective efficacy (Wikström et al., 2010; Wikström et al., 2012a). In order to measure these criminogenic behavior settings, he adapted techniques from time use studies to develop the space-time budget method (Wikström, Treiber, and Hardie, 2012c, see also Chapter 3) and started gathering data with this method among adolescents in Peterborough, England (Wikström and Butterworth, 2006; Wikström et al., 2012b).

Despite the important groundwork of Barker and Wikström, it remains largely unclear what defines and operationalizes a ‘criminogenic’ behavior setting⁴¹. In this book, I integrated the unstructured socializing perspective (Osgood et al., 1996) with other criminological theories and, in fact, constructed a practical definition of criminogenic behavior settings. The concept of unstructured socializing in itself approaches the definition of a behavior setting. As argued in Chapter 2, adolescents conduct behavior in a setting of unstructured socializing that they would not conduct in another setting, such as during a family dinner. This implies that *standing patterns*

41 In the monograph *Breaking Rules*, Wikström et al. (2012a) make a terrific start in scrutinizing the different conditions of a criminogenic behavior setting, referred to as *criminogenic setting and moral context*. The current study contributes to their work by investigating a wider variety of situational conditions, holding stronger controls for potential selection effects (of individuals selecting themselves into certain settings), and offering a more elaborate theoretical framework for how the proposed conditions contribute to crime-conducive situations.

of behavior are present in situations of unstructured socializing. A setting of teenagers hanging out is also bound in time and space. Imagine, for example, a group of girls hanging out on a bench in the Princess Beatrix park in Meppel (the Netherlands) on a Friday afternoon⁴². They go to the park around 3.00p.m., after their final class, and stay there until about 5.30p.m., as some of them are expected to be home for dinner. The *temporal boundaries* are thus 3.00p.m. and 5.30p.m.; the *spatial boundaries* are formed by the area in which they hang out within in the park. In this scenario, *behavior objects* are the girls, other people who are present but not necessary involved in the activity (e.g., passers-by), and elements of the physical environment where the activity occurs (e.g., the park bench, a trash bin, natural features of the park, such as grass and bushes). *Behavior-environment synomorphy* is illustrated by some of the girls sitting on the bench.

The specification of the unstructured socializing-delinquency relationship with functional location (Chapter 5), areal disorganization and disorder (Chapter 6), and characteristics of the present peers (Chapter 7) offers clues to what behavior objects in unstructured socializing settings are specifically criminogenic. First, *the peers who are present* have an important impact on adolescents' behavior and can provide immediate stimulation of delinquency (as audience, instigators, reinforcers, or provokers). They can also contribute to a deviance conducive setting by shaping standing behavior patterns in which deviant talk and deviant acts are tolerated or even encouraged. The present peers contribute to type-specific crime conducive settings: Unstructured socializing with vandalizing friends increases adolescents' risk for engaging in vandalism; unstructured socializing with friends who engage in theft increases adolescents' risk for theft, and so forth. Second, *the people who are present but not actively participating* in the activity are potential sources of social control and supervision. Their effect on adolescents' delinquency is illustrated by the findings on functional location and areal disadvantage: Unstructured socializing is more strongly related to delinquency if it occurs in locations where 'other' people generally do not feel responsible (Eck, 1994; Felson, 1995) and in neighborhoods where residents feel unable or unwilling to interfere when rules are broken (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls, 1997). People who are present but not actively participating in the

42 A hypothetical scenario, autobiographically inspired.

activity may also form targets or provokers of delinquency. One explanation for the finding that the unstructured socializing-delinquency relationship is amplified in public entertainment settings is that such locations are generally crowded with drunk, and therefore inconsiderate, people, which potentially evokes aggression. Third, *attributes in the physical environment* have been theorized to offer targets for delinquent behavior (such as ‘hot products’ in shopping centers, Clarke, 2002), to form cues that inappropriate behavior is tolerated (such as physical disorder; Keizer, Lindenberg, and Steg, 2008; Wilson and Kelling, 1982), or to facilitate delinquency through other ways (such as available alcoholic beverages in public entertainment settings that may evoke aggression and other inappropriate behaviors). Nevertheless, findings of the current study do not indicate that physical disorder in the area strengthens the unstructured socializing-delinquency relationship, nor do they indicate that unstructured socializing is particularly criminogenic in shopping centers. The criminogeneity of other physical attributes should be determined in future studies.

In summary, criminogenic behavior settings may be valuable units to examine environmental influences on individual delinquency. Nevertheless, much remains unclear about features that make behavior settings particularly criminogenic. The findings of this study can be used to specify criminogenic elements within unstructured socializing settings. I conclude that characteristics of the participating peers (whether they are delinquent), other people who are nearby (whether they feel responsible, willing and able to exert social control), and standing patterns of behavior (of poor collective efficacy or tolerance toward delinquency), contribute to the criminogenic nature of unstructured socializing. Further research is necessary to determine the criminogeneity of particular physical attributes in the setting, for example the physical attributes of criminogenic *functional* locations.

Broader theoretical implications for criminology

Criminology has thus far predominantly focused on *either* the patterning of criminal events in time and space *or* on background factors and life patterns that explained individual involvement in delinquency (Eck and Weisburd, 1995; Farrington, Sampson, and Wikström, 1993). As Wikström

(2006; Wikström and Sampson, 2003) suggested, the focus on a small unit that represents the micro environments in which individuals operate (incorporating both physical and social elements of those environments) has the potential to unite these lines of research. *Criminogenic behavior settings* potentially provide a key unit to understand 1) spatial crime patterning, 2) variation in criminal involvement across social strata, and 3) individuals' criminal involvement over the life course.

Pertaining to the first line of research, *spatial concentrations of crime* exist because a) something about the environment facilitates or stimulates crime or b) something about the environment attracts individuals (as visitors or residents) with certain backgrounds and intentions (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1995). Regarding the *facilitating crime* explanation, following the behavior setting approach, we would expect that social elements and physical elements (e.g., facilities, the location of trees or walls that prevent or stimulate supervision, signs that indicate standing patterns of behavior) at places deter, prevent, facilitate, or stimulate delinquent behavior. Understanding which physical and social elements of contexts are facilitative or stimulative of delinquency (i.e., what makes a behavior setting criminogenic) may help in understanding this spatial crime patterning: Places rich in criminogenic physical and social elements are more likely to produce delinquent behavior among their residents and visitors. Therefore, based on findings of the current study, as well as on findings of earlier studies (Wikström et al., 2010; Wikström et al., 2012a), we would expect that areas with concentrations of public entertainment settings and areas with poor collective efficacy have higher crime rates because they are characterized by standing behavior patterns of substance use and low supervision (e.g., Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls, 1997; Shaw and McKay, 1942). Regarding the *attracting offenders* explanation, to understand spatial crime patterning from this perspective, we need to know why potential offenders are attracted to certain features of places, and where places with those features can be found. Thus, we do not only need to know what kind of activities or social environments adolescents⁴³ are attracted to (e.g., unstructured socializing), but also in what types of locations they prefer to engage in those activities.

43 According to Osgood et al. (1996), all adolescents are potential motivated offenders, as motivation resides in the situation.

The Brantinghams refer to crime attractors as locations that attract individuals with criminal intentions. In the case of adolescents' hanging out, I do not think the adolescents are necessarily looking for trouble, but may nevertheless still be attracted to locations where supervision is low or with other benefits, such as the presence of recreational facilities. Adolescents select their hangouts not only based on social elements but also based on physical elements. The study of Bichler, Malm, and Enriquez (2014) showed, for example, that delinquent youth were drawn to shopping malls and large movie theaters to spend their leisure hours. Additionally, findings from Chapter 6, as well as from Wikström et al. (2012a), suggest that adolescents may be drawn to disadvantaged neighborhoods when engaging in unstructured socializing. Therefore, and based on persistent findings that crime concentrates in particular facilities (e.g., Eck, Clarke, and Guerette, 2007; Felson, 1987), we would expect that particular facilities, areas with concentrations of public entertainment settings, and areas with poor collective efficacy have higher crime rates because they are characterized by certain physical and social elements that attract adolescents seeking a place to hang out. As a final remark within this topic, I would like to point out that behavior settings theory is also applicable in explaining temporal variation in spatial crime patterns. To give an example, areas that facilitate both entertainment facilities and shops will attract a different public at different hours, depending on the opening hours of those facilities. These areas will thus form different contexts for (delinquent) behavior over the course of the day and week; one area can contain different behavior settings at different times, which might explain the dynamic nature of spatial patterns in crime. In conclusion, I propose that a better understanding of which behavior settings *attract* potential offenders, which behavior settings *facilitate* crime, and *where and when* those behavior settings can be found will enable a better understanding of static and dynamic spatial patterns in crime.

Second, *individual characteristics* that have consistently been related to increased risks of delinquency are gender, age, and socioeconomic status; males are more often involved in delinquency than females, adolescents are more often involved in delinquency than children and adults, and individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g., neighborhoods, families, lower educational levels) are more likely to engage in delinquency than individuals from higher socioeconomic status. However, as Wikström (2014: 74) pointed

out: “Being male, teenager or belonging to an ethnic minority does not move anyone, for example, to steal a CD from a shop, break into a car, burn down a school building or blow up an aircraft. *Attributes cannot be causes.*” In line with this, the link between individual attributes and their involvement in delinquency may partly be found in their exposure to criminogenic behavior settings. From previous studies we know, for example, that males are more often involved in unstructured socializing than females (Osgood et al., 1996; Vazsonyi et al., 2002) and that individuals from disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely to spend their time in equally disadvantaged areas (Krivo et al., 2013; Wikström et al., 2012a). It is, therefore, a plausible assumption that social variation in delinquency, with respect to these key demographics, is explained at least partly by differential exposure to criminogenic behavior settings. As Osgood et al. (1996: 652) said: It is likely that “routine activities are a key intersection between the macro level of social structure and the micro level of individual lives.” A better understanding and definition of criminogenic behavior settings therefore allows for a better understanding of why some groups of individuals are more likely to engage in delinquency than other groups of individuals.

Third, *life course crime patterns* are potentially also explained with exposure to criminogenic behavior settings. A routine activity perspective on the age-crime peak explains that adolescents have, compared to children and adults, considerable free time (they do not have major work or family responsibilities). Much of that free time is spent without parental supervision, more so than children, because adolescents gain autonomy from their parents as they grow older. Also, much of that free time is spent with peers and in unstructured ways, more so than in adulthood (Agnew, 2003). Indeed, several studies among adolescents show that involvement in unstructured socializing displays a similar age pattern as involvement in delinquency (Higgins and Jennings, 2010; Osgood et al., 1996; Stoolmiller, 1994), which are theorized to go hand in hand with more freedom and autonomy in leisure allocation (Felson and Gottfredson, 1984; Osgood, Anderson, and Shaffer, 2005). Thus, assuming that individuals’ delinquent dispositions remain the same across the life course, individuals are most likely to engage in delinquency in the life phases that offer the most opportunities. Their involvement in criminogenic behavior settings determines their exposure to opportunities for delinquency.

In summary, an understanding of criminogenic behavior settings and how they are distributed across space, individuals, and life courses may contribute to a further integration of three research lines in criminology: Ecological research, research on individual demographic and background factors, and life course research. An understanding of criminogenic behavior settings will thereby potentially expand our understanding of the variability in crime (Farrington, Sampson, and Wikström, 1993). The current study contributes to the literature by building on previous efforts in defining and operationalizing these intriguing and promising units. In doing so, I have argued that the concept of unstructured socializing of Osgood et al. (1996) approaches the concept of behavior settings (Barker, 1968) and that it may offer a great point of departure for further scrutinizing *criminogenic* behavior settings (Wikström, 1998; Wikström et al., 2012a).

Limitations and future research

Generalizability

Data for the current study were derived from approximately 600 adolescents (aged 11 to 20 years) from a large city in the Netherlands (Chapters 2, 5, and 6) and from approximately 10,000 adolescents (aged 10 to 17 years) from rural areas in the United States (Chapter 7). These samples did not only differ in urban background but also in other aspects. To mention one, the Dutch group was highly ethnically diverse, whereas the American teenagers were predominantly Caucasian. Thus, the results from Chapter 7 may not be applicable to the Dutch adolescents, and the results from Chapters 2, 5, and 6 may not be generalizable to the American sample. Furthermore, both samples overrepresented adolescents with a low socioeconomic status: the Dutch sample incorporated a relatively large number of adolescents enrolled in lower forms of secondary education; the American sample incorporated a relatively large number of adolescents who were eligible for free or reduced cost school lunches.

However, the aim was not to describe (inter)national spatial activity patterns of adolescents or to claim that the presented descriptive statistics about adolescents' involvement in unstructured socializing at certain

locations (Chapters 5 and 6) or with certain peers (Chapter 7) were generalizable beyond the applied samples. Rather, the study was concerned with explaining and specifying the relationship between involvement in unstructured socializing and adolescent delinquency; a relationship that has proven to be rather robust across nations (Steketee, 2012; Vazsonyi et al., 2002) and demographic characteristics (see the literature review in Chapter 1). Of course, further research is necessary to replicate these studies, to test the proposed hypotheses in non-western countries, and to explore their value across groups of individuals with different delinquent dispositions.

Limitations of the space-time budget method

Even though the space-time budget method has important advantages over other methods in measuring respondents' exposure to unstructured socializing, the method has its limitations as well. The most basic limitation is that, because the method is incredibly detailed and thus time consuming, the method can only be applied to a few days. This leaves room for measurement error because 1) it is unclear whether those days give a representative account of the respondents' general activities and whereabouts and 2) rare activities are unlikely to be captured. The decision to use time units of one hour and predefined spatial units introduce other limitations as well, such as the possibility of deciding on a spatial unit that does not fit the research topic (Openshaw, 1984), underreporting secondary activities, inability to establish the duration of brief activities, and the inability to apply the method to research areas larger than a city (these problems are discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 3). The two issues mentioned before, however, are considered to be the most important limitations.

With regard to the first topic, seasonal influences and the exclusion of holidays and Sundays may affect the extent to which the space-time budget information is representative for the respondents' general activities. It is likely that adolescents' activities vary with the weather, especially the activities that occur outside, such as unstructured socializing on the street.

With regard to the second topic, the method will only capture 'rare' activities, such as delinquency, for individuals who engage in those behaviors frequently (Gershuny, 2012; Van Halem et al., 2015). Although I have taken this into account by mainly focusing on the delinquency that was reported

in the stylized questionnaires, involvement in unstructured socializing can also be perceived as rare activity, especially when specified for particular circumstances. For example, relatively few hours were spent in unstructured socializing in public entertainment settings or shopping centers.

This is a potentially important limitation of the method if one is interested in individuals' exposure to very specific criminogenic behavior settings. The more conditions are added to the definition of a criminogenic behavior setting, the more rare exposure to that setting becomes, and the less likely that it will be captured by the space-time budget method. Luckily, a solution for this problem is currently under development. An increasing number of projects apply smartphone technology to collect (space-)time use information (e.g., Browning et al., 2014; Sonck and Fernee, 2013). As this method is less burdensome on the respondents, it allows for the collection of information over longer periods of time (e.g., a month instead of four days).

Individual characteristics

Evidently, an act of crime is better understood when taking into account both the type of environment and the kind of individual in that environment (Wikström, 2004; 2005; 2014). In the current study, I decided to focus on defining criminogeneity of the environment and thereby ignoring the individual risk factors. This was a well-considered decision that enabled me to have a detailed examination of 'risky environments'. Nevertheless, it seems appropriate to elaborate a little on individual characteristics and their interaction with individuals' surroundings.

There has been quite some (theoretical) interest in the investigation of interaction effects between criminogenic behavior settings, on the one hand, and individual dispositions that are believed to stimulate risk of delinquency, on the other hand (Wikström and Butterworth, 2006; Wikström et al., 2012a). In particular, interactions have been proposed and investigated between criminogenic behavior settings and self-control, attitudes favoring rule breaking, and risk taking. The theoretical relevance of this interaction is straightforward: The combination of crime prone individuals in crime conducive environments is believed to amplify risks of delinquency. The empirical evidence for this interaction, however, is not so convincing. As discussed in Chapter 1, most of the studies did not find an interaction of self-

control or impulsivity with unstructured socializing in predicting delinquency (e.g., Maimon and Browning, 2010; Thomas and McGloin, 2013), although a few studies offered partial support for such interaction (e.g., Hay and Forrest, 2008; LaGrange and Silverman, 1999). On the other hand, there is some evidence that the unstructured socializing-delinquency relationship is moderated by individuals' risk-seeking tendencies (LaGrange and Silverman, 1999) and attitudes toward delinquency (Bernburg and Thorlindsson, 2001). Nevertheless, based on these findings, there is no consistent evidence that some individuals are, to an extent, 'immune' to temptations of delinquency, whereas others are more susceptible to external influences. This speaks to the idea, advocated by Osgood et al. (1996), that most individuals have the potential for acting upon opportunities for deviance.

A theory in criminology particularly concerned with the interaction between individuals and the (micro) environments they are exposed to is Situational Action Theory (Wikström, 2004; 2005; 2014). The theory proposes that a criminal event is the outcome of a perception-choice process that occurs when individuals are exposed to temptations and provocations provided by their environment. The theory is aimed at explaining crime through the investigation of individual characteristics (specifically their crime propensity, a composite of self-control and morality), as well as the characteristics of the environments in which the individuals take part. The current study provided a more elaborate theoretical rationale for why some behavior settings are more criminogenic than others, and thereby theoretically extended one of the elements of the Situational Action Theory. These theoretical additions will hopefully be used to further develop and test the most important principle of Situational Action Theory: That delinquent acts are the outcome of the interaction between individual and environment.

Choices and constraints

The focus of this study was on the relationship between involvement in unstructured socializing and adolescent delinquency. Elaborate statistical techniques were applied to control for individual differences in background factors and thereby for potential selection effects that are pertinent if, for example, crime prone individuals prefer unstructured leisure settings over

other settings. Nevertheless, even though these potential selection effects were taken into account, the study did not discuss in depth the debate about choices versus constraints. It is possible that individuals ‘select’ the contexts to which they are exposed. Individuals allocate time to activities based on their preferences, their traits, their perception of the accessibility of facilities, and the constraints they experience that limit their alternatives (Chapin, 1974; Dangschat et al., 1982; Hägerstrand, 1970). We can distinguish self selection and social selection (Thoits, 2006); the former refers to selection through individuals’ preferences (e.g., risk-seeking individuals will prefer dangerous or edgy leisure activities over others), the latter to selection through (social) constraints on the available opportunities (e.g., adolescents cannot join a soccer club if their parents are unable to afford membership).

There is modest support for self selection effects. On the one hand, studies have shown that delinquent behavior is predictive of later involvement in unstructured socializing (Fleming et al., 2008; McHale, Crouter, and Tucker, 2001; Posner and Vandell, 1999; Vásquez and Zimmerman, 2014). On the other hand, despite the assertion of Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990: 157) that “ People who lack self-control tend to dislike settings that require discipline, supervision, or other constraints on their behavior; (...). These people therefore tend to gravitate to ‘the street’”, evidence that individual propensities (such as self-control or moral values) predicted later involvement in unstructured socializing is inconsistent. Some studies found that low self-control was indeed predictive of later unstructured socializing (Maimon, 2009; McGloin and Shermer, 2009), but others found that the effect disappeared after controlling for other characteristics (Maimon and Browning, 2010; Müller, Eisner, and Ribeaud, 2013).

Social selection appears to be more relevant. Findings of existing studies imply that adolescents are indeed constrained in their choice to engage in unstructured socializing. For example, studies have shown that disadvantage in the residential neighborhood is predictive of disadvantage in the areas where people spend their time (Krivo et al., 2013; Wikström et al., 2012a). In line with these findings, findings of the current study (Chapter 6) indicated that ethnic heterogeneity in the residential neighborhood affected the extent to which adolescents were involved in unstructured socializing, as well as the extent to which they were involved in unstructured socializing in low collective efficacy neighborhoods. Constraints raised by parents are also

relevant in predicting adolescents' involvement in unstructured socializing. Adolescents from single parent families (Bernburg and Thorlindsson, 2007; Osgood and Anderson, 2005), adolescents whose parents are not married (Maimon, 2009), adolescents whose parents provide insufficient response to rule breaking (Janssen, Deković, and Bruinsma, 2014), and adolescents who have much autonomy in choosing whether to stay out late at night (Goldstein, Eccles, and Davis-Kean, 2005) are more likely to engage in unstructured socializing. Also relevant in this regard is whether adolescents' have other reasons to leave the house, such as structured hobbies or jobs, which increase their opportunities to engage in unstructured socializing afterwards. Particularly, Gardner, Roth, and Brooks-Gunn (2009) found that sports participation increased adolescent boys' involvement in unstructured socializing, which increased their involvement in delinquency. Similarly, Staff et al. (2010) found, in a study among in-school youth, that having a job was predictive of involvement in unstructured socializing and, indirectly, of delinquency. They argued that employment provides adolescents with financial resources, which allows for more autonomy and opportunities to engage in more unstructured socializing. Osgood (1999) proposed that adolescents hang out with their colleagues after work, thereby increasing their involvement in unstructured socializing. Such arguments apply also to sports: Adolescents may have a drink and hang out after practice or a game. Another source of constraints is socioeconomic status. We would expect that adolescents from disadvantaged backgrounds are more often engaged in unstructured socializing because of a lack of alternative leisure opportunities. However, studies indicate an opposite effect: Adolescents from higher income families or whose parents received higher levels of education spent more time in unstructured socializing (Goldstein, Eccles, and Davis-Kean, 2005; Maimon, 2009; Osgood et al., 1996). Osgood et al. (1996) explained this by arguing that higher social class offers youth greater freedom of movement, which is consistent with the conclusions of Staff et al. (2010) regarding adolescents' own employment. Immigrant generational status was not predictive of involvement in unstructured socializing (DiPietro and McGloin, 2012).

In summary, it seems that existing studies provide evidence for social selection effects, and modest support for self selection regarding involvement in unstructured socializing. Further investigation of adolescents' involvement

in unstructured socializing, or their exposure to criminogenic behavior settings, warrants further investigation into such selection effects. Particularly, the interrelations between delinquency, delinquent peer associations, and involvement in unstructured socializing are in need of unraveling. The current study was undertaken from the assumption that involvement in unstructured socializing predicted association with delinquent peers (Chapter 2) and involvement in delinquency (entire book). However, as discussed previously, delinquent behavior may also predict involvement in unstructured socializing (Fleming et al., 2008; McHale, Crouter, and Tucker, 2001; Posner and Vandell, 1999; Vásquez and Zimmerman, 2014), and delinquent peers may motivate adolescents to engage in future unstructured socializing (Maimon, 2009). The association between delinquent peers and delinquent behavior has also been shown to be reciprocal (e.g., Matsueda and Anderson, 1998) and research suggests that the three aspects (delinquency, unstructured socializing, and delinquent associations) change together over time from childhood to early adolescence (Stoolmiller, 1994).

Other elements that make situations criminogenic

Another area of interest for future research relates to additional criminogenic elements inherent in situations of unstructured socializing. I did not provide an exhaustive list of criminogenic conditions nor found the ultimate definition of a criminogenic behavior setting. Therefore, I hope to inspire other scholars to explore additional conditions. In particular, the following aspects are recommended for further investigation: Individuals' perceptions of the situation, group composition, and group processes.

How an individual will act in a certain setting, depends on how he or she *perceives* the situation. Although individuals' responses to the environment are, to some extent, inherent to their personalities (Wikström, 2006; 2014), the fact that the same individuals sometimes respond differently in seemingly similar situations suggests that they those situations are perceived differently (Birkbeck and LaFree, 1993). Research about affective states, for example, indicates that individuals are less likely to become involved in drunk driving or other risky behavior if they are in a positive mood (Kamerdze et al., 2014). To better understand criminogenic situations, the current study into the *objective* elements of behavior settings can be extended with an examination

of the *subjective* elements, which are at least as important in explaining the behavioral outcome.

The structure, or composition, of the group of peers with whom adolescents are involved in unstructured socializing may be relevant to their risk of involvement in delinquency. *Group* refers here to a small group of about three to ten individuals who are participating in the activity and who are in direct interaction with each other. It would be interesting to investigate whether varying group sizes affect the criminogeneity of the activity. It would also be interesting to investigate the composition of the group with regard to 1) the nature of the friendships, whether it is a tight-knit group or assembly of distant acquaintances (Siennick and Osgood, 2012); 2) age differences in the group (Warr, 1996); 3) gender composition, whether it is a same-sex, opposite-sex, or mixed-sex group (Lam, McHale, and Crouter, 2014; Peterson, Miller, and Esbensen, 2001); and 4) variation in delinquent experience (Warr, 1996).

To determine the group processes through which peers influence each other's behavior, it is necessary to look in detail at the social interactions that take place. Observational studies have suggested that provocation and 'signifying' are important processes at play (Anderson, 1999; Short and Strodbeck, 1965), quantitative studies pointed at instigation (Warr, 1996; McGloin and Nguyen, 2012), and prior experimental research established the presence of positive reinforcement (Dishion, Andrews, and Crosby, 1995; Dishion et al., 1996) and imitation (Bot et al., 2007; Larsen et al., 2010). Future research needs to further scrutinize these, and perhaps other, group processes and disentangle their coherence with friendship characteristics and characteristics of the individual group members.

Policy implications

The research presented in this book was primarily concerned with furthering our understanding of the association between unstructured socializing and adolescent delinquency. As such, it was not undertaken to provide tools for practitioners to handle nuisances caused by unsupervised youth groups, to develop ways to discipline young offenders, or to prevent first offenders from furthering their criminal careers. Nevertheless, the study provides

information that is potentially useful for practice.

Parental supervision: Even though it seems obvious, it is important to emphasize the major role that parents still have when their kids reach adolescence. Parents have the authority and ability to restrict their kids' involvement in unstructured socializing (Janssen, Deković, and Bruinsma, 2014; Osgood and Anderson, 2004; Osgood, Anderson, and Shaffer, 2005), and may thereby affect their kids' involvement in delinquency (Goldstein, Eccles, and Davis-Kean, 2005; Janssen et al., 2015). Research on after school care showed that less supervision in the after school hours was associated with increased risks of externalizing problems (Galambos and Maggs, 1991; Pettit et al., 1999), increased association with delinquent peers, less impulse control (Galambos and Maggs, 1991), and higher susceptibility to peer pressure to engage in antisocial activity (Steinberg, 1986). Monitoring and supervision can also take on an indirect role: Bernburg and Thorlindsson (2007) found that adolescents were less often involved in unstructured socializing if their parents' knew their friends and the parents of their friends.

Hangout locations: Findings of the current study indicated that the perceived social control (in the form of the public nature of the location and collective efficacy in the area) at locations where adolescents spend time in unstructured socializing affected the relationship between unstructured socializing and adolescent delinquency. A policy implication would be to improve indirect supervision at such 'hanging' locations, in order to reduce delinquent acts of the adolescents who are engaged in unstructured socializing at those locations. One practical way to do this is to facilitate hangouts in sight of nearby residential buildings or shopping areas⁴⁴. However, there are complicating practical issues associated with the facilitation of hangout locations by the local government. First, adolescents are not always willing to hang out at locations organized by the municipality, especially if they were uninvolved in the decision making process. Increasing supervision at hangout locations may drive teenagers away in any case, regardless of their involvement. Second, facilitating hangout locations in sight of residents or shops may be beneficial for adolescents' delinquency risks, but is also likely to increase nuisances for those residents or shop owners. Third, it

⁴⁴ This implication was proposed and discussed at a meeting for practitioners on February 5th 2015, organized as part of the research project (Hoeben and Feitsma, 2015).

sometimes occurs that one group takes possession of a hangout location and blocks other groups, who are then forced to hang out at other, less suitable, locations. Fourth, adolescents generally choose their hangout location based on practical considerations, such as whether free wireless internet is available, whether they can shelter from the rain, and whether toilets are nearby. Local governments have to account for these considerations when organizing hangout locations⁴⁵.

Structuring leisure activities: To reduce nuisances caused by groups of teenagers hanging around a particular location, policy makers or municipalities could structure this ‘unstructured’ socializing. This structuring could be pursued by facilitating, for example, a basketball court or half pipe, or, in a more active approach, organizing activities in the after-school hours (Centrum voor Criminaliteitspreventie en Veiligheid, 2008). After school programs have been organized in the United States on a large scale (Gottfredson, Cross, and Soulé, 2007; James-Burdumy et al., 2005). Also, parents who are concerned about their teens’ leisure fulfillment could let their teenagers join a sports club, pay for lessons for musical instruments, or otherwise organize more structured agendas. Such activities would not only provide adolescents with structure in their day and week, but they would also increase adult supervision in the after school hours, as they generally involve a coach, trainer, teacher, or other authority figure.

Do we need to force adolescents into structured leisure activities?

Having discussed these policy implications, the question arises whether it is actually necessary, or even desirable, to structure adolescents’ leisure activities. Do we need to force adolescents into structured leisure activities? My view is that we should not. On the one hand, there is indeed quite some evidence for the positive developmental outcomes of involvement in structured leisure activities. Studies have shown that structured activities are related to future educational achievement, identity formation, skill building, emotional well-being, and several other positive developmental outcomes (Bartko and Eccles, 2003; Eccles et al., 2003; Larson, Hansen, and Moneta,

⁴⁵ See also Dutch reports from Centrum voor Criminaliteitspreventie en Veiligheid (2008), and Noorda and Veenbaas (2006), on youth groups and practical matters regarding the organization of hangout locations for youth.

2006). Further, the current study adds to the body of research that found clear relationships between unstructured activities—specifically unstructured socializing—and adolescent delinquency. However, on the other hand, there is not much empirical evidence indicating that *structuring* adolescents' leisure would lead to *less* delinquency (Gottfredson, Cross, and Soulé, 2007). We have known this for decades: “Research designed to evaluate the thesis that ‘idle hands are the devil’s workshop,’ that the fundamental approach to curing delinquency involves ‘getting kids off the streets’ has rarely produced evidence for the effectiveness of such programs” (Hirschi, 1969: 187). Rather, some studies have shown opposite effects, where the intervention group increased in delinquent behavior (James-Burdumy et al., 2005; Mahoney, Stattin, and Magnusson, 2001). Such undesirable effects are possibly explained by peer dynamics and the aggregation of low risk and high risk youth brought about by these programs (Dishion, McCord, and Poulin, 1999).

Although these issues have not been addressed in the current study, other studies suggest that the answer may be to *not* focus on structuring leisure activities, but on reducing adolescents' boredom, conflict, and other negative experiences. In situations of unstructured socializing, adolescents perceive more pressure from peers to engage in unwanted activities and more negative peer dynamics (e.g., inappropriate comments, jokes, or gestures) compared to in structured leisure activities (Larson, Hansen, and Moneta, 2006). These and other negative experiences may contribute to adolescents' delinquency, substance use, or other risky behavior (Caldwell and Smith, 2006; Wegner, 2011). Whether or not particular activities evoke negative experiences will differ per individual. For some adolescents, involvement in unstructured socializing or otherwise spending time with peers can lead to positive outcomes, such as emotional development, identity development, and positive social experiences (Allen and Antonishak, 2008; Larson, Hansen, and Moneta, 2006). For others, however, involvement in unstructured socializing is a way to ‘kill the time’ because they do not know what else to do. Unstructured socializing is then associated with boredom, and deviance a way to “add excitement to an otherwise uneventful situation” (Hawdon, 1996: 169). For those adolescents, intervention programs directed at leisure education may be relevant to improve well-being (Hansen and Larson, 2007) and reduce involvement in risky behaviors. Such programs increase adolescents' awareness of leisure time use, stimulate them to think about

their motivations to engage in activities (whether intrinsically motivated or because parents, peers, or teachers want them to), and teach them to develop a time allocation that appeals to their personal interests. At least one such intervention program has showed promising effects on reducing substance use among adolescents in Pennsylvania USA (Caldwell, 2005; Caldwell et al., 2004; Caldwell and Smith, 2006) and South Africa (Smith et al., 2008; Weybright et al., 2014). To that end, municipal policies, such as facilitating half pipes and basketball courts, indeed seem to be relevant: They provide adolescents with the opportunity to participate in structured activities, even if their parents cannot afford it. Further study into the associations between unstructured socializing, boredom, leisure motivation, and delinquency is warranted.

Concluding remarks

*Often it is not so much the kind of person a man is
as the kind of situation in which he finds himself that determines
how he will act – Stanley Milgram*

Behavior occurs in context. Especially during adolescence, individuals are exposed to a variety of external stimulants that attempt to dictate their behavior: Parents, school, but mostly their peers. Adolescents are extremely susceptible to influence from their peers (Berndt, 1979; Blakemore and Mills, 2014) and spend much of their time with them in unsupervised settings (Larson and Verma, 1999; Warr, 1993). Not surprisingly, it has been found that most delinquent acts committed by adolescents occur in the presence of one or two peers (Erickson and Jensen, 1977; Sarnecki, 2001; Warr, 1996).

Therefore, to understand adolescents' delinquency, it seems appropriate to have a thorough look at the settings in which adolescents encounter each other. The current study showed that some of those settings are more crime conducive than others. Settings of adolescents 'hanging out'—also referred to as unstructured socializing—were indeed related to increased involvement in delinquency (Osgood et al., 1996). Unstructured socializing exposes adolescents to delinquent peers, to perceived peer pressure to engage in delinquency, and to temptations to engage in delinquency, and it

makes adolescents increasingly tolerant toward delinquency. Unstructured socializing is particularly strongly related to adolescent delinquency if it occurs in certain locations (on the street, in open spaces, and in public entertainment settings), if it occurs in neighborhoods characterized by high levels of disorganization, and if it occurs in the presence of delinquent friends. In disentangling the underlying processes and scrutinizing the conditions that amplify the unstructured socializing-delinquency relationship, the current study enhanced our knowledge about *why* and under *what conditions* 'hanging out' is related to delinquency. Thereby, the current study made an important contribution in advancing our understanding of what is actually so bad about adolescents *hanging out and messing about*.

