

Online Classroom™

SOCIOLOGY

**CRIME
AND DEVIANCE**

Activities And Web Links



Crime and Deviance

Introduction

Crime and Deviance is a major topic in Sociology but one that many students find difficult. This is in part because of the fragmentation and diversity of the different approaches, making it difficult for both teacher and student to establish links and connections between them. This video attempts to address these difficulties by developing a framework to help clarify the similarities and differences between these very different approaches to crime and deviance.

We have also taken account of the dramatic shift in the focus of research in recent years away from *deviance and theorising about crime*, towards crime control and prevention. We look at how the field is changing and how some of the 'newer' approaches can be linked to the more 'familiar' ones.

The structure of both the video and the booklet is based on the idea that sociological theories of Crime and Deviance can be usefully divided into theories of:

- ***Social Causation***
- ***Social Construction***
- ***Social Control***

This division not only helps to clarify some of the diversity in the area, it also reflects some general traditions of sociological thought, the implications of which go well beyond crime and deviance.

This framework is also useful in adopting a ***chronological approach***, as in the video, to the teaching of the topic of crime and deviance. The idea here is to illustrate that theories are influenced by cultural changes in wider society and ideas also go in and out of fashion.

Before showing the video:

*Ask your students about their own experiences of crime.
Have they or anyone they know been the victim of a crime?
Have they ever been stopped by the police for questioning?
Do they have a view about the typical criminal?
What crimes or deviant behaviour will they admit to?*

Section 1: Origins of the Sociology of Crime and Deviance

Crime has always been with us but different historical periods have had different ways of analysing and responding to crime. This video begins with a brief look at the origins of the study of crime in the 18th Century. Although there won't be questions on this in the exam, it helps put the subject in its historical and social context, whilst bringing a sense of continuity to the subject and helping place changes in focus and 'new' developments into a wider context. As the video says, ideas go in and out of fashion and some of the newest ideas on crime prevention are similar to ideas from the 19th Century!

In order to clarify this historical perspective for students we identify three key influences of early sociology:

- classical criminology
- positivism
- Durkheim.

Classical criminology

Arising out of the philosophy of the Enlightenment, classical criminology was concerned, above all, with producing a more rational criminal justice system. It was argued that society was a contract; crime breached that contract and was therefore, a moral and a *political* issue requiring state control. However, that control should be rational and just. For example, laws should be clear, a person must be presumed innocent until proved guilty, criminal justice had to be consistent not arbitrary and, where possible, crime control should be characterised more by reform than by punishment of the body.

classical criminology: key assumptions

- the focus was on the criminal **act**
- there were no essential differences between criminals and non-criminals, criminals have **free will** and choose to commit crimes
- punishment should fit the crime

The ideas of classical criminology underpin the criminal justice system in most western societies and also make many of the same assumptions as recent approaches to crime control.

Positivism

While classical criminology influenced the judicial system, by the later part of the 19th Century the new social sciences developing in universities were becoming increasingly interested in the **causes** of crime. This work was underpinned by positivist ideas of the similarities between the social and the natural sciences. Crime was a *technical* problem and not a moral or political one. It was *caused* by some 'defect' and once you knew the cause you could put it right, rather like a mechanic can repair a faulty car. Of course, positivists differed in where they located the origins of that defect:

- in *biological* theory, the defect was to be found in the *body*
- in *psychological* theory, it was in the *mind*
- in early *social theory* it was less evidence of a defective individual than a defective *environment* [a longstanding theme in a variety of sociological approaches]

positivism: key assumptions

- the focus was on the **criminal**
- criminals were different from non-criminals [**determinism**]
- punishments (treatments) should fit the offender

positivism and classical criminology: continuing issues

The differences between classical criminology and positivism are important because they are still being played out in three longstanding debates in our thinking about crime and deviance.

- Should the focus be on the crime or the criminal?
- Is crime 'chosen' or 'determined'?
- Should the primary focus be on the causes of crime or its control?

Durkheim

Durkheim was trying to develop a **science** of moral order which puts him somewhere between classical approaches and positivism. He was concerned, with the problem of social order and the relationship between the individual and society. For Durkheim, the social causes of crime are not simply found in people's material situations as many social reformers believed. They are also to be found in people's cultural situations, such as the extent to which they feel part of society and the relationship between their aspirations and the opportunity to achieve them.

Although he wrote very little on crime itself, three of Durkheim's key ideas

- anomie
- the functions of crime
- social integration

have been very influential in the development of the sociology of crime and deviance. Some of these links are indicated in the following and may be useful in future analysis and discussion.

Links between Durkheimian ideas and later approaches

<u>Durkheim</u>	<u>crime and deviance</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• anomie and the regulation of the individual by society	Merton; strain theory and sub-cultural theories
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the functions of crime	interactionism and radical theory
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• social integration	control theory; Braithwaite

Questions for student discussion after Section on Origins of Sociology:

1. *How do the ideas of classical criminology transfer into the current criminal justice system?*
2. *Does punishment fit the crime in British criminal justice?*
3. *Do you think criminals choose to commit crime or are they 'driven' to commit crime by things outside their control*
4. *Positivism is often criticised for failing to recognise that people make choices in their lives? But does this view mean that people choose to commit crimes?*
5. *Durkheim argued that a certain amount of crime can be 'beneficial' for societies but how can crime (and deviance) be beneficial?*
6. *How does your school/college punish students? How might this punishment be 'functional' for the social order of the school/college?*

Following on from Durkheim leads naturally onto the first of our approaches:

Before showing this section of the video:

Ask your students to discuss why they think crime is still rising.

Who is committing crime and why?

How much of crime is poverty related?

Social Causes Approach

Chronologically this social causes approach is located in the **1950's/early 60's**: At this point of 'high modernity' the focus was still very much on the positivist project of finding the social causes of crime. The video illustrates the social causes approach by touching on strain and sub-cultural theories. Strain theory, for example, was a response to the puzzle of increasing crime in the midst of increasing affluence in western societies. In this section we elaborate on that by outlining social causation and its application in the study of crime and deviance.

Social Causation refers to the idea that regularities of human behaviour can be systematically linked to the cultural and economic organisation of societies. In simple terms societies 'cause' us to behave in different ways or, to put it less deterministically, societies make it more likely that certain groups of people will behave in certain ways. This approach involves adopting a **scientific** approach to the study of societies, searching for relations of cause and effect and, as far as possible, producing data that is reliable and quantifiable.

Social causation: key assumptions

- societies are objective realities that have an order and a coherence that can be comprehended
- sociological concepts describe this reality
- this reality can be illuminated through rational understanding and objective, quantitative research
- sociological research examines the ways in which people's thought and behaviour is shaped by social organisation
- the objective is to discover 'truths' which will lead to social improvements
- example: Durkheim on the social causes of suicide

Despite the many different forms they take, *social causes* approaches are making essentially the same general assumptions about the nature of social reality and how we understand it.

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Researchers in this tradition ask broadly the same **questions** about crime and deviance:

- Which groups are committing most crime?
- Why is it happening?
- What can be done to reduce it?

Examples of 'social causes' approaches

- ecological approaches (e.g. the Chicago school)
- strain and sub-cultural theories (e.g. Merton, Downes, Cohen)
- attachment theories (e.g. Hirschi; Wilson)
- radical criminology (e.g.)
- gender theories of crime causation (e.g.)
- new left realism (e.g. Lea and Young)

Questions for student discussion after Section on Social Causes of Crime:

1. *What is the difference between a criminal and a delinquent subculture?*
2. *In the video both Rob and Andy admit to criminal behaviour. Are there any differences between them and their attitude?*

Synoptic Link: Crime, Education and Health

Phase 1: 1950's/early 60's. In the middle of the 20th century, when sociologists of crime were grappling with the problem of the causes of rising crime rates in the midst of increasing affluence, sociologists researching other areas were asking broadly similar questions. Why, for example, in spite of free and accessible education and free health care, were working class children still failing at school and working class people still getting sick in much greater numbers? It was as if the working class people weren't showing any gratitude for all that had been done for them by the post-war government and the welfare state. Research in all three areas tended to be macro and used mainly official statistics and survey methods

Section 2: Social Constructionist Approaches

The second part of the video looks at the social construction of crime and deviance, locating it in the changing cultural context of the **late 1960s and 70's**: In the 1960's the field widened and sociologists became much more interested in the *social construction* of deviance and deviant identities than in the causes of crime. These approaches were more sceptical, playful and ironic: the consequence of increasing social control, labelling theorists mused, is increasing deviance. Sociologists became resistant to the idea that they were in any sense trying to find 'solutions' to the 'problems' of crime and deviance and 'criminology' became a dirty word to many sociologists. In questioning many of the taken for granted 'certainties' of earlier approaches to crime and deviance, interactionism was a product of the more questioning '60s, while radical criminology developed in the 1970s at a time of increasing interest in Marxism and class conflict.

Social constructionist approaches have their roots in philosophical idealism and stress the differences between the study of the natural and the social world. They reject the idea of sociology as a science of society and searching for relations of cause and effect. Rather the task of sociology is the creative interpretation of how **meanings are constructed** in everyday life and such questions usually involve research strategies using qualitative methods.

Before showing the video:

Ask your students about their experiences of labelling at school.

Do they know of any individuals who were affected by name calling?

How did it manifest itself?

social construction: key assumptions

- social reality only becomes intelligible in the way it does through cultural discourses; there is no 'access' to reality outside these discourses
- sociological concepts *create* a reality
- objective understanding of societies is prevented by the fact that there is no standpoint outside cultural discourses
- sociological research is about examining how meanings are constructed in everyday life
- there are no 'truths', sociology provides only relative interpretations
- example: Douglas on the construction of suicidal meanings

Crime and Deviance

Constructionist approaches to crime and deviance tend to have a wider focus, looking at deviance rather than crime, questioning taken for granted assumptions and rendering key concepts such as crime, problematic. They explore how criminal and deviant labels and identities are constructed and focus on how social control agencies operate. Constructionist approaches reject both the positivist notion of behaviour being determined and the realist notion of revealing underlying causes.

Social constructionist approaches return us to some of the ideas of classical criminology: i.e.

- the focus is on the deviant **act**
- there is opposition to pathologising offenders (i.e. anti-positivism)
- there is interest in how offenders (deviants) are 'processed' by the judicial system

Constructionist approaches ask very different **questions** about crime and deviance that change the focus of research:

- Why are some actions 'seen' as deviant or criminal?
- How are deviant meanings constructed in everyday life?
- What is the 'inside story' of people's experiences of deviant actions and social control?

Examples of 'constructionist' approaches

- Chicago school studies – 'tell it as it is' (e.g.)
- interactionism and labelling theory (e.g. Lemert, Becker)
- phenomenological studies of experiences of deviance [e.g. experiences of illness/disability, mental disorder, prison life etc.] (e.g.)
- ethnomethodologically influenced work on e.g. production of official statistics; processing 'mental cases' (e.g.)
- Foucauldian approaches and post modernism (e.g.)

Of course, not all the familiar theories fit neatly into this framework. Radical criminology, for example, is clearly interested in questions of labelling and construction. However, in the *final analysis* radical theory searches for real underlying social causes of both labelling and crime itself, while constructionists see these labelling processes as ends in themselves: deviance is what people say it is at a given time.

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Questions for student discussion after Section on Social Constructionist Approaches:

1. *In the video two boys who have committed crimes talk about some of their reasons and experiences these could be used to explore students' own views and experiences. For example, have they ever felt the same way as the boys in the video? If so, why didn't they act in the same way? Do they have any sympathy with the boys?*

The boys' comments could also be used to illustrate theories

2. *'I didn't have money to buy all the latest clothes and stuff... And I suppose I was quite jealous.'*

What theory does this illustrate?

3. *The boys 'justify' their actions by saying that 'things are unfair' and 'everybody's on the fiddle anyway'.*

Do students know a sociological term that describes this kind of response?

Synoptic Link: Crime, Education and Health

Phase 2: late 1960s and 70's. While sociologists of crime and deviance were becoming more interested in exploring how social control institutions produced **definitions** of crime and deviance and processed offenders, educational and medical sociologists were similarly gaining access to schools and clinics to explore social constructions of things like 'success' and 'failure' and health and illness. Detailed micro studies and qualitative methods dominated research.

The rise of realism

Part 2 of the video ends by looking at two major developments *outside sociology* that were going to change the ways in which sociologists looked at crime.

First, was the growing chorus of complaint that in its search for the causes of crime, its continual criticisms of society, the police, the media, and the criminal justice system and its persistent concern for the injustices handed out to those labelled as criminals, sociology had forgotten something very important. It had forgotten that crime has *victims*. This was something that had to be addressed.

Second, the election of Mrs. Thatcher's Conservative government in 1979 led to a change in how research was funded. To attract funding research had to become 'socially useful'. Researchers came up with some practical solutions to the crime problem. For sociologists the party was over. It was time to 'get real'.

Crime and Deviance

The movement from **Causes and Constructions to Control** had begun as well as another major paradigm shift in the way that sociologists (and others) thought about crime and criminal behaviour. Here the experts talk about a shift away from theoretical speculation about the causes of crime or its construction, towards a more pragmatic interest in its control and management.

- Section of the video
- increasing appreciation of the consequences of crime and rise of victimology
- increasing government funding for crime prevention

Before showing the section of the video:

Ask your students about their own experiences of surveillance and how it has affected their lives.

What crime prevention measures have they often come across when outside. Ask them to name 10 crime prevention measures routinely taken by their families.

Section 3: Social Control Theories

The third part of the video focuses on some of the more recent control theories and their application. Chronologically the period from **1980's onwards**: Since the 1980s the field has become increasingly dominated by much more pragmatic *social control* approaches which were responses to a recognition of the 'reality' of rising crime and to the influence of market values on social research which was now expected to pay for itself by being less theoretical and more 'socially useful'.

Social Control approaches refer to an increasingly influential tradition in sociology that views the subject more or less as a form of applied social policy. Work in this tradition confines itself to seeking solutions to 'middle range' problems and is not committed to specific grand theories of either society or knowledge. Research in this tradition favours comparative and quasi-experimental research designs using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Social and situational crime prevention

Control approaches to crime are closest to 'common sense' (though they raise all sort of subtle and complex problems for sociologists).

Control Theory: Some Characteristics

the new control theories

- a movement from study of deviance to **crime prevention**
- **realism**: acknowledgement of crime as a real 'social problem'
- **pragmatism**: focus on prevention and practical measures
- focus on the **crime situation** and the social spaces surrounding it
- **evaluative research** methods
- new ways of 'managing' **offenders**

An explanation of these new terms will help clarify this approach.

Crime prevention

The key idea of new control approaches is to try to **prevent** crime in the first place. As Downes observes, control approaches are closest to common sense:

*'In a sense we are giving practical expression to control theories of a **social** kind whenever we accompany young children to school or keep tabs on who they are playing with, and of a **situational** kind whenever we lock our doors at night.'*

Realism

In the 1980s there was a movement in the sociology of crime towards realism, that is, accepting the reality of crime and its consequences which, it was argued, had been forgotten in the 1960s and 70s. This is seen by most as a positive step, but the terminology is unfortunate and likely to confuse.

Realism in this context has nothing in common with philosophical realism. As Walklate S. [2003:44] puts it:

'The use of the term 'realism' in this context is more political than it is philosophical.... what binds different [realist] perspectives together is that they all take the rising crime rate as a real problem to be tackled. In other words, the crime rate is not to be seen simply as a product of either changes in reporting behaviour, or changes in recording practices of criminal justice officials, or a product of changes in implementation of the law. It is to be seen as a real indicator of a real social problem. It is in this sense that right realism and left realism share a common starting point.'

'Left' and 'right' realism

The distinction between left and right realism has become common currency in the sociological literature and as teachers we have to work with it. However, such a crude distinction is unfortunate for a number of reasons. Not only have the terms left and right become more ambiguous but, depending on their own political views, students may well approach them with preconceived ideas, reinterpreting one of them as obviously 'good' and the other as obviously 'bad' *before* they have understood them.

In **sociological** terms, a distinction built around structure and agency would have been more helpful. Although 'left realists' are interested in victims, domestic crime as well as street and property crime and crime prevention, they argue that crime cannot be divorced from wider *structural* concerns, particularly (echoing Merton) relative deprivation. Key figures in British left realism include, e.g., Young, Lea and Matthews.

'Right realists' do not necessarily deny the importance of structural (or psychological and biological) factors in the genesis of crime, particularly serious crime. However, they tend to give more weight to social action, or *agency*, arguing, like the classical criminologists, that *typical* offenders are opportunistic and, like most people, make *rational choices* about the opportunities presented to them. From this point of view, the best way to reduce crime is to reduce those opportunities and make the 'choice' less attractive.

Key figures in 'right realism' e.g. Wilson, Herrnstein, and Felson

Pragmatism

The argument here, used to justify the paradigm shift outlined above, is that criminology is about trying to develop practical solutions to help prevent, or reduce, crime. It is argued that:

- criminologists have spent a century looking for the causes of crime and have not been very successful
- even if crime *is* influenced by deprivation, family circumstances and the like, it does not suggest viable preventative strategies. Criminologists cannot give people better homes or a happy childhood.
- what criminologists *can* do is to offer people more protection from crime by making its commission more difficult

Focus on the crime situation

As a consequence of the objectives outlined above, attention has moved from the criminal to the crime (cf classical criminology) or, more specifically, the settings in which crime takes place. The argument is that the scope for prevention is greatest at that point by e.g. increased surveillance.

This general change of focus has been described as a shift to 'administrative criminology'. The arguments for it are that it seems to work to some extent. The arguments against it are that:

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- you cannot really develop long term strategies for crime without knowing its causes and
- it is 'right wing' because it accepts the status quo and works within it.

scientific realism: underlying assumptions

- rejection of the search for 'true' or real causes
- rejection of the 'defeatist' relativism of constructionism
- social sciences deal with *relative truths* i.e. one explanation or policy *can* be found to be better than another through evaluative research
- rejection of grand theories and general explanations in favour of 'middle range' research problems. [e.g. does CCTV reduce crime in this situation?]

Socio-environmental crime prevention

- the seminal paper is 'Broken Windows' by Wilson and Kelling [1982] '*perhaps the most influential single article on crime prevention ever written*' David Downes [1999:245]
- it argues there is a relationship between crime and disorder
- as neighbourhoods decline, fear of crime leads to decreasing informal and formal social control: people withdraw from social contacts and authorities increasingly turn a blind eye to infringements of the law
- solution 1: environmental renewal policies - e.g. mending 'broken windows'
- solution 2: 'zero tolerance' policing: minor offences will not be tolerated
- evidence: the New York experience: 50% drop in the crime rate: including a drop in serious offences:

Questions for student discussion after Section on Social Control Approaches:

After watching this section, students could be asked to think of sociological theories or ideas they have already studied that might be linked to situational crime prevention and restorative justice.

1. *In relation to their personal experiences, students can be asked describe their feelings when they go somewhere that is run-down, covered in graffiti and full of broken windows. What about CCTV? Does it deter?*

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2. *Have they ever thought of committing an offence but were then deterred by CCTV?*
3. *And what about zero tolerance policing? Does the school, or college, have a zero tolerance policy? If not, what you can you get away with? What would be the effects if zero tolerance policies were introduced? What would be the benefits and costs?*
4. *Can these ideas be applied to crime control?*
5. *Zero tolerance seems to have worked in New York, but what about its downside?*

Case Study: Mr. Joshi and 'right realism'

Mr. Joshi appears in the video. He and his family run a local post office/shop and were robbed three times in a year. The third time Mr. Joshi was beaten up and his wife was held hostage at gunpoint, all in front of their small children. Understandably, the Joshi family thought about closing the shop and leaving. However, due to public pressure and media attention, crime prevention measures were introduced in the shop. Since then there have been no more robberies and the family feels more secure.

These measures, located exclusively on the crime situation are an example of what are labelled as 'right realist' policies and many sociologists are very critical of them. Imagine a conversation between a sociological critic of right realism and Mr Joshi.

1. What arguments would be used?
2. Are social and situational crime prevention measures necessarily 'right wing'?
3. Can students think of better sociological terms that might be used in **critical evaluation** of these terms?
4. Do 'left' and 'right' realist policies have to be alternatives?

Questions for student discussion:

1. *Situational crime prevention measures may have been beneficial for Mr. Joshi, but what about their limitations and drawbacks?*
2. *Are attempts to reduce crime without trying to change individuals and/societies necessarily 'right wing'?*
3. *Can the results from New York be generalised? What about the 'downside' of zero tolerance policies? Could the 'Hawthorn effect' have been influential?*

Synoptic link: re theory. Most sociologists have explained crime in structural terms; however, more recently some of them have argued that criminals actually do make choices (agency) and those choices are influenced by opportunities, risk and reward.

Links to more established sociological ideas?

- **Chicago school** ecology: crime and the socially disorganised area
- **social integration**: neighbourhoods decline and social contacts are reduced
- **labelling theory**: i.e. labelling *areas* rather than individuals: some areas come to be 'stigmatised' as 'rough', 'no go': respectable people want to move out and people go there looking for trouble etc.; 'secondary deviance' kicks in

Situational crime prevention

- the origins, curiously, can be found in the study of suicide, the phasing out of coal gas led to a dramatic decline in the suicide rate ***synoptic link**
- the focus is on potential crime situations
- prevention by:
 - a) reducing opportunity
 - b) decreasing and
 - c) increasing risk of getting caught
- the focus is largely on technological solutions: e.g. target hardening, increased surveillance

Links to more established sociological ideas?

- re theory and method – scientific realism: re CCTV see 'Realism in the Car Park' in Pawson and Tilley [1997] pp. 78-82 ***synoptic link**
- re power and control: illustration of Foucault's idea of transition from sovereign to disciplinary power ***synoptic link** [see development of this idea, and comparison with education, on p. 9]

The final part of the video looks at Braithwaite, shaming and restorative justice.

So, before watching this section, students could be asked to discuss:

Why they think Japan has a much lower crime rate than Britain?

What sociological ideas that might help explain this? For example, is Durkheim's theory of suicide helpful here?

Rather than asking why people do commit crime, some control theories start by reversing this and asking why people don't commit crime. The students could discuss this. Do they commit crime? If not, why not? What would they be most concerned about if they were found committing a crime?

Reintegrative shaming

- key influence Braithwaite J. [1989]
- cross cultural analysis: reveals that crime is lower where collective interests predominate over individual interests e.g. Japan
- practical implication: to establish mechanisms where offenders are subject to collective pressures that shame them
- practice of **restorative justice** i.e.

an alternative to the present judicial system which is focused on:

- a) the offender and
- b) punishment and exclusion

restorative justice is about trying to restore the balance of a situation disrupted by crime

victims are given a more central role in the judicial process

offenders are held responsible for the actions and asked to make good

the act is shamed but attempts made to reintegrate the offender

Questions for student discussion after Section on Reintegrative shaming

1. *Would this work in Britain*
2. *Students could also be given roles and re-enact a restorative justice meeting. Other students could then assess what theories or ideas from the sociology of crime and deviance might be applied to help explain this process.*
3. *They can also discuss its possible benefits and drawbacks and limitations*

Synoptic Link: Crime, Education and Health

Phase 3: 1980's onwards When study of crime became much less theoretical, more pragmatic and policy orientated from the 1980s, similar changes could be seen in the sociology of education and health. Educational sociologists focused heavily on the effect of various educational reforms, while the expanding area of medical sociology examined things like patient outcomes and take up rates of preventative health services. This is sometimes referred to 'applied' or 'administrative' sociology and the dominant research strategy is evaluative research.

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Synoptic Link: Sociological Theory

- Durkheim and social integration: i.e. higher integration = lower the crime rate
- control theory: [e.g. Hirshci] the greater the commitment to others and institutions, the less likely people are to offend and the more they will feel ashamed if they do
- labelling theory: restorative justice attempts to de-stigmatise being labelled as an offender i.e. shaming the act but not the actor

The final expert comment on the video is from Dr. Kate Painter who says that 'its not deprivation that causes crime, its relative deprivation'. What sociological theory are her comments echoing?

Further Reading

the following are excellent, accessible introductory texts

Walklate S. [2003] *Understanding Criminology, 2nd edition*, Open University

Wincup E. and Griffiths J. [1999] *Crime, Deviance and Social Control*, Hodder and Stoughton

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Tierney J. [1996] *Criminology: Theory and Context*

Wilson J. and
Kelling G. [1982] Broken Windows *The Atlantic Monthly*, March: 29-38

Key Journals

British Journal of Criminology
Criminology
Howard Journal of Criminal Justice

Key Web Sites

The Home Office	http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk
The Prison Service	http:// www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk
Statistics on Crime	http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/index.htm

