



Breaking Rules

The Social and Situational Dynamics
of Young People's Urban Crime

PER-OLOF H. WIKSTRÖM,
DIETRICH OBERWITTLER, KYLE TREIBER,
AND BETH HARDIE

Clarendon Studies in Criminology

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by

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Preface

‘The aim of science is to find *satisfactory explanations* of whatever strikes us as being in need of explanation’ (Popper 1985: 132, original emphasis). In this book, we aim to contribute to the explanation of acts of crime by advancing the understanding of the social and situational dynamics of crime.

People are different, but so are the environments in which they live and take part. There is little doubt that the social environment plays an important role in how we act: it shapes and forms personal characteristics and experiences that influence how we react (propensity) and it provides circumstances to which we react (exposure). However, our understanding of the role of the social environment in crime causation is still rudimentary and leaves much unexplored. A particular aim of this research is to employ new theory developed to capture the person–environment interaction in crime causation, and advance more adequate methods for studying it.

This book is the first major presentation of key findings from the ESRC-financed Peterborough Adolescent and Young Adult Development Study (PADS+). The study follows a cohort of approximately 700 young people randomly selected from the UK city of Peterborough, focusing on the role of the interplay between their personal characteristics and experiences, and the features of the environments in which they live and take part, in their crime involvement. The study is guided by the recently developed Situational Action Theory (SAT), an action theory specifically created to account for the person–environment interaction in the explanation of moral action such as crime (see, eg, Wikström 2006, 2010a, 2010b, 2011a).

In this book we will concentrate on the role of the *social environment* and its interaction with personal factors in the explanation of young people’s involvement in *acts of crime* during the early to mid-adolescent period (ages 13–17). A second book will focus on the role of the social environment in young people’s development and change, dealing with questions such as how young people acquire different crime propensities, and how environmental factors (exposure) shape and form the extent and nature of their crime involvement and its changes.

The present research aim is to expand beyond conventional neighbourhood and place-based approaches in the empirical study of environmental effects on crime by utilizing new methodologies (and new combinations of methodologies) that capture (1) young people's exposure to different kinds of environments (their activity fields), and (2) the crime propensity–criminogenic exposure interaction in crime causation (the analysis of crime occurrences by kinds of people in kinds of settings).

We hope that the theory (SAT), the new methodologies, and the substantive findings presented in this book will help stimulate new integrated ways of thinking about crime and its causes and new avenues for integrated research and thinking about crime-prevention policies.

Per-Olof H. Wikström
University of Cambridge
3 September 2011

Foreword

Clarendon Studies in Criminology aims to provide a forum for outstanding empirical and theoretical work in all aspects of criminology and criminal justice, broadly understood. The Editors welcome submissions from established scholars, as well as excellent PhD work. The *Series* was inaugurated in 1994, with Roger Hood at its first General Editor, following discussions between Oxford University Press and three criminology centres. It is edited under the auspices of these three criminological centres: the Cambridge Institute of Criminology, the Mannheim Centre for Criminology at the London School of Economics, and the Centre for Criminology at the University of Oxford. Each supplies members of the Editorial Board and, in turn, the Series Editor.

Breaking Rules: The Social and Situational Dynamics of Young People's Urban Crime is a major contribution to criminology. Per-Olof Wikström, Dietrich Oberwittler, Kyle Trieber and Beth Hardie have set themselves the task of remedying what they see as the fragmented and poorly integrated state of theorizing about the causes of crime. In so doing, they advance criminological knowledge in two related ways. First, the book presents a full and systematic statement of 'situational action theory', a theory of why individuals break moral rules that Wikström has developed in several important papers over recent years. The theory aims to integrate individual and environmental perspectives on crime causation by proposing that acts of crime (which are defined as moral rules stated in law) are the result of a perception-choice process guided by the interaction between a person's propensity to commit crime and their exposure to criminogenic settings. Secondly, the book offers a first major presentation of key findings from the Peterborough Adolescent and Young Adult Development Study (PADS+) - an ongoing longitudinal of a cohort of 700 young people in Peterborough which combines interviews with young people and parents, analysis of official data, time-space diaries and a community survey. The result is a rich, detailed dissection of the distribution and causes of youth offending in Peterborough, and a major empirical demonstration of the explanatory power of situational action theory.

Theoretical and empirical studies of the causes of crime have in recent years been relatively under-represented in the *Clarendon Studies in Criminology*. The Editors are pleased to be able to go some way to making good this imbalance and welcome this important addition to the *Series*.

Ian Loader
University of Oxford
March 2012

Acknowledgements

The Peterborough Adolescent and Young Adult Development Study (PADS+) is financed by the *UK Economic and Social Research Council* (ESRC). Some additional funding (for the 2005 Peterborough Community Survey) has also been provided by the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales and Peterborough City Council.

PADS+ has benefited from the time and efforts of a large number of people who have assisted in numerous tasks, such as extracting official data, facilitating the arrangement of interviews, and generally supporting the process of setting up and carrying out the research. We would like to express our sincere thanks to the following schools, colleges, and other local organizations for their kind assistance:

Schools and colleges:

Arthur Mellows Village College
Bretton Woods School (now closed)
Bushfield Community College
Deacon's School (now closed)
Hereward School (now closed)
Jack Hunt School
John Mansfield School (now closed)
Ken Stimpson Community School
Marshfields School
New College Stamford
Orton Longueville School
Peterborough College of Adult Education
Peterborough High School
Peterborough Regional College
St John Fisher RC School
Stanground College
The King's School
The Voyager School
Thomas Deacon Academy
Walton School (now closed)

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Peterborough City Council (including the following departments):

Office of the Chief Executive

Children's Services

Economic and Community Regeneration (no longer exists)

Electoral Services

GIS Support Services

Youth Offending Service (particularly Mark Garratt and Adrian Alban)

Cambridgeshire Constabulary (including the following departments):

Management of Police Information

Northern Division Intelligence Unit (particularly Gillian Atherton)

Police National Computer Bureau (particularly Shirley Barnes, Gill Hughes, and Andy Plumb)

Others:

Cambridge Youth Offending Service

Huntingdonshire District Council

Peterborough Central Library

To ensure the highest possible data quality, PADS+ has employed only its own specially trained and qualified research staff for data collection (all of whom hold a degree in a social or behavioural science). It is no small task to keep track of and motivate more than 700 young people to take part in a longitudinal study. The fact that the study has a retention rate of 97 per cent over the first six waves of annual data collection (one wave of parent interviews, and five subsequent waves of young people's interviews) is by all standards an outstanding achievement, and can be attributed mostly to the dedication and professionalism of the PADS+ research staff. We would like to thank all those who have contributed to the study over the years. Below are listed all PADS+ researchers/research assistants who contributed significantly to the initial parent interviews (indicated by 'P') and/or the first five waves of young people's interviews (indicated by the number of the wave/s they took part in):

David Butterworth	(P)
Charlotte Read	(P)
Alpa Parmar	(P)
Nicola Every	(P,1)
Lindsay Whetter	(P,1,2)

Helen McKinnon	(1,2,3)
Aase Villadsen	(1,2,3,4)
Kyle Treiber	(1,2,3,4)
Louise Neil	(2,3)
Beth Hardie	(3,4,5)
Andrea Egerton	(4)
Caroline Moul	(4,5)
Seran Davies	(5)
Harsha Patel	(5)
Neema Trivedi	(5)

The current team of research assistants (Jenni Barton-Crosby, Lauren Bates, Beverley Garrigan, Harriet Ludford, and Loveday Newman) have helped in the compilation of some official statistics for this book.

Beth Hardie was responsible for managing the Peterborough Community Survey (PCS) in 2005.

Professor Jost Reinecke (University of Bielefeld) has kindly given us some valuable expert advice on aspects of the structural equation modelling applied in this book. Associate Professor Vania Ceccato (Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm), as a part of the initial research team, helped lay the groundwork for the geo-spatial methodologies we use. In the set-up phase of PADS+, Professor Magda Stouthamer-Loeber (University of Pittsburgh) and the team of the Pittsburgh Youth Study kindly shared with us their experiences of how to ensure high quality data collection in longitudinal research.

Former Chief Superintendent David Harvey and former Head of the Peterborough Youth Offending Service Bob Footer played an invaluable role in providing practical support facilitating our research. We would also like to thank Professor John Spencer (University of Cambridge) for providing legal advice, for example in matters concerning consent and disclosure.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to all the young people of Peterborough who have made this study possible by volunteering information about themselves and their lives repeatedly over the years. Without their contribution this study would not have been possible. Similarly, we would like to thank all the respondents of the Peterborough Community Survey who volunteered information about themselves and their neighbourhoods.

Advance Praise for *Breaking Rules*

Breaking Rules is among the most significant works in criminology in decades. It sets the standard for sophisticated and innovative measurement, for careful and well-executed research design, and for clarity and precision of presentation. It both presents and explicates an innovative theory of crime, one that is broad in scope and appropriately ambitious. The data and their analyses are of vital importance to cumulative knowledge in criminology. With this book, Situational Action Theory takes its place as among the most important perspectives in modern criminology and the study provides data of unprecedented scope and quality. *Breaking Rules* represents the best tradition of the science of criminology and as such it commands the attention of the field.

Professor Michael R. Gottfredson
University of California

Breaking Rules is a truly impressive book that combines all of the features of first-rate scholarship in the social sciences. The theorizing, in the form of Situational Action Theory (SAT), is creative. The methodological procedures are carefully crafted and skillfully executed to serve the theoretical objectives of the research. Moreover, the extensive and rich analyses of the data from the Peterborough Adolescent and Young Adult Development Study (PADS+) yield compelling insights about who commits crimes, when, where, and—most importantly—why.

Professor Steven F. Messner
University at Albany

Criminology has produced a staggering amount of data and findings. Correlates of crime are everywhere but theoretical interpretation of their meaning is fraught with disagreement. Wikström and colleagues cut through the fog with a compelling new theory and multi-faceted longitudinal study of adolescents that lays bare the fundamental importance of situational dynamics and their interaction with both person-level characteristics and the larger social environment of the city. The theoretical emphasis on situation and individual action in context is original and the empirical analysis is carefully constructed to assess major hypotheses. *Breaking Rules* is a breakthrough that deserves a wide readership.

Professor Robert J. Sampson
Harvard University

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