The ‘Crime Scene’ Experiment

Improving public knowledge through the provision of factual information on crime and criminal justice

Martina Yvonne Feilzer

St Anne’s College

Doctor of Philosophy Thesis
University of Oxford, Faculty of Law
Trinity Term 2007
Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between crime, media, and public opinion of crime and criminal justice. It sets out current levels of knowledge and contemporary debates in each of the three academic disciplines devoted to these aspects of social life, and discusses how they relate to each other. It focuses on the capacity of information and public education to influence levels of public knowledge of and, as a secondary concern, attitudes towards, crime and criminal justice.

The empirical research at the heart of the thesis employed a mixed methods research study drawing on quantitative – experimental research using a public opinion survey – as well as qualitative research methods – in-depth interviews and contextual data. The experimental research, the Oxford Public Opinion Survey and the publication of the Crime Scene column, was designed to measure the impact of providing factual information about crime and criminal justice to the public in a naturalistic way, i.e. by using a local newspaper column as the conveyor of such information.

The key finding from the research was that readership of the column was low and that the column had no measurable impact on readers. Overall, the research findings suggest that interest in, take-up, and retention of factual information on crime and criminal justice is not as high as previous empirical research has suggested. The Crime Scene study has implications for sociological theories of crime and punishment which rely on simplistic orthodoxies concerning the media’s importance in influencing public opinion on crime and criminal justice and the related assumption that ‘the public’ is straightforwardly punitive.
Contents

Abstract .............................................................................................................................. i
Contents ............................................................................................................................ ii
Index of figures ............................................................................................................... vi
Index of tables ............................................................................................................... vii
Acronyms ....................................................................................................................... vii
Acknowledgements ..................................................................................................... viii

Chapter 1 Setting the Crime Scene – Exploring some criminological orthodoxies .................. 1

1. Crime, media, and public opinion: Looking at a triptych ........................................ 1
   Some criminological orthodoxies ..................................................................... 3

2. Public opinion of crime and criminal justice ....................................................... 4
   a. What is ‘public opinion’? ............................................................................ 4
      A question of methodology ........................................................................ 6
   b. Why is public opinion of crime and criminal justice important? .................. 9
   c. Public knowledge of, and attitudes to, crime and criminal justice? .......... 11
      The myth of the punitive public ................................................................ 15
      A society of mistrust and postmodernist angst? ....................................... 22

3. The media in contemporary culture ............................................................... 24
   a. The role of the media ................................................................................ 24
   b. Media representations of crime – skewed reality? ..................................... 26
   c. (Mis-)Representing crime – so what? ....................................................... 29
      Trust in the media .................................................................................... 31

4. De-constructing criminological orthodoxies .................................................. 32

Chapter 2 Changing public opinion through information: reviewing the evidence and designing new research ...................................................... 34

1. The potential of information – how can public opinion be influenced? .......... 34

2. A new research design – a mixed methods experimental study ....................... 40
   a. The research question ............................................................................. 41
   b. A methodological critique – HORS 245 ................................................. 44
   c. Validity ...................................................................................................... 46
      Internal validity ........................................................................................ 46
      External validity ....................................................................................... 47
      Construct validity .................................................................................... 47
      Descriptive validity .................................................................................. 50
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>d. Content of the information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Questionnaire design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. HORS 245 findings in context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Addressing the research questions naturalistically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. The Oxford Public Opinion Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The ethics of the Crime Scene experiment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gaining access to a newspaper – The Oxford Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The Crime Scene experiment – writing columns for The Oxford Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sample selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Method of delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Questionnaire design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Conclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter 3 The Oxford Public Opinion Survey: a one-dimensional view of public opinion on crime and criminal justice?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The Oxford Public Opinion Survey – Oxford residents' knowledge of, and attitudes towards, crime and criminal justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. The OPOS response rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Oxford residents taking part in the survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Survey respondents' levels of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Pure guess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Measuring attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Concern about crime as a social issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Levels of confidence in the criminal justice system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Measuring punitiveness?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Psycho-social factors influencing attitudes to crime and criminal justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- CCTV and homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. After the Crime Scene columns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. The experimental group – <em>The Oxford Times</em> readers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Crime Scene column readers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Impact of column on levels of knowledge of column readers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Issues of validity in the OPOS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Impact of Crime Scene column on column readers' attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Successfully manipulating public knowledge?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 4 Adding a second dimension: Listening to respondents of the Oxford Public Opinion Survey .........................................................135

1. Reading between the lines – qualitative data emerging from a quantitative research tool.................................................................135
   Does everyone have a view on crime? .................................................................142
   “I am far more ignorant than I thought I was” ..................................................143

2. Simple answers to simple questions? Designing in-depth interviews ..........144
   a. From research design .............................................................................144
   b. …to implementation ..............................................................................148
   c. …to analysis ..........................................................................................152

3. Listening to people talk .............................................................................153
   a. Thematic analysis ................................................................................160
      The myth of crime as a salient issue ......................................................160
      The complexity of crime and criminal justice ........................................162
      The magic bullet: the role of factual information ...................................164
      ‘Seeing’ the Crime Scene column .........................................................167
      Public views of public opinion surveys ...............................................170
      “Good news is no news!” ...................................................................172
      The ‘decline and fall of the “British Way of Life” ’ .................................173

4. A different view of the experiment? ............................................................174

Chapter 5 Locating the Crime Scene experiment in space and time ....176

1. The City of Oxford ....................................................................................180
   a. The city of dreaming spires ....................................................................180
   b. Dealing with crime locally ....................................................................184
   c. A special point in time? ........................................................................187

2. The Oxford Times ........................................................................................192
   a. Background of a local weekly newspaper .............................................192

3. Seeking out context – exploratory interviews ..........................................205
   a. Interviews with media insiders ..............................................................205
   b. Interviews with opinion leaders ............................................................207

4. Criminologists as columnists – doing public criminology? .....................211
   a. The process of writing a weekly newspaper column ............................211
   b. Giving up editorial control .................................................................213
   c. Communicating with column readers ..................................................217
Chapter 6 The importance of telling a good story .........................223
1. Reflecting on the Crime Scene study – the practicalities of mixed methods
research ........................................................................................................223
   a. Collecting different types of data ...........................................................223
   b. Separate stages of data analysis ...........................................................224
2. Re-reading the literature on crime, the media, and public opinion –
   substantive findings from the Crime Scene study .....................................227
   a. Interpreting a public opinion survey.....................................................227
   b. Public criminology – the way ahead? ....................................................229
   c. It’s all about a good story ....................................................................232
3. Implications of the Crime Scene study for theories of crime
   and punishment ......................................................................................234
   a. Is there room for the concept of public punitiveness? .......................234
   b. Is the media stoking up fear of crime? ...............................................236
4. The crime, media, and public opinion triptych ....................................237

APPENDICES ..........................................................................................239
Appendix 1: Oxford Public Opinion Survey Part 1 ........................................240
Appendix 2: Additional questions included in repeat and post-only survey ....246
Appendix 3: Covering letter for Oxford Public Opinion Survey ....................248
Appendix 4: Covering letter for in-depth interviews .....................................250
Appendix 5: Interview schedule ..................................................................252
Appendix 6: Fact sheet ...............................................................................256
Appendix 7: Summary of research ...............................................................262
Appendix 8: Correlations between socio-demographic and psycho-social variables
and attitudes to crime and criminal justice: various tables .......................264
Appendix 9: Sample columns .......................................................................275
Appendix 10: Profile of Oxford residents taking part in the survey ...............277
**Index of figures**

Figure 1. Trends in levels of punitiveness? ............................................................. 18
Figure 2. Sentencing too lenient by attitude strength .............................................. 20
Figure 3. Attitudes to crime and criminal justice by age: Percentage agreeing with statement .................................................................................................. 96
Figure 4. Attitudes to crime and criminal justice by educational status: Percentage agreeing with statement ........................................................ 98
Figure 5. Attitudes to crime and criminal justice by OPOS Knowledge Score: Percentage agreeing with statement ...........................................97
Figure 6. Attitudes to crime and criminal justice by political affiliation: Percentage agreeing with statement ........................................................ 101
Figure 7. Attitudes to crime and criminal justice by newspaper readership: Percentage agreeing with statement ........................................ 102
Figure 8. Attitudes to crime and criminal justice by perception of risk of serious victimisation in the future: Percentage agreeing with statement ..........107
Figure 9. Attitudes to crime and criminal justice by trust in others: Percentage agreeing with statement .............................................................108
Figure 10. Attitudes to crime and criminal justice by satisfaction with financial situation: Percentage agreeing with statement.................................109
Figure 11. Front page of *The Oxford Times* ........................................................... 197
Figure 12. Front page of *Oxford Mail* ................................................................. 198
Figure 13. Crime Scene column, published in *The Oxford Times*, 5 Nov 2004 ...... 216
Index of tables

Table 1. Research questions and methods ............................................................ 42
Table 2. Survey mail out at each stage of design and response rate .................. 75
Table 3. Proportion of correct answers on knowledge questions ....................... 81
Table 4. Social issues respondents were most concerned about ....................... 86
Table 5. Attitudes towards crime, criminals, and criminal justice .................... 91
Table 6. Levels of knowledge of column readers ............................................. 120
Table 7. Levels of knowledge in various samples: 1 ........................................ 124
Table 8. Levels of knowledge in various samples: 2 ....................................... 126
Table 9. Attitudes of column readers ............................................................. 129
Table 10. Attitudes of various samples ............................................................ 130

Acronyms

BCS – British Crime Survey
BSAS – British Social Attitudes Survey
CPS – Crown Prosecution Service
HORS – Home Office Research Study
OPOS – Oxford Public Opinion Survey
TVP – Thames Valley Police
YJB – Youth Justice Board
YOT – Youth Offending Team
Acknowledgements

It is difficult to say ‘thank you' to many different people for different reasons without sounding boring, pretentious, or even insincere. Thus, I will keep these acknowledgements simple and brief, trusting that those concerned will be able to grasp the extent of my gratitude.

It is only proper to start with those who enabled the Crime Scene study. Sincere thanks go the Nuffield Foundation for funding the research and the Editor of The Oxford Times for offering the weekly column space and his support throughout the research. I gratefully acknowledge the time offered by those who decided to participate in one, or even two, of the Oxford Public Opinion Surveys, and in particular to those who cared enough to comment on badly worded questions and to explain their responses. I am especially indebted to those Oxford residents, opinion leaders, and media insiders who took time out of their busy schedules for the lengthy in-depth interviews.

The crime reporter at The Oxford Times allowed me to spend some time ‘shadowing' him and we shared a few interesting lunches. He opened my eyes to the similarities and the differences between journalistic and academic research and I am grateful for that.

Friends and colleagues both at Oxford and now in Bangor have provided invaluable support in getting me through the ups and downs of completing a thesis, and special thanks go to Ros Burnett, Cory Way, and, in particular, the Crim5 girls for all the fun dinners and the shared suffering.

Julian Roberts joined Richard Young as a supervisor in 2005 and his expertise in the field of public opinion is second to none – I am grateful for the help and advice he provided. Thanks are also due to Mike Hough, another eminent
criminologist and writer on the subject of public opinion, who provided advice and support when needed.

Richard Young was my supervisor from beginning to end, despite his desertion from Oxford. He was an inspiration both in the academic standards he set and in his professional conduct. I truly valued every single (of the few) word(s) of praise I received and the (many more) words of – always constructive – criticism.

Finally, I wish to thank my friends and my family whose confidence that ‘I would do it’, although wearing heavy at times, helped me immensely to get through this. Danke fuer alles, Bernd.

Martina Yvonne Feilzer, 20 September 2007

Für meinen Vater
Chapter 1

Setting the Crime Scene – Exploring some criminological orthodoxies

1. Crime, media, and public opinion: Looking at a triptych

Once upon a time Britain was a safe place, or so some would have us believe:
‘Violence and terror lurks in the once-safe streets [of Britain]. The family no longer holds its proper place and parents have abandoned their responsibilities. The police and magistrates have had their hands tied by the interference of sentimentalists and do-gooders. A new generation is upon us of mindless bully boys, vandals, muggers, head-bangers, football rowdies, granny-murderers, boot boys, toughs and tearaways who laugh in the face of the law, as we stand before the rising tide of violence and disorder with a Canute-like impotence’ (Pearson, 1983, 3).

The themes presented in Pearson’s quote are some examples of the enduring ‘master-narratives’ (Young, 1992, 71) on crime and criminal justice rehearsed in the media and condemned as misrepresentation, mythology, and an incitement of moral panics by criminologists and some sociologists (Cohen & Young, 1973; Kappeler et al., 2004; Pearson, 1983). However, cursory reading of the criminological literature about the relationship between crime, media, and public opinion would suggest that similar ‘criminological preconceptions’ or orthodoxies exist in respect to that relationship (Chancer & McLaughlin, 2007, 170).

Crime, media, and public opinion constitute three different aspects of the social world each with their own academic discipline and areas of research, each with their own complex story and imagery. Theoretical debates and empirical research have to contend with different complexities and academic sensitivities and be wary of superficial readings of the academic literature involved in each of them.
Combining these three different stories or images into one coherent picture, in a way looking at a triptych as a whole, while paying due attention to its constituent parts, is a difficult undertaking. There will also be a tendency to regard one’s own academic discipline, criminology in this case, as the centrepiece of the triptych potentially exaggerating its importance and centrality to the overall picture. This may explain the perceived preconceptions found in the criminological literature which, at times, draws on terms and concepts developed in each of the separate disciplines without explanation or definition of how they are used, operating ‘as little more than slogans’ (Hammersley, 1995, 19). In that way they may obstruct thinking rather than help to advance knowledge.

However, the assumption of the existence of criminological preconceptions itself may be a misinterpretation. When wider theoretical arguments are being made in relation to the overall picture of crime, media, and public opinion, background knowledge and complexities tend to be simplified to serve such arguments. In that process the finer details of academic debate in the individual disciplines may become blurred and complexities disappear at first sight. Therefore, criminological debates ought to be put under the microscope lest one falsely assumes a broad consensus exists among criminologists or one accuses authors of simplistic views which they do not hold in reality.

It is in this context that the empirical study at the heart of this thesis is exploring methods of subverting the existing master-narratives in the media while interrogating the details and the validity of the themes permeating criminology. The study asked whether presenting factual information about crime and criminal justice through a weekly newspaper column would have any effect on readers of a local newspaper, *The Oxford Times*. The research design is based on a number of underlying, implicit assumptions regarding the nature of public opinion of crime and criminal justice, and the influence of the media on public opinion. These form the key concepts discussed in this thesis and need to be made explicit in order to render
them meaningful for the analysis and interpretation of the findings from the empirical research (Young, 1992, 73). Thus, this chapter starts with a short account of the main contentions about the nature of public opinion on crime and criminal justice, and the relationship between the media and public opinion. Subsequently, these notions will be examined more closely as to their origin, relevance for criminology, and limitations.

Some criminological orthodoxies

It seems uncontroversial to claim that public opinion of, or more specifically public confidence in, the criminal justice system is low and that this is partly due to the fact that public knowledge of crime and criminal justice is poor. This perceived link between knowledge and confidence has led to the hypothesis that changes in levels of knowledge can lead to changes in confidence (Roberts & Hough, 2005b, 31).¹

The media’s importance in influencing public opinion has been asserted through statements such as that ‘the media are at the centre of all the influences’ in the relationship between the public and policy makers (Indermaur & Hough, 2002, 202). The media are perceived to ‘shape the accepted realities about crime and justice directly and indirectly’ (Indermaur & Hough, 2002, 202) creating a ‘growing interdependence of media representation and social “reality”’ (Reiner, 2002, 408). This relationship has been a cause for concern for those claiming that the media’s influence leads to exaggerated fear about crime and increased support for repressive criminal justice policies (Freiberg, 2001, 265; Reiner, 2002, 376; Schneider, 1978, 163).²

¹ This has been termed the cognitive deficit model which will be further explained below (Loader, forthcoming).

² For criticism of the assumption that media use is linked to fear of crime, see Ditton et al., 2004.
The assumptions about the nature of public opinion and its relationship with the media have gained new theoretical importance with the advent of the ‘new punitiveness’. Theorists of the ‘new punitiveness’ seek to explain the development of penal policy over the past three decades with reference to changes in public attitudes towards crime and punishment (for a summary, see Pratt et al., 2005, xi-xxv). The main contention of this theoretical framework is that punitive public opinion is, at least partly, responsible for a shift in UK policy towards a more repressive and punitive criminal justice system (Garland & Sparks, 2000, 197). The media have been blamed partly for this rise in public punitiveness (Dijk, 1978, 34; Reiner, 2002, 376).

However, the literature relating to the concepts outlined above deserves to be scrutinised more closely extending beyond the reach of the criminological literature to the disciplines of media studies, social psychology, and sociology where some of the notions originate from. The following sections summarise the relevant literatures and outline the main debates pertinent to this thesis. Some of those debates will be explored in detail in this chapter but others will be taken up throughout the thesis where they aid a better appreciation of the empirical research and the research findings.

2. Public opinion of crime and criminal justice

a. What is ‘public opinion’?

In sociological and criminological literature as well as the popular media the term ‘public opinion’ is used frequently as self-explanatory without theoretical discussion or conceptual clarity. However, ‘the precise nature of “public opinion” is still a mystery’ (Funkhouser, 1973, 62) and although ‘everything appears to be obvious, … nothing is so in fact’ (Robert, 1978, 56). As a concept, public opinion in its various guises has a long history, going back beyond the origins of the modern nation state.
It was first coined as a term by Jean-Jacques Rousseau – who thought of public opinion as ‘vain prejudices’ (Speier, 1950, 378) – but was discussed even before that as a developing concept among classical writers (Converse, 1987, 13; Lippman, 1956; Noelle-Neumann, 1979; Speier, 1950).

Public opinion has been used by two schools of thought to describe two different but related concepts, one rooted in the social-psychological sphere and one in the political sphere (Noelle-Neumann, 1979, 152). Public opinion emerged first in the social-psychological sphere describing communication among citizens (Speier, 1950, 376), implying a pressure on the individual to conform to the views expressed by the majority of people (Noelle-Neumann, 1977, 143).

In the political sphere, public opinion can be regarded as a cornerstone of democracy, as ‘primarily a communication from the citizens to their government’ (Speier, 1950, 376) with the expectation that the communication is relevant to government action. As such it entails the expressions of ‘praise or blame to the government’ after thorough deliberation by a ‘reasoning public’ (Habermas et al., 1974, 50) consisting of ‘informed and responsible citizens’ (Noelle-Neumann, 1977, 143). In its original form this understanding of public opinion demanded that expressions of the public can only be labelled public opinion if they are politically effective (for a critique of the concept of politically effective public opinion see, for example, Blumer, 1948; Lippman, 1956, 227-233).

Disagreements about the concept of public opinion – the effect it has or should have on the political process, whether public opinion can be regarded as the universal will of a society, whether a distinction should be made between private opinions volunteered or opinions expressed publicly in response to questioning (Hodder-Williams, 1970, 5-6) – came to the fore with the advent of regular polling of public opinion. In the UK, the measurement of public opinion, in the form of surveys capturing the public’s views, started in earnest in 1937 when the British Institute of Public Opinion (Gallup) was founded (Wybrow, 1989, 1).
This development temporarily shifted debates about public opinion from the realm of political philosophers to that of communication researchers in the guise of pragmatic empiricists concerned primarily with the ‘technology of public opinion assessment’ (Converse, 1987, 12). Public opinion ‘pollsters’ chose to discuss how public opinion could most representatively and best be measured, i.e. how their technique could be improved, rather than discussing its purpose and function in society.

A question of methodology

The concept of public opinion is intrinsically linked to the methods used to measure it. As shown above, the use of polls to measure ‘public opinion’ in the political sphere highlighted the conceptual muddiness of the term and triggered debates about the concept of public opinion and its function in society. However, the measurement of public opinion has moved on from the early days of polling, and simplistic surveys are no longer thought to be the best way of exploring the views of the public. This development was the result of growing awareness of the deficiencies of survey research.

The use of large-scale surveys to measure public opinion carries a number of inherent limitations. First, all those asked are presumed to have an opinion on the matter queried and to be capable of producing political opinions. Second, with the use of closed questions, respondents are not asked about their opinions but rather their choice of a small selection of pre-formed answers. This in turn assumes that the questions asked and the answers provided are meaningful to all members of the public, for ‘questioning the public on subjects which are insufficiently meaningful to them is likely to result, at best, in random and, usually, in induced answers’ (Robert, 1978, 91). Third, survey research assigns each individual opinion equal weight strictly following the egalitarian principle (Bourdieu, 1993, 149; Champagne, 2004, 62; Luskin et al., 2002, 456; Robert, 1978, 91; Tourangeau et al., 2000, 172). All of
the above assumptions have been comprehensively criticised, with some concluding that public opinion as an entity measurable by opinion polls does not exist and is simply a social scientific artefact (Blumer, 1948; Bourdieu, 1993; Osborne & Rose, 1999).3

As a tool of scientific measurement, public opinion surveys have suffered from their close association with politics, and their potential for political exploitation. They can be used to exert a pressure to conform by making people believe that a majority of citizens support a certain opinion or measure, ‘they allow the prospects of political leaders to be “tested”’, and generally help politicians to fine-tune their strategies (Champagne, 2004, 71). Public opinion polling in its form as political polling ‘has opened the way to political marketing’ (Champagne, 2004, 73). Moreover, conflicting findings resulting from different sets of surveys have lead to a cynicism about the validity of survey research among researchers and members of the public (Dran & Hildreth, 1995), with the conclusion that ‘researchers can get whatever result they want simply by changing the way in which they ask their questions’ (Hough, 1996, 192).

The interpretation of public opinion as elicited by survey research is further complicated by the now established understanding of how little the public know about some policy issues. Thus, even if people did hold opinions on every issue (which is implausible) or could construct opinions from underlying value systems, it is clear that opinions are based on very little factual information (Luskin et al., 2002, 457; Roberts & Stalans, 2000, 23-34). However, arguably ‘there is a class of question where knowledge relating to the subject matter is of no importance’ (Wilkins, 1984, 84). Two broad types of questions can be distinguished, those which are ‘evaluative’, for example, those which ask the respondent to judge the leniency or harshness of sentencing, and questions which are ‘normative’, namely those which ask the

3 A more substantive discussion of survey methodology will follow in chapter 2.
respondent about the rationales of punishment, principles of the criminal justice system, or concepts such as fairness. For evaluative questions to be meaningful they need to be based on knowledge of basic facts. Normative questions on the other hand are, to some extent at least, independent of knowledge (Wilkins, 1984, 84-86).

Acknowledging the inherent problems of survey research, social scientists have turned to other methods of measuring public opinion. Focus groups, deliberative polls, and convenience samples have gained prominence amongst researchers and are promoted as a more accurate way to find out what the public feels and thinks (Green, 2006, 132-135; Roberts & Stalans, 2000, 14-20).

Possibly the most important methodological advance in public opinion research is the deliberative poll. In 1994, the first deliberative poll on crime took place in Britain over a period of two days. The process was televised as a two-hour programme by Channel 4. Deliberative polls aim to address the lack of knowledge of poll participants on a particular issue, and elicit respondents’ views after they have been given relevant information and after they have had the chance to think about the issues in question. Deliberative polls seek to construct ‘informed public opinion’ or ideal citizens (Luskin et al., 2002, 458). The idea follows the notion that ‘democracy presupposes spaces of debate, time for reflection, and the diffusion of useful information so that citizens can make up their minds with full knowledge of the facts’ (Champagne, 2004, 74). The event itself was set up as a quasi-experiment. Participants’ views were measured at two points in time, at first they were invited to express their views as yet ‘uninformed’. The experimental intervention consisted of the provision of factual information about crime and criminal justice, and criminal justice policy proposals in a balanced briefing paper, moderated group discussions about the pros and cons of these proposals, and question and answer sessions with experts and politicians. Subsequently, respondents were questioned again using the same instrument for measurement as at the pre-experiment stage (Hough & Park, 2002; Luskin et al., 2002, 458-459; Sturgis et al., 2005).
Deliberative polling showed that the provision of factual information in the context of intense debates produced substantial changes in opinions, gains in levels of knowledge, thought, and involvement (Luskin et al., 2002). It also showed that opinion changes were associated with increases in knowledge as well as, to a somewhat lesser degree, with group mechanisms (Luskin et al., 2002, 481). However, the research on the deliberative poll did not actually interrogate the mechanisms at work in creating these findings and thus could not establish convincingly that the correlation between improved knowledge and opinion change was a causal one (Sturgis et al., 2005, 33).

There are additional forms in which members of the public can express their views, and such communication could be used as a clue to the climate of public opinion. Talk shows on the radio and on television which give their audience a certain amount of freedom to raise issues they are concerned about are examples of such (unscientific) indications of public opinion. So is the internet through the creation of websites, submission of entries to wikipedia, and most recently through blogs (Ungar, 2001, 280). These ‘new’ forms of communication using the means of the internet may well prove of immense value to the development of deliberative democracy, however, their likely impact is still unclear (for a discussion of this point, see, for example, Buchstein, 1997; Dahlberg, 2001).

b. Why is public opinion of crime and criminal justice important?
Crime and crime control have become highly politicised subjects in England and Wales and thus, public opinion of crime and criminal justice is today mainly discussed in the political sphere, i.e. in its role as a communication to the government. The discussion is centred on the concern that public confidence in the
criminal justice system\textsuperscript{4} is low and that this constitutes a threat to the legitimacy as well as the functioning of the system itself. In its political role, as a check on governmental power, public opinion of, and public confidence in, criminal justice matters (Bourdieu, 1993, 150; Silvey, 1961), 'because any democratic system of law needs the consent of those whom it polices' (Hough & Mayhew, 1983, 28). Likewise, it has been argued that public opinion can play an active role in the evolution and development of penal policy (Rock, 1995, 2) and it appears that 'public opinion is increasingly given more formal consideration in shaping sentencing policy' (Roberts & Hough, 2002, 4). Commentators have gone so far as to describe the political push towards more repressive criminal justice policies and the political rhetoric of 'toughness on crime' as 'an instance of “democracy at work”' (Cullen et al., 2000, 2).

The concern with public opinion is also pragmatic in nature, centring on the criminal justice system's ability to function. The police are dependent on the confidence and the backing of the public in order to police by consent (Bowling & Foster, 2002, 983; Napley, 1961, 369; Williams, 1961), not least because some 80 per cent of law breaking is brought to the police's attention by members of the public (Maguire, 2002, 335). Moreover, members of the public serve as witnesses in court, magistrates, referral panel members, and in other voluntary roles, thus ensuring the smooth running of the criminal justice system.

However, others have argued that levels of confidence in criminal justice organisations, such as the police are simply expressions of considerations of the moral and social cohesion of society and do not signify, primarily, concerns about crime levels and criminal justice efficiency and effectiveness (Girling et al., 2000; Jackson & Sunshine, 2007). I will elaborate on the significance of more general

\textsuperscript{4} It should be noted that the term 'criminal justice system' is a misnomer. A number of disparate agencies (police, probation, courts, etc.) are included in that umbrella term with their distinct professional cultures, aims and objectives, and rationales.
c. Public knowledge of, and attitudes to, crime and criminal justice?

The measurement of public opinion on crime and criminal justice is by no means a new undertaking nor is it restricted to Britain and the USA. In Britain, The Criminal Law Review published five articles written around the theme of ‘criminal law and public opinion’ in 1961 (Foreword to Silvey, 1961). A number of themes emerged from these articles,

- ‘there are indications of very considerable ignorance about crime among the public’ (Silvey, 1961, 357) and thus there is a need for surveys which assess the level of knowledge respondents hold on a particular subject to gauge to what extent ‘public opinion is well-informed’ (Silvey, 1961, 353);
- reasons for expressing particular (grouped or dichotomised) views are based on underlying attitudes and core beliefs and can therefore vary for each respondent (Silvey, 1961, 354);
- public opinion is ‘likely to be independent of evidence in a field so emotionally tinged as crime and punishment, with its socially acceptable projection of unconscious feelings’ (Silvey, 1961, 354);
- and fear of crime is an important influence on public opinion (Napley, 1961, 372).

In 1966, a survey of public attitudes towards crime and the penal system was carried out as part of the Royal Commission on the Penal System. According to the authors this survey was one of ‘very few conducted in Great Britain into public attitudes to crime’ at the time (Banks et al., 1975, 238). It covered a wide variety of issues related to crime and criminal justice, such as causes of crime, increase in crime, the courts, sentencing, and knowledge about prisons and prison life. Survey respondents were
presented with a selection of offences and were asked whether they thought those crimes had increased or decreased over the past few years. The majority of survey respondents felt that all of the crimes presented had increased ‘quite a bit’ and whereas that was true for most of the offences presented it was not true for all of them (Banks et al., 1975, 229). Despite the fact that half of the survey respondents reported direct experience of the courts, knowledge of the judicial system was low. Moreover, the survey tested respondents’ knowledge of prison life and found them to be ‘generally misinformed’ (Banks et al., 1975, 235). The authors compared their findings with those of a number of other surveys carried out in Britain and the USA at the time, and, in the USA context, pointed to respondents’ concern with the increasing crime rate and to calls for ‘stricter law enforcement’ (Banks et al., 1975, 240; Gibbons, 1969). Additionally, as early as 1955, researchers in the US pointed to the discrepancy between the sentences imposed by the judiciary and public views as to the appropriate punishments for a list of specified crimes (Rose & Prell, 1955, 248).

By the late 1970s public opinion research on crime and criminal justice was much more prevalent across Europe and the USA and in 1978 the 13th Criminological Research Conference in Strasbourg was devoted in its entirety to public opinion in relation to crime and criminal justice. The main findings from the various presentations were that substantial parts of the public are at odds with experts in that they favour repressive crime control policies, such as enlargement of the police and more severe sentencing (Dijk, 1978, 10). It was found that, at the time, knowledge about public opinion was almost exclusively made up from studies following a survey design (Dijk, 1978, 12) and that such research produced a ‘one-dimensional and simplified picture of public opinion’ (Schneider, 1978, 125). Violent crime was considered a major social problem by a substantial minority of the public (Dijk, 1978, 18). General levels of concern for crime as a social issue and fear of crime were shown to have demographic determinants but were not related clearly to actual
victimisation (Dijk, 1978, 23-25). The media, particularly newspapers, devoted a substantial proportion of their editorial space to crime stories and violent crime was over-represented in media representations of crime compared to its prevalence in crime statistics. Additionally, media reports were found to contain little factual information (Dijk, 1978, 28-29). Crime proved a popular topic of conversation among members of the public often prompted by media coverage of crime or criminal justice (Dijk, 1978, 19).

Researchers felt that the public’s knowledge of the criminal justice system was low (Robert, 1978, 63), and that exposure to crime stories in the mass media could lead to a perception (whether accurate or not) of an increase in crime and, in turn, to calls for repressive crime control policies (Dijk, 1978, 34). On the other hand the empirical evidence to link exposure to crime stories in the mass media to fear of, or concern about, crime was contradictory (Dijk, 1978, 30-31).

Nearly 30 years later, after extensive research has been devoted to the issue of public opinion of crime and criminal justice, many of the above observations are still pertinent. In that period, arguably, crime and criminal justice has gained momentum as a political topic and debates about appropriate criminal justice policies have taken a populist turn (Roberts & Hough, 2005b, 15-18). Additionally, public confidence in the criminal justice system has been a primary concern amongst politicians, policy-makers, and academics over the last ten years. As a result, the criminal justice arena has seen a plethora of legislative activity, and between 1997-2004 the Labour Government passed 49 Acts of Parliament dealing with aspects of crime and disorder, policing, criminal justice and punishment, and introduced no fewer than 1,018 new criminal offences (Loader, 2006, 18).

Examples of the Government’s ‘obsession’ with public confidence are, the 2002 White Paper ‘Justice for All’ where the lack of public confidence or the need for improving public confidence is explicitly mentioned at least 14 times (pp 26, 27, 37, 39, 53, 84, 86, 97, 99, 117, 119, 145, 148, and 152), and in which the Government set itself a target to improve the level of public confidence in the criminal justice system by 2004; the Home Office set up a Victims and Confidence unit, as a subunit of the Confidence, Customers & Communication unit.
Public confidence in the criminal justice system has been measured explicitly in the British Crime Survey only since 2000. Confidence was measured by asking respondents to express their level of satisfaction with the job done by the different criminal justice agencies. The report on the 2000 British Crime Survey noted a general but small decline in confidence in all parts of the criminal justice system which were assessed (Mirrlees-Black, 2001). A performance target was set for all criminal justice agencies to improve public confidence by 2004 (Mirrlees-Black, 2001, 1). Since 2004/5 confidence in seven different aspects of the criminal justice system has been measured (Walker et al., 2006, 40-42).

The concern with public confidence has led to a proliferation of (communication) strategies to improve public confidence and contributed to the establishment of numerous new communication units in the various criminal justice agencies. It could be argued that the increased professionalisation of communication in police forces in recent years (Mawby, 2002), and the establishment of the Judicial Communications Office in 2005 are a consequence of the current political climate.

Roberts and Hough succinctly summarise a number of key findings, produced by research over the past fifty years, relating to public opinion of crime and criminal justice in their recent textbook on public attitudes (Roberts & Hough, 2005b). Despite the steady fall in crime rates over the past 10 years, as measured by police statistics and the British Crime Survey, the majority of ‘the public’ still believe that crime is rising. This misperception of crime trends is associated with declining confidence in the system (Mirrlees-Black, 2001, 5; Roberts & Hough, 2005b, 10). Moreover, whilst interest in crime may be high, knowledge of crime and criminal justice is low (Hutton, 2005, 247; Roberts & Hough, 2005b, 7; Shaw, 1982, 26). Additionally, members of the public perceive the criminal justice system or more specifically the courts as

---

6 I have not been able to find out whether the target has been met.

7 For a debate on the shortcomings of standard measures of crime see Maguire, 2002.
being lenient towards offenders, and sentencers to be out of touch with the views of ‘ordinary’ people (Hutton, 2005, 248; Kappeler et al., 2004, 315; Roberts & Hough, 2005b, 13-15). Finally, there appears to be a relatively widespread consensus that the last twenty to thirty years have brought about the advent of penal populism (e.g. Garland & Sparks, 2000, 197; Hutton, 2005, 243; e.g. Roberts & Hough, 2005b, 15-18).

The myth of the punitive public

The idea of the (re-)emergence of public punitiveness deserves closer scrutiny. Maruna & King (2004, 278) and Matthews (2005) note that the existence of a punitive public has been accepted uncritically by many criminologists and sociologists. This is perhaps not surprising given poll findings which suggest that the majority of the British public agree, for example, that ‘for some crimes the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence’ (55%), and that ‘people who break the law should be given stiffer sentences’ (76%) (Park & Surridge, 2003, 135). Penal policies, which are classified as harsh and repressive – such as the ‘three strikes’ legislation or the death penalty in the USA; and mandatory minimum sentences and indeterminate sentences for public protection in the UK – are also used as evidence of an increasingly punitive climate of opinion (Tyler & Boeckmann, 1997).

All this appears to suggest that the British public today is decidedly ‘punitive’ in its stance towards criminals. However, before assessing the accuracy of this suggestion it is necessary to define the term ‘punitiveness’. The use of the term ‘populist punitiveness’ is associated with a paper published by Bottoms in 1995, in which he coined the term in the context of attempting to explain how changes in modern sentencing policy come about (Bottoms, 1995, 18). Bottoms clearly

---

distinguished between public opinion and populist punitiveness and intended the
term to ‘convey the notion of politicians tapping into, and using for their own
purposes, what they believe to be the public’s generally punitive stance’ (Bottoms,
2000, 40). Roger Matthews subsequently devoted a whole paper to conceptualising
the term and concluded that ‘the notion of punitiveness is most commonly associated
with retribution and vengeance’ normally carrying ‘connotations of excess’
(Matthews, 2005, 179).  

Traditionally, punishment has been associated with retribution, with the idea
that it is only ‘just that he [the culpable] should suffer’ and that the public should be
vindicated (Durkheim, 1964 [1933], 88). The infliction of something burdensome or
‘painful’ (not necessarily in the sense of physical pain) thus appears a necessary part
of punishment, and in particular, imprisonment (Foucault 1975, 16).

What makes punitiveness stand out in this context is the connotation of
excess which implies imposing punishment and thus pain solely for the sake of
suffering (Durkheim, 1964 [1933], 85-86). The more the guilty person suffers the
better. It follows that the wish for vindication and the infliction of pain is as such not a
sufficient criterion to merit the description of punitiveness. In order to qualify as
punitive, views have to support ‘a deviation from the principle of proportionality’
(Matthews, 2005, 179).  

Thus, support for ‘harsh’ punishment irrespective of
instrumental considerations of deterrence or rehabilitation could be interpreted as an
expression of ‘punitive’ views.  

9 There is not the space here for a detailed discussion of the philosophy of punishment and
the different theories as to the purpose and justifications of punishment as these issues are
highly complex and contested. For overviews see Ashworth, 2005, 67-101; Garland & Young,
1983; Sanders & Young, 2007, 1-53.

10 This definition has some inherent problems as the concept of proportionality itself is
contentious and depends on the interpretation of issues such as the harm caused by the
offender and many others, see Ashworth, 2000.

11 For a thorough discussion of definitions of punitiveness see King, 2005, 8-12; Matthews,
2005.
The term punitiveness has also been associated with the abandonment of ‘procedural safeguards designed to protect the individual’ (Tyler & Boeckmann, 1997, 243). However, the processes of the criminal justice system dedicated to the establishment of guilt are theoretically and systematically distinct from the stage of sentencing. I would argue that the label of punitiveness can only be applied to people’s expectations of sentencing. However, it might well be true that people who subscribe to punitive views of sentencing will also support curtailing procedural safeguards.

So, according to this interpretation of the term punitiveness, is the British public punitive, i.e. demanding excessively harsh punishments? And if so, is this the result of a shift in public opinion from 30-40 years ago? In the view of some commentators, the late 1970s and early 1980s were marked by a decline of the rehabilitative ideal or penal welfarism. Penal welfarism, it is argued, has been abandoned in favour of expressive justice and populist punitivism (Bottoms, 1995; Cullen, 1988; Garland, 2001).

Two regular large-scale surveys which arguably enable comparisons over time and thus the analysis of trends in levels of ‘punitive’ are the British Crime Survey (BCS) and the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSAS). One of the questions routinely included in the British Crime Survey is whether respondents think that sentences imposed by the courts are ‘too lenient, about right, or too tough’. The British Social Attitudes Survey includes two questions which arguably measure ‘punitive’ by asking respondents to agree or disagree with the statements that ‘people who break the law should be given stiffer sentences’ and that ‘for some crimes, the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence’. Figure 1 below shows the trend for the British Social Attitudes questions since 1986, and the British Crime Survey question since 1988.
Figure 1. Trends in levels of punitiveness?

- BSAS: People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences
- BSAS: For some crimes, the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence.
- BCS: Sentences imposed by the courts are too lenient
There is doubt about the validity of such questions as indicators of levels of ‘punitiveness’, i.e. respondents’ support for ‘harsh’ punishment for lawbreakers. The BCS question asks respondents to assess current sentencing levels and then express views on whether these are about right or otherwise. This is clearly an evaluative question and depends on respondents' knowledge of sentencing trends. Equally, the BSAS question on ‘stiffer sentences’ is an evaluative question and therefore dependent on levels of knowledge. Additionally, research has established that general or global questions trigger scenarios of the worst offender committing the worst offences in respondents’ minds (Gibbons, 1969, 394; Roberts & Stalans, 2000, 223). General questions can also lead to categorical responses to sentencing preferences whereas decision making in the criminal justice process is based on an individual, case by case, assessment. Thus, such survey questions have been criticised for being simplistic, too general, and inadequate for assessing public attitudes to sentencing (Hough & Roberts, 1998; Roberts & Stalans, 2000, 218; Shaw, 1982, 4). They are bound to elicit people’s spontaneous and emotive responses, their ‘gut feelings’ rather than their more deep-seated and considered views (Stalans, 2002).

The question about the death penalty is difficult to interpret as it is not a sanction available to the judiciary in the UK. It has been argued that responses to questions about the death penalty should be interpreted primarily as symbolic attitudes or emotions representing respondents’ more deep seated values and belief systems – their basic political-social attitudes such as liberalism or authoritarianism¹² – rather than their specific views towards capital punishment (Ellsworth & Gross, 1994, 31-32; Hessing et al., 2003, 607; Tyler & Weber, 1982, 40-43). However,

¹² The liberal-authoritarian divide is often equated to political concepts of left and right (Park & Surridge, 2003). Liberalism can be interpreted as a primary concern for individual freedom (Sanders & Young, 2007, 4); authoritarianism, on the other hand is characterised mainly by conformity and submissiveness to authority (Marshall, 1998).
regardless of the validity of the three questions listed above as indicators of punitiveness, the trend data presented has some interesting implications. Rather than showing a consistent upward trend, two of the questions show that levels of ‘punitiveness’ have remained relatively stable with a few upward and downward outliers. Additionally, the way the data on public perception of judicial leniency are presented (combining the response categories ‘too lenient’ and ‘much too lenient’) disguises the fact that the proportion of people thinking that sentences are much too lenient has dropped from 51 per cent in 1996 to 35 per cent in 2001/2, i.e. that members of the public seem to have moderated their view on sentencing (see Figure 2). Moreover, according to the BSAS measure, public support for the death penalty as the most appropriate sentence for some crimes has declined substantially over time.

Figure 2. Sentencing too lenient by attitude strength

![Sentencing too lenient by attitude strength](image)

Unfortunately, the data described above do not allow us to answer the question of whether the views of the British public have changed substantially over the last 30-40
years. Longitudinal data going back to the 1960s and 1970s are not available for England and Wales. Thus, basing claims of rising or falling levels of punitiveness on data of the type presented above echoes to some extent Osborne and Rose’s notion of a constructed phenomenon – once an issue has been identified as a potential problem, measurement of the issue begins and its problem status is confirmed (Osborne & Rose, 1999). However, looking at work on public opinion in relation to crime and criminal justice carried out in the 1960s and 1970s shows that, in fact, the perception of the general public as being ‘punitive’ and in support of repressive crime control measures is not a new phenomenon of the late 1970s or 1980s (see above pp 10-11 or, for example, Banks et al., 1975, 239-240; Gibbons, 1969; Shaw, 1982, 3).

Then as now, more sophisticated public opinion research convincingly demonstrates that the public is in fact not as punitive as it is made out to be by simplistic surveys and opinion polls. Comparative research has noted significant national differences in levels of punitive attitudes, and individual-level as well as group differences are obvious within national opinion polls (Brown, 2006; Hough & Roberts, 1998; Maruna et al., 2004, 278; Wood & Viki, 2004). Moreover, research has shown that when members of the public are presented with detailed vignettes of offences and offenders to be sentenced the sentences proposed are broadly in line with the sentences imposed by the judiciary (see, for example Hough, 1996, 191-192; Hough & Moxon, 1985, 171). Additionally, when members of the public are given information about both custodial and non-custodial sentences, alternatives to prison continue to receive considerable support (Hough & Park, 2002; Maruna &

---

13 For a similar discussion of the invention of a concept, the concept of the fear of crime, see Lee, 2007, 7 and 203.

14 For an analysis of historical data in Canada, see Roberts, 2007, for data from the US going back to 1974 see Brown, 2006 and Kappeler et al., 2004, 315. See also Pearson, 1983, 4-7; and Zedner, 2002, 344-346 warning against penal nostalgia.
Restorative justice initiatives, in particular, have great appeal for members of the public (Roberts & Stalans, 2004, 328-331).

Some of the literature introduced above has been described recently as subscribing to a ‘cognitive deficit model’ which can be summarised as follows: members of the public know little about crime and criminal justice which explains their dissatisfaction with lenient sentences and their perception of rising crime; this fact is exploited by politicians for purposes of easy political gain (Loader, forthcoming). Thus, so Loader argues, proponents of the cognitive deficit model see public education campaigns as the ‘magic bullet’ to gain public support for a more progressive, liberal, and rational criminal justice system. Loader’s main frustration with the cognitive deficit model lies in its alleged neglect of the role of emotion in influencing public opinion on crime and criminal justice.

There is no doubt that crime and punishment has the power to evoke strong emotions and deep-seated fears. However, that is not to say that members of the public are unable to assess criminal justice policy dispassionately and pragmatically. Indeed, Morgan (2002) suggests that, depending on the type of questions asked, the public will appear as primarily pragmatic rather than emotional and irrational.

A society of mistrust and postmodernist angst?

The loss of public confidence in the criminal justice system and the loss of trust in criminal justice experts are a constant worry for policy-makers, politicians, and increasingly academics. However, there are indications that the public’s lack of confidence in the criminal justice system is part of a wider societal trend in western democracies. This trend has been noted and theorised about in both the USA and the UK and continental Europe and has been labelled ‘postmodernist angst’ (Tonry, 2004, 59) or the ‘risk society’ (Beck, 1992 [1986]) which is characterised, among other things, by a loss of trust in society’s democratic and public institutions (Kelly,
The following paragraphs summarise the main characteristics of current societal developments wider than, but relevant to, the criminal justice arena.

Society has been transformed hugely from the post-war era by a number of related processes. ‘Globalisation, individualisation, the gender revolution, underemployment’ (Beck & Lau, 2005, 526), the ‘new’ energy and ecological crisis, mass migration, the decline of the nuclear family, the ‘international’ terrorist threat, are all aspects of today’s society. These general concerns have replaced previous ones, such as the cold war, the nuclear arms race, national terrorist threats, and others. All these developments, it has been argued, have led to a feeling of ‘ontological insecurity’ – a sense that the world around us is uncertain, chaotic, and obscure (Giddens, 1991, Chapter 2; Young, 1999, 97-102).

The prevalence of such insecurities are detrimental to trust and confidence. Public opinion polls routinely return findings which suggest that the British public has lost confidence in society’s once taken-for-granted institutions, such as parliament, the legal system, the police, the education system, the press, and even official statistics (Goddard, 2005; Kelly, 2005; Pidgeon, 2003, 4.3). Additionally, a loss of trust in ‘experts’ and in officialdom, e.g. professionals in the criminal justice system, seems to have developed alongside a more general decline in deference (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007, 1097; Garland, 2001; Gies, 2003, 271). These findings seem to hold true for most modern western democracies although there are considerable and interesting national variations (Newton & Norris, 1999, 4).

Thus, it could be argued that the understanding of the perceived loss of confidence in the criminal justice system needs to be firmly embedded in the wider context of societal developments, such as the decline in deference and the public’s...

15 I will not enter into a discussion of whether the current era can be described as postmodern, late modern, or in its second modernity (for a discussion of these theories see, for example, Beck & Lau, 2005; Feeley, 2003; Garland, 2001; Zedner, 2002).
yearning for freedom from anxiety and insecurity, over and above the security from crime (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007; Zedner, 2002, 351).

3. The media in contemporary culture

   a. The role of the media

Another notion which has taken on the air of a mantra is the importance of the media as an aspect of contemporary culture, in particular, media influence on individuals’ behaviour and opinion. However, as ‘an intermediary enabling or enhancing communication across time and space’ (Bertrand & Hughes, 2005, 4) the media have a dual role in contemporary society. In their political role, they provide information about society and its institutions to members of the public which they need in order to make rational political and economic choices (Lippman, 1956; McNair, 2003, 23; Petersen, 2003). The media provide the ‘public sphere’ which members of the public can access universally and in which debate and deliberation can take place and aid the formation of public opinion (Habermas, 1974; Schlesinger & Tumber, 1994, 7-9). Moreover, in the system of checks and balances of democracy, the media have been labelled the fourth power, charged with monitoring and scrutinising society’s other institutions (Ringen, 2003, 34), and with ‘guarding the guardians of the law’ (Davis, 2004, 61). There are plenty of examples – such as Watergate and the Profumo affair – where the press did rise to the challenge of enabling and protecting democracy, primarily through investigative journalism (for a discussion of the 'achievements' of British investigative journalism over the last 30 years, see Burgh, 2000, 48-64).

However, the media has another role, namely that of entertaining members of the public. Thus, the ‘romantic’ notion of the media as a guardian of democracy can be contrasted to that of the media as frivolous entertainment and ‘big business’. In that context, the media is frequently presented as the voice-piece of the powerful and accused of reproducing dominant ideology and misrepresenting reality (Lippman,
1956, 344; Lofquist, 1998, 242; McNair, 2003, 26; Petersen, 2003; Schlesinger & Tumber, 1994). In the following section, I am concerned primarily with the traditional media as the provider of information and news. This thesis will not look at media representations of crime for entertainment purposes, e.g. crime in film, literature, and culture, although it could be argued that with the growth of reality TV and ‘infotainment’ the news media and the entertainment media can no longer be easily separated (McNair, 2003, 46-52; Reiner, 2002, 379; Schneider, 1978, 126).

The media in the 21st century encompass numerous disparate organisations and communication styles. The traditional press and broadcasting organisations have been joined by new media, such as the internet, mobile technology, podcasts, and digital TV channels. There is no doubt that the media, whether traditional or new, play an enormous role in informing the public about events beyond the scope of their immediate experience. In 2002, radio programmes reached 44 million people who listened to an average of 90 hours of radio per week, national daily newspapers had a circulation of 13 million, and national Sunday newspapers a circulation of 14 million (McNair, 2003, 13-14). There are now a number of TV channels which provide 24 hours news coverage, and online news – whether provided by mainstream organisations such as the BBC or by niche organisations – can be accessed at any time of the day or night.

The news media enable us to get information about events outside our immediate experience and thus they reconfigure reality to provide us with easily digestible and short pieces of information. The news media have been described as our ‘window to the world’ (McNair, 2003, 23; Wykes, 2001, 20). This is true not only for foreign affairs and domestic politics, but also, it has been claimed, for crime. The importance of media representations of crime is often asserted by reference to the lack of the public’s immediate experience of crime, as either victims or offenders (Ryan, 2006, 31). Thus, it is claimed that the media serve as the main source of people’s understanding of crime and criminal justice issues (Chibnall, 1977; Ditton et
al., 2004, 595; Ericson, 1991, 219; Mason, 2003, 5). It is from this starting point that
the following section will interrogate briefly the nature of media representations of
crime and whether those representations actually matter.

b. Media representations of crime – skewed reality?

Criminologists and media sociologists have accused the media repeatedly of
misrepresenting the amount of crime in society, the prevalence of certain types of
crime, the processes of the criminal justice system, and sentencing trends, thereby
causing increased levels of fear of crime, moral panics, and a more punitive climate
of opinion (Dijk, 1978, 34; Ditton et al., 2004; Ericson, 1991; Garland & Sparks, 2000,
197; Hall, 1978; Potter & Kappeler, 1998, 4; Reiner, 2002, 376; Williams & Dickinson,
1993).

It is relatively undisputed that ‘crime occupies a great deal of space in public
discussion and the public's imagination’ (Reiner, 2002, 379; Schlesinger & Tumber,
1994, 6) and that the representation of crime and punishment in the news media play
an important, if not critical, role in shaping how people perceive the criminal justice
system (Barak, 1988, 576; Sparks, 2001). Indeed, content analyses have shown
that crime stories do in fact constitute a considerable proportion of news, and that
crime certainly plays a major role in the entertainment genre (for an overview see
Reiner, 2002). This has led to calls for criminologists to engage in a particular form of
‘public criminology’, by exploiting the ‘contradictions of news production’ and
participating in the ‘newsmaking process’ (Barak, 1988:577) thus influencing the
representation of crime and criminal justice.17

16 For a history of crime news in England and America, see King, 2007; Morgan & Rushton,

17 The notion of public criminology has gained prominence recently with a whole issue of
Theoretical Criminology 2007, Vol 11(2) devoted to it, see also Uggen & Inderbitzin, 2006. For
a parallel discussion on public sociology see The British Journal of Sociology 2005, Vol 56(3).
However, assessing the prevalence and nature of crime stories in the news media is dependent on the definition of crime chosen and the medium chosen for analysis. An analysis by Williams and Dickinson showed that the proportion of newspaper space devoted to crime news varied by individual newspaper and newspaper type, i.e. broadsheet, middlebrow tabloids or redtop tabloid papers.\textsuperscript{18} Tabloid papers not only covered more crime than broadsheet papers – between 25-30 per cent of all news compared to five to ten per cent – but more of their crime coverage was devoted to personal violence (Williams & Dickinson, 1993, 40-41). Similarly, Reiner (2002, 380) in a review of content analyses found that the prevalence of crime stories varied ‘between outlets according to their medium (e.g. radio, TV, or print journalism) and market (e.g., “quality” or “popular” journalism)’.

Moreover, there are limits to our knowledge of the true nature, extent, and patterns of crime. In comparing media representations of crime to ‘reality’ criminologists rely mainly on police recorded crime statistics, the British Crime Survey, and other research into the prevalence and patterns of crime. The limitations of that ‘construction of the reality’ of crime are well rehearsed (Maguire, 2002) and the criminological critique of media representation with reference to the reality of crime has been called ironic by Young (1996, 81). Nevertheless, if one accepts crime statistics and the British Crime Survey as an approximation of reality, then there is evidence that the news media’s coverage of crime is ‘distorted’ in the sense that it does not reflect the prevalence of certain types of crime in crime statistics (for a discussion of why the idea of distortion is misconceived see Way, 2006, Chapter 8). Violent crime, especially murder, sex offending, and serious assaults are over-represented, as are crimes of the powerful, and unusual crimes (for summaries of

\textsuperscript{18} It is no longer possible to distinguish ‘serious and popular’ newspapers simply by format now that most of the serious newspapers have adopted a tabloid or ‘Berliner’ format. However, the terminology may still be conveniently used to delineate the more high-brow, up-market, and serious newspapers, such as The Guardian, The Times from the mass market papers, e.g. Sun, Daily Mail. Alternative terminology which is frequently used is that of ‘qualities’, midmarkets’, and ‘populizers’ (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007, 1108).
empirical research see Reiner, 2002; and Schlesinger & Tumber, 1994, 184-190). In fact, research has shown a complete lack of congruence between crime news and crime statistics (Potter & Kappeler, 1998; Reiner, 2002, 383).

The media tend to concentrate on discrete crime incidents and fail to provide analyses of crime patterns and problems, or to discuss penal policy developments (Reiner, 2002). Moreover, they stand accused of sensationalising crime, providing stereotypical images of offenders, simplifying complex narratives into one-dimensional stories in black and white, demonising offenders, and particular groups in society (Reiner et al., 2003). However, it is not only offenders who are presented in a certain ‘cartoonish’ fashion, victims often fare little better. If victims choose to behave outside expected parameters or if they do not fit the narrative of the story they may experience media demonisation in ways similar to offenders. This reinforces the sense of the media as story-tellers, in search of a simple narrative of good and bad, black and white. Reality seems to be subordinate in many ways to the needs of a ‘good story’.

However, the question remains whether these criticisms do not simply imply that ‘one symbolically constructed reality’, that of ‘police operatives’ or even that of academics, is exchanged for another, ‘that of mass media operatives’ (Ericson, 1991, 220)? Why should we expect the media to cover crime according to crime statistics and thus to report on minor offences such as shoplifting with greater frequency than murder? And, does news media representation of crime really matter?

---

19 This may be a reflection of a wider trend by newspaper editors to move away from coverage of policy development in general (Solomon, 2006, 53).

20 An example of such media ‘demonisation’ of a victim would be the media coverage of Joanne Lees’s story, a British woman. She was abducted at gunpoint in Australia whilst travelling with her boyfriend who was murdered in the attack. She accused the media of mistreating her and sensationalising her case. She subsequently wrote a book in an attempt to ‘take back her life from the storytellers’ (Joanne Lees, quoted in BBC News, 9 Oct 2006).
c. (Mis-)Representing crime – so what?

Media representation of crime matters, it has been argued, because the ‘skew’ in media representation of crime and justice reflects and reinforces dominant ideology, legitimises the criminal justice system and the police, and helps maintain current social arrangements (which are perceived as being unjust) (Chibnall, 1977; Ericson, 1991, 221; Hall, 1978; Potter & Kappeler, 1998, 18). It has been argued that the media – or those who control and own them – have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo (Chermak, 1998, 184; Potter & Kappeler, 1998, 20). Moreover, the reliance and dependency of the media on official organisational sources, such as the police, courts, and the Home Office, allows those sources to advance their own agenda and frame ‘social problems’ in such a way that public opinion will be in line with their operational needs (Chermak, 1998, 188; McNair, 2003, 23). In the most extreme cases, official sources and the media ‘conspire’ to create a moral panic about a particular social problem (Cohen & Young, 1973, 343; Hall, 1978; Schlesinger & Tumber, 1994, 184).

A recent example of the claim that the media can cause moral panics is the, by now, infamous ‘naming and shaming’ of paedophiles campaign instigated by the News of the World in 2000 (King & Maruna, 2006, 17). McNair uses this story to describe how ‘the public can be led into mob rule by tabloid journalism’ (McNair, 2003, 27). In his version of events the News of the World campaign led to a paediatrician in Bristol being ‘chased from her home by an angry mob who thought she was a child molester’ (McNair, 2003, 27). It seems, however that this story has taken on a life of itself. In 2006, the BBC published a short news item in which it revisited the event and presented a rather different picture of what had happened. According to the BBC version the incident took place in Newport, Gwent, and involved a female paediatrician who came home ‘to find “paedo” spray-painted on her front door’ (O’Neill, 2006). What is the truth, what really happened? If one accepts the
BBC’s version of events, it shows that academics are not immune from, at best uncritically accepting media representations, and at worst, ‘manipulating reality or truth’ to support their arguments or ideological approach.

Another approach which denounces the dangers of the mass media is the ‘effects’ approach which assumes that the misrepresentation of crime and justice has a negative effect on the public in two ways. First, it is argued to lead to distorted views of the prevalence and nature of crime and thus to increased fear of crime (Ditton et al., 2004; Roberts, 2001; Williams & Dickinson, 1993). Second, the traditional approach, which applies more to the entertainment media – films and video games – argues that heavy doses of violence and glorification of crime will lead to deterioration in behaviour and copycat crime. However, although the power of the media to affect individuals’ behaviour or levels of fear of crime has assumed the air of an incontestable truth, evidence to support these theories is inconclusive (Reiner, 2002, 396-402; Roberts, 2001; Schlesinger & Tumber, 1994, 184-206).

Both, the ‘dominant ideology’ and the ‘effects’ approach have been criticised for exaggerating the ‘monolithic effect of mass media on our views, affects, and actions concerned with crime and justice’ and neglecting the role played by ‘human agency’ (Ericson, 1991, 221-222; Jewkes, 2006, 146).21 There is a significant body of research which shows that the media are not in fact people’s main source of knowledge on crime and criminal justice (Ericson, 1991, 242; Robinson and Levy 1986, 15 quoted in McNair, 2003, 22; Williams & Dickinson, 1993, 50). As far as fear of crime is concerned, an innovative study which moved away from assessing the media – fear of crime link through survey research found that local newspaper coverage of crime is seen as ‘background noise’ whereas crime reported in ‘national media was too distant and too abstract to have any effect at all on fear of crime’ (Roberts, 2001, 13). Ditton et al. were puzzled that the ‘connection between media

21 For a substantive critique of the ‘moral panic’ approach see Waddington, 1986; Way, 2006.
consumption and the fear of crime … cannot convincingly be made decades after the
first attempts to do so’ (2004, 608). Even in the case of perceptions of sentencing,
which supposedly are greatly affected by media coverage, research showed that
‘…in real life news media reports of sentences do not seem to make much
impression, even when they are strikingly lenient or severe…’ (Walker & Marsh,
1984, 41). The main contention of critics of both dominant ideology and effects
theories is that ‘the mass media are not unambiguous entities; they are ascribed
meaning by those who make use of them’ (Ericson, 1991, 221) and that the
‘producer-consumer dynamic’ is much more complex than those theories
acknowledge (Jewkes, 2006, 146). Moreover, it has been argued that individual
attitudes may play as much of a role in determining the choice of media consumption,
i.e. the choice of daily newspaper, or TV news consumption, as the particular
medium chosen in influencing individual attitudes (King & Maruna, 2006, 17).

**Trust in the media**

A major factor in this debate about media effects on public opinion of crime and
criminal justice is the trust that contemporary media outlets inspire. It could be
argued that the public will only respond to media messages consciously and directly
if they believe those messages can be trusted. In turn, this will mediate the impact of
media coverage on public opinion. A Mori survey studying the level of trust in public
institutions has shown that only 16 per cent of respondents asked ‘which factors are
most important in determining how much trust you have in public services’ identified
‘what is said about services in the media’. Further regression analysis did not identify
this variable as an important underlying factor influencing public trust (Duffy et al.,
2003, 14-16). This is not to negate media influence completely. The same study,
showed that high profile incidents such as the murder of Stephen Lawrence have a
big impact on respondents’ levels of trust, with nearly two-thirds saying that high
profile mistakes undermine their trust (36% who lose trust in the specific organisation
associated with the mistake, and 28% who lose trust in public sector organisations in general) (Duffy et al., 2003).

With respect to crime, trust in the accuracy of media representations of crime and criminal justice depends very much on the type of media. Page et al (2004, 5) found that tabloid newspapers are commonly distrusted whereas broadsheet newspapers and particularly local newspapers are more commonly trusted. However, in general, only a minority of the British public seems to be confident that the media accurately reports the news and that they present all sides of the story, which might explain why 80 per cent of respondents to a survey on trust in the media stated that they prefer to check several news sources to be fully informed (GlobeScan, 2006).

Thus, evidence on media effects, as expressed through theories of agenda-setting, social re-production, dominant ideology, or of the media influencing how we act and think in relation to crime and justice, is inconsistent and such theories are still highly contested (Corner et al., 1997). Important factors, such as public trust in the media and how this trust will interfere with any possible media effect; the plurality of news sources (mainstream and niche market); the question of choice regarding the type of media consulted, have been largely ignored in this debate. So, it seems that following McNair (2003, 28) we are left with the rather mundane conclusion that ‘journalism matters because we believe it to do so’.

4. De-constructing criminological orthodoxies

The purpose of this chapter was to deconstruct and de-mystify key concepts employed in the debates about the crime, media, and public opinion triptych which tend to be used in the criminological literature without much conceptualisation and discussion. This deconstruction led to a number of conclusions:
o The concept of public opinion is contentious and should not be disconnected from current debates in the political sciences relating to the evolution and development of democracy.

o Expressions of public opinion are contingent on the chosen methods of measurement.

o The interest in public opinion on crime and criminal justice is not a new phenomenon.

o The punitive public is, at least in part, a myth created by simplistic public opinion research, and the alleged rise of public punitiveness is, thus far, a hypothesis without much empirical basis.

o Discussion about public opinion on crime and criminal justice need to be seen in the wider context of developments in a modern/postmodern society.

o The notion of the media as being guilty of misrepresenting crime and criminal justice is misconceived and their role in influencing individuals’ views exaggerated.

Thus, the review of the relevant literature shows that experimental research relating to the media, crime, and public opinion triptych is highly pertinent. In Chapter 2 I will proceed to review a number of empirical studies which are of particular relevance to the experimental research at the heart of the thesis. Subsequently, I will introduce and outline in detail the design of the ‘Crime Scene’ study employing a methodological critique to outline the considerations which guided the research design.
Chapter 2

Changing public opinion through information: reviewing the evidence and designing new research

The first section of this chapter introduces the evidence available relating to attitude change (on crime and criminal justice) experiments based on the provision of information. It is particularly important to review and investigate this empirical body of research to understand and appreciate the particular research design chosen for the ‘Crime Scene’ study. The second part proceeds to describe the research design of the ‘Crime Scene’ study.

1. The potential of information – how can public opinion be influenced?

In the field of social psychology, literature on the nature, processes, and successes or otherwise of empirical tests of attitude change abounds. In fact, so much research has been carried out that in the 1970s ‘the whole enterprise was threatened with collapse due to an embarrassment of conflicting findings and theories’ (Petty & Wegener, 1998, 325). In order to accommodate contradictory research, theorists have developed two framework models22 which ‘recognize that different processes can lead to attitude change in different circumstances’ pointing to the complexity of the processes at work (Petty & Wegener, 1998, 326). A number of variables have been identified as having potential impact on attitudes (defined as evaluations based on emotions, beliefs, past experience, or behaviour): source, message, recipient, and context categories (Petty & Wegener, 1998, 324). ‘Messages aimed at the public are

22 The elaboration-likelihood model and the heuristic-systematic model.
not just arguments. Because of both what is said and who says it, and who receives the information and in what context, ‘they form a true epic narration’ (Durand et al., 1990, 32). As a result, ‘no communicator can assume that a message will have the intended meaning for all receivers or even that it will have the same meaning for all receivers’ (Severin & Tankard, 1992, 57).

Nevertheless, in criminal justice, research indicates that the public’s poor knowledge of crime patterns and the criminal justice system – its laws and procedures; the extent and pattern of crime; sentencing, etc. – has a detrimental impact on its perception of the system. Thus, it has been argued repeatedly that once that knowledge is improved, perceptions will follow suit (Chapman et al., 2002, 3-5; Hough, 1996, 210-212; Hough & Park, 2002; Kahn-Ackermann, 1978). However, there is a fundamental question of how much confidence the criminal justice system can realistically expect. Certain facts of police performance in ‘bringing offenders to justice’ are unlikely to inspire confidence, particularly where expectations of police performance are out of line with reality (take the example of the average police officer clearing up 10 crimes a year (Dodd, et al., 2004, 116)). Educating the public about this runs the risk of undermining public confidence rather than strengthening it and can have unintended consequences (Hough & Mayhew, 1983, 67; Hough & Park, 2002, 177).

The most recent and relevant experiments on improving the public’s knowledge of crime and criminal justice and changing attitudes towards the criminal justice system in Britain are the deliberative poll carried out in 1994, see above p 9; Home Office research (HORS 245) which tested the impact of the provision of factual information on crime and criminal justice on recipients’ knowledge of, and attitudes towards, crime and criminal justice; and Dutch research comparing sentences imposed by judges and informed members of the Dutch public.

As outlined in Chapter 1 the deliberative poll aimed to construct an ‘ideal’ citizen, who would express his/her attitudes towards an issue on the basis of
knowledge of the relevant facts. Thus, participants were provided with information on crime and criminal justice and given the opportunity to discuss the information with experts, policy-makers, and politicians. When the impact of the weekend intervention was measured immediately afterwards, it was found that it did have an effect on overall levels of knowledge of crime and criminal justice and also led to a measurable change in attitudes (Luskin et al., 2002). Additionally, a positive correlation between knowledge levels and attitude change was found (Luskin et al., 2002, 485).

Nevertheless, some questions remained regarding the robustness, quality, and cause of the attitudinal change, i.e. would change be retained in the long-term, would the increase in knowledge result in increased logical coherence of respondents’ attitudes (attitude constraint)\(^{23}\) and, most importantly, was it caused by the information provided (Hough & Park, 2002; Sturgis et al., 2005).

Thus – through secondary data analysis – a later piece of research measured participants’ level of knowledge and their attitudes again 10-months after the deliberative weekend. It was found that changes towards a more liberal view of sentencing had persisted although to a lesser extent than the short-term change observed immediately after the experiment. In this study researchers were confident that the change was a result of participation in the deliberative weekend. What remained unclear, however, was whether it was the information provided that had caused the change or other aspects of the weekend, e.g. particularly charismatic presenters, or the small group discussions (Hough & Park, 2002, 176-180).

In 2001, as part of a Sentencing Review, the Home Office commissioned research interrogating public views of sentencing (Halliday et al., 2001, 108). Part of the research involved an experimental intervention providing members of the public,

\(^{23}\) The notion of attitude constraint refers to ‘a configuration of ideas and attitudes in which the elements are bound together by some form of constraint or functional interdependence’ which could be interpreted as logically coherent world views and belief systems (Converse, 1964, 207).
who had participated in a public opinion survey on crime, with factual information on crime and criminal justice through three different media, a booklet, a video, and a seminar. The participants of the experiment were subsequently re-interviewed to measure the impact of this intervention (Chapman et al., 2002).

The study found that the provision of factual information significantly improved levels of knowledge regardless of the medium used. The information provided did not have a clear effect on participants’ sentencing preferences but did reduce worry about victimisation and the perception that sentencing was too lenient. Additionally, confidence in the criminal justice system improved (Chapman et al., 2002, ix-xi).

The study was ‘replicated’ to some extent in 2002/03, when a sub-sample of British Crime Survey respondents’ received a copy of the booklet used in the original research and were subsequently re-interviewed. Of those who had received the booklet, less than one in five respondents had read it in full, whereas 63 per cent had looked at some sections or flicked through it. The level of knowledge of those respondents who had looked at the book (including those who read it in full and those who just flicked through it) improved on some questions but not on others (Salisbury, 2004, 7-9). As regards an improvement in levels of confidence in the criminal justice system, the study found that, on a number of items, the level of confidence increased for those who had looked at the booklet just as it did for a control group of British Crime Survey respondents who had not received the booklet (Salisbury, 2004, 9-12). Thus, participation in the British Crime Survey itself, or the repeat interview seemed to have increased levels of confidence in the criminal justice system (Salisbury, 2004, 12). This could be interpreted as a Hawthorne effect – British Crime Survey respondents felt special by taking part (Cook & Campbell, 1979, 60) – or a result of a participants’ greater engagement with the issues questioned about and, as a result, a more thoughtful response to the questions posed. Additionally, participants in the 

24 A thorough discussion of the research design of HORS 245 follows below.
British Crime Survey might have perceived this process as the 'system’s attempt‘ to be reflexive and accountable, something which may well command greater confidence in itself.

Recent research in the Netherlands has attempted to replicate research carried out in the 1980s and 90s in Britain by Mike Hough exploring the gap between judicial sentencing norms and public views of appropriate sentencing levels (Hough, 1996; Hough & Moxon, 1985). In a mixed method experimental research project Keijser et al. (2007) compared sentencing preferences of members of the judiciary and members of the public provided with the same case details (complete realistic case files), and members of the public reading a newspaper article on the same cases. Two important findings emerged from that research. First, individual sentencing preferences are affected by the amount of information available on specific cases – confirming previous research findings. Secondly, despite receiving the same case details a substantive gap in sentence severity remained between members of the judiciary and ‘informed’ members of the public (albeit a smaller one than between judges and ‘uninformed’ members of the public) (Keijser et al., 2007, 154).

Experimental research on attitude change related to crime and criminal justice shows that the impact of information on levels of knowledge appears robust at least in the short-term, whereas the impact of information on attitude and confidence is less clear. Thus, a clear distinction has to be made between educating the public about crime and criminal justice as an end in itself, as opposed to being a means to achieving a change in public opinion, such as an improvement in confidence. However, the experimental interventions used to educate the public outlined above suffer from a number of problems. The deliberative poll as a tool to educate the public is limited by the small number of people addressed. A greater use of this approach to capture more members of the public would be time-intensive and the costs would be prohibitive. Sending out a leaflet to every household in the UK would
appear, on first sight, to be a relatively effective way of informing the public about crime and criminal justice. However, a small leaflet produced by the government comes with its own limitations. The amount of information which could be included would necessarily be small and highly selective and, in addition, it would need to be updated on a regular basis. The choice of the information to be included and the leaflet in general might be perceived as biased because of its association with the government, and the level of take-up or actual readership by the public may well be fairly small.

Thus, it appears that there is a place for empirical research which tests the impact of factual information on public opinion of crime and criminal justice provided in a more naturalistic setting. Recently, researchers in the Netherlands have carried out experimental research on the ‘effect of media information on people’s attitudes towards the justice system’ (Elffers et al., 2007, 163). Over the duration of a year a local Dutch newspaper reported, in 20 articles, on readers’ experiences and perceptions of regularly attending criminal proceedings in court (the group of readers attending court was labelled a ‘newspaper jury’). General readers of the local newspaper were surveyed, with a mail questionnaire, on their attitudes towards, and perceptions of, crime and justice. The main finding from the research was that the change in media reporting style had no substantial impact on the attitudes of the readers of the local newspaper (Elffers et al., 2007).

The quasi-experimental research presented in this thesis was designed following, unknowingly, much the same rationale as the Dutch research. It aimed to test whether factual information on crime and criminal justice conveyed

______________________________

25 A control group was established with readers of another local newspaper not reporting on the newspaper jury.

26 The effect of the experiment on the ‘newspaper jurors’ was two-fold. Jurors evaluated the professionals involved in the trial process positively while they were shocked by the crimes they witnessed and expressed negative views about the crimes and the offenders.
naturalistically, i.e. by the media which is accessed routinely by large numbers of citizens would improve the public's level of knowledge of these issues in the same way as the 'laboratory' studies noted above seemed to do. Whether or not the improvement in levels of knowledge would lead to a change in attitudes was only a secondary consideration for the Crime Scene study.

2. A new research design – a mixed methods experimental study

Empirical work in doctoral research can often suffer from financial constraints, as well as a lack of facilities, and restrictions of access to research subjects and organisations. It was possible to conduct a reasonably ambitious empirical study for the purpose of this doctoral thesis because of a successful bid for a research grant under the Nuffield Foundation’s ‘Access to Justice’ initiative. Funding was granted to my doctoral supervisor and me for a study looking at whether or not the provision of information about crime and the criminal justice system through a weekly column in a local newspaper can have an impact on readers' levels of knowledge and their attitudes. All research instruments were designed by me with the support of my doctoral supervisor, and I carried out most of the fieldwork.27

The discussion of the research design is the backbone of this thesis as it was deemed important to ground any theoretical deliberations in the 'real world', i.e. to support or refute theories with evidence gathered through empirical research (Stinchcombe, 1968, 53-56).28 The overarching theme of the thesis is to place what we know (and are going to find out through the empirical study) about public opinion, the link between the public and the media, and changing public opinion, in the

27 About half of the 550 follow-up contacts by phone for the first part of the Oxford Public Opinion survey were carried out by Karen Cooper, a research officer at the Centre for Criminology at the University of Oxford.

28 For a thorough discussion of the relationship between theory and research see Bottoms 2000, 15-60.
context of contemporary social theories (for example, Beck, 1992 [1986]; Garland, 2001; Giddens, 1991).

a. The research question

Thus, the main concern of the thesis is the nature of public opinion, levels of knowledge of crime and criminal justice, and how those can be influenced. Despite the breadth of public opinion research, understanding of what drives public opinion, how it can be changed, and whether it is as punitive, clear cut, and polarised as is often asserted, is still limited. Additionally, some of the research evidence available is unconvincing due to methodological flaws in the research design, or the limitations of the specific research methods used.

The research design for this study brings together a number of research methods which were deemed most fit for the purpose of addressing the different research questions. The main methods selected were the ‘Oxford Public Opinion Survey’ and in-depth interviews (‘It’s your turn’).

In this section, I will discuss in detail the methodology of the Oxford Public Opinion Survey and the experimental intervention, whilst the design of, and the findings from, the in-depth interviews will be discussed in Chapter 4. The research questions and the research methods chosen to address them are listed in Table 1 below.
### Table 1. Research questions and methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Research Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) What do members of the public know about crime and the criminal justice system?</td>
<td>Pre- and post self-completion questionnaire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Does the provision of information about crime and the criminal justice system increase readers' levels of knowledge of these issues? Sub-questions: -What level of interest in that kind of information is there among the public? -How many will read the column? -Will readers be able to recall material from the column accurately?</td>
<td>Pre- and post self-completion questionnaire. In-depth interviews. Pre- and post self-completion questionnaire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Will readers think a local newspaper is the appropriate forum for the provision of such information? Will readers question the information provided?</td>
<td>Content analysis of ‘letters to the editor’; in-depth interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Does improved knowledge, in turn, have any effect on attitudes towards the criminal justice system? Sub-questions, -Does it increase ‘confidence’? -Does it reduce ‘punitiveness’? -Does it make people’s attitudes more complex? -What might change these attitudes if not improved knowledge about how the system operates? -Do people believe increased knowledge could change their attitudes?</td>
<td>Pre- and post self-completion questionnaire. In-depth interviews. Pre- and post self-completion questionnaire. In-depth interviews. In-depth interviews.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before describing each of the research methods in more detail it is important to emphasise that they were not intended to stand in isolation. Each method and each dataset compiled is expected to provide a source for illumination and interpretation of each of the other datasets. This approach should enable me to build up a richer and more complex picture of the processes of take-up, reception, and recall of information, and of public opinion more generally. ‘Triangulation’ of the different data sources should also facilitate a more accurate assessment of the validity of all the data gathered. However, data and methodological triangulation is used in the spirit of its ability to ‘deepen understanding’ rather than to ‘guarantee validity’ or to serve as a search for the simple and ultimate truth (Silverman quoted in
Seale, 1999, 58). A short discussion of conflicting research paradigms and the advantages and disadvantages of mixed methods research will follow in Chapter 4.

Empirical studies in the social sciences should be replicable, and therefore all steps taken in the research design need to be explained in some detail (Bryman, 2001, 76). In order to comply with ‘descriptive validity’ or ‘replicability’, but also because it is interesting to describe the processes involved in designing a study such as this, the present chapter provides a reflective and comprehensive account of the research design and the specific methods chosen. In Chapter 1, I described the methodological limitations which are inevitable in public opinion research based exclusively on survey methodology. Thus, this research drew on both quantitative (the OPOS) and qualitative methods (in-depth interviews) in order to better address the research hypothesis (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 1).

Research carried out by the Home Office in 2001 (HORS 245) (Chapman et al., 2002), described briefly above on pp. 37-38, was the main inspiration for the Crime Scene experiment. I have chosen to discuss the research design of the Home Office study in some detail because it bears a strong resemblance to my own, superficially at any rate. The research looked at the impact of the provision of information to members of the public on their knowledge of, and their attitudes towards, the criminal justice system. Participants were provided with basic information about the criminal justice system, concentrating on sentencing levels, the different sentences available to the courts, the costs of sentences, levels of crime, and the nature of crime. They were questioned before and after they had received the information to test whether their level of knowledge had improved and their attitudes changed. In section 2 below this study will be critically analysed to draw out some of the methodological considerations guiding my own research design, choice

29 For a discussion of the use of triangulation and the criticisms of this method see, for example, Seale 1999, 52-61, and Young 2002, 158-160.
of research methods, and presentation of the research results. The format of this chapter, for example, was influenced by the finding that HORS 245 did not provide sufficient information to enable replication of the study. Its lack of descriptive validity is a shortcoming that I am keen to avoid.30

b. A methodological critique – HORS 245

The purpose of this methodological critique is to show an awareness of methodological issues and concerns as well as to explain how the Crime Scene experiment aimed to improve on the HORS 245 research design. HORS 245 was carefully analysed to assess whether parts of the research design could and should be replicated in the current research because of the similarity of the research questions.

There are a variety of research methods and designs to choose from for any empirical study in the social sciences. Research design ‘is the blueprint for a study’ and includes all aspects of the ‘who, what, where, when, why and how of the investigation’ (Hagan, 1997, 63). Research methods on the other hand are simply the ‘how’ a specific question is to be investigated and thus they need to fit that particular question (Madge, 1953, 216). In order to address questions of a causal nature it is necessary to adopt a research method which allows the researchers to rule out alternative explanations for changes in the variable under examination (dependent variable). Thus in order to answer the Home Office study’s research question it was necessary to measure whether the provision of information (independent variable) had an effect on levels of knowledge (dependent variable) of those receiving the information.

30 At my request, one of the authors of HORS 245, Becca Chapman, freely provided help and information to better understand the methodology of the study and I thank her for this.
Among the choice of research designs are ‘true’ experiments and quasi-experiments, both of which are used to assess the effect of an independent variable on those exposed to it. The main distinction between true experiments and quasi-experiments is that the latter do not randomly allocate participants to the comparison or the experimental group (Bachman & Schutt, 2003, 139; Bryman, 2001, 38). Both however focus on the comparison of one or more groups before and after exposure to an experimental intervention (independent variable). Where two groups are used, the group exposed to the intervention is known as the experimental group and the group not exposed is referred to as the comparison group.

The Home Office’s research consisted of a survey of ‘a nationally representative sample of 1,022 people to assess their levels of knowledge about crime, sentencing and the criminal justice system; attitudes to sentencing; and confidence in the criminal justice system’. In a second step, 220 respondents were selected to take part in an experiment ‘to test the impact of providing information’ about crime and the criminal justice system (Chapman et al., 2002, ix). The information was provided in three different ways, via a booklet, a seminar, or a video tape.31 Participants were then re-interviewed and any changes in levels of knowledge, in levels of confidence, and in attitudes were analysed in aggregate but also compared by information format.

Thus, HORS 245 used an adapted version of the one-group pre-test/post-test design, see Diagram 1 below. It was adapted insofar as HORS 245 measured the impact of providing information, using three different formats, to members of the public. Thus, it had in effect three different experimental groups which were tested prior to and after the provision of information. The data gathered from the tests were analysed in the aggregate and separately.

31 The leaflet is available on the RDS website http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/HORS245appb.pdf, and Becca Chapman was kind enough to send me a copy of the video tape.
Diagram 1. One group pre/post-test design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experimental group1:O1</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>O2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O = Observation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X = Experimental Intervention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

c. Validity

In a research setting, the concept of validity is concerned with the ‘best approximation to the truth or falsity’ of the hypothesis which is tested (Cook & Campbell, 1979, 37). The concept has been split into subgroups dealing with specific elements of the research design.

**Internal validity**

Internal validity refers to the ability to draw convincing conclusions about cause and effect. For example, the research question tested in HORS 245 was: Does the provision of information through a leaflet, a seminar, or a video tape, cause an increase in levels of knowledge amongst those reading the leaflet? The conclusion was: ‘providing simple factual information can improve public knowledge about crime and sentencing in the short term at least’ (Chapman et al., 2002, 49). The test of internal validity would examine whether the part of the conclusion which asserts that the provision of ‘simple factual information can improve knowledge’ can be safely drawn.

When analysing HORS 245 I noted a number of threats to the study’s ‘internal validity’. HORS 245 did not establish a comparison group – thus it was unable to rule out the possibility that the gains in knowledge found might have been caused by factors other than the information provided in the experiment. Such factors could be external to the experiment – for example, a particularly high profile crime covered by the media in such a way as to increase people’s knowledge of some of the questions covered by the research, new criminal justice legislation, or a mass information
campaign by the government – or internal, in that they were caused by the research itself. When respondents are interviewed about crime and the criminal justice system their interest in these issues might be raised and they might actively seek out information. However, these effects would be expected to apply to both the experimental and the comparison group and could therefore have been controlled for if a comparison group had been established.

**External validity**

All research designs, including true and quasi-experimental designs, face a number of threats to their ‘external validity’. External validity or generalisability is present when conclusions drawn from the research can confidently be applied to populations other than the one examined (Bachman & Schutt, 2003, 22). Using the example from above, external validity is concerned with examining whether the researchers were justified in drawing the conclusion which generalises the findings of cause and effect from the ‘experimental group’ to ‘the public’.

It was not entirely clear how the samples for each of the information format groups were selected from the initial, nationally representative, sample of survey respondents. Moreover, the authors of HORS 245 acknowledged that due to a low take-up those taking part in the experiment were not representative of the original sample interviewed. Additionally, there was no consideration of the extent to which the differential take-up of the experiment by the participants allocated to the three groups receiving the different information formats may have affected the validity of generalising the findings from the experimental groups to the public. All of this throws the external validity of the findings into doubt (Chapman et al., 2002, 38).

**Construct validity**

Another concept which has been placed under the general heading of external validity is construct validity (Cook & Campbell, 1979, 38). Where internal validity is
concerned with establishing whether there is a causal relationship between two variables, i.e. whether the observed effect has been caused by the experiment, construct validity is concerned with testing whether the effect has been caused by the experimental intervention alone, in this case the information provided, or whether it has been confounded by other factors related to the experiment.

The 'interaction effect of pre-testing', i.e. interviewing participants in the study prior to the experiment is of particular relevance to HORS 245. This effect refers to the pre-test potentially sensitising those in the experimental group to the experimental intervention and therefore exaggerating any findings of the impact of the intervention (Cook & Campbell, 1979, 68). One would want to be confident that any differences found are due to the experimental intervention alone rather than a combination of the intervention and the pre-test. There was no attempt in HORS 245 to ensure that the interaction effect of pre-testing had not exaggerated any findings of the impact of the provision of information. In the survey I undertook for this thesis, for example, I found that some respondents were curious as to what the correct answers to the questions were, as they realised how little they knew about the issues raised. Thus, it is important to find out whether the same effect in the experimental groups would be found without the application of the pre-test and a post-test only design would be necessary for this (Cook & Campbell, 1979, see Diagram 2 below for an example of this).

An additional confounding factor in HORS 245 could be that respondents were provided with a list of sources where they could find out more about crime and the criminal justice system, in at least two of the three information formats (I believe this to be true for all three formats – see below at pp 52-53). A few respondents may have consulted some of these sources in addition to the information received, and

32 The list included more than 10 different sources including 'Victim Support' and the British Crime Survey.
this might have affected the observed change in their level of knowledge of crime and the criminal justice system and their attitude towards it. However, the interview schedule for the post-interview did not include a question concerning whether respondents had followed-up any of those sources or obtained any additional information.

Another effect threatening construct validity that could be significant among participants in the HORS 245 seminar group is the reactive effect or Hawthorne effect, which refers to research participants reacting differently to the experiment because they feel special in taking part (Cook & Campbell, 1979, 60; Roberts & Stalans, 2000, 18). Evidence consistent with this effect was provided by the follow-up research to HORS 245 by Salisbury (2004), described above on p 39. Research results reporting attitudinal change as a result of the provision of information in a deliberative poll scenario, which employed a similar format to the seminar in HORS 245, have been criticised on this ground (Hough & Park, 2002, 166). In HORS 245, a sample of those initially interviewed was told that the interviewers were ‘recruiting people to take part in research’ and asked whether they were willing to ‘read some material about crime (in the form of an eight page booklet)’. They were informed that they subsequently would be re-contacted and asked ‘what you have learnt during this exercise’ (Chapman et al., 2002, Appendix A). Thus, it would have been quite clear to respondents that they were part of an experiment and what the aim of the experiment was. This is a crucial criticism of the HORS 245 research design. Gunter (2000, 219) reports that research testing participants’ memory of a television news broadcast showed that when participants were warned that they would be asked about the news item, they were able to remember 60 per cent more of the news item than respondents who were not forewarned.

Finally, another threat to construct validity is the social desirability effect, which might lead respondents to guess at the researcher’s hypothesis and attempt to provide the interviewer with the answers ‘they want to hear’ (Cook & Campbell, 1979,
In HORS 245, respondents were given a financial incentive to ‘consume’ the information and be re-interviewed, which might lead some people to wish to ‘repay the researchers’. The social desirability effect might have been further inflated by the way the information was presented in the information formats. The video tape, for example, spelt out fairly clearly what the desired effect of watching the video was on viewers’ levels of knowledge and their attitudes towards the system. The voiceover in the video asked ‘What are the facts? If we know more about crime and sentencing, would it change our opinions? Would we favour harsher sentences or not?’. Just before this voiceover the discussion of ‘harsh’ penalties was accompanied by pictures of medieval torture instruments and hanging ropes, i.e. pictures of punishments that today would be regarded by most as cruel and inhumane. It may be that the use of such images was thought necessary to secure the attention of viewers, but in contrasting notions of harsher sentences with the torture chamber it arguably predisposed people to recoil from harshness.

**Descriptive validity**

The report on HORS 245 did not provide sufficient information to enable replication or full appreciation of the research design and methods chosen. For example, it was not entirely clear how the samples for each of the information format groups were selected from the initial representative sample interviewed. The only statement relating to this was that ‘some of those interviewed were asked to take part in the further stages of the research’ and the footnote further says that ‘quotas were used to ensure that the groups receiving the different information sources were well balanced’ (Chapman et al., 2002, 7 fn 9) but there was no further discussion of the selection procedure. In addition, the report did not state explicitly whether all three groups did receive the ‘list of further contacts for information included at the back’ of the booklet (Chapman et al., 2002, 8). Becca Chapman in a personal communication stated that the video group did indeed receive the same list of websites and contacts
which was included in the booklet, however, it is still unclear whether the seminar groups were provided with that list although her communication suggests they were. This lack of descriptive validity can prove to be a serious shortcoming if one wants to assess the integrity and validity of the conclusions drawn.

d. Content of the information

In order to assess whether the kind of information about crime and the criminal justice system provided could plausibly be expected to change the level of knowledge measured one needs to know what kind of information was supplied. Obviously, any presentation of ‘facts’ about the criminal justice system short of thesis-length will have to be selective in order to be manageable and understandable to lay people (Chapman et al., 2002, 49).

However, the Home Office research did specifically explore whether ‘any improvements in knowledge have an impact on attitudes and confidence in the criminal justice system’ (Chapman et al., 2002, 1) and there appeared to be a selection bias in favour of information which could be expected to improve respondents’ confidence in the system. For example, information was provided on the very high proportion of convicted rapists, robbers, and domestic burglars sentenced to immediate imprisonment in what seemed a clear attempt to inspire confidence in sentencing. But no information was provided on the proportion of rapes, robberies, or domestic burglaries recorded by the police which result in a caution or conviction of the offender. The proportion in all three cases is low and thus would probably not justify much confidence in the criminal justice system's ability to bring offenders to justice. Indeed no information was provided about detection rates or conviction rates at all.

Additionally, the information was not always provided in such a way as to enable easy comparison. For example, the video presents the information about the
cost of prison sentence (costs per year) in a different way to the cost for a community sentence (costs per week) and in the leaflet the given costs for a community sentence are not linked to a specified time period.

e. Questionnaire design

Structured interviews in HORS 245 were carried out face-to-face, and there is the possibility that interviewer bias was introduced. There is some limited evidence that respondents’ answers to a questionnaire can sometimes be affected by the characteristics, such as the gender, ethnicity, and social class of the interviewer and that responses may accordingly be biased towards what is deemed ‘desirable’ answers by the interviewee (Bryman, 2001, 112).

The authors of HORS 245 stated explicitly that respondents had a chance of getting 3.3 out of 11 answers correctly just by guessing. In fact, the mean score of correct answers for the experimental groups was only 3.9. 33 Although the improvement in score was quite big, in that it increased to 5.9 correct answers, it could be argued that the knowledge questions were not sufficiently sensitive to measure change. For example, three of the 11 knowledge questions asked in HORS 245 were ‘true or false’ questions, which are obviously prone to being answered correctly simply by guessing. Another three questions were open-ended, and a range of answers had to be accepted. One example of such a question is: Roughly how much does it cost to keep a prisoner in prison for a year? The answer provided in the three information formats was £26,000 and HORS 245 states that everything within the range of £21,000 to £31,000 was accepted as a correct answer (Chapman et al., 2002, 10, Table 3.1).

33 This score was higher than that for the whole sample interviewed, which was 3.6 and indicates again that the experimental groups were not representative of the initial sample.
Moreover, the questions were not always precise enough to measure accurately the take-up and recall of the information provided. Just to give one example, Q41 of the Home Office questionnaire asks ‘how much of a prison sentence is spent in prison’? The response categories provided were: a quarter; a half; three quarters; the entire sentence; or don’t know. The leaflet provided the following information: Generally speaking, offenders are eligible for release once they have served between a half and two-thirds of their sentence.

Underlying implausible hypotheses on the part of the researchers caused further confusion in the research analysis. The authors of the report found that the proportion of respondents ‘thinking sentencing had “quite a lot” or “a great deal” of impact on crime increased’ (Chapman et al., 2002, 19). They expressed surprise at this finding given that people had been provided with information on levels of reconviction. However, information provided on reconviction rates is clearly targeted at the individual crime prevention/deterrent capacities of sentencing whereas the HORS 245 question on the impact of sentencing on crime tests beliefs in general deterrence and the functions of sentencing in society as a whole.

Finally, the time between receiving the information and follow-up varied between the three groups and overall was very short – between one and six weeks, thus allowing conclusions about improvements in knowledge to be drawn in the very short term only (Chapman et al., 2002, 37 Fn 29). The conclusions regarding the relative effectiveness of the information formats may have been affected by the different recall periods used.

f. HORS 245 findings in context

HORS 245 employed a simple one-group pre-test/post-test design and did not take all possible steps to guard against threats to internal validity. Thus, there are alternative factors unrelated to the experiment which could explain the changes in
knowledge scores and attitudes. The findings are not generalisable either as we do not know whether the three different samples of people taking part in the experiment are representative of the general population. Additionally, the Home Office experiment only tells us what might happen if we pay people (who know that they are part of an experiment) to read certain information. The information provided in the experiment was biased in favour of selecting facts which would be expected to improve confidence in the criminal justice system and the interview questionnaire was not sufficiently sensitive to measure accurately the impact of said information on levels of knowledge of and attitudes to the criminal justice system.

Gathering all the above evidence it appears to me that the conclusions that ‘providing simple factual information can improve public knowledge about crime and sentencing in the short term at least’; and that ‘participating in the project also had an impact on attitudes to and confidence in the criminal justice system’ (Chapman et al., 2002, 49) cannot be confidently drawn.

3. Addressing the research questions naturalistically

The analysis of HORS 245 facilitated a better grasp of the meaning and relevance of some of the methodological concepts described in section 2 above. The task then was to design research which would be better able to answer the research questions in a reliable and valid way. More importantly the naturalistic research design for the empirical part of this thesis incorporated two different research methods, quantitative and qualitative, to examine the research questions listed in Table 1 above. Additionally, careful field notes were taken throughout the duration of the fieldwork to keep track of anything of interest such as communications and ad hoc negotiations with The Oxford Times, communications with survey respondents and non-respondents, and communications with readers of the column and other interested parties.
The research methods which were expected to complement each other to better understand the underlying processes of reception, take-up, and recollection of information were:

- the ‘Oxford Public Opinion Survey’;
- in-depth interviews;
- and the gathering of contextual data.

These methods inform and supplement each other not only because they address different sub-questions of the study but also because they are taken from different research strategies. The Oxford Public Opinion Survey is a largely quantitative exercise, resulting in data which can be analysed statistically (through SPSS), with the potential of providing convincing support for causal inferences. However, the OPOS also contained a large amount of qualitative data as respondents commented on questions or used the space for comments provided. The in-depth interviews were an opportunity to qualitatively investigate some of the research sub-questions and shed light on the interpretation of the quantitative data derived from the survey. Both methods draw on direct communication with the ‘research subjects’ and it was anticipated that using two different forms of communication would enable me to ‘better capture the social complexity that the fieldwork explores’ (Arksey & Knight, 1999, 22).

It is vital to emphasise the naturalistic quality of the research design. In contrast to traditional experimental media research which measured whether the ‘media can produce certain effects’ (emphasis in the original, MacBeth 1996 quoted in Gunter, 2000, 252), this experiment intended to measure the effects that occur in ‘reality’. What, if any, effect does factual information on crime and criminal justice have if it is presented among the daily deluge of other information on crime and criminal justice which members of the public are exposed to on a daily basis?
a. The Oxford Public Opinion Survey

The primary focus of the survey was to assess whether or not factual information on crime and criminal justice in a weekly local newspaper column can change levels of knowledge measurably in those reading that column. It was decided to survey a representative sample of Oxford residents in order to capture a sufficient number of readers of *The Oxford Times* as the experimental group and those who state that they do not read this particular newspaper as a comparison group. Both groups were to be surveyed prior to and after the inclusion of weekly columns in this local newspaper.

It was vital to establish a comparison group in order to answer the research questions because of the potential threats to ‘internal validity’ discussed above. Ideally, comparison and experimental groups should be constructed through a process of random allocation. Given sufficient numbers in each group, it is possible to assert that any differences in outcomes are produced by the independent variable rather than merely reflecting initial differences between the groups (Bachman & Schutt, 2003, 145). However, random allocation of participants to either the experimental or the comparison group was not possible in this study as it was designed to test the ‘real or natural’ effect of providing information about crime and the criminal justice system through a medium regularly accessed by members of the public. The experimental group was therefore self-selected in that they were readers of the newspaper chosen for the research. In this research it was therefore only feasible to choose a random sample of people resident in Oxford, an unknown number of whom would then fall into either experimental or comparison group.34

In order to control for the interaction effect of pre-testing, a more sophisticated design than a simple classical experimental design needed to be employed. In the

---

34 For a grudging concession that it is sometimes neither feasible nor desirable to randomly assign respondents to experimental and comparison group, see Cook and Campbell 1979, 344-345.
Oxford Public Opinion Survey a particular type of experimental design, the Solomon four-group design has been used, except that participants were not randomly assigned. The Solomon four-group design compares four different groups: one group exposed to the experimental intervention (experimental group 1), and a comparison group 1, both of which are observed prior to and after the experimental intervention. In addition, another experimental group 2 and comparison group 2 are interviewed only after the experimental intervention (see Diagram 2 below). The underlying hypothesis for this design is that some of the participants in the study might be influenced by the initial observation, i.e. by knowing that they are taking part in a research project, and thus that the experimental intervention will trigger a reaction which differs from a 'normal, un-sensitised' reaction. Therefore another two groups (experimental and comparison) are observed but only after the experimental intervention. Any differences found between the experimental and the comparison groups which are attributed to the experimental intervention should be very similar for both, those observed twice and those observed only once. If that is the case, it would appear that no interaction between 'testing and treatment' has occurred.

Diagram 2. Solomon four-group design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>O1</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>O2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental group 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(readers of the local newspaper)</td>
<td></td>
<td>O1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison group 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>O1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(non-readers of the local newspaper)</td>
<td></td>
<td>O2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental group 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>O1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(readers of the local newspaper)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison group 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>O1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(non-readers of the local newspaper)</td>
<td></td>
<td>O1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

O = Observation
X = Experimental Intervention

Huge efforts were made to design a research study which was as internally valid as possible. However, it was expected from the outset that the external validity, i.e. the
generalisability of the experiment, might be limited. The specific research question had to be answered under the constraints of the design of a natural experiment and within the resources and time-frame available to a solitary doctoral student. The choice of a weekly local broadsheet newspaper does have considerable impact on the ability to generalise from any of the findings. As stated above, there is considerable research evidence that newspaper readership is linked to attitudes towards the criminal justice system. Moreover, Oxford is a ‘special’ city, influenced enormously by the presence of the university which is reflected in its resident population, the more than average turnover in that population and, in some respects, the tension between ‘town and gown’. For those two reasons, it is not possible to draw general conclusions about the effect of providing information to members of the public. This lack of generalisability might be regarded by many quantitative criminologists as a flaw in the research design.

However, the choice of newspaper was determined, partly, by practical considerations of gaining access but also theoretical considerations. The choice of *The Oxford Times* implied that my experimental group might indeed include members of the local ‘elites’, such as academics, councillors, and magistrates. It has been argued that the better-educated tend to assimilate (factual) information from the media better than the less well-educated (Gunter, 2000, 217) which would make it easier to detect the impact of the experimental intervention. Additionally, it was expected that readers of *The Oxford Times* may be more receptive to the particular style of the Crime Scene column and readership would be higher than amongst a less educated and more conservative readership. Thus, the experimental group constitutes what has been termed a ‘theoretically interesting sample’ (Bryman & Beardsworth, 2006, 4; Gadd, 2003, 317). Choosing your sample in such a way facilitates the comparison of findings from the research with the ‘kinds of consequences of the theory’ you would expect, thus testing whether or not the theory is true or false (Stinchcombe, 1968, 53).
Finally, in order to keep this experiment as natural as possible, steps were taken to prevent survey respondents from linking the columns to the Oxford Public Opinion Survey. The columns were written using a *nom de plume*, whereas the survey’s covering letter was signed using my real name and that of my supervisor. In addition, colleagues were ‘sworn to secrecy’ and any publicity for the project was avoided. Thus, the Nuffield Foundation was asked to change the project’s name on their webpage and keep their description of the project deliberately vague.

*The ethics of the Crime Scene experiment*

The secrecy around the Crime Scene column and the ‘true’ purpose of the Oxford Public Opinion Survey raises important questions about the ethics of the research. When applying for external research funding it is standard procedure and often a requirement from funding bodies to include a section on the ethical dimension of the research, i.e. whether any aspects of the research could have a detrimental impact on the ‘physical, social, [or] psychological wellbeing of an individual participating in research’ (British Society of Criminology, 2006).

Most aspects of the research process were fairly unproblematic as far as ethical issues were involved. Research participants were adults and identified using publicly accessible information, namely the electoral roll. Those selected at random from the electoral roll were contacted by post and asked to take part in a mail survey (see Appendix 3). Similarly, those survey respondents who agreed to be contacted for an in-depth interview were sent a letter (see Appendix 4) containing details of the reason for the interview, and covering issues of confidentiality, data protection, and consent. The research participants were not asked to take part in a particularly burdensome research process; even the in-depth interviews were fairly short, lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. Additionally, the research questions asked general questions about crime and criminal justice which were unlikely to prove harmful or stressful to participants.
All data collected in the research process were to be held under the rules of the Data Protection Act and the protection of the anonymity of respondents was taken seriously. It was necessary to retain personal information which could identify survey respondents who were willing to be re-contacted. Each survey was given a code which was used as a single identifier. Names and addresses of individuals were held in a file separate from the survey and interview data. The file was destroyed as soon as the fieldwork was completed.

However, the one issue which could be regarded as ethically problematic was the question of informed consent which is required from research participants. The British Society of Criminology states that informed consent ‘implies a responsibility on the part of the researchers to explain as fully as possible, and in terms meaningful to participants, what the research is about’. The issue of full disclosure of the rationale of the research before it begins has been a contentious issue for sociologists, criminologists, and others as it has been argued that such an interpretation of informed consent would render any covert or experimental research unethical (Goode, 1996; Homan, 1991, 69-79, in particular on 73; Hoyle, 2000; Ortmann & Hertwig, 2002). Survey respondents were not given the full information about the purpose of the OPOS or the interviews prior to agreeing to take part. Whether this is a case of being ‘economical with the truth’ or one of deception is, in my view, a moot point (for a similar conclusion see Ortmann & Hertwig, 2002, 113). Neither survey respondents nor interviewees had given fully informed consent to participation in the research as the full details of the research had not been disclosed.

However, ethical principles cannot be regarded as ‘absolutes’ (Hoyle, 2000), they are contested and have to be weighed against other concerns such as the importance of the research for the public, the impact of full disclosure on the validity of the research, and the amount of ‘damage’ to research participants (Goode, 1996, 13; Homan, 1991, 4). In the case of the Crime Scene experiment the integrity of the research would have been compromised had the full details of the nature of the
experiment been disclosed. As stated above the measurement of the impact of the experimental intervention could be confounded by participants’ awareness that they were taking part in an experiment. Naturally, this is not sufficient reason to dismiss ethical concerns, but the nature of the research was not intrusive and there was little to no risk of any harm to research participants. Moreover, in-depth interviewees were fully briefed at the end of the interview and provided with a summary of the research with the additional proviso that they could still withdraw their consent at the post-interview stage. It was also planned to publicise details of the research more widely through a feature in The Oxford Times, however, this did not materialise (see pp 217 below). Thus, although I was slightly uncomfortable with the element of deception in the research I believe it was unavoidable to be confident in the results from the research.

**Gaining access to a newspaper – The Oxford Times**

The crucial element of setting up research such as this is to gain access to a media organisation willing to take part in the research. There were theoretical as well as practical questions to consider in selecting a particular part of the media and a particular newspaper. There is support in the psychological literature for the proposition that because information in printed format requires a more active processing than that conveyed in audio or audio/visual format it leads to better recall (Furnham et al., 1990), i.e. more attention is paid to newspaper items than television programmes and thus newspapers are better able to transmit information, which is actually retained, than television (Clarke & Freddin, 1978, 156; Gunter, 2000, 163-189). Moreover, people might perceive news and information in local newspapers as more relevant and memorable (because closer to home), and also as verifiable, given that they might have other sources of local knowledge they can draw on (Ericson, 1991, 220; Franklin & Murphy, 1991, 3-10). An example of the distinction made by members of the public between the local and the national, is the finding that
people perceive levels of crime differently when asked about their local area rather than crime at a national level (see, for example Nicholas & Walker, 2004, 26).35

*The Oxford Times* can be described as a broadsheet or ‘quality’ newspaper and as such is likely to draw a higher status readership. Indeed, recent research established strong link between social status and newspaper readership (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007). Thus, with the assistance of my supervisor, I approached *The Oxford Times* which has a circulation of about 30,000 papers a week. The first step was to write a carefully worded letter to the editor, introducing the research and enquiring ‘whether you [the editor of *The Oxford Times*] would, in principle, be interested in supporting this research’. After a positive response from the editor an initial meeting was held at which the benefits of the research for the newspaper were explained as well as the rationale behind the research. We offered to provide feedback on the socio-demographic composition of the sample of *Oxford Times* readers, what parts of the newspaper they read, and how often they read it. The editor did ask for samples of columns for inclusion and emphasised that the columns would need to be local and topical. He also warned that it was of vital importance to be certain that a quality weekly column could be sustained for a period of six months. After securing funding for the empirical part of this thesis another meeting was arranged and it was agreed that weekly columns should be included in *The Oxford Times* from September 2004 until April 2005.

**The Crime Scene experiment – writing columns for The Oxford Times**

The ‘experimental intervention’ consisted of writing weekly columns about crime and the criminal justice system over a period of six months. The columns were designed to provide factual information which should increase knowledge of the prevalence

---

35 I was also encouraged to approach a local newspaper by knowing of another criminologist, David Wilson, Professor of Criminology at the University of Central England, who wrote weekly columns for the Birmingham Post for a period of six years.
and patterns of crime, sentencing patterns, and other processes of the criminal justice system. Overall, the columns could be read as a general introduction to criminology covering all key aspects of crime and the mechanisms of the criminal justice system. The aim of the research was to assess whether the level of knowledge of readers of the column could be improved rather than whether their confidence in the criminal justice system could be improved. This is an important distinction to make as it can be seen from the analysis of HORS 245 that if the intention is to improve confidence in the system one would probably need to exercise a particular selection bias concerning the information provided.

Clearly any presentation of information, particularly in the format of a newspaper column, will be influenced to some extent by the author’s values as ‘all knowledge is knowledge from some point of view’ (Fishman (1978), 531 quoted in Welsh et al., 1998). However, the style of the columns was discursive, presenting information and research evidence, discussing policy options, and pointing to potential advantages and disadvantages of these options.\textsuperscript{36} The columns were also meant to be of local interest and therefore ‘hot crime-related topics’ in Oxford, such as anti-social behaviour, and homelessness were also addressed. In total 26 columns were published on a weekly basis for the duration of six months. All the factual information needed to answer all but one of the factual questions posed in the OPOS was provided two to three times in the course of the publication of the Crime Scene columns. Nevertheless, considering the daily deluge of stories about crime and criminal justice the strength of the experimental manipulation might reasonably be regarded as relatively weak. Just how weak would depend, of course, on how

\textsuperscript{36} Sample columns are reproduced in Appendix 9 in order to allow the reader to make their own assessment of the information provided to readers of \textit{The Oxford Times}. All columns are available for inspection on request or can be found on microfiche at the Oxford library of the newspaper.
often the columns were sought out (or stumbled across) and read. I return to this issue in Chapter 3 below.

Sample selection

The aim was to sample 300 Oxford Times readers and 210 non-readers for a pre-and post-test, assuming an attrition of a third between the two stages. Additionally, it was hoped to survey 200 Oxford Times readers and 145 non-readers at the post-experiment stage only.

I was keen to generate a reasonably representative sample of Oxford Times readers and sought to draw it from across Oxford, the heartland of Oxford Times sales.37 Four wards in Oxford were selected according to socio-demographic criteria but also their likelihood of yielding sufficient numbers of Oxford Times readers for the research. The wards were chosen on the basis of being relatively different, i.e. ones which are less or more deprived, thus presumed to attract a different set of residents. The wards were chosen using the Indices of Deprivation 2000 at ward level in Oxford and a list of Oxford Times distribution across Oxford.38

The electoral register for the four wards in Oxford was used as the sampling frame. It contains the name and address of everyone eligible and willing to vote. As a consequence, the electoral register is not a register of all people resident in Oxford. It does not include children, and young people under 18, and it does not include the homeless and those who opt not to register to vote in any elections. Thus, the overall sample I have drawn from is not representative of Oxford’s total population. However, it was chosen for the reason that it was expected that many of the more transient of Oxford’s population, mainly students, would be unlikely to be included. It is obviously

37 According to the editor the readership of The Oxford Times is split 50:50 between Oxford city and Oxford county.

38 The four wards were: Headington, Hinksey Park, Oxford North, and Rose Hill and Iffley.
important to draw on a stable population for a pre-and post-survey design. It appeared however that many of the students chose to register for elections and thus I excluded students – where student accommodation was easily identifiable – and other unexpected registrations.\textsuperscript{39} They were excluded prior to randomising from the sample drawn from electoral register. In all, about 10 per cent of the original sample of 12,496 people registered in the four Oxford wards were lost. From this sample 625 people per ward were randomly selected for the sample of those respondents which were to be observed twice, and 375 people per ward for the sample only to be observed after the columns had been included in \textit{The Oxford Times}. The sample was randomised as a simple random sample (without replacement), meaning that each respondent had an equal chance of being included (Bryman, 2001, 88-89), using a procedure generated by a standard computer programme (Microsoft Office Excel).

In many cases, the random selection procedure led to the inclusion of more than one person of the same household. In order not to have to contact more than one person at each household, addresses were checked and if there was more than one respondent (even if it appeared to be shared accommodation) the surplus respondent(s) were randomly deleted from the sample, 21 per cent of the sample were lost through this procedure. It would have been awkward to contact respondents by phone and ask first for one and then the other member of the household. Additionally, having two participants in the survey in the same household might have been a confounding factor for assessing changing levels of knowledge as they might discuss the survey and share information from the columns.

In the event, 2,075 mail surveys were sent out to Oxford residents at the pre-experiment stage. The surveys were sent out in two batches of 1,123 and 956 in order to make the follow-up more manageable. The first batch of surveys was sent

\textsuperscript{39} I found a number of people listed on the electoral roll as living in hotels (more than could be accounted for by caretakers, owners, etc), in homeless accommodation, or similar temporary accommodation.
out one week prior to the start of the summer holidays (starting 12 July), and the second batch two weeks into the summer holidays (starting 2 August). The follow-up survey, which took place in May 2005 consisted of 520 surveys sent to respondents of the pre-sample who had agreed to be re-contacted and 1,066 respondents who were only surveyed once, at the post-survey stage.

**Method of delivery**

Large scale surveys can be carried out in a number of ways, as structured face-to-face interviews, telephone surveys, or mail surveys. Structured face-to-face interviews were rejected because of the impossibility for a sole researcher to interview more than 500 people before the experiment and more than 600 people after the experiment had taken place. The choice of delivery has major resource implications as response rates for phone and mail surveys can be low (Sarantakos, 1997, 265).

Initially it was planned to carry out the survey by telephone. However, the questionnaire developed was more complex than desirable for a phone interview. In addition, the amount of time that would have had to have been spent on the phone trying to get through to people only to be refused in many cases, would have been enormous. Moreover, according to British Telecom only 46 per cent of residential phone lines in the UK are listed in the phonebook. Thus, a phone survey would have further biased the selected sample and, importantly, the evidence regarding differences in the quality of results achieved is not strong (Schumann & Presser, 1996, 327-331).

A decision was taken to use a ‘mixed’ approach, using a mail survey which was followed up by phone (where possible) or letter. The Oxford Public Opinion

40 This can be found on BT’s directory enquiries webpage, once an unsuccessful search has been run, [http://www.bt.com/index.jsp](http://www.bt.com/index.jsp).
Survey was sent out to the sample with a covering letter (both are attached as Appendix 1 and 3). The covering letter invited respondents to take part in the survey and offered two different methods of doing so. The first was to return the letter in a free to post envelope within 10 days (a date was also provided to serve as a reminder) and the second was to carry out the survey over the phone. This was done so that one of the limitations of mail surveys, namely that they exclude respondents whose literacy skills are limited was avoided. It was also hoped that it might encourage respondents to take part whose English is only limited (Bryman, 2001, 131). Out of 954 survey respondents and 1,311 completed surveys very few people called to express interest, or responded positively to our offer to carry out the survey over the phone and in total only 18 respondents were interviewed in that manner.

It has been suggested that in order to optimise response rates mail surveys should be followed-up 2 to 3 times (Bryman, 2001, 132). However, I had to balance achieving an optimised response rate at this initial survey stage with the aim of receiving responses from those willing to be re-contacted. It is unlikely that those respondents who had to be contacted 2-3 times to take part in the initial survey would be keen to take part in another survey of the same kind. I followed-up the initial mail survey by phone where telephone numbers were listed in the local directory and by reminder letter where phone numbers were not found. Respondents whose phone number was available but who could not be contacted were reminded by letter. The follow-up was limited to one reminder, either by phone or letter.

In this study great care was taken so as to avoid contamination of the experiment by providing information to respondents other than that made available in the columns. In the initial survey, some people were intrigued by the ‘knowledge’ questions and were keen to receive the correct answers to these questions. Letters

\[ \text{41 Contact was attempted 2-3 times at different times of the day. A considerable proportion of phone numbers were found to be faulty.} \]
were sent out to inform them that they would have to wait until the end of the follow-up (9-10 months after the initial interview) before they would receive a ‘fact sheet’. This ran the risk of alienating some people, particularly when interviewing them on the phone but it was a necessary step to ensure the quality of the data obtained at the point of follow-up.

**Questionnaire design**

In designing a questionnaire for use either as a self-completion survey or a structured interview schedule great care needs to be taken to make sure that questions do indeed measure what they are meant to measure. There are some basic criteria for questionnaire design which, if adhered to, will go a long way to ensure that the questions measure the required concepts. Questions must address one specific point in a clear and unambiguous way and every question must be required for the purpose of the questionnaire. The following question, for example, is ambiguous, *Most of us worry some time or other about being a victim of crime. Could you tell me how worried you are about this?* (from HORS 245, Chapman et al., 2002, Appendix A). Some people might interpret this as a question about their own fears about becoming a victim, whereas others might interpret it as requiring them to say whether they worried about the fact that ‘most people’ worry about being a victim of crime at ‘some time or other’.

The questionnaire must be clear and in the right tone, which means the wording of the questions must be appropriate, all instructions must be easy to understand, it must be accompanied by a good cover letter, have an attractive layout and give an overall impression which is positive, in the sense of uncluttered, easy to read and easy to understand. If the questionnaire contains pre-coded response categories, they again must be easy to understand and more importantly they must be exhaustive, uni-dimensional, and mutually exclusive. For example, the following response categories would not be exhaustive, 10-20; 21-30; 31-50; 51-70; 71-90; 91-
100; *Don’t know* (from my pilot questionnaire), as the option 1-9 is missing. They are, however, mutually exclusive as they do not overlap as would be the case with 10-20; 20-30; etc, and uni-dimensional as they are sticking to a numeric system, and do not mix percentages and numbers, as would be the case in 10-20; 21-30%. In addition to these methodological issues, legal responsibilities and ethical questions need to be considered, i.e. whether any of the questions could cause a violation of the rights of respondents or cause respondents psychological harm (Sarantakos, 1997, 240, see also the discussion on ethics above).

It is clear from the discussion above that the feasibility of the proposed research tools is key to the success or failure of the fieldwork. The literature recommends that questionnaires are pre-piloted before it is even attempted to pilot them (see, for example, Madge, 1953, 217). So despite the fact that most of the questions were lifted from other validated and frequently used questionnaires, the OPOS was pre-piloted and piloted.42

In order to test the length of the questionnaires, the clarity of the questions, and the delivery method, the questionnaires was pre-piloted as a mail survey on two people, and as a phone survey on one person. In the pre-pilot a lengthy questionnaire, containing 81 questions was applied. It emerged that the questionnaire was far too long to be practicable for either a phone or a mail survey. It was decided to radically shorten the questionnaire and change the format, e.g. the response options, for some of the questions.

A pilot study to test the revised questionnaire and the delivery method was carried out with 41 people in the ward of St Margarets in Oxford. This particular ward was chosen because of its proximity to the Oxford Centre for Criminological Research where I was based, because of it similarity to one of the wards included in

42 Questions were drawn from a number of sources including the British Crime Survey, HORS 245 (Chapman et al., 2002, Appendix A), and the Cambridge University Public Opinion Project (King, 2005; King & Maruna, 2006).
the main study, and because it was not planned to include the ward in the main study. This pilot yielded an atypically high response rate of over 60 per cent. The questionnaire was only changed slightly following the pilot because the response rate was so good, the vast majority of the questionnaires had been filled in as intended, and very few criticisms as to the design of the questionnaire were received. However, the high proportion (more than 40%) of respondents who did not want to be re-contacted was a concern. Thus, the section on re-contact was changed to include an incentive for a repeated participation. The incentive was that 25 pence would be donated to Victim Support Oxfordshire for every repeat survey returned.43

The final OPOS questionnaire consisted of 61 questions with a number of distinct sections with one section gathering purely statistical information on survey respondents and their main demographic characteristics such as gender, age, and educational status; another section measured attitudes towards crime, criminals, and criminal justice; and one section asked more general questions about respondents’ habits of media consumption, areas of social concern, experience of victimisation, experience of crime and criminal justice, levels of trust in the criminal justice system, and perception of changes in crime rates.

4. Conclusion

This chapter summarised the evidence of empirical research, mainly experimental which relates to the issue of attitude change in the context of crime and criminal justice. This body of research found evidence of the impact of providing information to members of the public in the ‘laboratory’ on their levels of knowledge. It was noted

43 As a consequence, £175 were donated to Victim Support Oxfordshire in August 2005.
that recent research relying on a more naturalistic design has failed to confirm such impact.

In the second part of the chapter, Home Office research which inspired the Crime Scene experiment was criticised to delineate the methodological issues which need to be considered when designing a valid and reliable research project. Finally, the rationale for choosing an experimental design coupled with mixed methods was described in detail.

Chapter 3 will summarise the main findings from the Oxford Public Opinion Survey, discussing the impact of the experimental intervention (the Crime Scene columns) as measured by a standard quantitative research tool.
Chapter 3

*The Oxford Public Opinion Survey: a one-dimensional view of public opinion on crime and criminal justice?*

This chapter will present the findings from the Oxford Public Opinion Survey (OPOS) carried out as part of the empirical study at the heart of this thesis. Data for the empirical study were gathered in a number of different ways,

- First, ‘static’ public opinion data were gathered through a large-scale survey, the Oxford Public Opinion Survey, with a sample of Oxford residents randomly selected from the electoral roll;
- second, the impact of a regular weekly column on crime and criminal justice published in *The Oxford Times* was measured through a repeat survey with those respondents of the initial survey who were willing to be re-contacted after a period of nine months;
- third, further data on the experimental intervention were collected through in-depth interviews with a sub-sample of survey respondents who were self-reported readers of *The Oxford Times* and who had taken part in both the initial and the repeat OPOS;
- finally, contextual data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with media insiders, e.g. the editor, a columnist, and the subeditor of *The Oxford Times*; and in addition two ‘opinion leaders’ were interviewed to assess the potential impact of the Crime Scene column on those leading the political debate on crime and criminal justice.

The findings from each of the first two data sets will be presented in this chapter. This will show the level of knowledge of, and attitudes towards, crime and criminal justice.
among respondents of the OPOS. Further it will examine to what extent the inclusion of
a regular newspaper column on crime and criminal justice had an impact on readers of
that newspaper. Although the in-depth interview data and the contextual data described
above inform the structure and content of this chapter the findings from those datasets
will be discussed separately in Chapters 4 and 5.

1. The Oxford Public Opinion Survey – Oxford residents’ knowledge
   of, and attitudes towards, crime and criminal justice

   a. The OPOS response rate

   Before discussing the findings from the OPOS in terms of whether they confirm or
   question received wisdom about public opinion on crime and criminal justice it is
   important to provide some of the technical details of the survey, i.e. the response rate
   achieved and the sample composition.

   A key factor in assessing the reliability of any data accumulated through survey
   research is the response rate achieved. Surveys with low response rates carry the risk of
   a non-response bias, i.e. of all those addressed in the original mail out only a small
   number of people choose to respond to the survey. If that sub-group is too small it is
difficult to assert that they do not differ significantly in characteristics and views from
those who decided not to respond. Authors of a number of social science research
methods books rate response rates of below 60 per cent as ‘a disaster and even a 70
per cent response rate is not much more than minimally acceptable’ because it is ‘hard
to justify the representativeness of the sample’ (Bachman & Schutt, 2003; Mangione,
1995, 60-61).

   Mail surveys are well known for having lower response rates than face-to-face
interviews or phone surveys, although there are various suggestions on how to improve
response rates (Bryman, 2001, 132). Realistically and without undue expense of time and money mail surveys can be expected to yield a response rate of between 20 and 30 per cent (Bachman & Schutt, 2003, 201; Schutt, 2006, 258).\textsuperscript{44} Obviously, the feasibility of implementing suggestions for improving response rates to a particular research project (take for example, having a short questionnaire (Bryman, 2001, 131)) depends on the resources and time available to the researchers, the purpose of the survey research, and what it intends to measure (Jackson, 2004, 961).

The primary focus of this research was not to draw inferences from the survey about public opinion in Oxford generally but to assess the impact of the provision of information in a local newspaper on its readers. Thus, the representativeness of the sample was not a primary concern of the research design. The necessity to measure the impact of the experimental intervention also meant that sampling of ‘reluctant’ survey respondents was not deemed useful as the aim was to survey respondents twice. The research relied heavily on respondents’ willingness to be re-contacted after the experimental intervention. It is unlikely that ‘reluctant’ respondents would have agreed to a re-contact and thus the expense of time involved in recruiting such respondents would not have been efficient in the context of the aims and objectives of this particular research. Even so, for a mail survey with a single follow-up, the response rate for the Oxford Public Opinion Survey was reasonable at around 30 per cent for both the pre-experiment (31\%) and the post-experiment-only sample (29\%).\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{44} For a thorough discussion of response rates and survey design affecting response rates see, for example Blumberg et al., 1974.

\textsuperscript{45} See for comparison other public opinion surveys related to crime and criminal justice recently carried out in Britain: Thames Valley ‘Public Satisfaction Survey 2003-2004’: 25\% response rate (The Oxford Times, 28 Jan 05); single contact mail survey Tynedale District: 18\% effective response rate (Jackson, 2004, 952); Cambridge University Public Opinion Project: 26\% response rate (King & Maruna, 2006, 21).
The Crime Scene study was designed as a quasi-experiment based on a Solomon-4-group design (see Chapter 2 above). The number of surveys sent out at each experimental stage and the corresponding response rates are set out in Table 2.

### Table 2. Survey mail out at each stage of design and response rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage in experimental design</th>
<th>Number of surveys sent out</th>
<th>Number of valid surveys returned</th>
<th>Response rate %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-experiment</td>
<td>2,079</td>
<td>648(^{46})</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-experiment, second observation</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-experiment only</td>
<td>1,066</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,665</td>
<td>1,311</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The original sample of 3,145 Oxford residents was randomly selected from the electoral roll of four of Oxford’s 24 wards – Rose Hill and Iffley, Oxford North, Hinksey Park, and Headington (details of sample construction are discussed in Chapter 2). This sample was split into two groups, one for contact prior to the experimental intervention, consisting of a sample of 2,079, and one for contact after the experimental intervention, a sample of 1,066.

In the pre-experiment mail shot 2,079 surveys were sent out in two stages in July and August 2004. In May 2005, the follow-up survey was sent to all 520 respondents of the pre-experiment sample who had agreed to be re-contacted and a further 1,066

\(^{46}\) Nine completed surveys were received after the deadline (start of the publication of the Crime Scene column) had passed and were therefore treated as invalid. Out of the 3,145 initial surveys sent out, 117 were ‘returned to sender’ (i.e. unopened). This rate of ‘non-contact’ is equivalent to 4% of the total number of surveys sent out (2% in the pre-experiment sample, and 7% in the post-experiment-only sample). When surveys were followed up by phone I found that another group of respondents had not received the survey and some people claimed that they had returned the survey but it was never received by the researchers. Oxford’s postal service was suffering from serious performance problems at the time of the research.
surveys were sent to respondents who were only surveyed at the post-experiment stage. The pre-experiment and post-experiment surveys were identical with the exception of four questions included on the last page of the latter which sought to verify whether or not respondents had read the Crime Scene columns, one question on the pre-and-post survey which asked respondents to confirm that they had filled in the first survey, and one question which sought to elicit information on the annual household income of the respondent which was missed out in the pre-survey questionnaire (see Appendix 2).47

Where survey recipients had not responded by the deadline given in the letter they were re-contacted once, either by phone, where a phone number could be located on BT’s online directory, or by letter.48

b. Oxford residents taking part in the survey

In total, surveys were received from 954 Oxford residents, 648 before September 2004 and 306 between May and August 2005.49 In order to provide an overview of the main characteristics of Oxford residents who responded to the survey those 954 respondents will be presented as one sample, unless it appears that there are significant differences which might be due to the 9-month time difference in eliciting the survey data.

The response rate varied between the four selected wards: Headington had the highest response rate with 34 per cent, followed by Oxford North with 32 per cent, and Hinksey Park and Rose Hill and Iffley with 28 per cent each.

47 This flaw was pointed out by the examiners in the Qualifying Test. A question on income is necessary to draw conclusions about the social status held by respondents.

48 In total, only 18 of the 1,311 ‘surveys’ (1%) were carried out by phone.

49 Another 357 repeat surveys were received from Oxford residents who had taken part in the initial OPOS.
The sample resulting from the Oxford Public Opinion Survey was in many respects not representative of the population it was drawn from.\textsuperscript{50} It was skewed towards females, those of white ethnic background, the older generation (particularly those aged 60 or older), and those with a University degree (for a breakdown of the sample by demographic characteristics see Appendix 10). Additionally, more than half of the respondents (54\%) were regular broadsheet readers (defined as reading a broadsheet at least once a week), with only twenty-eight per cent of respondents reporting that they regularly read a tabloid newspaper.\textsuperscript{51}

This lack of representativeness is a concern for assessing and understanding the views of Oxford residents. However, as stated above, the main purpose of the OPOS was to measure the impact of the columns on levels of knowledge of the readers of The Oxford Times. Additionally, the lack of representativeness would only be relevant if levels of knowledge of, confidence in, and attitudes towards, crime and criminal justice are influenced by demographic variables.

Although there is some evidence from previous research that this is the case (for example Hough & Moxon, 1985), the relationship between attitudes and socio-demographics is far from clear. First, there is the problem of conflicting research findings.\textsuperscript{52} Second, it has been argued that socio-demographic factors merely disguise psycho-social factors such as fear of crime, experience of victimisation, or core ideologies and beliefs, which are linked to attitudes towards crime and criminal justice.


\textsuperscript{51} See Chapter 1 Fn 18 for a discussion of the terms broadsheet and tabloid newspapers.

\textsuperscript{52} For example, whilst American research suggests a relationship between ethnicity and public attitudes to crime, English research has failed to confirm such a relationship. For a review of the relevant research see Wood & Viki, 2004.
(Wood & Viki, 2004, 18-22). As far as levels of knowledge are concerned less research is available for analysis. Of particular relevance to this experiment, Chapman et al. (2002) in their study of the impact of information on attitudes to crime and criminal justice, make only guarded links between socio-demographic characteristics and levels of knowledge, concluding that ‘there was little systematic variation in how poorly informed people were’ (Chapman et al., 2002, 11). They also found that there was ‘little systematic variation in improved attitudes according to socio-demographics’ (Chapman et al., 2002, 35). Nevertheless, data from the OPOS were analysed to check for demographic variations in levels of knowledge of, and attitudes towards, crime and criminal justice (see below pp. 80).

The lack of direct experience of crime or the criminal justice system of the majority of the public is frequently blamed for low levels of knowledge and openness to misrepresentations of crime and criminal justice in the media. Thus, the OPOS included a number of questions of respondents’ previous experience of the system, however intense (criminal justice professionals) or tangential (as a spectator of a criminal case). Respondents were asked whether they had ever had personal contact with the criminal justice systems, either as victim, witness, juror, or spectator (35% had), or as defendants (only 6% admitted they had). Thirteen per cent reported that they had been inside a prison or Young Offender Institute for whatever reason, and eight per cent had worked in, or for, a part of the criminal justice system. A substantial proportion of respondents (40%) personally knew people who had gone to prison or been on probation and a significant minority (22%) had been a victim of a crime reported to the police in the past 12 months. Nearly a third of OPOS respondents (29%) reported that they had ever been the victim of a serious or personally damaging crime. Naturally, there was a certain amount of overlap on those questions, however, combining these figures showed that 68 per cent of respondents had experience of, or contact with, the system in one form or
another. These findings show that the assertion that most people only learn about crime and criminal justice from the media was not true for the majority of the respondents taking part in the OPOS.

c. Survey respondents’ levels of knowledge

The questionnaire included one section containing 14 knowledge questions which were specifically designed to test respondents’ knowledge of crime rates, reporting rates of specific crimes, and sentencing statistics. The survey instrument provided a small number of possible answers to each question, one of which was correct. Box 1 below shows an example of the type of question used. The multiple choice format made it possible to calculate the expected average score which could be attained by answering these questions purely through guessing as 2.94. The mean score achieved by Oxford survey respondents was 4.14 out of 14. Of the 943 respondents who responded to these questions, 172 (18%) answered two or fewer questions correctly and only 87 (9%) answered seven or more questions correctly. The best score was 9/14 which was achieved by six respondents.

Box 1: Example of knowledge question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example of knowledge question:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Out of every 100 adult males (aged 21 or over) convicted of robbery, how many go to prison?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ 1-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ 21-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ 41-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ 61-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ 81-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Pure Guess</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

53 Eleven respondents did not answer any of the knowledge questions.
Mean knowledge scores were slightly higher for men (4.22) than for women (4.09) and best for men aged 16-29 (4.47). For both men and women mean knowledge scores gradually deteriorated with age. Mean knowledge scores were slightly higher for white (4.15) than ethnic minority (4.02) respondents but did not differ between those of Conservative (4.19), Labour (4.16), Liberal (4.15), or Green (4.21) political affiliation. They were lower for those reporting being non-political (3.94) and higher for those subscribing to other (not mainstream) political beliefs (4.63) including Socialists, Welsh Nationalists, Anarchists, and supporters of UKIP. The level of educational achievement was divided into those who gained a University degree (mean knowledge score of 4.39) and those who had no qualification or any qualification of a different kind (mean knowledge score of 3.85). Media consumption also appeared to be associated with levels of knowledge of the criminal justice system. Mean knowledge scores were higher for those respondents who regularly (at least once a week) read a broadsheet (4.32) than whose who regularly read a tabloid newspaper (3.89). Unsurprisingly, respondents who stated that they had ever worked in, or for, any part of the criminal justice system had a better mean knowledge score (4.76) than those who had not (4.10). The only statistically significant predictors for a higher knowledge score were the level of educational achievement and the experience of working in, or for, any parts

---

54 The dividing line was drawn at the level of University degree because this split the sample neatly into two groups of equal size. Those who had no qualifications had a knowledge score of 3.53, and those with A/AS-levels a score of 4.00.

55 Eighty-two survey respondents (9%) reported reading both tabloid and broadsheet newspaper on a regular basis. Those who reported ever reading The Oxford Times had a knowledge score of 4.21.

56 This was only partly related to educational achievement. Those survey respondents who had ever worked in, or for, any part of the criminal justice system (n=74) and had no University qualification (n=23) had a knowledge score of 4.35 (higher than those with similar qualification but no experience of working in the system, 3.85), compared to those with a University degree who had a knowledge score of 4.94 (n=51).
of the criminal justice system, cancelling out the effects of gender, age, ethnicity, working status, and media consumption.⁵⁷

Table 3 below shows the proportion of correct answers given by the 943 respondents for the 14 knowledge questions (see Appendix 6 for the fact sheet sent to survey respondents after completion of the Crime Scene experiment).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Correct answer</th>
<th>Correct answers given (%)</th>
<th>Expected by chance (%)</th>
<th>Missing data (%)</th>
<th>Pure guess (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do you think is the minimum sentence for an adult (aged 18 or over) who has been convicted three times of house burglary?</td>
<td>3 years prison sentence</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>79.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of every 100 adult males (aged 21 or over) convicted of robbery, how many go to prison?</td>
<td>81-100</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>84.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of every 100 adult males (aged 21 or over) convicted of rape, how many go to prison?</td>
<td>81-100</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>81.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An adult male (aged 21 or over) convicted of rape will be sentenced to an average prison sentence length of,</td>
<td>Between 7-9 years</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>79.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 thefts of vehicles, how many are reported to the police?</td>
<td>81-100</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>81.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁵⁷ Age, ethnicity, gender, level of educational achievement, working status, media consumption, and experience of working in the criminal justice system were entered into a linear regression model. Only level of educational achievement and experience of working in, or for, the criminal justice system were statistically significant predictors for a higher knowledge score, educational achievement p<0.05; experience of working p<0.01.
### Table 3  Proportion of correct answers on knowledge question (n=943) (contd.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Correct answer</th>
<th>Correct answers given (%)</th>
<th>Expected by chance (%)</th>
<th>Missing data (%)</th>
<th>Pure guess (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 robberies, how many are reported to the police?</td>
<td>41-60</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>82.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 rapes, how many are reported to the police?</td>
<td>1-20</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>81.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 rapes, how many are committed by someone the victim does not know?</td>
<td>1-20</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>75.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 crimes, how many are violent?</td>
<td>1-40</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>78.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 violent crimes, how many result in actual injury to the victim?</td>
<td>41-60</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>79.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who, do you think, is most at risk of being a victim of a violent crime?</td>
<td>Young man aged 16-24</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>62.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 rapes recorded by the police, how many result in a conviction?</td>
<td>1-20</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>76.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 burglaries recorded by the police, how many result in a conviction?</td>
<td>1-20</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>75.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 males aged 40, how many have a criminal conviction (not including minor offences such as speeding)?</td>
<td>21-40</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows that knowledge of crime rates, reporting rates, and sentencing statistics varies between topics and appears prone to popular misconceptions. For example, 84 per cent of respondents indicated that they were purely guessing the answer to the question about the rate of imprisonment for adult men convicted of robbery. If people had indeed randomly guessed at least 20 per cent of the sample should have guessed correctly. However, in this survey less than two per cent of those identifying themselves as ‘guessers’ chose the right answer of ‘81-100%’ while nearly three-quarters (73%)
‘guessed’ that the rate of imprisonment for convicted robbers was between one and 40 per cent, with 44 per cent assuming that the rate of imprisonment was less than 20 per cent. This would imply that survey respondents when asked to make a choice, despite being aware of their lack of knowledge, subscribe to certain perceptions of what the queried trends are (i.e. the rate of imprisonment for convicted robbers is low).

In this section of factual questions about crime and criminals one question tapped respondents’ familiarity with one of the two main measures of crime trends currently employed by the British Government, the British Crime Survey (BCS). Given the prominence of the BCS in the frequent discussion of crime rates in the media, it is striking that only 12 per cent of the sample were confident that they knew what the British Crime Survey was. Nearly two-thirds (65%) reported that they had not even heard of it.

The findings of the Oxford Public Opinion Survey regarding the perception of crime levels support a number of findings presented repeatedly by the British Crime Survey. First, people’s perception of changes in crime rates is more negative the more remote the area of reference. Thus, more Oxford respondents perceived crime to be rising nationally (56%) than in their local area – Oxfordshire in this case (49%). This trend is even more obvious when respondents were asked about their neighbourhood where only 40 per cent believed crime to be rising.\(^\text{58}\) In terms of the proportion of people believing that crime had increased nationally, the data from the Oxford Public Opinion Survey is roughly in line with the findings from the latest British Crime Survey (56% OPOS v 61% in BCS 2004/2005). This data would also appear to provide support for the claim that since 2002/03 awareness is growing among members of the public (although

\(^\text{58}\) In both cases the differences were statistically significant, p<0.001. This tendency to ‘impute crime to other, less familiar, places’ has also been observed in survey research in the US (Warr, 1995, 299).
still a minority) that crime has been falling for a decade (Dodd et al., 2004, 17; Nicholas et al., 2005, 21-22).

**Pure guess**

Those who responded to the Oxford Public Opinion Survey were acutely aware of their lack of knowledge of crime patterns and the processes of the criminal justice system. More than three-quarters of respondents regarded their response to 13 of the 14 knowledge questions as a ‘pure guess’. It could be argued that the frequent use made of the ‘pure guess’ option is an indication of how reflective people are on their level of knowledge. However, this should not be interpreted as a sign that people do not subscribe to specific perceptions and beliefs of the ‘right’ answer, only that they are aware that such perceptions are not based on knowledge of the facts.

Respondents who ‘ticked the correct boxes’ were generally more confident in their answers and for seven of these questions the difference was statistically significant.\(^{59}\) The inclusion of the ‘pure guess’ choice not only made it possible to contextualise the simplistic dichotomy of getting answers to the knowledge questions right or wrong but it was also something appreciated and commented on by respondents to the survey. In the in-depth interviews many interviewees (13 out of 38 – 34%) spontaneously mentioned the ‘pure guess’ option, with nine of them stating that they found it useful to be given the opportunity to qualify their response to the knowledge

\(^{59}\) In all cases, p<0.01. Only on four questions were those answering correctly less confident in their answers than those giving the wrong answers, none of these differences was statistically significant.
questions. As far as it was possible to check, the OPOS was the first survey to use such an option in combination with knowledge questions.60

d. Measuring attitudes

A section of the OPOS questionnaire was designed specifically to elicit respondents’ attitudes towards crime and criminal justice. In addition, a number of other questions asked more general questions about survey respondents’ confidence in criminal justice, and their concern about crime as a social issue.

**Concern about crime as a social issue**

Survey respondents were asked to choose which one of eight social issues they were most concerned about in order to assess whether crime was an issue of great concern among those who replied to a lengthy survey on crime and criminal justice. It was quite clear that people found it difficult to decide on just one social issue with 15 per cent choosing more than one. Where respondents felt able to choose one social issue, 21 per cent were concerned most about the standard of the National Health Service, 19 per cent about the level of inflation/house prices/cost of living, and 17 per cent about the quality of education. Fourteen per cent of respondents chose crime as the most important social issue, equivalent to the proportion of respondents’ who saw the state of the environment as their most pressing concern (see Table 4 for the list of all issues). In line with the ranking of issues of social concern, two thirds of the sample (66%) also thought that the National Health Service was one of the two most important areas that

---

60 An internet search of the Odum Institute’s Public Opinion Poll Question Database was carried out – the search for ‘pure guess/educated guess/wild guess’ anywhere in the questionnaire did not return any results ([http://www.ciesin.org/datasets/irss/irss.html](http://www.ciesin.org/datasets/irss/irss.html)).
the Government had to spend money on. Education followed with 56 per cent and under a third chose the police/criminal justice system (29%).

Bearing in mind that these questions was asked in a public opinion survey on crime and criminal justice this is an interesting finding. Survey researchers suggest that members of the public are more likely to respond to a survey which is salient and relevant to them (Bryman, 2001, 130-131). The implication is that those who responded to the survey are those members of the public more concerned with and interested in crime and criminal justice. Nevertheless, crime was only chosen as the most important social issue by 14 per cent of survey respondents. This might be taken as some reassurance that the OPOS respondents were not just those who feel very strongly about issues of, or have a specific personal, political, or professional interest in, crime and criminal justice.

Table 4. Social issues respondents were most concerned about

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social issue</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondent chose more than one issue</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing/refused</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents choosing one social issue, n=807</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard of the National Health Service</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of inflation/house prices/cost of living</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of education</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of crime</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of the environment</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of immigration</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of unemployment</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk of terrorism</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Levels of confidence in the criminal justice system

The public’s lack of confidence in the criminal justice system is a source of great concern to politicians, policy-makers, and academics. One of the questions raised in this empirical study was whether the provision of information on crime and criminal justice could have an impact on the public’s level of confidence. Therefore, the Oxford Public Opinion Survey asked how confident respondents were in three different aspects of the criminal justice system. First, that it is effective in bringing people who commit crimes to justice; second that it meets the needs of victims of crime; and third that it respects the rights of people accused of committing a crime and treats them fairly. These questions were lifted from the British Crime Survey where they have been routinely asked since 2000. In order to assess whether OPOS respondents differed in their level of confidence in the criminal justice system from the population nationally the results of the Oxford Public Opinion Survey were compared with the results from the British Crime Survey 2004/05 (Nicholas et al., 2005, 24). This comparison showed that:

- roughly the same proportion of OPOS and BCS respondents are confident in the criminal justice system’s effectiveness of bringing people to justice (41% OPOS v 43% BCS);
- a higher proportion of BCS 2004/2005 than OPOS respondents (34% BCS v 27% OPOS) were confident that the criminal justice system meets the needs of victims of crime;
- although a majority of OPOS respondents were confident that the criminal justice system respects the rights of people accused of committing a crime and treats them fairly (61%) the majority was not as overwhelming as the one found by the BCS (78%).
Measuring punitiveness?

Additionally, there were eleven questions which explored respondents’ attitudes towards crime, criminals, and the criminal justice system. The questions in this section were taken from a variety of sources. Some derived from the questionnaire developed for recent Home Office research into the impact of information on public attitudes to the criminal justice system (Chapman et al., 2002, Appendix A), while others were taken from a questionnaire used for the Cambridge Public Opinion project (King, 2005). Table 5 below shows what proportion of the 954 respondents agreed or disagreed with the statements provided. Moreover, it reveals the proportion of people who did not express a view on those issues, either by ticking ‘don’t know’ or not answering that particular question.

The difficult question is how to assess whether agreement or disagreement with the statements below (see Table 5) signifies a progressive liberal stance or a conservative or even punitive stance. This is an important consideration given the weight attributed to public attitudes to crime and criminal justice. For example, agreement with the statement that the criminal justice system is not effective in reducing crime can be interpreted in two different ways. On the one hand it could be seen as evidence of a conservative stance, namely as pointing to the failure of criminal justice agencies to address crime effectively by, for example, stricter law enforcement or tougher sentencing. Alternatively, it could be interpreted as an understanding of the limited ability of criminal justice agencies to address the underlying causes of crime and impact on general crime trends, which would, arguably, denote a fairly informed and progressive point of view. Similarly, responses to the statement about the effectiveness of a prison sentence are open to interpretation. The conclusion that prison is not effective in reducing an offender’s likelihood of reconviction may be based on the notion that prisons are too much ‘like holiday camps’ (Comment on survey form, HiPpre132) to be an
effective deterrent, whereas the same conclusion can be drawn on the basis of the
detrimental impact of a prison sentence on an offender’s family life, employment
prospects, and chances of resettlement, as summarised by another survey respondent.

61 I think our prisons are much too full and that due consideration on the primitive
effects of a prison sentence on the offender’s family/dependants are not
adequately taken into account. (Comment on survey form, Nopost029)

The problematic nature of evaluative questions regarding the leniency or severity of the
courts, perceptions of rising crime rates, and general questions about sentencers being
out of touch with ordinary people, as indicators of punitiveness has been discussed in
Chapter 1. Other questions were very specific and asked about people’s trust in
offenders’ ability to change and thus a belief in the concept of rehabilitation (item 6); or
respondents’ awareness of the ‘fact’ that offending behaviour is widespread and
common throughout society (item 9). 62 This statement was, however, misunderstood by
a number of survey respondents and one commented that ‘Q51 is unclear and
ambiguous. People probably commit crimes unknowingly (eg speeding when driving) or
do not see such events as being ‘criminal’” (Comment on survey form, Hippre379).

Finally, two questions (items 10 and 11) explored respondents’ views regarding
the notion of society’s declining standards and fear of the young following in the tradition
established by Pearson (1983). It seems that the adult public tend to overestimate the
proportion of crime committed by young people and to believe that youth crime is
increasing (Haines & Case, 2007; Hough & Roberts, 2004). Whilst young people

61 Both survey respondents commented next to the prison item, item 4 in Table 5 below, and
ticked ‘not very effective’.

62 As evidenced by self-reported offending surveys, see Budd & Sharp, 2005; Graham & Bowling,
1995; longitudinal research into offending behaviour, see Farrington et al., 2006; and most
contribute significantly to the total amount of crime, in 2005 only about 12 per cent of
known offenders found guilty or cautioned for any offence were aged between 10 and
17, and 23 per cent aged under 21 (RDS Office for Criminal Justice Reform, 2006, Table
3.8). If one considers additionally the crimes, traditionally hidden from official statistics,
such as corporate fraud, tax evasion, health and safety at work violations, environmental
crime, and organised crime which are overwhelmingly committed by adults, the
proportion of crime committed by young people will be even smaller.

The one statement which, it could be argued, fulfils the definition of punitiveness
as a call for harsh treatment irrespective of instrumental considerations (see the
discussion on pp 15-22 above), suggesting offenders should be treated harshly, should
be treated with some caution. It is a general question which could well trigger images of
rare and serious crimes. Moreover, the question was criticised by a number of survey
respondents and some added a note stating that the response to this statement would
‘depend on the crime committed’.

These cautionary statements are made, not to be negative and suggest that data
derived from public opinion surveys using such questions are meaningless, but to warn
against drawing firm conclusions of levels of public punitiveness or progressiveness on
the basis of such questions. Interpretation of these question should be restricted to using
them as ‘soundings of general opinion’ (Ellsworth & Gross, 1994, 21) rather than as, for
example, firm calls for changes in sentencing policy or lack of support for rehabilitation.
Thus, the following discussion of the relationship between socio-demographics and
psycho-social factors and attitudes to crime and criminal justice and descriptions of
socio-demographic groups as ‘punitive’ should be understood with those methodological
caveats in mind.

63 Figures for indictable offences were 25% for 10-17 year olds, and 39% for those under 21.
Table 5. Attitudes towards crime, criminals, and criminal justice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude questions[^64]</th>
<th>Whole sample surveyed once n=954</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences are too lenient (1)</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal justice system is not effective in reducing crime (2)</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime nationally has risen (3)</td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A prison sentence is effective in reducing an offender’s likelihood of reconviction (4)</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentencers are out of touch (5)</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders can be helped to change (6)</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Including ‘about right’, 17.2%.
** Including those believing there has been ‘no change’, 16.7%.

[^64] Numbering does not correspond to numbers in questionnaire; it is intended for ease of reference. Note, not all of the items were constructed as scales asking the respondent to agree or disagree with a statement, see OPOS questionnaire in Appendix 1.
### Table 5. Attitudes towards crime, criminals, and criminal justice (contd.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude questions</th>
<th>Whole sample surveyed once</th>
<th>n=954</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree %</td>
<td>Agree %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders should be treated harshly (7)</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison should be used as a last resort (8)</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people commit several crimes (9)</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour of young people is worse (10)</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people are responsible for most of the crime (11)</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 shows that a majority of respondents of the Oxford Public Opinion Survey believed that crime nationally had risen over the past five years, that the criminal justice system is not effective in reducing crime, that the judiciary is out of touch with ordinary people, and the sentences they impose are too lenient (items 1, 2, 3, and 5). These findings are very much in line with results from other survey research (Nicholas et al., 2005; Roberts & Hough, 2005b) and can be read as a lack of confidence in the criminal justice system and the judiciary and a demand for more punitive sentences. However, at the same time respondents were evenly divided on whether offenders should be treated harshly, less than a quarter of respondents believed that a prison sentence is effective in reducing an offender’s likelihood of reconviction, two-thirds believed that offenders can be helped to change, and more than half felt that prison should only be used as a last resort. These seemingly contradictory findings question whether the public’s complaint about the leniency of court sentences should be translated as a call for the imposition of more and longer prison sentences which has often been assumed. They are yet another example of the well reported ambivalence found in public opinion surveys regarding the public’s attitudes towards crime, criminals, and sentencing (Stalans, 2002, 18-19; Wood & Viki, 2004, 30). Such findings have been described as a result of the limitations of survey design as much as a reflection of ‘attitudinal incoherence’ (Hough & Park, 2002, 163). Additionally, the findings return to the problematic nature of interpreting some of these questions as indicators of punitiveness or liberalism.

It can also be seen from Table 5 that a considerable proportion of respondents did not hold strong or any attitudes on some of the statements provided. On two of the eleven questions as many as 20 per cent of the sample confessed to ‘not knowing’ whether they agreed or disagreed with a statement. The view of people lacking attitudes on certain narrow issues to do with crime and criminal justice was supported by
statements made during the in-depth interviews, and comments noted on survey forms. This theme will be picked up in more detail in Chapter 4.

These general findings on attitudes towards crime and criminal justice were subsequently broken down by a number of demographic as well as psycho-social variables. This was done in order to test whether there was a relationship between socio-demographic or psycho-dynamic variables and views on crime and justice in this particular sample. Only differences which reached statistical significance are summarised below. 

Generally, more women than men (between 2-8%) were willing to acknowledge that they did not have a view on the issues tested (on eight out of eleven items). Only on two questions, however, were the gender differences noted statistically significant (see Table 1 in Appendix 8). Significantly more men (61%) than women (54%) felt that sentences handed down by the courts were too lenient and more men (35%) than women (24%) showed an awareness of the evidence supporting the statement that most people commit several crimes during their lives.

The correlation between age and attitudes to crime and criminal justice was more substantial but also more complex. Figure 3 (see also Table 2 in Appendix 8) shows quite clearly that there was no linear relationship between age and attitudes to crime and criminal justice, making interpretation difficult. Agreement increased gradually with age for statements such as crime nationally has risen; prison should be used as a last resort; and young people are responsible for most crime (items 3, 8, and 11). Agreement fell with age on two statements, namely offenders can be helped to change and most people

\[65\] Findings have been regarded as statistically significant on the basis that they reached the 5% level of significance which has been described as the convention among social researchers, see Bryman, 2004, 237. The 5% level of significance means that one out of 20 findings of significance could be due to chance alone.
commit several crimes (items 6 and 9). On three of the attitudinal statements it seemed that the youngest and the oldest age group shared similar, arguably, more punitive views. Similar majorities of 16-29 years olds and those aged 60 or older felt that sentencing was too lenient (60% and 62% compared to 52% of 30-59 year olds), that offenders should be treated harshly (51% and 50% compared to 41%), and that the behaviour of young people today is worse than it was in the past (69% and 73% compared to 57%).

Figure 4 and Figure 5 show the relationship between two related variables (as described above on p 81), respondents’ educational status and their OPOS knowledge score (also see Tables 3 and 4 in Appendix 8). Educational status was statistically significantly related to all but three of the eleven attitudinal questions, with those holding a University degree being more ‘liberal’. For example, fewer respondents with a University degree than those with no or any other qualifications thought that sentencing was too lenient; sentencers were out of touch; or offenders should be treated harshly (items 1, 5, and 7), whereas more respondents with a University degree than those with no or any other qualification felt that prison should be used as a last resort and offenders can be helped to change (items 6 and 8).
Figure 3. Attitudes to crime and criminal justice by age: Percentage agreeing with statement
Figure 4. Attitudes to crime and criminal justice by educational status: Percentage agreeing with statement

- Sentences are too lenient (1)
- Crime nationally has risen (3)
- A prison sentence is effective in reducing an offender’s likelihood of reconviction (4)
- Sentencers are out of touch (5)
- Offenders can be helped to change (6)
- Offenders should be treated harshly (7)
- Prison should be used as a last resort (8)
- Behaviour of young people is worse (10)
- Young people are responsible for most of the crime (11)
Figure 5 shows that better knowledge of the system as measured by the OPOS is related to different, in the aggregate more informed, attitudes to evaluative questions such as sentences are too lenient and crime nationally has risen (items 1 and 3). It is also correlated to less ‘punitive’ views, i.e. fewer of the respondents with a knowledge score of 5 or higher supported the statement that offenders should be treated harshly (item 7), and views of society’s or society’s youths’ declining standards as exemplified by lower levels of agreement with the statement that the behaviour of young people has deteriorated (item 10). However, maybe surprisingly, a better knowledge of (some of) the facts of crime and criminal justice was not significantly correlated with the other seven attitudinal statements.

**Figure 5.** Attitudes to crime and criminal justice by OPOS Knowledge Score: Percentage agreeing with statement
The analysis presented in Section 1c in this chapter showed that levels of knowledge of crime and the criminal justice system were higher for those survey respondents working in the system (past or present). The impact of such close contact with crime and criminal justice on attitudes was also examined (see Table 5 in Appendix 8). Statistically significant correlations were found on four items. Fewer of those who worked (or had worked) in the criminal justice system thought that sentencing was too lenient (47% compared to 58%); and that offenders should be treated harshly (25% compared to 47%). Significantly more criminal justice professionals thought that sentencers were in touch with ‘ordinary’ people (27% compared to 15%) and that prison sentences were not effective in reducing offenders’ reconviction rates (87% compared to 69%).

Analysis of the relationship between ethnicity and attitudes to crime and criminal justice was limited due to the relatively small number of OPOS respondents who were from an ethnic minority (n=49) (see Table 6 in Appendix 8). Differences between ethnic minority and white respondents’ attitudes reached statistical significance in only four cases. In three of those significantly more minority ethnic respondents than white respondents preferred to not express agreement or disagreement with an attitudinal statement. Only in one case was there evidence of substantively different attitudes between ethnic minority and white respondents. This related to the statement that young people are responsible for most crime which a substantially greater proportion of ethnic minority (35%) than white (19%) respondents agreed with.

The OPOS questionnaire included a question about respondents’ political affiliation to explore the relationship between more deep-seated political values and attitudes to crime and criminal justice. Political affiliation was statistically significantly related to attitudinal statements in seven cases when each political affiliation was considered (items 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 10). Although there were differences in responses
to the attitudinal questions between all the different political groups, the attitudes of those reporting Conservative affiliation were consistently among the most extreme. Thus, to highlight the considerable differences between ‘Conservative’ respondents and respondents of other political affiliation, those ‘others’ (Labour, Liberal, Green, non-political) were collapsed into one group. Figure 6 below (see also Table 7 in Appendix 8) therefore represents the attitudes of Conservatives compared to all other political affiliations. This shows that on all but two attitudinal questions those of Conservative affiliation were significantly more punitive – for example, 67 per cent of ‘Conservatives’ compared to 41 per cent of ‘others’ were of the view that offenders should be treated harshly – and less informed – 71 per cent of ‘Conservatives’ compared to 53 per cent of ‘others’ believed that crime nationally has risen – than those of any other political affiliation. This shows a clear relationship between political values and attitudes towards crime and criminal justice.

Media consumption or type of newspaper readership was discussed above in relation to levels of knowledge of crime and criminal justice. Although the type of newspaper readership was associated with levels of knowledge it was not found to be a statistically significant predictor once other variables were included. Here, the relationship between media consumption and attitudes towards crime and criminal justice will now be explored. More than half of OPOS respondents (54%) stated that they regularly\textsuperscript{66} read a broadsheet newspaper, with considerably fewer (28%) saying the same about tabloid newspapers.\textsuperscript{67}

\footnotesize

\textsuperscript{66} Defined as reading a particular newspaper at least once a week.

\textsuperscript{67} A small group of survey respondents reported reading both, broadsheet and tabloid newspaper on a regular basis (n=82, 9%).
Figure 6.  **Attitudes to crime and criminal justice by political affiliation: Percentage agreeing with statement**

- Sentences are too lenient (1)
- Crime nationally has risen (3)
- A prison sentence is effective in reducing an offender's likelihood of reconviction (4)
- Sentencers are out of touch (5)
- Offenders can be helped to change (6)
- Offenders should be treated harshly (7)
- Prison should be used as a last resort (8)
- Most people commit several crimes (9)
- Behaviour of young people is worse (10)
Figure 7. Attitudes to crime and criminal justice by newspaper readership: Percentage agreeing with statement
Nearly half of respondents (48%) also said that they regularly read a local newspaper, and more than three-quarters of those were most interested in the main news section rather than property, jobs, or other sections.\(^{68}\) Additionally, nearly three-quarter of respondents (72%) watched or listened to the news six to seven times a week. A large proportion of OPOS respondents (41%) referred to television news as their main source of information about crime and the criminal justice system and another twenty per cent of respondents to national broadsheet newspapers. It is noteworthy, that only three per cent said that local newspapers were their main source of information and equally only two per cent relied on national tabloids as their main source of information.

I will concentrate here on the link between readership of tabloid or broadsheet newspapers as data from the British Crime Survey has suggested repeatedly that those reading tabloids are more likely than broadsheet readers to believe crime has risen (Nicholas et al., 2007, 97; Simmons & (eds.), 2003, 127; Walker et al., 2006, 33) and to be worried about crime (Simmons & (eds.), 2003, 134; Walker et al., 2006, 37). Additionally, criminological commentators assign the tabloid media with direct noticeable influence on punitive attitudes (see, for example, Allen, 2006, 77-78; Jewkes, 2006, 147).

Newspaper readership was divided into those regularly reading a broadsheet paper, those regularly reading a tabloid paper, those reading both types of papers, and those reading neither. Figure 7 (also see Table 8 in Appendix 8) shows that on all attitudinal questions the differences between tabloid, broadsheet, both, and non-readers were statistically significant. Additionally, findings regarding the belief about the rise in crime were in line with the findings from the British Crime Survey, i.e. tabloid readers

\(^{68}\) Alongside The Oxford Times eight other local newspapers are published by the Newsquest Oxfordshire Corporation, most prominently among them the daily Oxford Mail.
were more likely to believe that crime nationally had risen than broadsheet readers (77% compared to 48%). In other respects the findings seemed to support the notions outlined above, namely that readership of tabloid newspapers is related to more punitive views. So, for example, significantly more tabloid than broadsheet readers thought that sentencing was too lenient (84% v 44%); offenders should be treated harshly (67% v 31%); sentencers are out of touch (79% v 65%); and so on. However, it is impossible to infer from this association what ‘came first’: punitive views which lead people to choose a tabloid newspaper supporting or reinforcing those views, or readership of a tabloid newspaper which ‘created’ the punitive views held.

**Psycho-social factors influencing attitudes to crime and criminal justice**

Research has suggested that public opinion on crime and particularly punitive attitudes towards offenders can only be understood by reference to levels of fear of crime or other psycho-social variables. In turn, fear of crime – however ill defined – has been associated with differences in the psycho-social make-up of populations rather than simply their demographics such as age, gender, or ethnicity (Ditton et al., 2004; Farrall et al., 2000; Wood & Viki, 2004, 20). Thus, a number of questions assessing psycho-social dynamics were part of the OPOS questionnaire such variables include: satisfaction with personal financial situation; trust in most other people; and perceived risk of serious victimisation.

There has been fairly consistent research evidence showing that instrumental factors such as criminal victimisation are not correlated to attitudes of crime and criminal justice which could be interpreted as expressions of liberalism or punitiveness (Ellsworth & Gross, 1994, 42; Maruna et al., 2004, 279; Tyler & Boeckmann, 1997; Wood & Viki, 2004, 24). Similarly, when the data from the OPOS were analysed no statistically significant relationship was found between reported criminal victimisation, whether
recent victimisation of any kind, i.e. in the past 12 months or serious victimisation regardless of when it occurred and attitudes towards crime and criminal justice.

Evidence concerning the relationship between the fear of crime and attitudes on crime and criminal justice has produced mixed findings (Dijk, 1978, 30-31; Ditton et al., 2004; Jackson, 2004; Wood & Viki, 2004, 22). One question included in the OPOS questionnaire (drawn from the Cambridge Public Opinion Project) explored the cognitive elements of the concept of fear of crime, namely the perceived risk of actual victimisation (Jackson, 2004, 960; Porter, 2007, 224). Relatively few respondents, seven per cent, thought it likely that they would be victims of a personally damaging or serious crime in the near future, i.e. the next 12 months. In nearly half of these 70 cases this perception was based on previous experience of serious victimisation (n=29, 44%). Figure 8 (see also Table 9 in Appendix 8) shows that in general, ‘fearful’ respondents were less informed and more punitive on all but one item (9).

Trust in other people is regarded as a psycho-social variable which indicates how people regard the world around them more generally, and crime and how it is dealt with more specifically. This indicator of interpersonal or social trust is also a key aspect of social capital (Hall, 1999; Portes, 1998). Thus, respondents were asked in the OPOS to state whether they thought that ‘Generally speaking, most people can be trusted’, 69 and a substantial proportion of respondents felt this was not the case (n=169, 18%) or stated that they did not know (n=111, 12%). Figure 9 below (and Table 10 in Appendix 8) shows that a lack of trust in others was correlated to the belief that crime nationally had risen, sentencing is too lenient, offenders should be treated harshly, and all but one of the attitudinal items (item 4).

69 This slightly revised version of the commonly used item measuring social trust was also used by the Cambridge Public Opinion Project, see King, 2005 and King & Maruna, 2006.
Another survey item which was drawn from the Cambridge Public Opinion Project was a question about respondents’ satisfaction with their financial situation. This is another aspect of what has been described as the anxieties or angst associated with late modern societies (Bottoms, 1995; Giddens, 1991; Tonry, 2004). The item touches on people’s feeling of being under economic pressure. In response to the OPOS, nearly a third of respondents stated that they were not satisfied with their personal financial situation and this dissatisfaction was correlated with less informed and more punitive attitudes towards crime and the criminal justice system (on all but three items 4, 6, and 9).

Thus, the analysis showed that socio-demographic as well as psycho-social variables were correlated with attitudes towards crime and criminal justice. However, in order to interrogate whether any of the correlations were masking underlying relationships further analysis using binary logistic regression for each attitudinal statement was carried out. Logistic regression showed that the variables presented above, which were all included, were not particularly powerful in explaining levels of agreement or disagreement with the attitudinal statements. The percentage of variance (Cohen & Holliday, 1982, 110) explained ranged from as little as four per cent (item 2) to 22 per cent on the item frequently used as an indicator of punitiveness, namely that offenders should be treated harshly.
Figure 8. Attitudes to crime and criminal justice by perception of risk of serious victimisation in the future: Percentage agreeing with statement
Figure 9. Attitudes to crime and criminal justice by trust in others: Percentage agreeing with statement

(sentences)

- Sentences are too lenient (1)
- Criminal justice system is effective in reducing crime (2)
- Crime nationally has risen (3)
- Sentencers are out of touch (5)
- Offenders can be helped to change (6)
- Offenders should be treated harshly (7)
- Prison should be used as a last resort (8)
- Most people commit several crimes (9)
- Most people commit several crimes (9)
- Behaviour of young people is worse (10)
- Young people are responsible for most of the crime (11)

(behaviour)

- Most people can be trusted
- Most people cannot be trusted
Figure 10. Attitudes to crime and criminal justice by satisfaction with financial situation: Percentage agreeing with statement
This stage of the analysis showed that educational status was the most powerful predictor of attitudes, remaining statistically significantly related to the attitudes expressed in all but two cases (items 2 and 9) confirming all correlations shown in Figure 4 above. Logistic regression also confirmed three of the correlations (item 3 was no longer significantly correlated) found between knowledge of, and attitudes towards, the criminal justice system as described in Figure 5. In addition after including other variables, knowledge was found to be correlated to item 2. Status as a criminal justice professional was only related to two of the attitudinal statements after the logistic regression procedure, namely items 4 and 7. Half of the correlations between age and attitudes as shown in Figure 3 were found not to be significant (items 1, 6, 7, and 10) once other variables were taken into account. Whether or not respondents described themselves as Conservative was the second strongest predictor of attitudes confirming significant correlations on seven of the items presented in Figure 6 above. Once other variables were taken into account items 4 and 5 were no longer significant.

Newspaper readership, however, only remained significantly related to attitudes on two of the 11 correlations presented in Figure 7 above. This suggests that underlying variables such as educational status and political affiliation account for the attitudes expressed by tabloid and broadsheet readers. Moreover it suggests that such variables would also influence the choice of the type of newspaper read on a regular basis. However, the two items in which newspaper readership proved to be a predictor were the ones which can be interpreted as expressions of punitiveness (items 7 and 8) and thus, to some extent the chosen type of newspaper might serve to reinforce and strengthen previously held attitudes. Similarly, three of the correlations (see Figure 8) between perceived risk of victimisation and attitudes were no long significant (items 1, 8, and 11) once other variables were entered into the equation.
Figure 9 shows correlations between level of interpersonal trust and attitudes for all but one of the attitudinal statements. However, again six of those correlations were apparently accounted for by other variables and were no longer statistically significant (items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 10). Regarding the question about respondents’ satisfaction with their financial situation a similar picture emerged. Three of the correlations found (see Figure 10 above) were no longer significant (items 3, 5, 10) once other variables were taken into account.

The fact that different socio-demographic or psycho-social variables remained statistically significantly related to the individual attitudinal statements suggests that these statements are indeed measuring different aspects of public views of crime and criminal justice (as discussed above, pp. 86). The low variance explained by the logistic regression further indicates that the variables included hold insufficient explanatory value as regards some of the attitudinal statements.

**CCTV and homelessness**

Two sections of more general questions about CCTV and homelessness were included in the questionnaire. Both were intended as a further check on the effect of information on levels of knowledge and perceptions of specific crime related issues. Respondents were asked whether they were aware of CCTV cameras in shops, car parks, and city streets, and what they thought of their effectiveness in regard to catching offenders, preventing crime, or making people feel safer. Clear majorities of respondents had noticed CCTV cameras in shops (87%), in car parks (67%), and in city streets (65%). Clear majorities of respondents were convinced by CCTV cameras’ effectiveness in detecting crime (74%), preventing crime (64%), and making people feel safer (64%).
Additionally, two questions (one with 3 sub-questions) tackled an issue which is particularly salient in Oxford, homelessness. Respondents most commonly over-estimated the size of the homeless population sleeping rough in Oxford (53%), but more than a third (35%) answered the question about the average number of people sleeping rough in Oxford correctly. A large proportion of respondents (67%) thought that homeless people sleeping rough should ‘under no circumstances’ be allowed to drink alcohol in the city centre, and nearly half of respondents (44%) thought that ‘under no circumstances’ should they be allowed to beg. However, respondents were apparently more forgiving when it came to the homeless sleeping on park benches with only about a quarter (27%) saying that they should not be allowed to sleep on park benches overnight.

A final group of questions (3) queried respondents’ knowledge of which types of behaviour are proscribed by law, which two of these behaviours they judged to be most damaging to the community, and which two activities they would like Oxford City Council to spend most of their crime prevention money on. Only six per cent of respondents identified correctly the criminal offences among the listed behaviours. The

70 Oxford has a higher rate of people accepted as homeless than England nationally (8.5 v 6 per 1,000 population), and a very visible population of people sleeping rough (Oxford City Council, 2001a, 18). In 2001, the Oxford City Council created a Street Scene Task Force to ‘deal with rough sleepers and the unwelcome aspects of street culture’ (Oxford City Council, 2001a, 5).

71 The exact number of rough sleepers is very hard to establish, however, Oxford City Council provided an estimate of between 11 and 30 people sleeping rough on any given night in its 2001 Crime and Disorder Audit (Oxford City Council, 2001a), with a figure of 24 recorded in April 2001 (Oxford City Council, 2001b, 1). According to Oxford City Council this figure has since fallen to under ten for most of the period 2001 to 2004 (Oxford Safer Communities Partnership, 2005c, f-5).

72 The behaviours listed were: fly-tipping, begging, drinking alcohol in the street, hanging around in groups (teenagers), breaking speed limits when driving, cyclists ignoring a red traffic light, and possession of cannabis.

73 Correct, 13 July 2005. Fly-tipping is a criminal offence according to the Control of Pollution (Amendment) Act 1989 and The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005. Begging is a
behaviours regarded as most damaging to the community were fly-tipping (48%), speeding (47%), and drinking alcohol in the street (34%). Respondents had expressed confidence in CCTV cameras’ capability to ‘combat’ crime (see above), nevertheless they did not want Oxford City Council to spend most of its crime prevention money on installing more of them. Nearly three-quarter of respondents (71%) wanted to see more ‘bobbies on the beat’. While this desire is often expressed by the public in response to such survey questions (for a summary of research, see Roberts & Hough, 2005b, 54-56) it is likely that surveys which prompt the public to think more imaginatively would find support for measures that might be regarded as addressing some of the causes of crime. Thus more than half of respondents (53%) wanted Oxford City Council to spend most of their crime prevention money on setting up and running more youth clubs.\textsuperscript{74}

2. After the Crime Scene columns

The primary objective of the Oxford Public Opinion Survey was to assess the impact of a weekly column on crime and criminal justice on readers of a weekly local newspaper. In order to assess rigorously whether the experiment, i.e. the inclusion of 26 weekly columns, did have an impact on readers’ knowledge of crime and the criminal justice

---

\textsuperscript{74} More ‘bobbies on the beat’ and more youth clubs was also the combination most commonly selected, by 34% of respondents.
system it was necessary to employ a robust experimental design. It was decided to use a quasi-Solomon four-group design (see Diagram 3 below) as this design enables the researcher to check whether any effect found in the experimental group is due to the experimental intervention rather than the initial observation (which may have sensitised the group to the experiment). Therefore in addition to the experimental and comparison group which are observed twice (pre- and post intervention), another two groups (experimental and comparison) are observed but only after the experimental intervention. The experimental group included all people who reported to ever read *The Oxford Times*\textsuperscript{75} and the comparison group included those who identified themselves as never reading *The Oxford Times*.

**Diagram 3. Solomon four-group design in practice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experimental group 1</th>
<th>O1 (486)</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>O2 (234)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comparison group 1</td>
<td>O1 (161)</td>
<td></td>
<td>O2 (123)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental group 2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>O1 (209)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison group 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>O1 (97)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

O = Observation  
X = Experimental Intervention  
* In one case information on newspaper readership was not available.

In total 520 (80%) of the 648 Oxford residents who had responded to the pre-experiment survey agreed to be re-contacted. These 520 respondents were re-contacted in May 2005 and asked to fill in the Oxford Public Opinion Survey Part 2. The second survey

\textsuperscript{75} At research design stage it was planned to include only regular readers of *The Oxford Times*, i.e. those reading 3 out of 4 issues, in the experimental group. However, at the analysis stage it was found that 14 (26%) of those respondents who reported reading the column were irregular readers. Due to the small number of people in the sample who read the columns it was decided to include every respondent self reporting to ever reading the newspaper in the experimental group.
consisted of the same 61 questions asked in the first OPOS plus an additional six questions (see Appendix 2). One of those was included to elicit further data on the social status (class) of the respondents, and one was included to check whether or not the respondents remembered filling in the first part of the survey. One question asked directly whether respondents had noticed and read the Crime Scene column and the remaining three questions asked whether respondents had watched TV programmes on crime, and/or accessed the Home Office's webpage, or any other sources of information on crime. These questions were partly a smokescreen for the Crime Scene column question but also a check whether respondents had sought out information on crime and criminal justice through the media or other sources of information. By August 2005, 366 (70%) surveys had been returned and, after data cleaning, 357 completed surveys remained in the sample.\textsuperscript{76}

Of the 234 people surveyed who responded twice to the survey and reported ever reading \textit{The Oxford Times}, 27 respondents reported to have read the column (12\%) – 17 less than once a month and only six twice a month or more often. Nineteen respondents claimed that they had noticed the column but not read it. The post-experiment-only sample were also asked whether they had noticed or read the Crime Scene column and out of 208 people who reported to ever reading \textit{The Oxford Times} again 27 respondents reported to have read the column (13\%) – 11 less than once a month, and 12 twice a month or more often.

\textsuperscript{76} Nine surveys were filled in by respondents other than pre-survey respondent and were therefore excluded.
a. The experimental group – *The Oxford Times* readers

*The Oxford Times*, its standing in Oxford and its readership will be described in more detail in Chapter 5. This research was based on a natural quasi-experiment, which means that the experimental and the comparison group self-selected through their choice of reading a particular local newspaper.

Thus, it was important to establish whether the experimental group differed in important aspects from the comparison group and the analysis found that *Oxford Times* readers were different from non-readers in a number of respects. A higher proportion of *Oxford Times* readers (60% v 37% of non-readers) was educated to University degree level, owned the property they lived in (68% v 45% of non-readers), was of Labour or Liberal political affiliation,\(^\text{77}\) earned more than £41,000 a year (29% v 6% of non-readers),\(^\text{78}\) regularly read broadsheet newspapers (63% v 26%), and was aged between 30-59 (55% v 40% of non-readers). The mean knowledge score of *The Oxford Times* readers was also higher than that of non-readers (4.21 v 3.92).

**Crime Scene column readers**

In contrast, there were few demographic differences between the general readership of *The Oxford Times* and those *Oxford Times* readers who claimed to have read the Crime Scene column. Those 54 respondents (27 in the pre-and-post-experiment sample, and 27 in the post-only sample) who reported reading the columns were similar to the general *Oxford Times* readership in respect of gender, ethnicity, and educational qualifications. There were considerable differences in age (46% of column readers were

\(^{77}\) Labour 32% v 26% of non-readers, Liberal 26% v 20% of non-readers.

\(^{78}\) Data on annual income was only available for the post-experiment-only sample and those completing the pre-and-post experiment survey (n=640) as the question was only included at the post-experiment stage.
aged 60 or older v 32% of Oxford Times readers overall) and related differences in homeownership (50% of column readers owning their house outright\textsuperscript{79} v 37% of OT readers owning outright) and working status (41% of column readers were retired v 25% of OT readers). There were, however, similar rates of victimisation in the past 12 months, or serious victimisation in the lifetime, between the two groups.

The data collected through the OPOS were explored further to find out if any other factors determined column readership. There were no significant differences on psycho-social variables such as level of trust, satisfaction with financial situation, perceived likelihood of victimisation, or political affiliation. As far as attitudes were concerned, findings were not consistently pointing in one direction, i.e. that column readers were more ‘punitive’ or more ‘liberal’, and none of the differences was statistically significant. Thus, the findings on demographic differences and other factors which might have an impact on interest in a column on crime and criminal justice suggest that readership of the column was mainly determined by the amount of ‘spare’ time available to readers of The Oxford Times.

b. Impact of column on levels of knowledge of column readers

As noted above, the knowledge score that could be achieved entirely by guessing was 2.94. Readers of the column (n=27) had a slightly lower mean knowledge score than the total sample prior to the experiment (4.07 v 4.20). The 26 weekly columns provided the information that would have enabled readers to answer every knowledge question (bar one) correctly and the information was repeated on at least two occasions. After the experimental intervention, however, the mean knowledge score increased only slightly for the column reader sample (from 4.07 to 4.19 - not statistically significant) and it was

\textsuperscript{79} Defined as having paid off their mortgage.
still lower than the mean score achieved by The Oxford Times readers who had not read the column (4.45, up from 4.40).80

Looking only at those six respondents who reported to have read the Crime Scene column twice a month or more often, their knowledge score was much lower than the average of Oxford Times readers and improved only slightly from pre- (3.67) to post-experiment survey (3.83).

As far as changes on an individual level were concerned, 13 readers showed an improvement in knowledge score. Nine of these reported to have read the column only occasionally, less than once a month; two reported to have read the column once a month; and two reported that they had read the column three to four times a month. Four column readers showed no change (2 occasional readers; 2 twice a month); and in ten cases the knowledge score deteriorated (6 occasional readers; 2 once a month; 1 twice a month; 1 three-four times a month).

Overall, as Table 6 shows, levels of knowledge seem to have fallen on six questions, and risen on four questions. The biggest observable improvement in knowledge was on the ‘minimum sentence for burglars’ question which was not covered in any of the columns.81 This improvement was only visible in the column reader sample which was surveyed twice and indicates a completely random shift or at least one not caused by reading the column.

A better level of knowledge was found for column readers on awareness of the British Crime Survey (BCS). This shift was observed for the pre- and post experimental group as a whole (excluding column readers) as well as the pre- and post comparison

80 The mean knowledge score of non-readers was considerably lower than that of The Oxford Times readers prior to and after the experiment (3.92 and 3.95 respectively).

81 The decision not to provide information about this particular question served as an additional test of the experiment’s internal validity. Clearly, it served its purpose.
group (although to a lesser extent). Additionally, a relatively high awareness of the BCS was apparent in column readers only surveyed post the experiment, however, this was not true for either the experimental or comparison group only surveyed post the experiment.

In conclusion, consumption of the Crime Scene column did not have a measurable effect on column readers’ level of knowledge of crime and the criminal justice system. This is probably unsurprising considering the irregularity of self-reported reading of the column.
### Table 6. Levels of knowledge of column readers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Readers of column, Pre-and-post-sample pre-experiment n=27</th>
<th>Readers of column, Pre-and-post-sample post-experiment n=27</th>
<th>Readers of column, Post-only-sample post-experiment n=27</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Correct answers (%)</td>
<td>Pure guess (%)</td>
<td>Missing data (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think is the minimum sentence for an adult who has been convicted three times of house burglary?</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of every 100 adult males convicted of robbery, how many go to prison?</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>85.2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of every 100 adult males convicted of rape, how many go to prison?</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An adult male convicted of rape will be sentenced to an average prison sentence length of,</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 thefts of vehicles, how many are reported to the police?</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 robberies, how many are reported to the police?</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 rapes, how many are reported to the police?</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 rapes, how many are committed by someone the victim does not know?</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 crimes, how many are violent?</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6  Levels of knowledge of column readers (contd.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Readers of column, Pre-experiment n=27</th>
<th>Readers of column, Post-experiment n=27</th>
<th>Readers of column, Post-sample n=27</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Correct answers (%)</td>
<td>Pure guess (%)</td>
<td>Missing data (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 violent crimes, how many result in actual injury to the victim?</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who, do you think, is most at risk of being a victim of a violent crime?</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 rapes recorded by the police, how many result in a conviction?</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 burglaries recorded by the police, how many result in a conviction?</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 males aged 40, how many have a criminal conviction?</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Knowledge” score</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you heard of the British Crime Survey?</td>
<td>Yes, and I know what it is.</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>63.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, and I know what it is.</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages are calculated as a proportion of the whole sample including missing data.
Issues of validity in the OPOS

In addition to assessing whether readership of the column had any effect on readers’ level of knowledge of crime and criminal justice the Solomon-four-group design was used to assess whether exposure to the pre-experiment survey would pre-dispose people to read the Crime Scene column (sensitisation effect). Additionally, the research literature identifies a potential threat to the validity of research findings as survey respondents might feel ‘special’ by taking part in the survey. This could mean that the initial survey influences the way that people answered the survey questions at the post-experiment stage (an ‘instrumentation effect’ or Hawthorne effect). The Solomon-four-group design enables the experimenter to assess whether any sensitisation or instrumentation effects were present, (see Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of the research design).

Tables 7 and 8 compare levels of knowledge pre- and post-experiment for those respondents in the experimental and comparison groups who were surveyed twice (excluding column readers), as well as for those in the experimental and comparison groups who were only interviewed after the experimental intervention. These tables showed that there were considerable differences in levels of knowledge between experimental and comparison groups prior to and post the experimental intervention. Thus, *The Oxford Times* readership was more knowledgeable and not as prone to misconception as appeared to be the case with the comparison group.

In terms of knowledge there was no consistent shift in levels of knowledge in one or the other direction for any of the samples. However, as noted above there was a shift on the question of awareness and knowledge of the British Crime Survey. It appears that this shift was the result of a small sensitisation or instrumentation effect for those groups surveyed twice, as it was seen in the sample who took part in the experiment – the column readers; those exposed to it but not taking part (experimental group – *Oxford Times* readers) and those not even
exposed to the experiment (comparison group – non-readers). Thus, the better knowledge of the British Crime Survey among column readers only surveyed after the experiment is likely to be another random outlier rather than being attributable to the experimental intervention.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Pre-experiment**</th>
<th>Pre-experiment</th>
<th>Post-experiment**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental group1 O1, n=207</td>
<td>Comparison Group1 O1, n=123</td>
<td>Experimental Group1 O2, n=207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Correct answers (%)</td>
<td>Pure guess (%)</td>
<td>Missing data (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think is the minimum sentence for an adult who has been convicted three times of house burglary?</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of every 100 adult males convicted of robbery, how many go to prison?</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>84.5</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of every 100 adult males convicted of rape, how many go to prison?</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An adult male convicted of rape will be sentenced to an average prison sentence length of,</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>78.7</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 thefts of vehicles, how many are reported to the police?</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 robberies, how many are reported to the police?</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>79.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 rapes, how many are reported to the police?</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 rapes, how many are committed by someone the victim does not know?</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>68.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 crimes, how many are violent?</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages are calculated as a proportion of the whole sample including missing data.
** Excluding ‘column readers’.
### Table 7  Levels of knowledge in various samples: 1* (contd.)

| Sample | Pre-experiment** | | | Pre-experiment | | | Post-experiment** |
|--------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|        | Experimental group1 O1, n=207 | Comparison Group1 O1, n=123 | Experimental Group1 O2, n=207 |
| Question | Correct answers (%) | Pure guess (%) | Missing data (%) | Correct answers (%) | Pure guess (%) | Missing data (%) | Correct answers (%) | Pure guess (%) | Missing data (%) |
| Out of 100 violent crimes, how many result in actual injury to the victim? | 24.6 | 77.3 | 4.3 | 26.8 | 77.2 | 0.8 | 30.4 | 81.6 | 1.9 |
| Who, do you think, is most at risk of being a victim of a violent crime? | 62.8 | 50.2 | 4.3 | 43.1 | 56.9 | 0.8 | 63.8 | 51.2 | 1.9 |
| Out of 100 rapes recorded by the police, how many result in a conviction? | 45.4 | 71.5 | 4.8 | 43.9 | 74.0 | 2.4 | 52.7 | 70.0 | 1.4 |
| Out of 100 burglaries recorded by the police, how many result in a conviction? | 54.1 | 72.0 | 3.9 | 40.7 | 75.6 | 1.6 | 53.1 | 73.9 | 2.9 |
| Out of 100 males aged 40, how many have a criminal conviction? | 17.9 | 71.0 | 4.3 | 30.1 | 74.0 | 3.3 | 20.3 | 73.4 | 1.9 |
| “Knowledge” score | 4.43 | 4.13 | 4.51 |
| Have you heard of the British Crime Survey? | 38.6 | 31.7 | 61.3 |
| Yes, and I know what it is. | 13.0 | 11.6 | 28.0 |

*Percentages are calculated as a proportion of the whole sample including missing data.  
** Excluding ‘column readers’.
**Table 8. Levels of knowledge in various samples: 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Post-experiment Comparison group1 O2, n=123</th>
<th>Post-only** Experimental Group2 O1, n=182</th>
<th>Post-only Comparison Group2 O1, n=97</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Correct answers (%)</td>
<td>Pure guess (%)</td>
<td>Missing data (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think is the minimum sentence for an adult who has been convicted three times of house burglary?</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of every 100 adult males convicted of robbery, how many go to prison?</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>86.2</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of every 100 adult males convicted of rape, how many go to prison?</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An adult male convicted of rape will be sentenced to an average prison sentence length of,</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 thefts of vehicles, how many are reported to the police?</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 robberies, how many are reported to the police?</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 rapes, how many are reported to the police?</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 rapes, how many are committed by someone the victim does not know?</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 crimes, how many are violent?</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>81.3</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages are calculated as a proportion of the whole sample including missing data.*

**Excluding ‘column readers’.*
### Table 8  Levels of knowledge in various samples: 2* (contd.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Post-experiment**</th>
<th>Post-only**</th>
<th>Post-only**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comparison group1 O2, n=123</td>
<td>Experimental Group2 O1, n=182</td>
<td>Comparison Group2 O1, n=97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Correct answers (%)</td>
<td>Pure guess (%)</td>
<td>Missing data (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 violent crimes, how many result in actual injury to the victim?</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who, do you think, is most at risk of being a victim of a violent crime?</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 rapes recorded by the police, how many result in a conviction?</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 burglaries recorded by the police, how many result in a conviction?</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 males aged 40, how many have a criminal conviction?</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Knowledge&quot; score</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>3.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you heard of the British Crime Survey? Yes, and I know what it is.</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages are calculated as a proportion of the whole sample including missing data.

** Excluding ‘column readers’.
c. Impact of Crime Scene column on column readers’ attitudes

Table 9 and Table 10 show the list of eleven questions which were considered suitable (and have been used in previous opinion surveys) to elicit respondents’ attitudes towards crime, criminals, and the criminal justice system. The tables illustrate the attitudes of different samples as well as changes in attitudes from the pre-experiment survey to the post-experiment survey.

A lively discussion in the social psychological literature surrounds the validity of attitudes gathered through survey research. These discussions date back to Converse who noted in 1964 that answers to attitudinal questions can undergo dramatic shifts at an individual level over time (Converse, 1964). Researchers have been startled by the effect that question order, or minor changes in the wording of questions can have on the responses to attitudinal questions. Their conclusion has been that the assumption that attitudes are simple ‘readouts of stored judgement’ is flawed (Tourangeau et al., 2000, 22) and that people do not always hold ‘ready-made’ attitudes on narrow social issues they know little about. However, rather than admitting to not having an opinion many people will attempt to construct one either on the basis of general values and predispositions or specific beliefs about the issue in question (Tourangeau et al., 2000, 172). Thus, changes in attitudes over time have to be considered with caution, as ‘attitudes’ can simply be created ad hoc to serve the perceived purpose of the survey.

Moreover, although a number of changes could be observed among the column readers, most of them in a ‘desired’, i.e. less ‘punitive’, more confident, direction, none was statistically significant. Table 10 also reveals the considerable differences in attitudes between experimental and comparison groups with the comparison groups being generally less informed and more ‘punitive’, a reflection of the particular readership of The Oxford Times.
### Table 9. Attitudes of column readers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude questions</th>
<th>Readers of column, Pre-experiment, n=27</th>
<th>Readers of column, Post-experiment, n=27</th>
<th>Readers of column, Post-experiment-only sample, n=27</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Agree</td>
<td>% Don’t know</td>
<td>% Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences are too lenient (1)</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>48.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal justice system is not effective in reducing crime (2)</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime nationally has risen (3)</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>55.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A prison sentence is effective in reducing an offender’s likelihood of reconviction (4)</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentencers are out of touch (5)</td>
<td>85.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>77.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders can be helped to change (6)</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders should be treated harshly (7)</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison should be used as a last resort (8)</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>63.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people commit several crimes (9)</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour of young people is worse (10)</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>63.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people are responsible for most of the crime (11)</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude questions</td>
<td>Pre-experiment Experimental Group1 O1**, n=207</td>
<td>Pre-experiment Comparison Group1 O1, n=123</td>
<td>Post-experiment** Experimental Group1 O2, n=207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Agree</td>
<td>% Don't know</td>
<td>% Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences are too lenient (1)</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>59.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal justice system is not effective in reducing crime (2)</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime nationally has risen (3)</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>62.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A prison sentence is effective in reducing an offender's likelihood of reconviction (4)</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentencers are out of touch (5)</td>
<td>66.2</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>65.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders can be helped to change (6)</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>64.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders should be treated harshly (7)</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages are calculated as a proportion of the whole sample including missing data.
** Excluding ‘column readers’.
Table 10  Attitudes of various samples (contd.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude questions</th>
<th>Pre-experiment Experimental Group1 O1**, n=207</th>
<th>Pre-experiment Comparison Group1 O1, n=123</th>
<th>Post-experiment** Experimental Group1 O2, n=207</th>
<th>Post-experiment Comparison Group1 O2, n=123</th>
<th>Post-only Experimental Group2 O1, n=182</th>
<th>Post-only Comparison Group2 O1, n=97</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Agree</td>
<td>% Don't know</td>
<td>% Agree</td>
<td>% Don't know</td>
<td>% Agree</td>
<td>% Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison should be used as a last resort (8)</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people commit several crimes (9)</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour of young people is worse (10)</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people are responsible for most of the crime (11)</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages are calculated as a proportion of the whole sample including missing data.
** Excluding 'column readers'. 
3. Successfully manipulating public knowledge?

This chapter presented the findings from the Oxford Public Opinion Survey in two main sections. The first section discussed the findings from the OPOS in relation to Oxford residents' response rate, levels of knowledge and attitudes. This showed that the response rate to the Oxford Public Opinion Survey was too low to allow generalisations from the survey findings of respondents' levels of knowledge of, and attitudes towards, crime and criminal justice. However, interesting findings emerged as regards this particular and disproportionately well educated sample of Oxford residents who responded to the OPOS.

In many respects findings resembled those found in other public opinion surveys regarding the public’s attitudes towards crime, criminals, and sentencing. Oxford residents revealed ambivalence in their views about crime and criminal justice. Moreover, the use of the ‘pure guess’ box proved successful as it highlighted respondents' acute awareness of their lack of knowledge of crime patterns and the processes of the criminal justice system. It was evident that this did not deter them from answering the knowledge questions according to their perceptions and beliefs of the ‘right’ answer.

The analysis of this dataset provided evidence of correlations between a number of demographic variables and levels of knowledge but further analysis using logistic regression showed that only educational status was significantly related to levels of knowledge. There were also numerous associations between demographic and psycho-social variables and attitudes towards crime, criminals, and criminal justice. However, some of these disappeared when the relationship was further interrogated using logistic regression analysis. The analysis showed that the level of variance explained was low indicating that the variables entered into the equation hold little power in explaining some of the attitudes elicited by the survey.
The second part of this chapter presented the findings from the OPOS in relation to the main aspect of the Crime Scene experiment – to test the impact of the provision of factual information through a weekly newspaper column on readers of the local newspaper. This natural experiment suggests that simply providing factual information through a weekly newspaper column in a local newspaper on crime and criminal justice is unlikely to reach a significant proportion of the relevant geographic population on a regular basis. Additionally those who self-reportedly read the column did not show improvements in levels of knowledge of, or significant changes of attitudes towards, crime and criminal justice. Thus, there is some evidence that interest in, take-up, and retention of factual information on crime and criminal justice is not as high as previous research has suggested. This does not necessarily mean that it is futile to seek to inform the public about crime and criminal justice through a weekly column in a local newspaper. The provision of information or public education should be regarded as an end in itself, and it could be argued that it is sufficient if the ‘right’ people are reached with such communication.

In the case of the Crime Scene column there are alternative explanations for why it failed to make an impact. Returning to the social-psychological literature message reception can be influenced by the message’s source and by the message itself amongst other things (see p 32 above). Various aspects of the source and message element could have been altered. As stated before the experimental intervention can be described as fairly light. The column ran only once weekly and for a duration of six months. It is possible that it needed more time to establish itself. Additionally, it was not presented in typical column style with a picture of the columnist and a by-line stating their ‘level of expertise’. This would have given the column the air of more authoritative authorship (e.g. by an academic at the University of Oxford). Perhaps, crucially though, the column’s position in the newspaper changed from week to week. Better and more consistent positioning in the paper might have alerted more readers to its existence. Finally, more advertising might
have made the difference. It would have been possible to flag the column on the front page, not depending on readers to ‘stumble across’ it when flicking through the newspaper.

It is plausible that such changes might have had an impact on the findings from the OPOS. This notion will be explored further in the next chapter which aims to shed more light on the reasons behind low take-up of the column, and other aspects of the research design through the analysis of data gleaned from the in-depth interviews with survey participants, media insiders, and opinion leaders.
Chapter 4

Adding a second dimension:

Listening to respondents of the Oxford Public Opinion Survey

This chapter explores the qualitative data drawn from both the Oxford Public Opinion Survey (OPOS) and the follow-up in-depth interviews. In the first section, the qualitative data collected in the process of employing an initially purely quantitative research tool, the OPOS, is presented and discussed. The second section outlines the ‘designed’ qualitative element of the ‘Crime Scene’ experiment, the in-depth interviews, and presents the findings from that element of the research. Both elements add another dimension to the rather one-dimensional picture painted by the analysis of the quantitative data collected through the OPOS. The study’s mixed methods approach builds on the notion of triangulation, i.e. that it is useful to look at social scientific phenomena or research questions from as many (theoretical and methodological) perspectives as possible, thus helping to deconstruct and better understand the objects of inquiry (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 12-13).

1. Reading between the lines – qualitative data emerging from a quantitative research tool

The use of large-scale ‘tick-box’ surveys is often favoured by researchers employing primarily quantitative research methods because it provides data which are precise and, arguably, unambiguous. As set out in Chapter 1, the implicit expectation is that survey
respondents comprehend the questions posed in the same way as the researchers/pollsters do, that they hold attitudes on all the issues raised, and that they are willing to share these views with the researchers.

Thus, most research reports presenting findings from quantitative surveys do not provide details of ‘unwanted noise’ in the survey process, such as comments scribbled onto survey forms and phone calls explaining why forms were not returned. In choosing to ignore this type of data researchers may be neglecting an important part of the research process, and unduly limiting the validity and value of their data. The OPOS invited comments from respondents on its last page, but notes were also found scribbled next to questions throughout the questionnaire. The number of comments made on the survey forms was noticeably high and thus they were recorded during data entry.

About a third of respondents felt the need to comment on some aspect of the survey. Some of these comments were purely practical, for example, advising the researchers on a change of address, but most were much more substantive, inquiring about the validity of the questions, and commenting on and qualifying answers. More than a quarter (27%) of all survey respondents made such substantive comments. Here is one particularly striking example:

I believe that the greatest threat to our society is not crime but the cynical exploitation of people’s fear of crime by a corrupt and mendacious governing elite in order to control and limit individual liberty. I also feel the views of those who hold such beliefs are deliberately excluded from the debate by government and their media lackeys, which is why I make a point of mentioning it. The rule of law in this country was instituted to protect individual liberty (Magna Carta), not to protect ‘victims’. Two quotes that I

---

82 The British Crime Survey for example comes with it own Technical Report, however, no reference is made to comments or other data volunteered by the interviewees except for a detailed account of how verbatim offence descriptions need to be coded into the appropriate offence category (see for example (Grant et al., 2006). Similarly, every issue of the British Social Attitudes Survey contains a technical report. However, again in the three issues sampled, including the introduction to the first survey, there was no mention of information volunteered by survey respondents over and above the categorical answers to specific survey questions (Jowell, 1984; Park et al., 2004; Park et al., 2007).
feel are relevant, ‘If every criminal trial in the last 50 years in the US had been decided the other way, society would be not a bit different’ Clarence Darrow 1955. ‘What is the crime of robbing a bank compared to the crime of owning a bank?’ Bakunin. Thank you for this opportunity to state (rant) my views. (Comment on survey form, emphasis in original, Hippre515)

The methodology literature suggests that survey respondents and interview participants, once they have agreed to take part in research, ‘accept the framework of questions and try earnestly to work within that framework’ (Schumann & Presser, 1996, 299). And this certainly rings true for the ‘silent’ majority of those taking part in the OPOS. However, the fact that a sizeable minority of respondents expressed doubts about particular questions, the survey methodology, or took the opportunity to qualify what could be interpreted as simplistic responses to very complex issues, raises questions about the appropriate interpretation of survey research. A number of themes emerged from these comments, some of which also filtered through in the in-depth interviews.

Survey respondents did take issue with various aspects of the OPOS questionnaire and the methodology employed. There were complaints specifically related to the questionnaire, such as concerns about its length, inherent bias, intrusiveness, and particular questions.

This questionnaire is too long; I suspect your response rate would be greater if you shortened it. (Comment on survey form, HiPpre018)

You don't have a single woman criminal in this - it's a good example of the bias there is. (Comment on survey form, Nopre076)

There were some important issues within the questions but the questions were too limited and therefore the answers are not a true reflection of my views, e.g. Q49, offenders should be treated harshly according to the severity of the crime. (Comment on survey form, Nopre086)

I hope this survey helps but I feel that this is a very complicated issue and I don't think that my general attitudes and beliefs regarding crime and the criminal justice system have been captured on this form. (Comment on survey form, RoHpre435)
Some survey respondents questioned the relevance of ‘personal’ questions, such as those relating to political affiliation, household income, age, or newspaper readership. For some, those questions may well have been a reason not to take part in the survey. One survey was returned unanswered with a note making these concerns explicit:

I do not want to take part in this survey because many of the questions have nothing to do with crime such as who do I vote for in elections, also my financial situation, that’s personal. Anyhow what have these questions got to with crime? (Note: Rohpre341)

Other survey respondents simply chose to ignore some of the questions they found intrusive as the respondent did who added the following comments. 83

I feel Q1-6 are irrelevant unless you are looking into the social background and educational status of the individuals you question. Personally I am not sure if these two aspects are really relevant to crime, unless you delve into the areas of the ‘deprived’. … I think great liberties have been taken in probing citizens’ private lives, makes a lot of extra paper work which all cost time and money which could be better spent ‘up front’ - like most big organisations spending other people's money!!! (Comment on survey form, Nopost043)

A number of comments referred to the questions about whether or not sentences imposed by the criminal courts were too lenient (Q23) and whether those who sentence offenders are in touch or out of touch with what ‘ordinary’ people think (Q40). These comments are particularly interesting because Q23 was lifted from HORS 245, which took this question to be an ‘indicator of punitiveness, but also a barometer of how appropriate sentencing is seen to be’ (Chapman et al., 2002, 30).

I think questions 23 and 40 are too general. Q 23 - I think some sentences are too harsh, some too lenient. Q 40 - Obviously those people will differ from each other. Plus I don't know any of them anyway. (Comment on survey form, Nopre034)

Sentences handed down by judges and magistrates seem to vary wildly for exactly the same crime. (Comment on survey form, Heapre468)

83 Nevertheless, the proportion of missing data on personal, demographic questions was not substantially different from that on other sections of the OPOS questionnaire.
I find the inconsistency in the sentencing of convicted criminals disturbing. I would make a clear distinction between murder/brutal violent crime and all other crime. I consider the sentences handed out for murder/violent attacks derisory and offering insufficient protection to the public. (Comment on survey form, Nopre321)

Regarding question 23 - I was tempted not to answer this question since I don't believe sentencing is an important issue in crime reduction. The way you have phrased it invited the answer 'too lenient' - who wants to appear soft on crime? (Comment on survey form, Hippre179)

More generally, a degree of doubt regarding the value of survey research and public opinion polling was evident among those respondents who had made comments on the survey form. A number of commentators ‘consider the limiting properties of surveys in reflecting attitudinal dimensions of public opinion and whether the survey situation creates attitudes where none really exist’ (Dran & Hildreth, 1995, 130). Moreover, while members of the public generally welcome the chance to ‘make their voices heard’, they also express ‘some degree of scepticism about polling as a mechanism of public input’ (Dran & Hildreth, 1995, 141). There remains the question of how valid tick-box questionnaires are in measuring complex phenomena such as attitudes and beliefs. It has been contended that ‘nothing more inadequately expresses the state of opinion than a percentage’ (Bourdieu, 1993, 150). The next couple of comments included on returned surveys illustrate some of the limitations of tick-box questionnaires gathering data on complex issues such as crime and criminal justice as perceived by survey respondents.

I hope my considered comments will be of use and not simply binned, ignored, in favour of the current vogue for statistics (63.5% of respondents considered; 15.3% thought). (Comment on survey form, Heapre045)

It is extremely difficult to answer these questions accurately as crime and justice is a broad spectrum. (Comment on survey form, Hippost146)

Some questions and answers feel too simplistic but that's the problem of questionnaires. (Comment on survey form, Heapre237)

You do not question whether prison is a suitable moral punishment, which is an important function of the criminal justice system alongside prevention and rehabilitation. Q 20, Police recorded crime levels does not take into account
the large percentage of unrecorded crimes because the public have lost faith in the ability of the police to do anything or the courts to obtain a conviction. (Comment on survey form, Heapre069)

This [the survey] is invalid if there is no option to say I am ambivalent to the multiple choice questions. (Comment on survey form, Nopost133)

Surveys are fine but I think you should also listen to people in their own homes and neighbourhoods. (Comment on survey form, Heapost144)

In addition to comments regarding the research methods and the wording of specific survey questions, survey respondents offered their views on causes of crime and how to prevent them, on many occasions relating their comments directly to offending by young people. Respondents referred to a decline in British society’s standards, such as falling levels of respect by young people, and rising levels of incivilities and crime.  

I think teenagers are getting worse as the years go by as windows are getting smashed, cars scratched, shops getting broken into, and gangs hanging around at shops and shouting things at you and other things. We need something for the children to do like activity clubs or something to get them off the streets. (Comment on survey form, RoHpre316)

People commit crime/break the law because many laws are not enforced or they know it will be a 'slap on the wrist'. I think laws should be strongly enforced and then people may think twice about breaking them. Higher fines can help pay for more police presence. (Comment on survey form, Heapre399)

I think our prisons are much too full and that due consideration on the primitive effects of a prison sentence on the offender's family/dependants are not adequately taken into account. I think much crime is a result of drug or alcohol dependency and that more provision should be made to help people kick the habit. Also I think that juvenile crime is often the result of educational frustration and inadequacy. (Comment on survey form, Nopost029)

I am glad my span of life is nearly at an end. I do not feel safe on the streets by day or night. Never ever see a policeman. I would like to see the Oxford City Police as it was prior to 1969. (Comment on survey form, Heapre082)

A lot of teenagers seem to lack respect for adults. These issues should be dealt with in schools. We're living in a society where youngsters love being

84 These concerns are neither new nor restricted to Britain, see, for example Pearson, 1983, Part One and Lee, 2007, 189-190.
abusive and using the phrase 'I've got my rights, you can't do anything, ha, ha, ha'.

(Comment on survey form, Heapost047)

The OPOS included a question on how respondents thought Oxford City Council should spend its crime prevention money. Nearly three-quarters of respondents chose 'more police officers on the beat' as one of their two possible choices out of six. Alongside calls for 'tougher sentencing' this demand is a common feature of public debates on crime and criminal justice as presented through public opinion polls and in the media (Newburn, 2003, 1; Roberts & Hough, 2005b, 54-55 and 76-78). These themes of a failing criminal justice system were also captured in some of the comments made on the survey forms.

Something needs to be done to protect the rights of the elderly, who at present, are afraid to go out alone, even in the daytime. A visible police force, on the streets would be a great help. Stronger deterrent, for young offenders, and if possible, involve the offender's parents.

(Comment on survey form, Hippost275)

I strongly believe that more police should be out on the streets. More things to do on Oxford estates like more youth clubs to stop teenagers hanging on the street corners bored and getting into trouble.

(Comment on survey form, Rohpost018)

Conviction for criminal offences is very difficult, because prosecution has to satisfy a few criteria, e.g. actus rea, mens rea, etc, before a successful conviction can be made. Therefore, criminals always get away and are laughing at our justice system. So, I would believe that, if there is a successful conviction, imprisonment or tougher sentence should be passed to deter criminals. Remember, the criminals may have been getting away so many times before.

(Comment on survey form, Hippre265)

The justice system is too lenient towards kids and others who misbehave and break the laws of the country.

(Comment on survey form, Rohpost052)

---

85 For examples of some recent tabloid headlines calling for tougher sentences, see Feilzer, 2007.
Does everyone have a view on crime?

The preceding section exemplifies the difficulty of capturing complex views and attitudes on a fairly simplistic questionnaire. However, this is not the only limitation of survey research seeking to draw some conclusions on public opinion and attitudes. As Wilkins contended, ‘if one asks the average citizen for his opinion on a topic, the most honest response may well be, ‘Frankly, until you asked me, I had not given it a moment’s thought” (1984, 83). However, rather than admitting to not having an opinion many people will attempt to construct one either on the basis of general values and predispositions or specific beliefs about the issue in question (Tourangeau et al., 2000, 172). It is for that reason that respondents were provided with the option to tick the ‘pure guess’ box for the 14 knowledge questions, and with a ‘don’t know’ option where they were asked to express attitudes related to crime, criminals, and criminal justice – two examples of the chosen format are included below.

Box 2: Examples of knowledge and attitudinal questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example of knowledge question:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Out of 100 rapes recorded by the police, how many result in a conviction?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ 1-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ 21-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ 41-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ 61-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ 81-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Pure Guess</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example of attitudinal question:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If prison has to be used, it should be used sparingly and only as a last resort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Don’t know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most respondents did not express strong attitudes on the statements provided. In fact on some of the statement a sizeable minority did not express any attitudes at all. For
example, as many as 20 per cent of the sample confessed to ‘not knowing’ the answer to the question of whether they perceived sentences handed out by the courts to be too lenient, too tough, or about right; and whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement that children and young people are responsible for most of the crimes committed in this country (see Table 5 in Chapter 3). This absence of clear attitude with respect to certain narrow issues to do with crime and criminal justice was supported by statements made during the in-depth interviews, and comments noted on survey forms.

I found this very interesting and it got me thinking about the subject more (at all)! (Comment on survey form, Hippost136)

It just intrigued me because I didn’t know what sort of my answers would be, it was like, well I haven’t really thought about this. So I suppose half it is personal to have a think about what my actual attitudes were and some of it because I thought you might give feedback. (Excerpt from in-depth interview, Hippre377)86

“I am far more ignorant than I thought I was”87

The issue of not having pre-formed attitudes and views on certain aspects of crime and criminal justice can be linked to the notion that public knowledge of most policy related issues including criminal justice policy is weak (Luskin et al., 2002, 457; Roberts & Stalans, 2000, 23-24). The vast majority of survey respondents – more than three-quarters on all but one question – acknowledged their lack of the specific knowledge required to answer the factual questions confidently by ticking the ‘pure guess’ box provided on the survey form.88 Moreover, a few expressed surprise on realising just how little they knew about crime and justice.

I would like to read the final report and have the facts as it has made me aware of how ignorant I am. (Comment on survey form, RoHpre302)

86 In response to a question on the reasons for participating in the OPOS.

87 Comment on survey form, Hippost136.

88 For a thorough discussion of the use of the pure guess box see Chapter 3, section 1c.
On that basis some respondents questioned the value and use of survey data based on ‘un-informed’ opinions.

I am not sure that answers that are pure guesswork are satisfactory. I was always taught as a young engineer that an uninformed guess was of no value, but a well informed and knowledgeable guess just might be worth consideration - mine may not be worth considering. (Comment on survey form, Heapre202)

Thus, to regard survey results as valid and accurate reflections of survey respondents’ attitudes and beliefs seems to ignore not only a considerable body of social psychological research and scholarship but also survey respondents’ explicit concerns about the limitations and flaws of tick-box questionnaires. Thus, I would concur with Bolt (1961, 393) that ‘every reflection forces upon us the extreme need for caution and reserve whenever we generalise about public opinion. In form, it is as unstable and nebulous as a river mist’.

2. Simple answers to simple questions? Designing in-depth interviews

In this section I consider the qualitative element of the Crime Scene study. The discussion is broken down into three main parts, which cover the process and practicalities of designing in-depth interviews from research design, through to implementation and, finally, to analysis.

a. From research design...

The OPOS tested whether the provision of information on crime and criminal justice to members of the public through a local newspaper had a measurable impact on readers’ knowledge of these issues. However, as discussed in detail in chapters 1 and 2 and
above, public opinion research relying solely on survey research has been criticised for its inherent methodological deficiencies. In order to counter some of the problems of relying on just one methodology – for example, limited validity, one-dimensionality – this research study was designed as a mixed methods project, which sought to complement the quantitative data elicited from the public opinion survey with more detailed qualitative data derived from in-depth interviews.

Using a mixed methods research design raises wider ontological and epistemological questions and necessitates an awareness of current debates and discussions (Cresswell & Clark, 2007; Greene et al., 2001, 40; Hammersley, 1995; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). A short note on the spirit in which this research has been carried out is required to position the study’s design amongst the differing research paradigms. The main paradigms or worldviews which traditionally are presented as being fundamentally opposed are those of positivism/postpositivism and constructivism (Cresswell & Clark, 2007). The positivist notion of a singular reality, the one and only truth which is out there waiting to be discovered by objective and value-free inquiry underpins quantitative research methods. It is contrasted with the idea that there is no such thing as a single objective reality and that ‘subjective inquiry is the only kind possible to do’ and for that reason constructivists favour qualitative research methods (Cresswell & Clark, 2007; Erlandson et al., 1993, xi). Thus, it has been argued that ‘quantitative and qualitative research are based on such different foundational assumptions that they cannot be successfully integrated’ (Elliott, 2005, 172).

Therefore, mixed methods research, aiming for an integration of different research strategies, does not fall comfortably within one or the other worldview described above, and researchers have attempted to construct an alternative framework which accommodates the eclectic nature of such research (Cresswell & Clark, 2007, 26-28). However, there appears to be little agreement amongst mixed methods researchers on
the nature of this framework. Thus, while Cresswell (2007, 26) describes three alternative stances on the paradigm issue, Greene et al. (2001, 28) list four different frameworks for mixing methods, and Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998, 29-30) only discuss one framework in detail. The approach chosen by Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998, 29-30), and the one most commonly associated with mixed methods research is pragmatism which offers an alternative worldview to those of positivism and constructivism and focuses on the problem to be researched and the consequences of the research (Brewer & Hunter, 1989, 74; Cresswell & Clark, 2007, 26; Miller, 2006; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 29-30). It sidesteps the contentious issues of truth and reality, accepts, philosophically, that there are singular and multiple realities which are open to empirical inquiry and orients itself toward solving practical problems in the 'real world' (Cresswell & Clark, 2007, 20-28).

Mixed methods research allows the researcher to be free of mental and practical constraints imposed by the ‘forced choice dichotomy between postpositivism and constructivism’ (Cresswell & Clark, 2007, 27), thus researchers do not have to ‘be the prisoner of a particular method or technique’ (Robson, 1993, 291). At the same time, however, mixing methods can lead to contradictory and conflicting results across methods and rather than achieving a ‘deeper or more comprehensive description of reality’ (Miller, 2006, 5) can ‘add to confusion and uncertainty’ (Robson, 1993, 290). Ultimately, mixed methods research aims to render inferences from research findings more powerful by complementing different research methods so that the ‘confounding effects of methods on our measurements’ (Robson, 1993, 290) are minimised (Brewer & Hunter, 1989, 16-21). Thus, in this case in-depth interviews were chosen to complement, question, and add to the survey data. Interviews represent a qualitative approach to data collection, designed to go beyond the simplistic answers provided through a tick-box questionnaire and to seek open-ended, qualified answers. Rather than offering research
participants a limited number of pre-selected answers, the in-depth interview aims to elicit responses which ‘provide access to the meanings people attribute to their experiences and social worlds’ (Miller & Glassner, 1997, 100).

In survey research, respondents’ answers are quantifiable – as in ‘45 per cent said ‘yes’ and the majority, 55 per cent, said ‘no’’. As a result, ‘their capacity to produce evidence is taken for granted’ (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, 7); evidence that is measurable, easily expressed, and, in cases of good quality survey research, reliable and generalisable. However, when one considers the qualitative data which was generated by the OPOS and reflects on the general limitations of survey research as discussed in the methods literature (Blumer, 1948; Bourdieu, 1993; Osborne & Rose, 1999), the validity of findings from survey research relating to public opinion and public attitudes towards complex issues such as crime and criminal justice seems questionable. It is the ‘complexity of social phenomena’ which calls for the use of more than one research tool to shed more light on the validity of findings (Greene et al., 2001, 26).

The in-depth interviews complementing the OPOS were designed to follow the survey research sequentially to explore in more detail the findings – a sequential mixed methods design. As the quasi-experiment explored whether or not the provision of information would have a measurable impact on readers of the local newspaper, the method chosen for the second stage of the research design, the interview schedule was not finalised until after the completion of the experiment and subsequent data analysis. Obviously, the outcome of the experiment was unknown at the research design stage. However, both potential outcomes (experimental intervention did or did not have an impact) were simulated in order to start considering an interview schedule which would explore the eventual findings in more detail.
Thus, one simulation was based on the expectation that there would be a need to explore and validate differences found between survey respondents who appeared to have improved their levels of knowledge, and those who did not improve their knowledge. Social psychological research suggests that there is a difference between ‘exposure’ to information and ‘reception’ which ‘requires attending to, comprehending and retaining’ information (Price & Zaller, 1993, 134); (see also Gunter, 2000, 163-189).

In order to make sure that potential findings of improvements in knowledge levels and, as a secondary concern, attitude change were not just such an artefact of the methods chosen, it was vital to design the research to include a complementary and more sensitive method by which to examine public opinion.

The second potential outcome involved the null-hypothesis, i.e. the assumption that the experimental intervention or independent variable – the weekly Crime Scene column – had no effect (Shaughnessey et al., 2000, 245). In both cases, in-depth interviews were thought to be the method most fit for purpose, namely to explore the processes of take-up, reception, and retention of the information contained in the columns.

b. …to implementation …

As stated above the sequential or two-phase design provided the flexibility to adapt the second stage to the findings from the first research stage, in this case the quasi-experiment. Chapter 3 has shown in detail that self-reported readership of the column had been low and that it appears that the column – the experimental intervention – had no measurable aggregate, and little individual, effect on readers of the local newspaper. As a consequence, the in-depth interviews were adapted to explore the processes of transmitting factual information to members of the public, the low take-up of the column, and the experience of filling in a fairly lengthy public opinion survey.
Interviews were semi-structured through the use of open-ended questions which explored three main issues:

- respondents’ interest in crime and criminal justice;
- the way in which they received the column in respect to recall, impact, content, and style;
- and the experience of filling in the Oxford Public Opinion Survey.

At the post-experiment stage, survey respondents who had filled in the pre-experiment survey were asked whether they would agree to be re-contacted for an in-depth interview. On the survey form (see Appendix 2) respondents were offered £20 to be paid to them or the local Victim Support scheme, Victim Support Oxfordshire, at their choice. Forty-one per cent (n=145) of respondents of the post-experiment survey were happy to be re-contacted for an in-depth interview. In the event, £20 were handed to interviewees in a closed envelope and no reference was made to Victim Support in order to avoid the impression of putting pressure on interviewees to appear charitable. None of the interviewees asked for the money to be donated to Victim Support.

Forty-four survey respondents were contacted for the in-depth interview, including nine survey respondents who had self-reported to have read the column and 11 respondents who reported to have noticed but not read the column. Additionally, regular readers of The Oxford Times who had agreed to be re-contacted and who had reported to reading the main news section but nevertheless stated to not have noticed the column were selected. In total 38 interviews were carried out (86% response rate).

89 The reference to Victim Support was dropped in the introductory letter to the in-depth interview.

90 Covering letter and interview schedule are attached as Appendix 4 and 5.

91 Respondents who self-reported reading at least three out of four issues of The Oxford Times.
Not unexpectedly, the interview sample was not at all representative of the population of Oxford, or the original sample of survey respondents drawn from the electoral roll. Two-thirds of interviewees were women; all except three were white (92%); three-quarters held a University degree; and the vast majority (84%) were homeowners (55% owned their property outright). Additionally, nearly half of the interviewees (42%) had an annual household income of more than £41,000; a quarter were aged 60 or older (26%); and 60% regarded themselves to be either Labour or Liberal voters (30% each), whereas only sixteen per cent described themselves as Conservative. Interviewees’ knowledge score prior to the experimental intervention was slightly better than that of the sample as a whole (4.47 v 4.20).

Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. They were tape-recorded and later transcribed to allow the interviewer to engage with the interviewees and to ensure accurate representation of interviewees’ accounts. At the start of the interview I explained that everything interviewees said would be treated as confidential and any quotes used in subsequent publications would be anonymised. It was also pointed out that the interview could be terminated at any stage and that interviewees could withdraw consent to the use of their interview data after they had read the research summary, disclosing the nature of the experiment, handed out at the end of the interview. However, the exact nature of the research, my particular research interest in the impact of the columns and my authorship of the column were not disclosed at this stage.

The interview itself had three distinct parts. The first part of the interview explored interviewees’ levels of interest in crime, probing whether they were interested in crime and criminal justice in general and/or as entertainment. The section included questions on whether respondents were interested in receiving more factual information about crime and criminal justice and what format for conveying the information they thought would be most appropriate and effective. How attitudes towards crime and criminal
justice change and could be changed (manipulated) was also explored. Additionally, this first section contained three word associations with the word, crime, criminals, and the criminal justice system to elicit some more general ‘crime talk’ (Girling et al., 2000).

Interviewees were then given three of the ‘Crime Scene’ columns published in *The Oxford Times* to confirm whether or not they had noticed or read any of them. The same three columns were used in all of the in-depth interviews. The three columns chosen for the in-depth interview were all headed by, in my view, catchy headlines asking pertinent questions about the danger of being attacked by strangers, offenders’ rights, and the effectiveness of ‘tougher sentencing’ (one of the columns is included as Figure 13 below, the other two columns are reprinted in Appendix 9). These are topic areas where the media are most frequently accused of misinformation and misrepresentation (Lee, 2007, 188-189; Reiner et al., 2003; Ryan, 2006). All three columns contained relevant local references, thus, ensuring the columns could not be dismissed as irrelevant, at least in a spatial sense. Interviewees were asked to choose one of the columns to read it and comment on its quality, informational value, and elements of surprise.

The third part of the interview explored respondents’ experience of filling in a public opinion survey, the reasons for taking part, feedback on the specific questions, and views on tick-box questionnaires more generally.

The last part of the interview was used to explain the experimental intervention at the heart of the research in more detail and making it explicit (disclosing) that the interviewer had written the columns in *The Oxford Times*. The purpose of this was to gauge interviewees’ view of the research and its design and to ‘come clean’. Interviewees were provided with a one-page summary of the research which included

---

92 See the discussion in Chapter 2 about the ethical questions raised by the study’s experimental design.
information on authorship of the column and the experimental intervention. It was at this point that interviewees were reminded that they could still withdraw their consent to use of the interview data they had just provided, however, no one did.

It is likely that carrying out the interviews after interviewees had responded twice to the OPOS will have influenced the interviewees’ expectations of the interview process and content and probably the language used (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 49). Interview situations can be used as an opportunity to communicate a narrative to an ‘audience’, namely the interviewer, with the additional factor of the interview being transcribed to be listened to again (Elliott, 2005, 11). Thus, interviewees might have prepared mentally, whether consciously or subconsciously, by paying closer attention to media representations of crime, thinking about the OPOS and its questions, and reflecting on personal experiences of crime and criminal justice. This may well have changed how people talk about crime, falling back on mainstream ideas and terminology, and following the climate of public opinion. Indeed, one interviewee had prepared a list of her ‘thoughts on crime and the way in which it is reported in the media’.93 This factor has been taken into account in the analysis of the interview data by using separate analytical techniques for the interpretation of the data.

c. …to analysis

In contrast to the analysis of quantitative data, there are few clearly defined rules regarding the analysis of qualitative data. This has led to criticisms of a lack of reliability, replicability, and consistency of the interpretation of such data (Bryman & Beardsworth, 2006, 6; Cresswell, 1998, 140-142). However, Cresswell (1998, 142) argues that the

93 This list may have been written by somebody other than the interviewee; the thoughts summarised on the list did not tally with the views presented in the interview.
analysis of qualitative data ‘conforms to a general contour’ a ‘data analysis spiral’ which allows the researcher to construct a narrative which corresponds to and is ‘true’ to the data as much as possible. Additionally, there appears to be a trend amongst some researchers in the social sciences to formalise criteria for ‘good’ qualitative research in an attempt to increase the ‘credibility, rigour and relevance of individual research studies’ (Preface to Spencer et al., 2004, 3). Bryman and Beardsworth (2006, 7-8) have greeted this trend with scepticism and its implications for qualitative research and whether it will lead to greater transparency and integrity of qualitative research or greater rigidity and creative formality are as yet unclear.

In this research, interview data was analysed in three separate stages. Interview data were analysed ‘quantitatively’, reducing (where possible) in-depth discursive answers to categorical responses to the questions posed and analysing them using SPSS. In a separate step, raw interview data were analysed using a qualitative, in-depth approach by grouping responses according to questions and emerging themes. Finally, again going back to the raw interview material, interviews were scrutinised by re-reading interview transcripts and listening to interviews again ‘looking out’ for well-rehearsed metaphors, slogans, or narratives used in the media, by politicians, or policy-makers speaking ‘on behalf’ of the public.94

3. Listening to people talk

For the purpose of interpretation the quantified data from the interviews will be presented alongside a narrative relating to the themes drawn from the interviews. A number of ideas emerged from the interviews but not always in a straightforward manner. As

94 I did not make use of qualitative data analysis software such as NUDIST, or NVivo, because of the relatively small number of interviews conducted.
Girling, et al. (2000) have noted: ‘people’s talk about crime is dense and digressive. It slips from topic to topic, changes gear and direction’ (Girling et al., 2000, 5). Some of my own interviewees reflexively monitored their own discursive detours. ‘I am rambling a bit’ (Nopre371) was a comment frequently made.

The in-depth interviews were organised around the three specific topics listed above, namely interviewees’ interest in crime and criminal justice, their comments on the column, and their experience of filling in a lengthy public opinion survey. However, a certain amount of generalised ‘crime talk’ was invited in the interview. This aspect of the interview helped elaborate the answers to the seemingly easy research questions of ‘did X read the column’ and ‘did the column have an impact on Y’. To put this another way, the interviews illuminated not just such questions as ‘did these columns improve this person’s knowledge of sentencing patterns?’ or ‘did they change this person’s attitude to sentencing?’ but also such questions as ‘how might the messages of these columns be woven into individuals’ generalised crime talk’. I have included two extracts from interview transcripts to illustrate the often circular way of talking about crime. The first extract is from an interview with a 46 year-old male who had noticed but not read the Crime Scene column.

M95: The next couple of questions are about word associations. When you hear the word crime, is there anything that immediately comes to your mind?
I96: I think when I hear the word crime I think about bad things. I might think about crimes that I’ve been subject to, you know, minor criminal action like a minor theft or something like that, feeling a sort of, loss or lack of empowerment and control over your world sort of thing. Crimes are those things that can happen to you without, sometimes, you won’t be able to control it, I am just a bit of a control freak about controlling things sometimes but if someone wants to rob you or something, well you can take precautions but it’s just going to happen.

95 Martina Feilzer.
96 Interviewee.
I don't feel threatened, it makes me, sometimes going to a place I don't know, it would make me cautious.

I don't know what other associations I have with the word crime. Something about it being something that's sort of perpetrated by people who aren't in the world that I live in, they are other people, so that there is a distancing. Because I don't really know anybody who has been involved in perpetrating any crime. It's a different set of people in the world who do those things. Probably when I think about crime I might think of police, people who are dealing with crime, handling the aftermath of crime, it has kind of to do with that. That's another association.

M: You've dealt with the next one about 'criminals' in passing already, they are 'other people'. Anything else on that?

I: Criminals. Yeah as I said a distant set of people. Probably in some way people who are, I think about disadvantaged, a criminal culture. A different culture than I would know about where it's, sort of an acceptable standard to commit crime. I suppose I was thinking more broadly about that because I recognise that there are different levels of crime. There are all sorts of minor infringements that people might fiddle their expenses or something, which are considered not to be crimes by me but if you like where I draw my judgement. So I would probably classify people who commit crime, criminals, as being people who commit violent crime or theft as opposed to people who might do tax evasion, but so where is the difference between the two really, one is ok and one isn't. So I recognise that but I draw the line somewhere in my head, so that would be my own analysis here. As I say I don't think I know anybody who is a criminal so I suppose one of the issues would be the unknown nature of those people and hence the, you would draw, my picture of what criminals are is drawn from what I have read or seen and so might be influenced by reading the Oxford Times about people who have committed crimes and things that happened, as to what sort of people those are and where they come from and... I might think of particular areas of the City where criminals might come from. In my mind there is a tie between those areas that are the least, the most disadvantaged and where people who participate in crime would originate from.

M: What about the word the 'criminal justice system'. Is there anything that comes to mind?

I: Inefficient. I have an ex-colleague who is now working in the criminal justice system. He used to be where I worked in the NHS, managing hospitals and he is currently managing judges whereas he was then line managing hospital consultants. He says it's a complete nightmare of a world, they don't start till 10 o'clock, and then they work a little, it sounds a slightly crazy sort of system. So that's one perception about the mechanics of the bureaucracy. I am not, there would be confusion in my mind about the criminal justice system, what happens at which level, I know the mechanics of the Magistrates, but exactly what happens at which other than a general scale of severity, I wouldn't understand. It's not particularly clear. The perceptions I have about the justice system from what I read in newspapers that it feels to be sometimes to be biased far too far in favour of people's rights. Allowing sometimes blindingly obviously criminal people not to be convicted, but that's my judgement, due to a technicality or something. But I have no direct experience of criminal justice systems so I wouldn't know whether that was
right or not, I never had to deal with the court or anywhere, so any of my thoughts are based on just perceptions, probably from the news media.

**M:** The next question needs a bit of an introduction in the sense that politicians, policy makers and criminologists are quite concerned about the level of people’s confidence in the criminal justice system. That people have quite negative views towards the system. What do you think would change people’s attitudes towards the criminal justice system?

**I:** Well, what we have just been talking about - information about how well it’s doing rather than perceptions based on sensational cases, would be good. So I don’t know, for things that affect everyday people. So um the number of people charged/convicted of car crime, house burglary, those sorts of things that people have happen to them. That would be, that would help with the perception. Tell me the whole question again?

**M:** What do you think would change people’s attitudes towards the criminal justice system?

**I:** I suppose knowing more, just simply more about how it works and who does what, might help people understand it. One of those TV shows, reality, not a reality show, but a sort of people familiarise themselves with hospital and they spend six weeks following people around so they can see what’s it about which exposes people to some of the challenges then of running the system, they might then empathise more with the difficulties of the system and understand that it might fail but for very good reasons. That might counter their negative feelings about you. I can’t think of much else.

**M:** Do you think your attitudes towards crime, criminals, and the criminal justice system has changed from when you were younger?

**I:** I’m sure it must have really. I’m someone who has always had fairly, I believe in ethical principles, I am a very keen supporter of human rights, Amnesty International and whatever. I feel very strongly about having a justice system that’s just, it’s something in this country, it’s important to have a very good system and there are obviously questions have been raised about how good that is and the intentions in it. So I don’t think my attitude has changed that much. I suppose my attitude towards – were you saying just towards crime or my attitude to the justice system?

**M:** Towards crime and towards the criminal justice system as a whole.

**I:** Yeah. I mean I think I might have been more tolerant as a young person as to what was criminal activity or not. Marginally illegal substances at University or whatever, those sorts of things. Which I know would think are probably not a good idea. So my line there would have sort of changed. I suppose the other thing that happens as you get older and you acquire more stability and family and possessions and things is that you worry more about those things being disturbed by crime and maybe you feel it would be nice to have some nice things so you might be more subject to being robbed or something. I don’t feel any more or less threatened out and about than when I was a teenager really, so. I suppose the only thing, I am gonna sound like an old man, won’t I, saying “they wouldn’t have got away with that in my day”, “we had more discipline at school” sort of thing, but I wouldn’t have thought that when I was at school or University, but now I think “how could anyone get away with it” so I don’t know whether that’s the sort of ‘angry old man’ syndrome creeping up on me. Which actually, I mean, I should have said that earlier on but the issue about society’s standards changing that probably has influenced my perception in that it appears that slightly more, not necessarily
lawless, but unruly behaviour is more acceptable. If you work on the principle that’s led to the zero tolerance idea it is that once you have allowed, you know, drunken, marauding people on the streets who may not be committing criminal activity but once that happens then maybe something else can come out of that. So, I probably didn’t think that when I was younger. I don’t know whether Society has become less ordered and less disciplined or whether I’ve grown up and that’s just getting older. I don’t know. (Nopre353)

This interview extract highlights an interesting facet of many people’s way of thinking about criminal behaviour and criminals. The interviewee is clearly aware that his associations with the world criminals are dependent on his personal distinction between behaviour which is ‘ok’ – although he recognises it to be in breach of the law, such as tax evasion – and behaviour which he considers not to be ‘ok’, such as violent crime and theft. This strategy enabled him to effectively ‘other’ criminals as a group, as people ‘who aren’t in the world that I live in’. Not surprisingly maybe, this interviewee strongly disagreed with the statement that ‘most people commit several offences during their lives’. The responses to the OPOS attitudinal statements also reflected some of the inconsistencies in his crime talk, i.e. his support for Amnesty International, human rights and a ‘just’ criminal justice system, combined with his belief in zero tolerance and that the system sometimes is biased in favour of offender’s rights. In his OPOS questionnaire this was mimicked in a way by his strong agreement with the idea that offenders can be helped to change coupled with his (lesser) support for the harsh treatment of offenders and his disagreement with the use of prison only as a last resort. The reference to the term ‘zero tolerance’ is also noteworthy. It could be interpreted as showing that penal policy terms such as this one have found their way into people’s crime talk.

The next extract is from an interview with a 34 year-old female who had not noticed the ‘Crime Scene’ column in The Oxford Times.

M: [Word associations] What about the ‘criminal justice system’?
I: Magistrates court, police, judges, wigs, paper work, you see Taxis driving up outside the Magistrates court and getting out boxes and boxes of things. I did
a week’s work experience once in Blexbury with a solicitor and he took me to a court once to see the sentencing, I think, and it was just very full of official looking white men, middle aged, you know and there was, I can’t even remember who the defendant was, I think, I am not sure they were even there. It just seemed to be a whole system of process that was quite impersonal and he wasn’t a very forthcoming guy either so it put me off the law to be honest. I suppose it’s the system isn’t it, it is very official, it’s very imposing all courts and Magistrates courts and police stations, I just think. Although the police themselves actually when I have come up against them have been very friendly and very approachable. I had a caution once for, do you want to hear this now or shall I tell you later, when Cornmarket used to allow buses down there and I was cycling down it and what I didn’t realise was that you were not allowed to cycle down there and I was cycling down there and it was really busy. There was bus behind me someone walked out in front of me and I slammed on my brakes, the bus right behind me swerved to avoid me and there was a policeman right there and he said ‘what are you doing on your bike your not supposed to be cycling’ and then someone on the bus had fallen off their seat and was going to claim compensation or something so it was like ‘we have to arrest you for reckless cycling’ and the funny thing was, I asked ‘what happens next’ as I didn’t have any idea what happens next, he was ‘well within 6 months, if you don’t hear anything in 6 months nothing will happen and you don’t need to worry about it’. But all the time we were there everyone who was walking past was kind of going ‘pig’, making really rude comments to the policeman, which I felt really bad about because I was the one who was at fault and he was really fine, really good about it but constantly had these comments coming. So I thought I wouldn’t like to be in his shoes. And nothing happened I didn’t get any, nothing came. I think I got away with my reckless cycling. Yeah, everyone was cycling past at the same time and I was like ‘what about them’ and they were like ‘yeah we got you’.

M: What, do you think, would change people’s attitudes towards the criminal justice system?
I: That’s a difficult one because we have just had the bombings in London you know and I felt after that, that at the time people were like the police are doing the right job, the police are on it and they have made a lot of arrests. I think it gave me more confidence in the sort of handling of it and the fact that I have noticed the presence of the police has been stepped up massively, which I find very comforting, you know. You didn’t often see police walking around Oxford and now you see them, there was eight of them at the bus station the other day. I know, I know I went up the week after the bombings on the tube and there is loads more police around and there’s loads, I noticed more on bicycles and just bigger presence really. But then they went and shot the Brazilian guy which, I think, might have persuaded it the other way and the things that happened, I think it was in the papers today saying that he had already stopped and they already had him pinned down and all that sort of thing and in a way they are their own worst enemies, they are doing so much good but something like which is just like ‘oh my god’, I don’t think giving police guns will make any difference for me that wouldn’t gain confidence. In fact I was very scared when I went to Heathrow and I saw police walking around with these bloody great machine guns and stuff, you know, and that I find more worrying than policeman without a gun. So I guess
heightened presence. I’m not entirely sure that because you hear so many statistics all the time, there’s a new report in every newspaper about everyday on the news, a scientists says this and some more statistics about that and in the middle of that you kind of get the crime figures come out and they go, you know, violent crime is up and what’s the latest one? Crime due to drinking or something is up and there are so many figures bombarding people that I am not entirely sure everyone is completely aware of them, I mean I’m not aware of how good our crime rate is or whether it is going up or down or is it any worse than it was 10 years ago if it's any better or if arrests have gone up. The only one I am really aware of is rape and that's I guess because I’m just more aware of those things and I do tend to hear that more rape cases collapse than other types of cases. So in a way figures increasing and higher conviction rate I don’t think would make that big a difference. But I think a bigger presence of police on the high street and in the particular areas would install more confidence. (Hippre377)

This particular interview extract illustrates how interviewees would generalise from personal experiences – her work experience – to conclude that those involved in law are very ‘official and imposing’, only to contradict that generalisation with another personal anecdote – the ‘fine’ police officer just doing his job and receiving abuse. Subsequently, this interviewee appeared to play out a whole discussion about the benefits and drawbacks of proactive, on the street, policing. This interview extract certainly does not give the impression of ready formed firm attitudes and views about how policing should be done or what criminal justice professionals are like. It illustrates the interviewee’s uneasiness and doubts about her support, as expressed in the OPOS questionnaire and in the interview, for more police officers on the beat.

Both these extracts show that interviewees re-adjusted, qualified, re-thought, and questioned their attitudes throughout the interview. Interviewees often drew on personal experiences to provide context to what could be perceived as being one-sided comments, or conflicting views. In many cases, the phrase ‘intermingling streams of consciousness’ best described how interviewees attempted to answer the interview questions. Survey research such as the OPOS or the British Crime Survey is clearly not designed to capture the complexities of such crime talk. However, in many respects
the ‘ramblings’ can tell us much more about public attitudes of crime and criminal justice than simplistic survey questions can ever hope to do.

a. Thematic analysis

At this point I move away from presenting people’s views ‘in the raw’, leaving behind the loose crime talk, towards a more thematic analysis of the in-depth interview material. This strategy involves a shift towards abstraction, in which the researcher’s decisions about key themes, key respondents, and key quotes form important filters for the reader. But such a shift is both desirable and necessary to digest the mass of interview data collected and to provide a useful basis for analytical discussion in terms of the main concerns of this thesis.

The myth of crime as a salient issue

One theme explored through the discussions in the first part of the interviews was whether or not crime in general is of great interest to members of the public. Interviewees’ responses cast doubt on the widely held assumption that crime and criminal justice in any form or format is of particular interest to members of the public. The nature of the sample of the public interviewed – those taking part in the interview had already given up their time to fill in two public opinion surveys on the topic – as well as their demographic make-up needs to be considered in this context. The expectation, considering the nature of the sample and the prevalent orthodoxy in the criminological literature and the media that ‘crime sells’, was that interest in crime, criminals, and criminal justice – generally and as a topic for cultural consumption – would be fairly high. Thus, it came as a surprise that a large group of interviewees (n=17, 45%) described themselves as only ‘interested in a general sense’ (n=5), ‘moderately interested’ (n=5)
and ‘not particularly interested’ (n=7) in such issues. The following quotes best illustrate the range of responses to this question, from a genuine interest to a fleeting one.

Yes, I think everyone is nowadays. I have a burglar alarm and I tend to be careful where I leave things like bicycles and cars and I generally take reasonable care in things like locking up. (Rohpre045)

Not hugely really, I suppose moderately in terms of kind of problems of crime and culture of crime but it’s not a really big issue. (Nopre407)

Not particularly [interested], just as part of a social fabric, if you like, of society, I haven’t got a particular interest in criminals or criminology or whatever, but just as an indicator of our society if you like. (Heapre245)

Another aspect of the debate surrounding the salience of crime is the ‘public’s’ avid consumption of crime fiction in a number of formats – crime novels, movies, television series, and reality shows relating to crime. This appetite for crime has persisted for centuries and seems to be fairly common across the world (King, 2007; Snell, 2007; Way, 2006). Thus, interviewees were asked whether they liked crime fiction and TV crime drama in order to establish whether a self-reported general interest in crime was related to favouring crime narratives over other types of entertainment. Responses did not indicate a clear relationship between interest in crime as entertainment, be it as fiction or reality TV – Crime Watch was used as an example – and a general (sociological) or personal interest in crime. In each case, half of the respondents who had expressed an interest in crime fiction (n=16, 42%), or acknowledged that they watched Crime Watch (n=15, 40%), also expressed an interest in crime more generally, the other half did not.

---

97 Responses were grouped into five categories: interested (including very interested); fairly interested; interested in a general sense; moderately interested; and not particularly interested.
More surprisingly maybe, a general interest in crime did not appear to be related to actual readership of crime incidents in the local newspaper either. The majority of interviewees (n=33, 87%) reported that they read stories about crime incidents in *The Oxford Times*, however only half of them also expressed a general interest in crime and criminal justice. In other words, those who lacked a general interest in crime were just as likely to read particular crime stories as those who had such an interest. Interviewees were asked whether they were actively seeking out crime incident stories or whether they read them primarily because the headlines grabbed their attention. Respondents emphasised that their interest was based on items’ relevance to them either through a personal connection, e.g. personal knowledge of either perpetrator or victim; a connection through locality, e.g. proximity to areas they frequent or live in; or a ‘biographical’ connection, such as same age, gender, profession, or other seemingly tangential and random circumstances.

I would read them if they were relevant to me, if they were somebody I knew… (Nopre371)

Well I think I read it – I wouldn’t single crime incidents out of the newspaper – when I buy the newspaper I tend to read it because it’s a way of keeping up with what’s going on locally. I mean, um it’s also alerts you, in some respects to possible dangers. I don’t home in on them. (Rohpre045)

Well they headline quite a few things. There was something happening at Barton yet again and then, as I said, the thing that’s now beginning to get to me is when they beat up old people. That really hurts me as a person. I really feel as if they are doing it to me and when we were young, when we were young you tended to, you wouldn’t touch old people; you wouldn’t do any harm to old people. Now it seems to be that anybody’s fair game and that does bother me. There’s nothing I can do about that. I do get frustrated when I read about it. That happened recently … and that bothered me, again because I felt that could be me. As I say, it’s getting closer and closer. (Heapre460)

*The complexity of crime and criminal justice*

The questions asking interviewees about what they associated with crime, criminals, and the criminal justice system were intended to trigger more general and unrestricted ‘crime
talk’. They were successful in encouraging interviewees to talk more freely about their understanding of crime, criminals, and the British criminal justice system. Fourteen interviewees (37%) mentioned violent crime as their immediate association with crime, sometimes amongst a list of other crimes in response to this question. This was not unexpected given the literature which suggests that people asked about crime tend to think of extreme scenarios featuring violent criminals committing terrible crimes (see for example Gibbons, 1969, 394; Roberts & Stalans, 2000, 223). Some interviewees, however, started fairly sophisticated discussions about the social construction of crime and the social control aspects of law enforcement.

What comes to mind is that it [criminal justice system] is really a euphemism. The criminal justice system literally involves far more than what one would call a criminal, you know, than what most people would think of as criminal justice. The whole process in which the police, the courts, the probation service, the social services in some cases are involved in, is a far wider one than what I guess the average person in the street would call crime as such. And, it’s a relative issue, you know I think, the criminal justice system is really a sociological construct, not a moral one and people sort of think of criminal justice as, a process of enforcing moral values, as in, whereas in fact I don’t think it is, I think it’s really a process of enforcing social conformity really. Enforcing is the wrong word, reinforcing would be a better word. (Hippre515)

Even on a more basic level there was a clear understanding that the term crime is very general and ambiguous. ‘From my personal point of view it’s a too generalised a term. It encompasses a far wider range of activities than most people of the general public would think’ (Heapre005). In that context, interviewees showed an awareness of white collar crime and the perceived lack of attention paid to this type of crime by the media and politicians and policy-makers.

White collar crime is a concern to me, just as much as ordinary, well not ordinary, but ‘everyday’ crime which I might encounter. I don’t think you can have, one shouldn’t treat so-called victim-less crime, such as massive fraud as any less important, but it doesn’t mean unfortunately that it makes the headlines. In the end it hurts probably far more people than street crime. (Hippre154)
I tend to get into this kind of theoretical debate about what is a criminal. Is it just somebody on the street who’s offending or is it somebody in white collar crime which tends to go unreported and I think I can get into this lively debate about war criminals. (Heapre419)

It was also acknowledged by some interviewees that crime transcends boundaries of class, gender, and age and that it is more frequent than commonly perceived.

Well, my immediate reaction is that there are criminals in all parts of society, not confined to one group or class or one sex, you know. (Heapre245)

But if you actually took that literally, most people would probably be criminals. I think a good example of a current issue would be speed cameras, ...they mean that they disapprove of the crimes that other people commit, but not crimes they commit themselves. I mean I saw a chap on television the other day saying how, I think he was from the AA or one of the motoring organisations, saying how people could avoid speed cameras and how it was just being used by councils to raise money, but the issue that it was against the law, so presumably you shouldn’t be doing it, didn’t even crop up in his conversation. (Hippre515)

Thus, many interviewees showed a clear understanding of the complexity of the concepts of crime and criminals and appreciated the difficulties of setting up any system trying to deal with these complexities.

*The magic bullet: the role of factual information*

An important factor in the experimental intervention was whether members of the public would be receptive to factual information about crime and criminal justice, i.e. whether a general interest in crime would extend to a willingness to engage with information of a procedural and statistical kind, far removed from crime incident narratives. It could be argued that the best gauge for this is how many people actually read the column and the direct response to the column from readers and media personnel. However, in asking whether interviewees were interested in receiving more factual information (such as reliable statistics) about crime and the criminal justice system a different aspect of the issue was measured, namely whether interviewees would report an interest, rather than...
what level of observable interest they exhibited by reportedly reading the column. This acknowledges the distinction between what people say they do and what they actually do (Brewer & Hunter, 1989, 64; Hagger & Chatzisarantis, 2005) and enabled me to explore further why readership of the Crime Scene column as measured by the OPOS was so low.

Nearly a quarter (n=9) of interviewees stated that they were ‘just not interested’ in more information about crime and criminal justice and another four respondents made it clear that they did not trust any statistics due to the perceived ease of manipulation.

I mean moderately, so-so. I read things in the papers and you see statistics about such and such crimes increase, such and such decrease, I don’t feel a burning need for more information if you like. (Hippre386)

I’m not really that interested in statistics, I don’t think that they’re a really representative picture, because they can be fiddled or manipulated in a certain way so, if I hear about statistics on the news that violent crime is on the increase I would find it interesting, but I wouldn’t take it as if it were necessarily true. It doesn’t necessarily reflect what’s going on. Statistics don’t really interest me that much, I guess it’s more case studies and sort of individual incidents that capture my attention. (Rohpre081)

Nevertheless, two-thirds of interviewees (n=25) stated that they would be receptive to and interested in factual information on crime and criminal justice.98

Yes I think that is something that I don’t know about. I would be interested to know more about that. If I saw a newspaper article which was the effect of the criminal justice system, how many people go through the system, how successful it is, how many fail due to technicalities, that sort of thing, I’d be interested in knowing more about the system. (Nopre353)

Nearly a third of interviewees (n=12, 32%) went on, without prompting, to suggest that providing factual information through a local newspaper would be a good method of

98 Nine of the 25 (40%) had reported, in the interview, that they had read the Crime Scene column.
making it available to members of the public. Moreover, when asked about the value of a regular newspaper column on crime fifteen interviewees (40%) thought this was a good idea and the majority of them (n=9, 60%) subsequently reported that they remembered reading the Crime Scene column. Only three interviewees (8%) felt that a regular column on crime was a bad idea. This included one interviewee who thought it was a bad idea even though, or maybe because, s/he had read the column. Providing information through the distribution of leaflets was greeted with scepticism by nearly a third of interviewees (n=12, 32%). Additionally a quarter of interviewees, respectively, thought the distribution of leaflets was a good (n=10, 26%) or a bad (n=9, 24%) idea.

I would think the television news I think really, and maybe the newspapers. I dump things that come through the door very often. Too much junk mail comes through the doors for people to take any notice off. (Hippre088)

The difficulty of engaging members of the public with a leaflet about crime and criminal justice was exemplified by research carried out by Home Office researchers in 2002/03. The research followed up previous Home Office Research (HORS 245 – an experimental intervention providing members of the public with factual information on crime and criminal justice and testing the intervention’s impact) and tested the impact of the leaflet used in that research on British Crime Survey respondents’ attitudes and level of knowledge (see the discussion on pp 34-35 above). British Crime Survey respondents received the leaflet after their face-to-face interview, thus at a time where you would expect that respondents were sensitised to, and perhaps unusually curious about, issues to do with crime and criminal justice. Nevertheless, take-up of the leaflet was fairly low,

99 However, only four of the 12 (33%) had reported, in the interview, to have read the Crime Scene column.
only 18 per cent of respondents read through the whole booklet, 19 per cent read some sections, and 44 per cent flicked through it (Salisbury, 2004).  

There were many other suggestions made by my interviewees for effective communication of factual information on levels of crime. Taken in the aggregate, their views suggest that the effectiveness of any information ‘campaign’ would depend on the use of a wide variety of formats to access different audiences, including television ‘soap operas’, radio programmes, the internet, leaflets available in libraries and criminal justice agencies, and billboards. There was also an awareness that such campaigns needed to be responsive to the particular sensitivities of the target audience, as one interviewee suggested, ‘for the elderly, it’s about getting the balance right without too much fear’ (Hippre022). Successfully transmitting information is not only about making it available in some form or another but also about making it accessible to the target audience, to ‘spin it in an appropriate way. Not spin as in bias but I mean just in terms of presentation’ (Nopre353).

Thus, interviewees acknowledged that it was difficult to disseminate factual information effectively but close to sixty per cent of interviewees (n=22, 58%) felt that it would be worthwhile. They believed that increased knowledge of patterns of crime and the processes of the criminal justice system had the potential to change attitudes towards crime and criminal justice.

‘Seeing’ the Crime Scene column

It was noted above that the OPOS results suggested that relatively few readers of The Oxford Times had noticed (20%), still less read (12%), the Crime Scene columns. When informed of these findings, the Editor of The Oxford Times expressed the view that the

100 Despite it being a fairly easy read, see http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/hors2002.html.
number of survey respondents who had identified themselves as ‘Crime Scene’ readers was too low and that readership ‘would be much, much higher than that’. The in-depth interviews provided an opportunity to test the reliability of that particular OPOS finding and to explore whether there was evidence to support the Editor’s instincts.

In the second part of the in-depth interview, interviewees were presented with a selection – the original copies (cut outs) – of three ‘Crime Scene’ columns (see sample columns in Appendix 9 and column re-printed on p 215 below) and then asked whether they recalled reading any of the 26 columns published. This is a technique sometimes described in the literature as ‘aided recall’.101 Nineteen of the interview participants reported that they had read the column at least once or twice, more than doubling the number of interviewees who had indicated readership of the column when filling in the survey. Five of the 12 ‘new’ column readers had said in the survey that they had noticed but not read the column and seven had previously claimed not even to have noticed the column.102

The finding of higher column readership than that ascertained by the survey has important implications for the interpretation of the survey results relating to the impact of the column. It highlights one of the concerns raised by critics of mixed methods research, namely that findings from one method might undermine findings from the other.103 However, it can be argued, more convincingly in my view, that mixed methods research reduces the danger of ‘inappropriate certainty’ of research findings (Robson, 1993, 290).

---

101 The issue of establishing accurately whether someone has read a particular newspaper, a particular issue of that newspaper or even a particular item in the newspaper has been explored in detail by media researchers (Gunter, 2000, 99-110). One commonly adopted method of aided recall is to show participants a copy of the paper ‘to find out which stories the respondent remembers’ (Gunter, 2000, 105).

102 However, one of those who had reported in the survey that s/he had read the column did not confirm readership of the column in the interview.

103 Comment made during the DPhil qualifying test, see also Robson, 1993, 290.
1993, 290) as one method points to and exposes the limitations of another (Brewer & Hunter, 1989, 17). As Brewer pointed out (1989, 17) divergent findings ‘signal the need to analyze a research problem further and to be cautious in interpreting the significance of any one set of data’.

What this finding suggests is that presenting the column in visual form was a more effective way of triggering memories of reading it than the OPOS survey method of merely referring to the title and author of the column in one amongst many other questions. Another possibility is that in the interview situation respondents were more likely to give the answer they thought the researcher wanted to hear, although it is worth stressing that at the point of undertaking this exercise interviewees had yet to be told that the column had been written by the interviewer. It is plausible to assume, however, that some interviewees had realised what the nature of the experiment had been. Indeed one interviewee directly asked me, on seeing the columns, whether I had written them.

In order to check whether the different levels of readership would lead to different conclusions regarding the impact of the column, pre- and post-experiment knowledge scores of all those interviewees who reported reading the column in the interview (n=19) were re-analysed. Findings were similar to those reported in chapter 3. There was a marginal improvement of knowledge score from pre-experiment to post-experiment survey (4.76 to 4.84). While at an individual level some column readers’ (n=7) knowledge score improved, for an equal number knowledge levels stayed the same, and knowledge levels deteriorated for slightly fewer (n=5) interviewees. Thus, although the survey might have underestimated the level of readership of the column, the finding of a lack of a measurable impact of the column on levels of knowledge on crime and criminal justice on column readers is further supported by this analysis.
Public views of public opinion surveys

The third section of the interview was concerned with better understanding whether members of the public are confident in extrapolations from survey research. Thus, interviewees were asked whether they thought that public opinion polls can adequately capture people’s views and attitudes. Nearly half of interviewees (47%) stated that this would depend on the chosen methodology – sample selection, questionnaire design, and response rate – and quality of analysis. It was also noted repeatedly that surveys can only ‘capture part of the attitudes’ (Rohpre081). This point is supported by the finding that about 27 per cent of survey respondents felt the need to comment on or question the validity of the questions, or explain, or qualify their answers. The highly divergent nature of public opinion surveys which can cover ‘everything, from yoghurt brands to who you are gonna vote for at the next election’ (Heapre005) was an issue of concern as was the quality of the surveys received. One interviewee reflected on her difficulty in distinguishing between good quality and poor quality surveys and her need to call on her ‘expert’ husband to vet surveys for her.

…unless it’s a silly questionnaire or badly set out. My husband does quite a lot of work with questionnaires so I usually sort of say ‘what do you think of this, should I do it’ and he will usually say ‘yes that’s a good questionnaire or it’s a bad questionnaire or’, you know, whatever. So he thought it was quite an interesting questionnaire. (Nopre274)

This section of the interview allowed reflection on two seemingly contradictory sets of findings which emerged from the OPOS. On the one hand, survey respondents believed that crime nationally had risen over the past five years; that the criminal justice system is not effective in reducing crime; that the judiciary is out of touch and that the sentences they impose are too lenient. On the other hand, respondents were evenly divided on whether offenders should be treated harshly, less than a quarter of respondents believed that a prison sentence is effective in reducing an offender’s likelihood of reconviction,
two-thirds believed that offenders can be helped to change and more than half felt that prison should only be used as a last resort.

At least some of the apparent contradictions can be explained by flaws in the design of questions and differences in interpretation. With regard to the question relating to the effectiveness of a prison sentence in reducing an offender’s likelihood of reconviction, survey respondents contended that the question missed the point to some extent. The question ‘addressed [only] one aspect of prison. It may not reduce the chance of reconviction, but you missed the obvious other side of the coin, if they are in prison they cannot re-offend’ (Comment on survey form, Heapost061). Additionally, there remains the issue of ‘whether prison is a suitable moral punishment, which is an important function of the criminal justice system alongside prevention and rehabilitation’ (Comment on survey form, Heapre069).

Additionally, as discussed earlier in the thesis, support is increasing in the social psychology literature for the theory that the attitudes expressed in survey research may be created ad hoc to serve the purposes of a particular survey rather than being readily-stored evaluations which can be reproduced easily and without fail if prompted (Tourangeau et al., 2000). Moreover, the responses to attitudinal questions may be especially susceptible to such influences as mood and recent experience, as described well by one interviewee.

I think the other problem with these sorts of things very much depends on the mood or the experience you are in at the time, if you have just come back from a lovely holiday which has been very peaceful and very calm and you haven’t encountered any sort of minor problems recently you are going to be far more optimistic whereas if you have just come back from some minor fracas on the Magdalen Road or something like that you are going to be in a negative frame of mind and if you’re not sure then you will be opting for the worst scenario when you are answering the questions. (Heapre180)
One theme which transpired from both comments on the survey form and interview data was that of the (negative) role of the media in influencing perceptions of crime and criminal justice. Many of the questions debated in the media and criminological literature (see, for example, Ericson, 1991; Hall, 1978; Reiner et al., 2003), such as the misrepresentation of actual crime rates, the nature of crime and public opinion, were rehearsed in these comments.

I think media coverage gives people the impression that there is more crime than actual figures suggest. (Comment on survey form, Heapre397)

I think as I say, the press is another part of the problem, the system which gives an impression of things, it’s [crime] spiralling out of control. I am a bit sceptical of the media. (Hippre154)

I think I am interested in that because I am interested in the whole aspect of, I am particularly interested in what is effective in criminal justice and also I am concerned about the prison population expanding, I think that’s not a good thing. And how sentences increase sometimes as a result of public pressure or a sense of media. The kind of pressure that seems to be created by the media and may not be reflecting what people really think or what’s best. (Heapre247)

The media featured highly in interviewees’ accounts of how they learn to understand the nature and prevalence of crime; media distortion of the actual state of affairs was a frequent complaint. The media’s role in the creation of what some described as an exaggerated fear of crime was also discussed.

On the whole I think there’s more worry about crime than there needs to be. I think people are more worried about crime because of the sensationalism you get in the press. . . . . Going back to the press I think they have a lot to answer for. There are some glaring headlines and when you come to look at things underneath they’re often not as bad. They’re creating this sort of feeling of fear and anxiety and even that things aren’t being done properly. Whether more successes and sensible outcomes could be reported? (Heapre133)

104 Comment on survey form, Heapre272.
The ‘decline and fall of the “British Way of Life”’

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, a number of the themes which emerged from the interviews echoed media as well as criminological orthodoxies. A yearning for the golden age was clear in many interviewees’ accounts and not only those of the older interviewees. A safer past was conjured up, ‘where we never locked our doors’ (Nopre371); in which ‘law enforcement would consist of a clip round the ear from the local bobby’ (Hippre177), and there was more respect for older people and more discipline. This discourse of ‘law and order nostalgia’ (Hogg and Brown 1998, cited in Lee, 2007) or the decline of the British Way of Life has been explored in detail by Pearson who concluded that ‘the pre-occupation with [growing] lawlessness belongs more properly to a remarkably stable tradition’ (Pearson, 1983, 212). Thus, there is nothing new or particularly surprising in the invocation of a lost Golden Age by the interviewees. This nostalgia, however, is not restricted to issues of policing, levels of crime, or discipline, it has been noted on perceptions of civil liberties (Johnson & Gearty, 2007), can be seen annually when A-level results are reported in the media, and generally seems to be a timeless and culturally independent recurrent theme (Godfrey & Lawrence, 2005, 20-25; Lee, 2007, 187-193; Pearson, 1983).

However, it is important to emphasise yet again that this discourse was by no means uniformly present or uncontested. Some interviewees went beyond the airbrushed facades of the nostalgic past and showed their awareness of the discourse’s simplistic and subjective nature. This was clearly exemplified by the interview extracts shown on pp 150-155 which used elements of the discourse only to subsequently qualify and question them, and by the following comment:


106 See Chapter 1 for a discussion of both.
I think it’s a pity that what we tend to hear from the newspaper reports is always everything’s getting worse and I do remember when I was doing my social work training twenty years ago now and there was a social policy module, our lecturer brought in some newspaper headlines, a whole set of newspaper headlines all the sort of “It’s never been as bad as this” and asked us when we thought they were set and they actually came from ten years ago and right back to Victorian days. We always thought it’s never been as bad as it is now and it was always better in the past. (Heapre381)

4. A different view of the experiment?

This chapter has offered a different perspective on the experimental intervention in two areas, methodologically as well as substantively. Methodologically, the analysis has shown that the labelling of particular research methods as purely quantitative or qualitative may be rather unhelpful in gaining an understanding of the phenomenon under scrutiny. The OPOS – a quantitative public opinion survey – produced a large amount of qualitative data, much in the same way in which the qualitative interview data could be analysed quantitatively to explore links between certain types of self-reported behaviour.

In terms of content, the interview data provided evidence that crime in general, a sociological issue, was not of as much interest to members of the public as commonly perceived. Another interesting finding was that interviewees seemed to be aware of the complexity of crime and criminal justice and the difficulties of educating the public about these complex issues.

Interviews further suggested that readership of the Crime Scene column was probably higher than that elicited by the OPOS. However, subsequent analysis demonstrated that there was no evidence to question the earlier conclusion drawn regarding the lack of impact on column readers’ levels of knowledge of crime and criminal justice.
Finally, interviewees rehearsed some of the debates raging in the criminological and media literature by referring to the negative influence of the media on levels of fear of crime linked to distorted representations of crime in the media. Moreover, the narratives regarding the decline of the British Way of Life which emerged from some of the interviews seem to rehearse and confirm notions that (some sections of) the public are punitive, unsympathetic to offenders and unaware of their manipulation by the media. However, the fact that respondents were prepared for the interviews by filling in two lengthy surveys on crime and criminal justice may well have influenced their expectation of, mental preparation for, and response to, the interview. It should also be emphasised that the narratives of decline were not uncontested in individual accounts and differing accounts were presented by interviewees.

The next chapter will put the findings from both stages of the research into a local and temporal context. Data from additional exploratory interviews with ‘media insiders’ and ‘opinion leaders’ will be presented as well as some background to The Oxford Times, and the City of Oxford. The chapter will also explore in some detail the experience of being a ‘public criminologist’, i.e. of writing a weekly column, the editing process, and how the column was perceived (or not) by column readers, interview participants, and Oxford Times readers more generally.
Chapter 5

Locating the Crime Scene experiment in space and time

The previous two chapters reported on the findings of two of the three elements of the Crime Scene study. Chapter 3 discussed the Oxford Public Opinion Survey and the experimental intervention while Chapter 4 drew on the in-depth interviews. This chapter constitutes the third element of the Crime Scene study in that it aims to locate the research in space and time and thus embed the research findings in the relevant context. Details about the specific locale and the timing of the research as well as background data on the local newspaper used as the medium for the information and any other relevant contextual data will be presented. This will include data collected through additional fieldwork, namely a small number of exploratory interviews with ‘media insiders’ and ‘opinion leaders’, and other data accumulated as part of the overall research process, such as observational data and data collated during the period of fieldwork.

The exploratory interviews pursued themes which emerged from the findings of the Oxford Public Opinion Survey and the in-depth interviews as well as informal communication with the editor of The Oxford Times, the newspaper’s crime reporter, and other sources. The interviews with the ‘media insiders’, i.e. three professionals working in the local newspaper organisation, were designed to capture respondents’ views on their professional role, their professional assessment of the quality and suitability of the Crime Scene columns, and their views of the role of the media in influencing the public’s knowledge of, and attitudes towards, crime and criminal justice. The interviews also touched on issues of accountability and the relationship between the media and their ‘sources’.
The interviews with opinion leaders, the Acting Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police, and the Restorative Justice Manager of the Oxfordshire Youth Offending Team, explored interviewees’ interactions with the media, how they attempted to influence the media, and how they assessed their organisation’s or their individual relationship with the media. Additionally, interviewees’ views on their role as opinion leaders and their professional identity were discussed.

The themes explored with opinion leaders and media insiders overlapped but also diverged. This enabled comparisons between the views expressed by media sources, i.e. those who ‘influence’ the media, with those of media ‘representatives’, i.e. those who are ‘influenced’. It also allowed probing differences in organisational culture and perceptions of the media-sources relationship, and respective organisational roles and responsibilities.

The in-depth interviews with opinion leaders and media insiders raised ethical concerns in addition to the ones already discussed in chapter 2. All those interviewed in the few exploratory interviews were aware of the nature of the experiment and my authorship of the column prior to agreeing to the interview. Thus, in these cases deception was not the problematic issue. The tricky point was that the identity of the interviewees and their unique professional roles rendered worthless standard assurances of confidentiality. Even though quotes from the transcripts were anonymised in the sense that no names are provided, referring to the interviewees by their professional role makes them clearly identifiable – there was only one Acting Chief Constable in 2006. As it is exactly that professional role which gives interviewees the special status for which they have been chosen, such references cannot be avoided. At the time of the interview, interviewees were made aware that interview extracts might be included in my doctoral thesis and they had no objections. On completion of the thesis, I sought permission for all the quotes used (28 Sept 2007) and at the stage of the viva (10
December 2007) permission to use the quotes had been received from all interviewees.\textsuperscript{107}

Contextualising the Crime Scene study at once limits the interpretation of the data collected, e.g. its generalisability, but also enhances its validity and its meaningfulness (Erlandson et al., 1993, 16-18). Arguably, only the more detailed understanding of where, when, and how the research was implemented provides the necessary insights into the processes which resulted in the particular findings presented in the previous chapters. As some argue, it is impossible to draw valid conclusions in the sense of time-and context-free generalisations (Erlandson et al., 1993, 14-19; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 10). Girling et al. (2000, 5-12) have argued that in relation to crime talk the immediate locale of the people ‘doing the talking’ is important. In this sense, any meaning derived from the research is contingent on the particular situation and locality in which it took place (Girling et al., 2000, 163; Innes, 2002, 68).

Moreover, the particular quality of the research described in this thesis is its design as a \textit{natural} experiment. I have argued above in Chapter 2 that some of the findings from previous research on the impact of factual information on members of the public were flawed because the research took place in artificial settings and circumstances. Thus, to be true to the notion of such a naturalistic design it is important to capture the particularities of the research context and use it to inform the data analysis and interpretation. It should also be noted that the Crime Scene columns were written specifically for a local audience with local concerns in mind and thus have to be understood in a spatial and temporal context.

\textsuperscript{107} Permission was sought and received for quotes used in the final report to the Nuffield Foundation and the three papers which have been published on the research to date.
The contextual data collected aimed to capture Oxford’s peculiarities, particular local concerns, and local frictions. It is presented in recognition of the role that the locality in which the research took place has played in producing the research findings outlined in Ch 3 and 4 above. The ‘data collection’ was guided by questions of ‘descriptive validity’, i.e. what information should be included to enable a researcher to repeat the research in a similar location, such as a basic (demographic) description of Oxford, its outstanding and slightly unusual features, and debates and concerns a local resident would recognise. Other data were collected in the process of ‘being a participant observer’, ‘impersonating a columnist’ and researching local data in order to write the columns.

In this sense, this chapter is meant to provide a third element, providing the background against which to view the research findings. Combining the three elements facilitates interpretation of each dataset, two of them collected through fairly standard social scientific research methods, and this last one in a more grounded, inductive research fashion (Bottoms, 2000, 42-44; Bryman, 2004, 10 and Chapter 19). Looking at the OPOS data and the data collected through the in-depth interviews in isolation would probably lead to two different sets of conclusions. However, analysing the datasets separately at first and then bringing them together in the next and final chapter will enable me to interpret the data from another, richer, perspective. Using separate analytical steps to triangulate the data also makes it possible to reflect on the added value of using more than one method to address the research questions.
1. The City of Oxford

   a. The city of dreaming spires

   The poem by Matthew Arnold did not only coin Oxford’s byname as the city of dreaming
   spires but its content as well as its very existence symbolises some of the characteristics
   Oxford is thought to embody – history, tradition, culture, civilisation, beauty, and
   scholarship. Oxford is filled with ancient and attractive architecture; libraries; lauded
   museums; not one but two universities, Oxford Brookes University and the University of
   Oxford – the oldest in the English-speaking world; 39 colleges; and thousands of
   students and scholars. The University of Oxford educated six Kings, 46 Nobel Prize
   Winners, three saints, 86 Archbishops and 25 British Prime Ministers, it is a member of
   the Russell Group – a powerful association of the UK’s major research intensive
   Universities (University of Oxford, 2006), topped the UK’s universities league table in
   2007, and was ranked among the three best universities in the world in 2006 (Times
   Higher Education Supplement, 2006).
When looking at the pictures above or visiting one of Oxford’s 39 colleges one could be forgiven for equating Oxford with a haven of prosperity, serenity, tranquillity, and peace. One interview respondent encapsulated this idyllic theme in a few words.

I think Oxford is a sort of isolated bubble of civilisation, I suppose we get sunshine when the rest of the country is covered in rain.\textsuperscript{108} So I wouldn’t necessarily say it’s typical of the wider country. (Hippre154)

Yet there is more to Oxford than this romanticism would suggest. Oxford is host to a successful business community benefiting from its close links to London and the

\textsuperscript{108} A rather unfortunate comment given the regularity of flooding in some parts of Oxford with the most recent serious flooding in Oxford and Oxfordshire in the summer of 2007.
'information technology sector' based in the M3/M4 corridor. The city is home to approximately 135,000 people according to the Census 2001 (National Statistics, 2002) including some 30,000 students (University of Oxford, 2006), and has about five million visitors per year (Atmosphere, 1999). It is cosmopolitan, with a diverse minority ethnic community making up 13 per cent of Oxford’s population, and relatively young, with nearly half (48%) of the population under the age of 30 (National Statistics, 2002).109

However, as one survey respondent pointed out on the OPOS form, Oxford is also a city of contrasts with pockets of great wealth as well as considerable deprivation.

Oxford seems to be a place where there are very distinct areas of wealth (North Oxford) and poverty (Blackbird Leys) and that can cause disharmony. The relative wealth of a student population who seem mainly to come from a privileged background perhaps adds to a sense of financial/social unfairness that may be felt by young people without employment/interests. (Comment on survey form, Hippost339)

Out of 85 areas in Oxford which were compared in the Multiple Deprivation Index (IMD) 2004110, seven were ranked among the richest areas in England. However, the Multiple Deprivation Index placed another ten Oxford areas among the 20 per cent of the most deprived areas in England and one of these areas, Northfield Brook, is amongst the most deprived ten per cent of all areas in England (Oxford Safer Communities Partnership, 2005a, b-4). Overall, deprivation is concentrated mostly in the local wards of Blackbird Leys and Northfield Brook. However, one of the wards chosen for the OPOS, Rose Hill and Iffley is among the ten per cent most deprived areas in England and Wales for the crime domain (Oxford Safer Communities Partnership, 2005b, 4) and

109 England and Wales as a whole has a minority ethnic community making up about 9% of the population and 38% of the population in England and Wales are under the age of 30.

110 The IMD 2004 measures multiple deprivation at ‘super output area’ (SOA) level and is based on seven indicators of deprivation: income; employment; health and disability; education, skills, and training; barriers to housing and services; living environment; and crime (Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, 2004).
Carfax ward\textsuperscript{111} is among the most deprived ten per cent in terms of health and disability (Oxford Safer Communities Partnership, 2005a, b-6).

Thus, the historic distinction made between the ‘town and gown’ goes beyond differences of the workplace or the level of education achieved. The contrast between those benefiting from Oxford’s economic and the Universities’ academic success and those sidelined by those developments is stark and exemplified by figures showing that the average life expectancy in Oxford’s wealthiest areas is more than six years higher than that of Oxford’s most deprived areas (Oxford Safer Communities Partnership, 2005a, b-7).\textsuperscript{112} Additionally, whilst the proportion of Oxford’s population without any qualifications is lower than that of England (approx. 18% compared to 29%) (Oxford Safer Communities Partnership, 2005a) and the proportion of the population who were educated to degree level is nearly twice that of England and Wales (National Statistics, 2002), this is not representative of all the different areas within the city. The ward of Blackbird Leys, for example, has got a substantively higher rate of people without qualification (46%) than Oxford (approx. 18%) or England (29%) and similarly, another five wards have rates of ‘no qualification’ above the average rate for England (Oxford Safer Communities Partnership, 2005a).

Moreover, Oxford’s economic success could be regarded as a mixed blessing. The city’s house prices are considerably higher than the average of England and Wales and as a result, Oxford has an enduring problem with homelessness and rough sleepers – single homeless people who spend a significant amount of time without

\textsuperscript{111} Carfax is not one of the OPOS wards as it has a relatively small permanent population, see below.

\textsuperscript{112} I excluded Carfax from this comparison which has a life expectancy of ten years less than the wealthiest areas. However, Carfax is the city centre ward which houses a disproportionate number of accommodation facilities for the homeless and will be affected by the deprivation levels and related health problems experienced by this particular group (Oxford Safer Communities Partnership, 2005a, b-6).
accommodation and thus sleeping ‘on the streets’ (Atmosphere, 1999; Oxford Safer Communities Partnership, 2005b). It is noteworthy, that only 0.1 per cent of all SO areas in England are more deprived on the ‘barriers to housing and services’ domain than one SOA in Northfield Brook. The shortage of housing, particularly social housing, is a major issue of concern in Oxford (Oxford City Council, 2003; Oxford Safer Communities Partnership, 2005a, b-11-12).

Maybe unsurprisingly, given the emerging picture of wealth and relative poverty living side by side, Oxford is regarded by the Oxford Safer Communities Partnership as a high crime area (2005b, 4) and the reduction of crime is (and has been for a number of years) a priority for the various agencies involved in community safety, law enforcement, and related services (Atmosphere, 1999; Oxford Safer Communities Partnership, 2005c).

b. Dealing with crime locally

The Oxford Safer Communities Partnership identified Oxford’s ‘top crime priorities’ after the Community Safety Audit 2004 was completed.113 Those were to reduce all crime with a particular emphasis on tackling particular types of offences such as violent assault and mugging, hate crime, burglary, motor vehicle crime, and anti-social behaviour (Oxford Safer Communities Partnership, 2005a). The symbols of a number of attempts to tackle crime and disorder are on display in the City of Oxford. These include alcohol free zones in the city centre (accompanied by stern warnings of penalties for breach), the design of street furniture to prevent rough sleepers from using it, and an increase in neighbourhood policing. So who is responsible for preventing and detecting crime and disorder in Oxford?

113 Oxford’s local crime and disorder partnership, for more details see overleaf.
A large number of agencies are involved in the ‘business’ of dealing with disorder, crime, and criminals on a local and national level; the police and probation services, the courts, and the prison service are among the more obvious ones. However, Section 17 the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 introduced an obligation on each local authority to ‘exercise its functions with due regard to…the need to do all it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area’. In many cases, including Oxford’s, this has lead to the establishment of local crime and disorder partnerships, made up of a number of partner agencies. In Oxford, Atmosphere was set up in 1998 but was later renamed as the Oxford Safer Communities Partnership (OSCP). The OSCP is made up of Oxford City Council, Thames Valley Police, Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford City Primary Care Trust, Thames Valley Probation Service, Oxfordshire Youth Offending Service, Thames Valley Police Authority, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, and the Government Office for the South East (Oxford Safer Communities Partnership, 2006).

Additionally, local criminal justice boards were set up nationwide in 2003, and the Thames Valley Criminal Justice Board is tasked with the improvement of co-operation between the local criminal justice agencies (http://lcjb.cjsonline.gov.uk/ThamesValley/). Finally, a multitude of voluntary, charitable, and community organisations are based in Oxford providing support for victims of crime, offenders, and the wider community.114

Leaving aside the work of such organisations, the primary responsibility for law enforcement and crime control in Oxford lies in the hands of Thames Valley Police (TVP), which is the largest non-metropolitan police force in the country (Thames Valley Police, http://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/news_info/info/about.htm). As a police force

114 For example, the Thames Valley Partnership was created to ‘bring people and organisations together to create safer and stronger communities’ (http://www.thamesvalleypartnership.org/), and Victim Support Oxfordshire provides ‘emotional and practical support and information to anyone affected by crime’ http://www.victimsupport.org.uk/vs_england_wales/contacts/oxfordshire_buckinghamshire/.
TVP is a ‘reasonably typical non-metropolitan police force’ (Young & Hoyle, 2003) albeit one which has been characterised in recent years by brave and innovative initiatives aiming to change aspects of police culture and police work. Thames Valley Police, for example, was the first police force in England and Wales to implement restorative cautions in 1998 (Hoyle et al., 2002) and a restorative justice element in the police complaints process in 2001 (Hill et al., 2003). It may be noteworthy, in that context, that two of Thames Valley Police’s recent Chief Constables, Peter Neyroud, Chief Constable from 2002-2006 and his predecessor Charles Pollard (1991-2001), gained a reputation beyond the local area.115

Once suspects have been apprehended they will be prosecuted by the CPS Thames Valley and brought before Oxford Magistrates’ Court or Oxford Crown Court. On sentence, dependent on their age and offence, offenders will be handed over to Oxfordshire’s Youth Offending Team (YOT), Thames Valley Probation Service, or the Prison Service.

Criminal justice agencies (other than the police) and related services which serve Oxford and its surrounding area have been at the forefront of a number of innovative approaches to dealing with crime, disorder, and criminals. Oxford’s Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB) established a pioneering relationship with HMP Springhill to train prisoners to be citizens’ advisers (Burnett & Maruna, 2004), and Oxfordshire’s YOT was not only one of the Youth Justice Board’s (YJB) pathway YOTs116, but also piloted Referral Orders and in 2006 won an award for its Restorative Justice newsletter

---

115 Charles Pollard for actively promoting the use of restorative justice, and Peter Neyroud when he became the Chief Executive of the National Improvement Policing Agency.

116 Eight YOTs were given pathway status to ‘help determine which interventions and methods of delivery worked best to achieve the Board’s main aim of reducing offending’ (Burnett & Appleton, 2004, 2).
‘Amends’ which aims to communicate the advantages of an alternative to traditional criminal justice procedure (anon, 2006).

Thus, to those working in any of the local criminal justice agencies or in related services, or those volunteering for local charities, Oxford is a place in which trends are set and where new ways of dealing with crime and its aftermath are explored. However, it is doubtful that this level of innovation has reached public consciousness and that Oxford’s citizens know about the creativity and pioneering projects relating to crime and criminal justice implemented in their local area.

c. A special point in time?
Locating research in time is not an easy task; it seems hardly possible to capture the key events of any year in a few lines of text or even choose events and issues which can claim relevance to the research presented. However, some review of the period in which this research took place is necessary to understand and contextualise responses to the survey and interview questions which might otherwise seem random and irrelevant.

The Crime Scene research study was conducted over a period of two years, starting in February 2004 and lasting until March 2006. The pre-experiment survey was conducted between July and September 2004, the cut-off date determined by the publication of the first Crime Scene column on 17 September 2004. Columns ran until 8 April 2005 and were followed by a repeat survey and post-experiment-only survey between May and July 2005. In-depth interviews with survey respondents were carried out between August and November 2005, and exploratory interviews with opinion leaders and media insiders took place between October 2005 and February 2006.

In the interviews, interviewees often used ‘cultural references’ which were closely related to place and time to transmit meaning in the form of short narratives. This emphasises the importance of temporal as well as local context and it is in this sense
that the following paragraphs provide a selection of stories which hit the headlines in 2004 and 2005 and appear to be of relevance to the research. In presenting a temporal context to the research one relies almost inevitably on a version of ‘history’ as constructed by the mainstream media who provide a ‘review of the year 2004’ (anon, 2004). However, the relevance of some of the events highlighted below is made clear by providing relevant excerpts from the interviews, others simply serve the purpose of providing contextual background data.

The years 2004 and 2005 were dominated by the ongoing Iraq conflict with daily news of British, American, and Iraqi casualties, incidents of severe human rights abuses committed by British and American soldiers, intermittently re-occurring controversy about the justification for the invasion of Iraq, and a running commentary on that country’s descent into civil war. One interviewee’s free association with the word crime exemplifies the enduring pre-occupation with the Iraq conflict in British media, politics, and among some members of the public.

It’s probably totally irrelevant but things like Tony Blair and illegal wars in Iraq rather than crimes in the streets. War crimes, crimes against humanity, those sort of crimes. Not probably a standard answer but that’s what comes to mind. (Heapre419)

2004 and 2005 also saw major terror attacks on European countries, first in Madrid in March 2004, then in London in July 2005. Despite these events, OPOS respondents did not appear too concerned with the risk of terrorism; slightly more than one per cent (1.4%) of OPOS respondents questioned in 2004 and one per cent of respondents in 2005 stated that the social issue they were most concerned about was the risk of terrorism. However, this does not mean that the ‘war on terror’ was not prominent in people’s minds. In fact, nearly a quarter of the in-depth interviewees (n=9) referred
(unprompted) to terrorism in one way or another during the interview\textsuperscript{117} whether to exemplify a view that the priorities of the Government have changed, to express a concern for the loss of civil liberties, or as part of a discussion of the perception of risk.

Feel that nationally at the moment too much emphasis on terrorism and 'big news' problems and neglect of fundamentals such as unemployment and care of those less fortunate. Homeless people need help not criminalising. (Comment on survey form, Heapre221)

I mean the thing that does really worry me actually and I don’t know if anybody else is worried about this, with terrorism and the bombings in London and the fact that they want to take away the right to be tried by jury for some terrorists and I mean that really, really worries me and in that sense that would mean give me even less confidence in the system because it is taking away liberties that have been there for centuries and suddenly because there are a few bombings it gives Blair the right to whip through some law which takes them away. (Hippre377)

I think of the terrorist, bombs, you know, has that greatly increased the chance of the average person in Britain being killed, probably not. But the perception of something like that, so the quality of the crime committed perhaps, is very different from the numerical perception, but I mean the other thing is that, you know I’m aware of this in other ways, but people’s perception of risk in statistical terms is totally emotional. (Hippre386)

Other incidents which were reported in the news in 2004 and were taken up by some of the interviewees included the conviction and imprisonment of the American Martha Stewart for obstruction and false statements relating to allegations of suspicious share dealings (anon, 2004);

I certainly feel now, that white collar crime doesn’t get the punishment it deserves and that has just changed because that’s by learning and reading and watching and you know, sort of how can somebody like Martha Stewart in the USA have done what she did and you know, sort of, and six months later be back, and you know and Jeffrey Archer is another one, you know. Those are headline cases, but I think it’s true that if you’ve got money you can probably buy your way out of quite a lot of punishment. (Heapre245)

The strategy to refer to personal experiences of crime and criminal justice (as illustrated by the interview extracts in Chapter 4 above) or a particularly infamous criminal case or

\textsuperscript{117} Plus one person commenting on the survey form.
incident to convey thoughts and views about certain issues was used frequently. As one interviewee replied, when asked about his associations with the word ‘criminals’:

… there’s so much white collar crime these days, that [to identify particular groups of people as criminal] would be inappropriate, especially the people that get away with it, like Ernest Saunders did with his alleged Alzheimer’s which miraculously disappeared as soon as he’d been cleared, things like that. (Hippre177)

In local crime related news, 2004 saw: a parent sentenced to 25 days imprisonment for allowing her daughter to ‘play truant’ in February; work starting on the conversion of the former Oxford Prison into a hotel in March; and a paedophile convicted of rape of two boys and sentenced to 11 years imprisonment at Oxford Crown Court in April. In May, a local man was found guilty of murdering his partner of 22 years and a 91 year-old woman was left lying on the pavement for more than half an hour after being mugged because paramedics claimed they could not attend the scene without police protection. In a story critical of police response to a crime, it was alleged that it took armed police 64 minutes to attend the scene of a double murder in June. The year ended amidst claims that an Oxford area 118 was turning into a ghetto for drug dealers in October, and in an arson attack on Oxford’s main police station in November (Little, 2004, 11).

In 2005 tragic and unusual crimes made their appearance. In April a funeral director was found guilty of deception for giving out the wrong ashes and sentenced to community service after a lengthy investigation and protracted media coverage. A local angle was found to cover the terrorist attacks in London in July and to re-visit the fraud scandal involving the Maxwell family in September. A number of intra-familial killings hit the headlines, a young woman died of a knife wound inflicted by her husband in January, a young woman was strangled to death by her ex-boyfriend who also killed a 

118 One of the wards included in the OPOS covers the area described and a number of respondents commented on the survey form to the same effect.
work colleague and later himself in October, a mother killed her disabled son and two teenage men fatally stabbed their sister’s boyfriend in an ‘honour’ killing in November. Stories which excited throughout the year were the investigation into the death of a man in police custody which ended in three police officers being found not guilty of manslaughter charges in November; Animal Rights activists intimidated and threatened University staff, committed a number of arson attacks, and warned Oxford University that it was under constant threat for its intention to build a new animal research laboratory in the city; and the details and consequences of the new licensing laws which a senior judge allegedly described as handing over Oxford’s streets to ‘tribes of pugnacious, drunk, noisy, vomiting louts’ in August (Little, 2005).

Additionally, whilst the research was taking place a number of high profile news items on crime ran in the national and local media. The release of the first Crime and Justice Survey (Budd & Sharp, 2005) was given coverage in BBC1 10 o’clock news in January 2005 and the publication of a Home Office report on rape (Kelly et al., 2005) made it to the front pages of The Times and was also given air time on the BBC1 10 o’clock news in February 2005.

The presentation of this selection of crime stories shows that most of the stories covered are crime incident stories which for one reason – their tragic details or absurd aspects – are memorable or newsworthy. Most of the stories, as presented in the review, but also as presented in the articles published at the time of their occurrence, are devoid of context or references to trends, policies, and other ‘factual’ information. The impact of such ‘background noise’ on perceptions and views of crime and criminal justice is still unclear, however, their role in influencing public knowledge on crime and criminal justice can only be marginal.119

119 See Roberts, 2001 for a discussion of the impact of local newspaper reports on crime.
2. The Oxford Times

a. Background of a local weekly newspaper

In this study, the medium chosen for ‘doing public criminology’ or informing the public about crime and criminal justice was The Oxford Times, a weekly local newspaper with a longstanding history and reputation. As Franklin noted the local weekly is the epitome of the local newspaper (1991, 62) and The Oxford Times, although unusual in some respects (noted below), falls within that category of a traditional local paper. The local press fulfils a particular purpose, it provides ostensibly reliable local information for the local community, the community being restricted to the particular paper’s readership. This traditional view of the role of the local press was shared by the editor of The Oxford Times, responding to a question on criticism of the media for misrepresenting crime and criminal justice.

Well, I think if you, I mean, when these sort of surveys are done, you actually find that of all the media, local newspapers are among the most trusted, and I think that is because we do strive to give a true and clear picture of what is going on, and you know we can be found out very easily because, we are writing about our readers, about where they live, about where they work. So if we get it wrong, then it’s wrong in the eyes of our readers, so we live and die by the way we represent the world as it is in Oxfordshire. And I think, you know, most local newspaper editors would give you a very similar answer. …

(Editor of The Oxford Times)

His comment also supports Lacey and Longman’s (1997, 194) argument that newspapers need to ‘build trust’ and in order to do that ‘a newspaper needs to support and sustain a pattern of values and beliefs that reflect those of its readership’. They continue stating that whether or not newspapers do in fact influence their readers depends ‘on the skills of its editors and journalists in bringing about a balance between satisfying reader demands and shaping the news to influence what the readership understands (Lacey & Longman, 1997, 195). Conversely, Franklin and Murphy (1991, 74) argued that the traditional local press supports those in power, the ‘local
establishment’ out of their thirst for a ‘regular supply of validated and ‘reliable’ information’ which is produced by ‘local government bureaucracy, business public relations departments…, who all have reasons for wanting their versions of events to be published as news’.

The history and tradition of The Oxford Times is beyond doubt. The first newspaper in Oxford was established between 1746 and 1748 under the title ‘Oxford Flying Weekly Journal and Cirencester Gazette’. The ‘Jackson’s Oxford Journal’ was published from 1753 and bought in 1899 by the Oxford Times Company. It remained Oxford’s only newspaper for 53 years. In 1862 publication of the ‘Oxford Times and Midland Counties Advertiser’ began, with a conservative bias until 1929, when it became a non-political newspaper. The Oxford Mail was first published in 1928 as a daily paper in competition with The Oxford Times until the two papers merged into the Oxford and County Newspapers in 1929 (Hibbert, 1988, 278-279). The Oxford Times and the Oxford Mail have since been sister papers and are currently published by the Newsquest Media Group, which is owned by the Gannett Company.¹²⁰ The Newsquest (Oxfordshire) Group publishes another eight regional titles¹²¹ and the journalists employed by the group feed their stories into a central story database from which a group of subeditors will supply the different regional titles with stories.¹²²

There are different editors for the Oxford Mail and The Oxford Times, a daily and a weekly newspaper which serve different audiences and thus require a different type of

¹²⁰ Newsquest is one of the UK’s largest newspaper publishers, publishing more than 300 titles. The Newsquest Media Group was formed in 1996, and in 1999 it was bought by Gannett Co., Inc, an US based international news and information company (Newsquest Media Group, 2006).

¹²¹ Abingdon Herald, Witney Gazette, Bicester Advertiser, Banbury Cake (free paper), Didcot Herald, Oxford Star (free paper), Wantage & Grove Herald, and Wallingford Herald.

¹²² A structure which appears to be fairly common among local newspaper organisations these days (Franklin & Murphy, 1991, 21).
paper. The subediting of stories or news items depends on the particular style of the newspaper publishing the story, and as the crime reporter noted, both *The Oxford Times* and the *Oxford Mail* would occasionally run the exact same story but *The Oxford Times* would run the 'longer version with longer sentences'.

*The Oxford Times* has a circulation of 30,000 copies, with half of those sold in the City of Oxford, and a readership of about 80,000, calculated on the basis that two to three people will be reading each issue sold. *The Oxford Times* has retained its look as a broadsheet newspaper despite pressures to modernise and follow the example of all national quality newspapers (other than the Daily (and Sunday) Telegraph) to change their format into tabloid or 'Berliner' format. One survey respondent portrayed it as a fairly 'old-fashioned paper' (Hippre154). It was described mainly in reference to its readership by its editor:

Well, I would describe it as quite a, a very particular type of weekly newspaper, because, I wouldn't say it's a typical weekly newspaper in the UK, because it's, it has a very, let's say its audience are very much readers of broadsheet newspapers, quality newspapers. Broadsheets are an old hat now, because a lot of the old broadsheet newspapers are now what you call quality newspaper. So we have an audience which is probably, has a higher proportion of professional, very well educated people than most weekly newspapers in the country. (Editor of *The Oxford Times*)

Although the Newsquest organisation in Oxfordshire has no other local newspaper competition, it is suffering from the rise in independent and alternative media, such as free newspapers, online news, and 24-hour television news (McNair, 2003, 207-218). In Oxfordshire, at the time of the research, the *Oxford Mail* had seen dropping sales

123 Personal communication with crime reporter, 7 April 2004.

124 The columnist working for the Newsquest organisation also called *The Oxford Times* 'old-fashioned' during his interview, 16 Dec 2005.
figures, whereas sales for *The Oxford Times* were stable. However, the threat of losing readers and presumably the threat to his career was very real for the editor of *The Oxford Times*.

My ambition for *The Oxford Times* really is to, in a world which, where people are assailed by different media is to retain my readers, retain and grow my readers really, that has to be my ambition, because it’s a tough world with all the TV, radio, 24-hour news everywhere, Internet, it's very tough to actually do that in this, in this sort of competition that we have these days with the different forms of the media, and do that really by A) giving your existing readers what they want but B) doing what you can to encourage new younger readers into the newspaper. The latter being harder than the former. (Editor of *The Oxford Times*)

Thus, readership research was a priority for the editor of *The Oxford Times*. He kindly provided access to two reader surveys, conducted in 2000 and 2005, which were carried out by the Newsquest organisation in-house, as well as to a focus group report which was carried out independently by Oxford Brookes University. This research, as well as the demographic data elicited from the OPOS, confirmed that readers of this weekly newspaper belonged firmly to the more educated, liberal as measured by self-reported political affiliation, wealthier and older echelon of Oxford’s population (see chapter 3 and Appendix 10) (Newsquest (Oxfordshire) Marketing Services, 2000, , 2005).

Figure 11 shows the front page of *The Oxford Times*, dated 23 July 2004 and Figure 12 shows the front page of the *Oxford Mail*, dated 22 July 2004 for comparison. These front pages exemplify the different styles embraced by the two local newspapers, arguably the ‘most important source of news’ (Franklin & Murphy 1991, 6) in Oxford. The front pages were chosen from two successive days following the release of statistics which showed an increase in violent crime in Oxfordshire. In both cases this ‘story’ made

---

125 Personal communication with crime reporter, 24 Nov 2004. Dropping sales for the tabloid *Oxford Mail* is in line with the reportedly widespread decline of the tabloid press (McNair, 2003, 178-179).
it to the front page. Whilst the *Oxford Mail* (22 July 2004) devoted most of its front page to the headline ‘Violent crimes soar in county’, *The Oxford Times* (23 July 2004) ran a rather tame one sentence caption under the general ‘This week’ section entitled ‘Violent crime rises’. The format and the density of text on the front page of *The Oxford Times* lends support to the claims of its editor that it is a ‘high quality newspaper’ (Editor of *The Oxford Times*).

In addition to their value as sources of local news, local newspapers play an important role in training young journalists (Franklin & Murphy 1991, 8), the majority of whom are graduates and are ‘overworked and under-appreciated’ according to the local crime reporter.¹²⁶

In addition to offering news through the medium of newspapers the Newsquest organisation has designed a website, www.thisisoxfordshire.co.uk which provides the main news for Oxford online while being an advert for all local newspapers sold in Oxfordshire. At the time of the research, Newsquest ran weekly polls on issues of local interest on its website as ‘just a way of encouraging a bit of interaction with the readers really’ (Editor of *The Oxford Times*).¹²⁷ Nearly a third of these unscientific polls related to issues of crime and disorder.

¹²⁶ Personal communication, 7 April 2004. He also alleged that the Gannett company makes large profits but do not pass those on to their staff – staff and company were apparently in pay negotiations at the time. He left the Newsquest organisation in March 2005 to work as a Government press officer, personal communication, 2 March 2005.

¹²⁷ These polls have since been discontinued.
Army may protect animal lab

School plans early finish

Deputy PM ends seven-year row

15 held in fraud case

HONEST STATIONERY

Palace festival celebrates rural life

KISS THE SKY.
Figure 12. Front page of Oxford Mail
b. Media and news sources in Oxford – a symbiotic relationship?

‘By now the story is familiar. We walk around with media generated images of the world, using them to construct meaning about political and social issues. The lens through which we receive these images is not neutral but evinces the power and point of view of the political and economic elite who operate and focus it’ (Gamson et al., 1992, 374). The argument is that the media are influenced and manipulated by ‘primary definers’, the powerful sources of information who have privileged access to journalists (Schlesinger et al., 1991).

Elements of the relationship between the local media and their news sources became evident through my observations of the crime reporter’s routine work. These insights were then further developed in informal discussions with the crime reporter and the editor of The Oxford Times and later in the formal interviews with the editor of The Oxford Times and the Acting Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police.

On first impression the relationship between the crime reporter and Thames Valley Police was very good. The crime reporter was able to attend the police’s morning briefing sessions in order to pick up on what had happened the night before. However, this did not mean that he was able to use everything mentioned in the briefing. Rather, he had to check with the press officer after the meeting which of the stories he would be able to use and which were ‘out of bounds’.

Nevertheless, the nature of the relationship between The Oxford Times, and Thames Valley Police was not stable or unproblematic. Adverse reporting on incidents of police misconduct can quickly lead to the deterioration of established personal and institutional links between crime reporter and individual police officers or press officers. There is great fear among the police of the impact of such adverse publicity of ‘police deviance’ stories.
On the downside, there is the line of work that shows that kind of police deviance stories are much more frequent in a way. The public like to read deviance stories, and they sell newspapers therefore it’s attractive. So the difficulty is that bad news stories about the police doing the wrong thing or being immoral or ineffective are very, very attractive. And I think I read somewhere the other day that it takes ten good stories to cancel out the effect of one bad story. So they do have an impact on us there is no doubt about it. (Acting Chief Constable, Thames Valley Police)

The following is a local example of the effect on the police-media relationship of such unwelcome media attention. In November 2003, shortly before the research began, an Oxford Brookes University student was killed in an accident involving a police car responding to an emergency call. The editor of The Oxford Times referred to the incident and described the relationship between the media and the police at the time as fraught and uneasy and just recovering. The Acting Chief Constable reflected on the case and its implications for police-media relationship in saying:

…it doesn’t take much to upset it really. The relationship with the Oxford Times is reasonable, but the Oxford Mail, I know it’s basically the same newspaper, but I mean, because the Oxford Mail is published every day they do have space to fill, but on the whole it’s dealt with because both sides need each other, particularly at local level. (Acting Chief Constable, Thames Valley Police)

Additionally, personality clashes on an individual level between press officer and journalist for example, and staff turnover on either side of the media-news source divide can have implications for the smooth transmission of information. The crime reporter supplying both The Oxford Times and the Oxford Mail with crime stories seemed to have a good working relationship with police officers on the ground. He noted that his relationship with them depended very much on the individual police officer’s character, whether they were chatty or suspicious. He also believed that the most important factor

128 Personal communication with editor of The Oxford Times, 9 Feb 2004.
influencing his relationship with the police was whether or not the ‘chain of command’ was in favour of the media.\textsuperscript{129}

However, the editor of \textit{The Oxford Times} pointed out on more than one occasion that the good old days of crime reporting had gone, there was no longer a ‘dialogue with the police’.\textsuperscript{130} This change appears to coincide with changes in the nature of policing and how policing is publicised these days (Mawby, 2002; McLaughlin, 2007, 104). Not long ago crime reporting used to consist of getting hold of \textit{all} crime incidents uncensored which could then be scrutinised for unusual and interesting crimes in one sense or another. Nowadays most police stations have press officers managing the amount of information going to the media. The editor of \textit{The Oxford Times} in slightly nostalgic terms recollected how, as a young crime reporter, he had researched his stories.\textsuperscript{131}

\ldots less than 20 years ago, 1987 we are talking, I used to work in Reading, which is the same force, Thames Valley force, and every morning I used to go down to the local police station and one of the Chief Inspectors there used to go through all the crimes sheets, every single one, and we just used to stop him at the point that we thought we were interested in. \ldots there was no filtering system there, occasionally there were things, that weren't for press for whatever reason, but by and large we went through everything. That, that doesn't happen these days. \ldots so [the police] tend to, these days, have press officers who do it, and of course press officers only get what they are told by the police officers anyway, so it just makes things worse. (Editor of \textit{The Oxford Times})

\textsuperscript{129} In conversation the crime reporter mentioned that he had problems communicating with police officers from the major crime incidents unit. The then Chief Constable responding to a query by the editor of \textit{The Oxford Times} suggested that the problems occurred because the police are obliged to provide the defence team with all the newspaper cuttings related to the case in question which can then be used in court. Personal communication with crime reporter and observation, 19 May 2004 and 24 Nov 2004.

\textsuperscript{130} See interview below and personal communication, 9 Feb 2004.

\textsuperscript{131} The feeling that crime and court reporting has changed for the worse was shared by the columnist of \textit{The Oxford Times}, interview 16 Dec 2005 who stated that ‘the old-style court reporting has gone’.
The importance the police place on media relations and communication with the public has been well documented, as has the fact that the police are not content with monitoring media representations in a passive way. Chief Constables have taken on a more active role as social commentators since the 1970s, and police communication strategies in general have become more proactive and professional with an emphasis on controlling media images of policing as much as possible (Loader & Mulcahy, 2001; Mawby, 2003, 228-231; Reiner, 2003; Wilcox & Young, 2007). It appears that other criminal justice agencies are also feeling the need (or have been pushed) to improve their communications strategies and control their image in the media. The Judicial Communications Office, for example, was established as recently as 2005 and is working to ‘enhance public confidence in judicial office holders in England and Wales’ (Department for Constitutional Affairs, 2007). Thus, although slower than expected by Lippman (1956, 344) ‘the enormous discretion as to what facts and what impressions shall be reported is steadily convincing every organised group of people that whether it wishes to secure publicity or avoid it, the exercise of discretion cannot be left to the reporter’.

However, the police are not only aiming to carefully control their public image they are also dependent on the media for some aspects of their operational success, i.e. they use the media as an investigative resource (Innes, 1999). In this respect it is the local media in particular that is important. Quite clearly though, there is an element of interdependency, a symbiotic relationship (Chermak, 1994, 98) between the police and the media and both organisations are well aware of that.

And quite, in a sense a symbiotic relationship there, because particularly in terms of what’s local media, they need us for kind of, to fill their, print their pages and we need them as well. (Acting Chief Constable of TVP, 2006)
However, despite the police’s awareness of their dependency on the media, the Acting Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police expressed her view that the police needed to be aware of the independence of the media, for strategic reasons and reasons of propriety. This argument, namely that an expectation of the media to serve as a ‘responsible conduit of information’ (Solomon 2006, 62) is neglecting the very ‘nature of the beast’ as a business selling interesting stories, is starting to gain more ground (Way 2006, Solomon 2006).

…and by the way, if our plan is to rely on the media to be our PR organisation a) that’s actually really immoral because that’s not their job but b) they are not very reliable it’s not the most effective way to do it, it’s kind of a bad plan but I actually think it’s misplaced. (Acting Chief Constable of TVP)

The perceived dependency of the media on the police stems from its practice of using crime stories as reliable fillers (with only very unusual or newsworthy items receiving greater attention). Newspapers need a steady supply of straightforward stories in order to fill each copy. Crime incident stories, which are often very descriptive, devoid of context, and brief, provide such easy copy (Franklin & Murphy, 1991, 64; Solomon 2006, 50). To some extent the amount of crime covered in each edition of a paper depends on its size, and the size in turn depends on the success of the marketing department in selling advertising space. This use of crime stories was confirmed by the Editor of The Oxford Times.¹³²

We don’t very often, unless it’s a really major crime, we don’t very often give it huge prominence in the paper. We obviously cover big trials, big murder trials or things like that. Or if there is a murder it will get major coverage, but by and large crimes tend to fill in the kind of small pieces around a lot of the others. (Editor of The Oxford Times)

Such coverage of crime is in stark contrast to in-depth coverage of penal policy developments which Solomon (2006, 53) argues is being discouraged by editors. The crime reporter at The Oxford Times confessed that before he gained access to the police morning briefings he used to write more, what he called, ‘issue stories’ which would be more in-depth, monitor trends, and talk about particular crime ‘problems’ with reference to their context – political, policy, and legislative.\(^{133}\)

Both the editor of The Oxford Times and the Acting Chief Constable of TVP expressed their dissatisfaction with aspects of the police-media relationship.

I have to check whether that’s [crime reporter’s access to police morning briefings] still happening but it was, I mean that was set up after a meeting between the editors, the police, and some of the senior journalists as well, so we set that up after a formal meeting. And it was very much about [name of reporter] as well, because he was well known and trusted I think. But again, that’s sort of, it’s not quite what we used to have in the sense that we used to be able to go through all the crimes and everything, I mean what that briefing is, is some of the major things that are going on anyway, and with the major things we tend to be, I mean even now we, while [name of reporter] was going to those meetings and things, one of our biggest complaint was that we would find out about, we would be told that a crime had taken place about 5 days after it had taken place which is, well, not much good to a newspaper which is supposed to be up to date and I also would argue it’s not much good to the police either, when we are reporting something a week after the event when people’s memories have gone, then it’s no good. So we still have a, whether we have got these meetings or not, we still have a difficulty in terms of the amount of information that is communicated to us from the police about crimes taking place in Oxford. I mean, you know, you would probably find that in smaller places where, and in smaller towns in Oxfordshire where the local reporter will have a closer relationship with the police we find out more of what’s going on. (Editor of The Oxford Times)

Um, the one thing I do have an issue with is the lack of accountability. That if inaccurate, exaggerated stories are printed, and then the kind of rebuttal is stuck on about page 10. Once the kind of, I mean people say it’s not that bad. I mean there are things that are exaggerated, things that aren’t true, somebody once said, you know, that there wouldn’t be a good press if the part the media printed was the part they knew was true, but there is a sense of a lack of accountability and that procedures acting as

\(^{133}\) Personal communication with crime reporter, 20 May 2004
a balance aren’t very good and there, I think that you know the kind of freedom of the press is a big thing in this country, and it is perhaps not balanced as much, in terms of privacy as it is in some of the European cultures, where the rights to privacy are much, much stricter. (Acting Chief Constable of TVP)

Thus, the relationship between the media and the police on a local level is often determined by interpersonal issues such as personal preferences and dislikes. However, it also reflects wider debates on the interdependence of the media and the police, the collusion between source and conveyor of information and media scholars’ interests in structural theories dominant ideology and agenda-setting (McNair, 2003, 21-29).

3. Seeking out context – exploratory interviews

This section summarises the main findings from the exploratory in-depth interviews with media insiders and opinion leaders. In addition to the exploratory interviews, a limited amount of observational work (using unstructured observation techniques, i.e. observation and recording of data without predetermined criteria, see O’Leary, 2005, 121), with an element of non-participant and participant observation), was undertaken through shadowing a crime reporter and writing a weekly column. Informal lunch meetings with crime reporter and colleagues, as well as meetings with the Editor were recorded using a fieldwork diary. Data from those meetings have been used throughout this chapter as they informed my understanding of the newspaper production process.

a. Interviews with media insiders

Three semi-structured exploratory interviews were carried out with professionals in the media industry directly connected to the local media used for the experimental intervention. Thus, I interviewed an experienced and quite controversial columnist for the paper, a subeditor, and the editor of The Oxford Times. The themes of the interviews
were to gain a better understanding of the processes of writing and editing a column, to explore media insiders’ views of the column and its effectiveness, and, more generally, their view on the influence of the local media on public opinion in relation to crime and criminal justice.

The interviews provided insights in how different professional roles and different personalities coloured the view of how a newspaper works and should work. In relation to columns in general, the editor and subeditor made it clear that columns differed from news items in that they carried (personal) opinion whereas news items presented facts dispassionately and objectively.

Well, I thought it was interesting because it was a, it was an opportunity to carry a column that was different to, um, anything we are carrying at the moment, so that was an opportunity in itself. I thought it was an interesting experiment as well, to see how our readers would react to a different perspective on crime and to be honest I thought our readers would probably be quite receptive to it as well. …We are always looking for opinion on whatever is going on in Oxford really and the more opinion we can have in the paper the better, because we tend to deal, in our reports we tend to deal very sort of in the facts and remain very dispassionate but people like to see opinion and strong opinion as well, so I thought it would be good in that respect. (Editor of The Oxford Times)

This is in clear contrast to my ambition for the column to be a factual discussion of issues relating to crime and criminal justice. In relation to the content of the Crime Scene columns and how they could have been improved in order to gain readership, the editor touched on a theme which has been noted elsewhere, namely that the column was lacking in human interest.\(^{134}\) This comment was also taken up by the sub-editor who was mainly responsible for editing the Crime Scene columns. He felt that the columns should have been more reactive to crime incidents which had happened rather than being a

\(^{134}\) Personal communication, 16 Dec 2005.
straight crime column. The sub-editor sent me an e-mail after the interview to add that he thought the Crime Scene column would have been more successful had it been publicised and presented in a different way, putting greater emphasis on the ‘messenger’ (for a discussion of the importance of the messenger, see Solomon 2006, 60-61).

Columns work, I think, as much because of who is writing them as what is being written in them. That is why they always put pictures of the columnist with the piece. It helps people to identify with the writer and to decide whether they like or dislike them and are therefore generally for or against what they write. Perhaps this lack of a picture with the Crime Scene column counted against it in terms of getting a reaction. I think a column telling people that all immigrants should be sent home has more impact if there is a picture byline of a crusty Home Counties Colonel with a big bushy moustache.

Finally, I interviewed an experienced columnist working for both the Oxford Mail and The Oxford Times. He had worked for The Oxford Times since 1973 and claimed to have very good knowledge of Oxford, crime reporting, and the English language. He found it more difficult to say what causes reaction to columns’ content and reported a number of occasions where he had expected strong reactions and was disappointed. He did claim, however, that including animals in a column would always result in a lot of reaction.

I don’t know what causes reaction, sometimes I expect reaction and there isn’t any, other stories unexpectedly create a huge response, the story about a stray dog in Greece attracted an enormous response, so animals result in a lot of reaction. (Columnist, The Oxford Times)

b. Interviews with opinion leaders

It became clear during the writing of the columns that, on a number of occasions, professionals working in criminal justice agencies or people with a ‘stake in’ charitable organisations working in the criminal justice field had noticed the Crime Scene column

135 Personal communication, 9 Dec 2005.

136 E-mail communication with sub-editor of the Newsquest organisation, 9 Dec 2005.
and were referring to it. Apparently, the Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police, noted in communication with the newspaper’s managing director some interest in the Crime Scene column and stated that he liked it.\(^{137}\) The Restorative Justice Manager of the Oxfordshire Youth Offending Team contacted me in my role of the columnist to inquire whether I would be able to write a column on restorative justice as implemented in the Oxfordshire Youth Offending Team. He subsequently managed to get coverage in a big one-page feature in *The Oxford Times*.

Finally, one of the columns discussed whether offenders could be a force for good. The column was published on 17 Dec 2004 and made reference to a local project run in conjunction between the Oxford Citizen’s Advice Bureau and Springhill prison in which prisoners were trained to act a citizen’s advisers. The project had been evaluated by a colleague at the Centre for Criminology, University of Oxford (Burnett & Maruna, 2004). Some of those involved in the Springhill-CAB partnership lived in Oxfordshire and noticed the coverage in *The Oxford Times*, and subsequently disseminated the article to anybody who might be interested.\(^{138}\)

The only other criminologist I know of who wrote a weekly column for a local newspaper, the Birmingham Post, for a substantial period of time - nearly six years between 1998 and 2003\(^{139}\) - Professor David Wilson\(^{140}\), reported a similar experience.

---

\(^{137}\) Personal communication with the editor of *The Oxford Times*, 1 Nov 2004.

\(^{138}\) Personal communication with Dr Ros Burnett, 21 Dec 2004, who evaluated the CAB-Springhill project and received e-mail communication about the coverage of the project in *The Oxford Times*. Another six CAB – Prison partnerships were set up overseen by the National Offender Management Service (personal communication with Dr Ros Burnett, 19 Sept 2007, for local newspaper coverage of the Derby CAB – Sudbury prison partnership, see Lower (2007) in the *Derby Gripe*.

\(^{139}\) In total, he wrote 287 columns with the tag line ‘Perspective’. The Birmingham Post kindly sent me 14 of his columns.
He referred to the ‘highpoint’ of his column, when Martin Narey, whom he had criticised in one of his columns, requested editorial space in the Birmingham Post to respond to his column. Thus, I decided to explore this anecdotal evidence further and interviewed the Restorative Justice Manager of the Oxfordshire YOT, and the Acting Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police. Those two members of Oxford’s community in its widest sense were chosen as potential opinion leaders for ‘what they know’, ‘who they are’, and ‘whom they know’ in terms of their social and professional status. The elements of ‘personification of certain values’, ‘competence’, and strategic social location are the criteria originally developed for the concept of opinion leadership (Weimann, 1991, 276).

Thus, while it has been argued elsewhere, that newspaper columns are used to ‘inform an ongoing debate between national elites’ and that there is really ‘very little substantive public participation’ (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2004, 66), opinion leaders are defined as such because of their ‘capacity to influence the views of the general public’ (Kelly, 2005, 4) and thus to act as mediators between the elites and the public.

Oxford YOT’s restorative justice manager was quicker to describe himself as an opinion leader than the, arguably more influential, Acting Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police (now Chief Constable of TVP), who had described her professional role as one which holds great symbolic importance.

---

140 Professor of Criminology at the University of Central England.


142 Personal communication, 5 May 2004.

143 The concept of opinion leaders as mediators of persuasive communication between media outlets and the general population, emerged as the hypothesis on the ‘two-step flow of communication’ in the first half of the 20th century (Lazarsfeld in Katz, 1957, 61).
And I am very conscious that it’s one of those roles, I think, where what you are, the being, I think, is more important than the doing, if that makes sense. Because of course, it’s very odd to be in a job where nobody is telling you what to do, but everybody is watching what you do. So actually, the bit about the media, even in terms of, sort of, accountability you have a hundred and one people watching what you are doing and listening for the signals and signs, so that’s massive, and as I say that’s inside the organisation and outside the organisation. … Key issues about police legitimacy, around confidence, fairness, integrity are all about being rather than doing and I think that that whole sense of reputation matters so much. If the force has got a bad reputation it’s not good in terms of confidence, it’s not good in terms of legitimacy and also we rely on most people to abide by the law most of the time because we are only, kind of, the thin blue line, so all those things, as I say about reputation, legitimacy matter very much, in terms of encouraging a peaceful society. (Acting Chief Constable of TVP)

However, when pressed about her role as an opinion leader the Acting Chief Constable was rather coy while the Restorative Justice Manager was more confident and self-assured.

I wouldn’t describe myself as an opinion leader, no. (Acting Chief Constable of TVP)

Yeah, on restorative justice I think I would, yeah. I mean I organised a national conference about two weeks ago, on reparation in particular, on forms of reparation. (Restorative Justice Manager, Oxfordshire YOT)

However, both agreed on the importance of the media in communicating with the public.

The Restorative Justice Manager of the local YOT was very happy about his relationship with the local media and he felt that restorative justice stories could go a long way to dispel myths about crime and sentencing.

I mean, the local media, we are feeding them stories continuously, and they are very interested in it and very, I think the local media, I would say has been very good on this. They tend to report fairly straight and they sort of lap up any leading stories that we pass their way. So the local media have been great I would say, also I haven’t had any really big problems with the local media. … We have been in all the local papers, plus on the radio, plus BBC TV locally, it’s very media-friendly this stuff and it’s good news stories which kind of counters some of the, you know, crime, I think, is whipped up by a lot of media stories which are very frightening often, and what we can do is to sort of help to counterbalance that a little bit by saying ‘well, actually, here are some young people who have made a mistake and are willing to acknowledge it and are now doing something very practical, making real
steps to repair the harm, let’s give them another chance’. (Restorative Justice Manager, Oxfordshire YOT)

Part of the interview involved the interviewees looking at a Crime Scene column and reflecting on it. Both interviewees noted a particularity about the column and felt that it was clear that it had not been written by a journalist.

I think, well, I immediately sort of recognised that it was a helpful column, I found it gave a very nicely balanced, well researched and well grounded, it wasn’t some sort of, it wasn’t a journalist who just pretended to know about it, it was obviously written by somebody who was involved in, who came from a criminological background. So I thought, it would be great for the restorative justice work, which I really believe in, to receive the same treatment, and to be given that kind of respect. Because I, my motivation being that I thought it would be helpful, and the more media coverage the better really. (Restorative Justice Manager, Oxfordshire YOT)

The other thing of course about a newspaper is, when they write articles you can, you know what it’s saying in the first three paragraphs because they kind of repeat and extend the argument all the time, don’t they. Cos, this reads more like something from beginning to end, so it just reads differently. (Acting Chief Constable of TVP)

4. Criminologists as columnists – doing public criminology?

a. The process of writing a weekly newspaper column

Gaining access to a local newspaper was at once a fairly straightforward and protracted process. I initially wrote to the editor of The Oxford Times, with the support of my doctoral supervisor in 4 November 2002, which was followed by a meeting between my supervisor, the editor and deputy editor of The Oxford Times, and me two weeks later. Initially, the editor offered a space in the news section for a column of 400-500 words in length which after a number of meetings grew to 800 words.

Twenty-six columns (with the title Crime Scene), 800 words in length, providing information about crime and criminal justice were published in The Oxford Times.
between September 2004 and April 2005. Nine columns presented statistics on the nature and frequency of crime in general and particular types of offences such as violent crime. Another nine columns touched on issues relating to sentencing in the widest sense, including the description of a local experiment on cycling\textsuperscript{144} to introduce the concept of deterrence in the criminal justice context. Four of those columns touched on prison sentences and discussed issues such as the rationales for imprisonment, the effects of imprisonment on rates of re-offending, and the perception that sentencing is too lenient. Another four columns looked at behaviour commonly linked to crime, such as anti-social behaviour, and rough sleeping. Two columns looked at issues to do with confidence in the criminal justice system and civil liberties respectively.

Writing columns of 800 words to a tight deadline every week proved to be a challenge as was including the statistical information necessary to cover all the knowledge questions posed in the OPOS. Moreover, attempting to find a local angle for each of the columns was equally daunting, considering that local statistical data on court proceedings, sentencing, arrests, and prosecutions are hard to come by. However, all deadlines were met and most columns had a distinctly local feel (see column below on p 215; two additional sample columns are included in Appendix 9).

The editor had always appeared to be very interested in the research in meetings and all communication prior to the publication of the column. However, once the columns were up and running the feeling of enthusiasm seemed to disappear, the columns were not a priority, and the editor did not appear to be too concerned about whether or not they ran, where they were positioned or what they contained. I instigated a meeting some way into the experimental intervention and whilst the editor was happy to meet up there was no sense of urgency or need to discuss how things were going. In the

\textsuperscript{144} Inconsiderate or illegal cycling is another issue of great concern to those living in Oxford.
meeting, the editor made it clear that although he believed the column had been noted, in order to raise the debate the columns would have to be more controversial and more reactive to ongoing stories and concerns. The editor felt that in order to confront difficult issues we would need to ‘anger’ others.145

b. Giving up editorial control

Doing public criminology can be a ‘risky business’. Working within a media organisation means that academic concerns have to give way to institutional and organisational priorities, practices, and preferences. The process of writing weekly columns emphasised that working closely with the media resulted in the loss of complete control over my written work. When the Crime Scene study was set up, certain assurances were made that the columns would appear on the same page and in the same space every week. However this was not the case. Whereas the column was supposed to be a prestigious ‘op-ed’ item (i.e. appearing opposite the editorial column), it often appeared in less well traversed space. Moreover, there were a number of errors regarding the publication of the columns. The column was not published one week because the editor was on holiday, one column was duplicated two weeks after it appeared originally, and occasionally the column would run without its logo or e-mail address at the bottom.

Furthermore, columns were subedited in that headlines were re-written or changed, and columns shortened and amended on occasion. The column included below, as submitted by the author and as published in *The Oxford Times*, 5th November 2004, serves as an example to highlight this process. The column was one of the three columns used in the in-depth interview with survey respondents to explore column impact and interviewees’ response to column content and style. The highlighted sections

145 Personal communication, 1 Nov 2004.
Crime Scene Oxford – Can the courts help to reduce crime by ‘tougher’ sentencing?

A few weeks ago a victim of a violent burglary offered three options to deal with his attacker(s), sympathy for the socially deprived offender; rehabilitation; or a mandatory ten year sentence of imprisonment. He reflected that ‘pragmatists will choose’ the prison option (Letter to the editor ‘Criminal choice’ The Oxford Times, 15 Oct 2004). So, what do we want our criminal courts to achieve through the sentences they impose on offenders? This is a vital question and its answer will help determine how we judge the criminal justice system and how much confidence we have in it.

According to the Home Office ‘the criminal justice system in England and Wales is responsible for maintaining law and order and administering justice. It aims to reduce crime and to deliver justice on behalf of victims, defendants and communities.’ This concise formulation actually incorporates a number of rationales. The aim of reducing crime is consistent with individual deterrent sentencing, in which sentencers opt for the sanction they think will deter a specific offender from committing further offences. But it might also be achieved through general deterrent sentencing in which the main aim is to send out a warning to people other than the offender before the court. An alternative way of using sentences to reduce crime is through forcing offenders to accept help thought necessary if they are to desist from offending behaviour (i.e. in the form of drug treatment, anger-management classes, etc). Finally, a sentencer might aim to reduce crime by imposing a sanction that incapacitates the offender in some way, by imprisoning them, or subjecting them to a home curfew. The problem is that these rationales often seem to pull in different directions.

The situation becomes more complicated still once sentencers try to take into account the Home Office aim of delivering justice for victims and communities. Victims (and communities) differ in their views about what should happen to offenders and, indeed, sometimes it is simply impossible to sentence in accordance with victims’ wishes. Thus, the courts operate by seeking factual information from victims, through Victim Personal Statements, on the harm the crime caused so that this can be taken into account in assessing the seriousness of the offence. Victims’ opinions on what sentence should be imposed are not sought.

However, the issue of repairing harm is not ignored by sentencers. The offender can be ordered to pay compensation to the victim – and the court must give reasons if it fails to order the offender to pay compensation – or perform unpaid work for the community. One situation in which compensation is not commonly ordered is where an offender is imprisoned and thus denied the means to earn money with which to pay back the victim. Here we see the different rationales of sentencing come into conflict.

So sentencers face difficult choices. Much is likely to turn on views of the effectiveness of sentencing in reducing crime, but the views of magistrates and judges should ideally be based on the large body of research on the subject. Many people believe that prison is the only real deterrent for offenders. There is an element of truth in this, but it does not follow that a policy of imposing tougher sentences on offenders will reduce crime. Because a spell in prison can lead to an offender losing family ties, job prospects and housing, any deterrent effect may be offset by the increased pressures and temptations to offend on release. One key finding of research is that the reconviction rate for those released from prison is virtually identical to the reconviction rate for similar offenders who serve their sentences in the community. As an individual deterrent, at least, prison does not work.
Similarly, while experience suggests that a system of policing and punishment
does achieve a useful general deterrent effect, there is virtually no evidence in support of
the idea that increasing the punitive bite of sentences will result in an increase in the level
of general deterrence. Using prison to incapacitate is not a very promising strategy either.
In the mid-1990s one researcher calculated that we would need to increase the prison
population by 25 per cent in order to achieve a one per cent reduction in the crime rate.
And his calculations took no account of the many offences that take place in prison
(including drug dealing, assaults on staff and so forth).
Finally, with some exceptions, rehabilitation programmes for offenders have
generally failed to achieve reductions in re-offending, and their impact on the overall
crime rate is negligible. Those who call for, or introduce, changes in sentencing law and
sentencing practice as a way of reducing crime are barking up the wrong tree.
Is ‘tougher’ sentencing the answer?

A few weeks ago a victim of a violent burglary offered three options to deal with his attackers: sympathy for the socially deprived offender; rehabilitation; or a mandatory ten year sentence of imprisonment. He reflected that ‘pragmatists will choose’ the prison option (Letters, October 15). So, what do we want our criminal courts to achieve through the sentences they impose on offenders?

This is a vital question and its answer will help determine how we judge the criminal justice system and how much confidence we have in it. According to the Home Office ‘the criminal justice system in England and Wales is responsible for maintaining law and order and administering justice.’

It aims to reduce crime and to deliver justice on behalf of victims, defendants and communities. This concise formulation actually incorporates a number of rationales. The aim of reducing crime is consistent with individual deterrent sentencing, in which sentencers opt for the sanction they think will deter a specific offender from committing further offences.

But it might also be achieved through general deterrent sentencing in which the main aim is to send out a warning to people other than the offender before the court. An alternative way of using sentences to reduce crime is through forcing offenders to accept help thought necessary if they are to desist from offending behaviour (i.e. in the form of drug treatment, anger-management classes, etc). Finally, a reparation might aim to reduce crime by imposing a sanction that incapacitates the offender in some way, by imprisoning them, or subjecting them to a home curfew.

The problem is that these rationales often seem to pull in different directions.

The situation becomes more complicated still, once sentencers try to take into account the Home Office aim of delivering justice for victims and communities. Victims (and communities) differ in their views about what should happen to offenders and, indeed, sometimes it is simply impossible to sentence in accordance with victims’ wishes.

Thus, the courts operate by seeking factual information from victims, through Victim Personal Statements, on the harm the crime caused, so that this can be taken into account in assessing the seriousness of the offence.

However, the issue of repairing harm is not ignored by sentencers. The offender can be ordered to pay compensation to the victim — and the court must give reasons if it fails to order the offender to pay compensation — or perform unpaid work for the community. One situation in which compensation is not commonly ordered is where an offender is imprisoned and thus denied the means to earn money with which to pay back the victim. Here we see the different rationales of sentencing come into conflict.

So sentencers face difficult choices. Much is likely to turn on views of the effectiveness of sentencing in reducing crime, but the views of magistrates and judges should ideally be based on the large body of research on the subject.

Many people believe that prison is the only real deterrent for offenders. There is an element of truth in this, but it does not follow that a policy of imposing tougher sentences on offenders will reduce crime.

Because a spell in prison can lead to an offender losing family ties, job prospects and housing, any deterrent effect may be offset by the increased pressures and temptations to offend on release. One key finding of research is that the recidivism rate for those released from prison is virtually identical to the reconviction rate for similar offenders who serve their sentences in the community. As an individual deterrent, at least, prison does not work.

There is virtually no evidence in support of the idea that increasing the punitive bite of sentences will result in an increase in the level of general deterrence.

Figure 13. Crime Scene column, published in The Oxford Times, 5 Nov 2004
It was agreed with the editor that the research study would get coverage in *The Oxford Times* upon completion. However, enthusiasm on the part of the newspaper was fairly low and despite my efforts to contact the journalist responsible for the feature, newspaper coverage did not materialise. It is unclear whether the editor did in fact ask the feature writer to contact me and he decided it was not worthwhile or whether the editor was not interested in communicating the newspaper’s involvement in the research more widely. However, despite all this the editor had asserted during the formal interview he would be happy to include the column again. ‘I mean it’s something I would certainly consider including again’, although ‘maybe not every week but it’s a column that at the right time, maybe when something has happened or when some crime figures are out and that sort of thing so when there is some angle to it, it’s the sort of column that, you know, could have it’s place at any time really’.

In keeping with the idea of public criminology, dissemination of the research findings to research participants as well as more widely was important to the research design. All interviewees received a one-page summary of the research at the end of the interview and a copy of the 10-page report submitted to the Nuffield Foundation was sent to those survey respondents and interviewees who had expressed an interest in the research findings.

c. Communicating with column readers

My expectation had been that the Crime Scene column would be of interest to readers of *The Oxford Times* and would generate debate on local criminal justice policy or strategies ‘to fight crime’. However, there was very little feedback to the columns. Throughout the 6-months period only one letter was received by the editor of *The Oxford Times*. Unfortunately this letter was misplaced and the editor was unable to locate it. The lack of communication, despite attempts to generate controversy by referring in the
column to comments made by an executive member of the Oxford City Council and
direct reference to a letter to the editor by a victim of a burglary who had called for a
mandatory 10-year prison sentence for burglars (see Figure 13 above), was
disappointing. The editor of *The Oxford Times* did not find the lack of response
particularly surprising, as his comment below indicates.

> We don’t get a lot of letters about crime. We don’t, we get letters about traffic congestion, we get letters about horrible new buildings, we get letters about, you know, litter in the streets, we get letters about speeding and speed cameras and things like that. We, honestly, I think over the period of a year you could count the number of letters we get on crime almost on one hand, there really is that few. Which is interesting, isn’t it really when you consider that crime is always supposedly the big election issue and politicians always jump on it and surveys supposedly find that people’s fear of crime is huge. It never comes through from the readers’ letters. I mean the letters we might get are ones about the police not answering the phone. Or very petty things like petty anti-social behaviour, young kids, or something like that. But, in real terms crime doesn’t attract a lot of letters. (*Editor of The Oxford Times*)

In a last attempt to get direct feedback on the column, I asked readers to write in and let me know whether readers’ thought ‘the column provided you with useful information about crime and criminal justice’ in the final column. They could text or e-mail their answers (‘CSO no’ or ‘CSO yes’). In total there were six responses\(^{146}\), five positive and one negative. Three of the e-mail communications (which were all positive) included a few words about the column.

> CSO yes. We found your balanced articles a very welcome exception to newsworthy reporting and politically-inspired scare stories. It would be very helpful if the facts you gave could be listed on a website for reference in case of argument breaking out. Being both clear and concise is a difficult art that you practice well. We need more such. Gratefully, X and Y. (*Names provided*), Oxford

> CSO yes. I found the series immensely helpful, showing, as it did, the enormous gulf between political/tabloid myth and reality. Alas I missed one or two of the articles and wonder whether the series might appear in

---

\(^{146}\) Four e-mails and two text messages.
the form of a booklet? (Name provided)

CSO yes, indeed, I positively looked forward to it - dead interesting, and well written; thank you. (Name provided)

The lack of response to the Crime Scene column would suggest very little interest in the column. However, arguably, it might simply be a reflection of an unwillingness of readers to engage in dialogue with their local newspaper. For example, the reader surveys run by the Newsquest (Oxfordshire) organisation in The Oxford Times resulted in a response rate of 0.8 per cent (n=249) in 2000 and two per cent (n=614) in 2005.\textsuperscript{147} Moreover, the polls which were run on the Newsquest website (mentioned above), rarely had more than a few hundred participants.

\textit{Column feedback from interviewees}

One section of the in-depth interview with respondents to the OPOS was concerned with views on the Crime Scene columns, content as well as layout. As described in Chapter 4, three of the Crime Scene columns were presented to interviewees to find out whether they could remember seeing the column in the newspaper or even reading it. Subsequently, interviewees were asked to choose one of the three ‘Crime Scene’ columns to read and comment on. Although most interviewees (71\%) said that they found the column they chose interesting rather than dull, nearly all had suggestions on how to improve the readability of the column. The comments mostly concerned the visual accessibility of the arguments made and recommended the inclusion of visual aids.

\textsuperscript{147} Response rate was calculated on the basis of the circulation figures of 30,000. The reader survey carried out in May 2005 consisted of a whole page spread motivating readers to take part by offering the chance to win £250.
In media studies, the role of design, layout, typeface, and illustrations on reader interest has been measured through experimental research, but research findings are inconsistent. Although readers prefer large pictures over smaller ones, like graphic presentations, and find the use of colour appealing, such design improvements seem to have little effect on the retention of information, reader interest in particular items, or assessments of newspaper importance and value. Additionally, research found that while the use of charts, bars, or 'infographics' in general was appealing to readers such illustrations did not aid readers' comprehension (Gunter, 2000, 70-72).

Some interviewees felt that the column’s style was not appropriate for a newspaper, that it was trying to provide too much information, was too complicated, and not sufficiently self-critical (n=6), others were clearly not interested in a column dedicated to crime, or unimpressed by a perceived bias, and others avoided opinion pieces altogether.

I also think that, I don’t mean to criticise it, but it’s a sort of essay, so a lot of people just don’t read essay type things so, it might be more interesting if there were more quotations. (Heapre247)

I think it needs to give a balanced picture and doesn’t need to feel responsible about how society feels about crime. I think it needs to attempt, it needs to regard itself as the servant of its readers and give an objective a picture as it can. … and I don’t feel that article is adequately self critical. (Heapre106)

I probably did [see them] and threw them down in disgust. (Heapre082)

No I haven’t seen any of those. I think I would have avoided them. (Heapre133)

Editorial things I tend to read less if I am reading a paper because that’s where the newspaper can be completely suggestive. I really don’t like reading them as I can really disagree with and get cross. (Heapre101)

It is very interesting that I didn’t read them isn’t it! I think it probably goes back up what I was trying to say earlier that these would not come across,
looking at them quickly through the Oxford Times as being about the areas that I am concerned about and so I wouldn’t have felt the need to read them and crime is not an area that I would particular wish to dwell on so therefore and I would have moved on to the next thing. That’s why I didn’t read them. (Hippre204)

The question of style and the criticism of the column as being written like an essay was linked to suggestions of a more lively prose, the inclusion of human interest stories, quotations, and more local examples. Some interviewees picked up on the contradictions between the criticism they had made earlier of how the media represent issues to do with crime and criminals but could not resolve this apparent inconsistency:

I suppose especially from a journalistic point of view it might be more interesting to read if it was linked to individual cases, cited as examples, I mean obviously there might well be legal problems, with doing that but, that’s about all I can think of really. I mean I didn’t think it wasn’t interesting! I mean given the nature of the subject, a sort of dry analysis is a tempting option. This is never going to be as interesting I suppose as a, to most people, as a gory murder report. (Hippre515)

I think that it’s quite, as we said, written in a bit of an essay style and it’s quite an erudite sort of style really and there’s one hell of a lot of stuff in here as I said before. (Nopre353)

Because I’ve just got this picture [logo], that just makes it look like a crime novel but really they’re serious essays and so I think somebody like me would read them because I’m, unless I thought it was just going over things I already knew about, but it’s, maybe it has to engage the reader a bit more, but you know I can understand why the Oxford Times isn’t necessarily going to give it a full page spread, you know bigger budget or something like that. (Heapre247)

I think use more examples, use more real examples and put it in the context. I know it’s the sort of we kind of criticise media for doing is over personalising things but I think you did need examples, some people need visualisation, some people just need that identification that just helps people to understand what you are saying. I mean maybe in sort of graphics or some sort of image might help as well. (Heapre069)
5. The need to contextualise research

This chapter provided the spatial and temporal context to the Crime Scene study. Whilst it is clear that small local studies suffer from limitations as regards their external validity or generalisability, they do have great advantages too. They offer insights into the structures and processes involved in creating certain findings and aid appropriate interpretation.

This chapter explored further the (lack of) impact of the Crime Scene column by the use of exploratory interviews with media insiders and opinion leaders. The interviews suggested that there is no ‘exact science’ to writing successful columns but that the Crime Scene column might not have been what is expected of newspaper columns. The interview with opinion leaders also indicated that those with a special professional interest are more likely to notice a column on crime and criminal justice.

The next chapter will integrate the findings from the different research methods used in the Crime Scene study, summarising conclusions under three main heading: methodological implications; substantive findings; and theoretical implications.
Chapter 6

The importance of telling a good story

This final chapter will reflect on, integrate, and summarise the findings from the Crime Scene study. Chapter 1 set the scene for the empirical research at the heart of the thesis and introduced the debates raging in each of the three disciplines underlying the crime, media, and public opinion triptych. Chapter 2 presented findings from relevant empirical research on attitude change and described the rationale behind the Crime Scene study’s design. Chapters 3 through 5 presented the findings from the three ‘datasets’ elicited in the process of the empirical research. Thus, this chapter will bring all these elements together into one coherent picture broadly structured under three headings: findings with methodological implications; substantive findings; and findings which are perceived to have wider implications for sociological theories of crime and punishment. The final part of this chapter will present some ‘blue sky thinking’ and suggest avenues for further research and theoretical development.

1. Reflecting on the Crime Scene study – the practicalities of mixed methods research

   a. Collecting different types of data

The research design for this study brought together a number of research methods, quantitative as well as qualitative, experimental as well as exploratory. The main quantitative research tool was the Oxford Public Opinion Survey – a public opinion survey sent to a sample of Oxford residents selected at random from the electoral roll, the findings of which were presented in Chapter 3. In the process of implementing the
survey a total of 3,145 surveys were sent to Oxford residents and 1,311 valid surveys were subsequently received and analysed using SPSS. Additionally, a lot of qualitative data emerged from the OPOS which was analysed qualitatively. Data from 38 in-depth interviews with Oxford residents who had reported to be regular Oxford Times readers were analysed quantitatively using SpSS and qualitatively. The five exploratory interviews with opinion leaders (n=2) and media insiders (n=3) were only analysed qualitatively. Finally, contextual data gathered through observation, informal meetings and communications, and keeping a fieldwork diary were used to frame the Crime Scene study. Thus, methods for the collation of data as well as for the analysis of data were mixed.

Individual elements of the Crime Scene study were ambitious; designing and implementing a public opinion survey and writing weekly columns for a local newspaper; designing and implementing in-depth interviews; and doing observational work; were all labour and time-intense. Moreover, they demanded that I took on a number of different roles, as pollster, (lay) statistician, interviewer, participant and non-participant observer, columnist, and ‘ethnographer’. Thus, mixed methods research of this kind needs either considerable funding or substantial stamina and hard work. It also requires researchers which have the ability and, more importantly, the inclination to do ‘number crunching’ as well as working with ‘soft’ data.

b. Separate stages of data analysis

The Oxford Public Opinion Survey was designed to provide evidence on whether or not the experiment ‘worked’, i.e. whether Oxford Times readers would be interested in the column, read it, and improve their levels of knowledge of crime and criminal justice. In isolation, the survey research would have been unable to offer much in the way of explaining the findings, their meaning, and how to understand and thus interpret them
(Greene et al., 2001, 27). Why did Oxford Times readers choose not to read the column? Why did they not read the column avidly every week? And if they did read them why did it not increase their knowledge or change their views? The survey alone would have provided little more than a snapshot, a photograph of a social experiment without the subtitle enabling it to come to life. The limitations of survey research and ‘polls’ have been discussed in detail above, and restricting the research to that one method alone would, in my view, have limited the research’s validity and value. Thus, the in-depth interviews offered some useful insights into the ways in which the public respond to standardised questionnaires on crime and criminal justice, thus helping to overcome some of the inherent problems in interpreting one-dimensional survey research.

A new research technique termed ‘Questerviews’, designed to overcome the epistemological paucity of survey research, has been used in health sciences research. Questerviews are a combination of qualitative and quantitative research in which the completion of standardised self-completion questionnaire is tape-recorded whilst respondents are encouraged to discuss their understanding of terms and responses to individual questionnaire items (Adamson, et al., 2004, 139). Adamson et al. (2004, 144) pointed out the similarities between their ‘new’ method and the techniques of cognitive interviewing148 – processes which are ‘concerned with how respondents interpret and comprehend questions and the process behind making a response’.

The rationale behind mixing methods followed a similar interpretation of the limitations of survey research and the benefits of interrogating particular survey responses and findings through qualitative research. Thus, the findings from the different

148 For a brief explanation of the origin of cognitive interviews as a tool to improve police interviews, see Memon, et al. (1997).
research methods are used in a co-ordinated way, to ‘illustrate, enhance, help to explain, or refine the other set of findings’ (Greene et al., 2001, 31).

There is a danger of course that a mixed-methods design leads to heterogeneous results which need to be interpreted carefully. Do such results undermine one or other of the methods used or do they simply represent different dimensions of the interrogated phenomenon? As Greene et al. (2001, 41) suggest designing, analysing and interpreting mixed-methods research requires reflexivity and care. It became clear that so-called quantitative research methods such as large-scale public opinion surveys can have elements of qualitative data, whilst qualitative data can also be quantified. This is another pointer towards the inadequacy of the two main research paradigms of positivism and constructivism to meaningfully capture the reality of data collection in social sciences research. Their inherent dualism based on assumed logical contradictions is not sensitive or receptive to the complexity of the social world.

The findings elicited through the various research methods used have been presented separately in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 to allow the reader to follow the analytical step of interpreting findings in isolation and the subsequent step of integrating the findings which emerged from different methods chosen. In other words, this chapter aims to narrate the story from beginning to end of how this research helped to improve our understanding of the relationship between crime, media, and public opinion on crime and criminal justice. It became clear that where similar findings transpired from each of the different datasets their validity and power increased. However, where conflicting findings emerged appropriate interpretation was more difficult and more care was needed in drawing valid and convincing conclusions. It is in this sense that the substantive findings from the Crime Scene study are brought together and summarised below.
2. Re-reading the literature on crime, the media, and public opinion – substantive findings from the Crime Scene study

This section will summarise the main findings from the Crime Scene study pointing to their origin and their ‘degree of validity’ where appropriate. In some instances findings are purely descriptive and thus do not warrant lengthy discussions as to the implications of mixed methods research for their validity. However, in other cases it will be necessary to expand on issues of validity.

a. Interpreting a public opinion survey

Findings from the Oxford Public Opinion Survey as regards knowledge of, or attitudes towards, crime and criminal justice were not generalisable. Chapter 5 suggested that Oxford is a ‘special place’ unlike most other places in England. Moreover, respondents to the OPOS on crime and criminal justice were not representative of Oxford residents in general. This factor proved to be relevant because levels of knowledge of, as well as attitudes towards, crime and criminal justice were correlated to a small number of demographic and psycho-social variables and therefore the level of knowledge shown and the attitudes expressed were unlikely to be representative of Oxford residents’ views. Educational status and experience of working in, or for, the criminal justice system were predictors for higher levels of knowledge as measured by the knowledge questions included in the OPOS. Although readership of tabloid or broadsheet newspapers was correlated to knowledge scores, once other variables were taken into account such as education, gender, and ethnicity the relationship was no longer significant. This suggests that tabloid readers do not display lower levels of knowledge because they read tabloid newspapers but that people of ‘lower’ educational status who
have lower levels of knowledge of crime and criminal justice choose to read tabloid newspapers.

Similarly, attitudes towards crime and criminal justice were influenced mainly by educational status and self-identification as of Conservative political affiliation (as opposed to all other political affiliations combined). Newspaper readership was only related to two of the attitudinal statements once other variables had been included in the analysis. Those statements, however, were the ones coming closest to indicating punitiveness, namely ‘offenders should be treated harshly’ and ‘prison should be used as a last resort’. The discussion about the validity of the attitudinal statements as indicators of levels of punitiveness will be picked up in section 3 below. It was noteworthy that the variables included in the analysis, gender; age; ethnicity; knowledge of crime and criminal justice; educational status; experience of working in, or for the criminal justice system; political affiliation; newspaper readership; financial satisfaction; trust in others; perceived risk of serious future victimisation; and previous victimisation did not explain much of the variance, i.e. the variables were not powerful in explaining attitudes towards crime and criminal justice. These findings have implications for the potential impact of factual information on levels of knowledge of, and attitudes towards, crime and criminal justice and will be discussed below.

Nevertheless, the findings of the OPOS were similar to those found in other public opinion surveys regarding the public's attitudes towards crime, criminals, and sentencing and supported previous conclusions of public ambivalence (Stalans, 2002: 18-19; Wood & Viki, 2004: 30). Thus it was found that a majority of respondents believed that crime nationally had risen over the past five years; that the criminal justice system is not effective in reducing crime; that the judiciary is out of touch; and that sentences imposed by the judiciary are too lenient. Yet at the same time a majority held that a
prison sentence is not effective in reducing an offender’s likelihood of reconviction; that offenders can be helped to change; and that prison should only be used as a last resort.

Some of these contradictory findings were a result of the inadequacy of the questions asked. It was shown above that some of the attitudinal statements were open to interpretation and others were clearly misunderstood by survey respondents. The in-depth interviews confirmed that the categorical responses produced by closed questionnaires do not adequately capture the complexity and ambiguity of people’s views.

Another important finding from the OPOS was that survey respondents were acutely aware of their lack of knowledge of crime patterns and the processes of the criminal justice system. More than three-quarters of respondents regarded their answer to 13 of the 14 knowledge questions as a ‘pure guess’. This finding of awareness of a lack of knowledge and the uneasiness of presenting it with the certainty implied in survey research was confirmed by the in-depth interviews.

Thus, the use of the ‘pure guess’ box might be a useful tool for future survey research as it allows survey respondents to contextualise their answers to some extent. However, it was also apparent that rather than randomly guessing at the right answer, respondents would fall back on perceptions and beliefs of the ‘right’ answer which may well be influenced by media coverage of infamous criminal cases or scandals. Thus, even admitted ‘pure guesswork’ did not lead to anything remotely resembling an even distribution of answers.

b. Public criminology – the way ahead?

There is widespread belief among sections of the media, among politicians, and among criminologists that ‘crime sells’ and ‘when it bleeds it leads’. However, all three datasets collated for the Crime Scene study provided some much needed context on this issue.
Interest in crime in general, as opposed to crime incidents, was found to be fairly low. This finding is remarkable and made even more so by its validation through the use of different research methods. Thus, survey respondents only ranked it fourth of the social issues they were most concerned about and nearly half of the interviewees did not express a strong interest in issues to do with crime and criminal justice. Moreover, the editor of *The Oxford Times* repeatedly asserted that crime in general was not an important topic for his paper and his readership. It probably could have been expected that enthusiasm on the part of the newspaper to run a big feature on the Crime Scene research would be fairly low and maybe it should not have come as a surprise that the feature did not materialise. The findings from this research seem to imply very strongly that crime in general is not a salient issue for the public and that interest focuses primarily on narratives of particular crime incidents. However, even the readership of particular incidents depended on their perceived relevance to individual members of the public.

The main research question of the Crime Scene experiment was whether or not a weekly column in a local broadsheet newspaper would have an impact on column readers and readers of that local newspaper more generally. It emerged that only a small proportion of *Oxford Times* readers identified themselves as column readers and only very few of those had read the column regularly. The in-depth interviews resulted in conflicting findings in this respect. However, rather than undermining the findings from the survey the interview findings simply indicated the greater efficiency of visual prompting in triggering memory. Thus, it is likely that survey responses underestimated the readership of the column.

More important than the exact number of column readers is whether or not the column had an impact on their levels of knowledge. It was found that among column readers (whether identified by the OPOS or the in-depth interviews) no significant
improvements of levels of knowledge were found. This is hardly surprising, considering the irregularity of column readership, and the relative lack of any general interest in crime and criminal justice. The findings from the OPOS regarding the relationship between certain socio-demographic variables and knowledge of crime further suggests that factual information presented through the newspaper is unlikely to have a major impact on knowledge levels. Unless the whole British public were to be educated to degree level or were to start working in the criminal justice system knowledge levels are unlikely to increase significantly. Thus, in the context of aspirations to change public levels of knowledge, research which shows that the provision of information changes individuals’ knowledge and attitudes in a laboratory setting or artificial setting is of little practical value.

Moreover, column readers only showed very slight changes in the attitudes expressed which were not statistically significant. Although this research suggests that attitudes are highly dependent on educational status, their correlation to levels of knowledge of the criminal justice system was not strong. In contrast, they were highly correlated to political beliefs, in particular political affiliation with Conservatives. As Maruna & King (2004, 102) concluded ‘when attitudes are based on other than informational discrepancies or deficits, they are not easily altered’. Thus, ‘schemes to educate and inform the public about the nuances of sentencing, the ‘facts’ about crime, and so forth are noble, well-meaning efforts, but unlikely to have more than marginal impact on either public understanding of crime issues or punitive, prison-centric attitudes’ (Maruna & King, 2004, 102). In essence then, the value of public criminology is limited if it intends to educate the public about the reality of crime and criminal justice (Barak, 2007) through the provision of factual information on criminal justice processes, sentencing patterns, crime trends, and the social construction of crime.
Nevertheless, there was anecdotal evidence that the columns had been read by people with a professional or particular private interest in criminal justice. Criminal justice agencies are improving their communication strategies and are likely to monitor media coverage carefully. Thus, the impact of factual information on crime and criminal justice presented in the media on opinion leaders and professionals in the criminal justice system should be interrogated further. While the impact of the Crime Scene column on opinion leaders was only subject to exploratory research, this study did provide some insights into a potentially very interesting and promising avenue for ‘public criminology’.

c. It’s all about a good story
The ‘Crime Scene’ column might have gained more lay readers had more attention been paid to the presentation of the ‘message’ (not only in terms of content) and the ‘messenger’, with more time to establish the column, better and more consistent positioning in the paper, more authoritative authorship, and more ‘advertising’. I freely admit that the experimental intervention can be described as fairly light. However, I would be sceptical that such changes would have influenced the general research outcomes not only because of the lack of interest in crime but also because messages can be received in a multitude of ways. Reception may depend on individuals’ particular ‘social experiences, cultural knowledge and specific personal experiences’ (Gunter, 2000, 234). Thus, an individual’s background does not only influence his/her attitudes but also how s/he relates to and interprets media ‘texts’. How and whether messages are received as intended or at all can only be controlled to a limited extent.

Nevertheless, the importance of telling a good story to present issues of crime and criminal justice was a theme that emerged from the in-depth interviews with survey respondents, media insiders, and opinion leaders. Interviewees referred to the need to present penal policy, and factual information about crime and criminal justice through the
medium of case stories and as narratives with a human interest angle. This evidence was consistent with *The Oxford Times* editor's sense that the majority of *Oxford Times* readers are attracted by the human drama of crime but were not particularly interested in broader treatments of statistical trends and underlying issues. Further, it became clear from the interviews that people make sense of the processes of the criminal justice system by recounting *stories*, whether they related to their own experiences or infamous cases and scandals. The structure and content of the narrative was also viewed as being important. ‘Life is easier when there is a villain’ was the view of the Acting Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police, referring to the media coverage of a police crash killing a student mentioned in Chapter 5 above. Clear story lines about good and bad, mad or evil offenders and innocent victims, ideally with an element of the unusual, are clearly attractive to the media as well as the public (see Way, 2006, Chapter 5). Oxfordshire YOT’s Restorative Justice Manager also mentioned the advantage of the narrative simplicity of restorative justice processes, in particular, when the actors are young people. The narrative of the young straying off the path but making up for their mistakes, i.e. stories about remorse, reform, and forgiveness, seem to have great appeal. Stories about the intricate processes of the criminal justice system, tedious information on how crime is a social construct, or the complexities of the sentencing process certainly do not have such appeal.
3. Implications of the Crime Scene study for theories of crime and punishment

a. Is there room for the concept of public punitiveness?

The construction of some contemporary theories about the development of criminal justice policies and the advent of penal ‘crises’ in some Western societies relating, in particular, to overcrowded prisons rely on a number of assumptions. The punitive public has been regarded as one of the drivers of the introduction of repressive policies and sentences (see, for example, Bottoms, 2000, 40; Garland & Sparks, 2000, 197; Pratt et al., 2005, xi-xxv). However, there are some intrinsic problems with the notion of punitiveness as we understand and (under-)conceptualise it (Matthews, 2005). Punitive, as defined through a requirement of excess throws up a number of difficult philosophical questions about the justification of punishment. What is the right level of punishment for theft, fraud, or murder?

Moreover, as Hough and Roberts (see, for example, 2002; 2005b) have shown, the public are in fact not as punitive as commonly asserted. Aside from philosophical considerations, measuring punitiveness in survey research is difficult as many of the questions used are seriously flawed. Hough and Roberts provide evidence that the public are more supportive of alternatives to imprisonment, rehabilitation, and less punitive towards the young, if they are questioned in a more appropriate way (Hough & Roberts, 2004; Roberts & Stalans, 2004; Roberts & Hough, 2005a). In support, this research strongly suggests that the categorical responses provided by survey research are only half of the picture of public opinion, if not a misleading picture. Analysis of the qualitative data collected through the OPOS provided evidence that people would tick the same responses to a question or attitudinal statement following different and in some cases conflicting reasoning.
Additionally, the idea of the punitive public relies, to some extent, on the premise that the majority of the public (the law-abiding majority) have no first-hand knowledge of crime and receive most of their information on crime and criminal justice from the media. Again, this premise is fundamentally flawed because the 'law-abiding majority' is a chimera (Karstedt & Farrall, 2006, 1030; Karstedt & Farrall, 2007). As stated above, offending behaviour is widespread among the young and old, poor and rich, and throughout the whole of society (see Budd & Sharp, 2005; Graham & Bowling, 1995; Farrington et al., 2006; Karstedt & Farrall, 2007). Moreover, a large proportion of the public will have been a victim of crime (if only minor) at one time or another. The OPOS (although findings are not generalisable) showed that a considerable proportion of survey respondents had first-hand knowledge of crime (as defendant or victim), the criminal justice system (as defendant, victim, juror, witness, spectator, or criminal justice professional), or knew somebody who had been in prison or on probation. The view that crime constitutes a part of everyday life and is fairly ‘normal’ is certainly supported through such evidence (Garland, 2001, 106).

Thus, I believe that the concept and the very existence of public punitiveness needs a thorough rethink and alongside it so do some of the theoretical developments which are heavily based on its premise. I believe that this research supports the conclusions that ‘ultimately, public opinion on crime and punishment is a complex mix of perception, reason, emotion, and social ideas of justice, one that cannot be readily reduced to political slogans or newspaper headlines’ (Warr, 1995, 302). Unfortunately, public opinion on crime and criminal justice has not yet been adequately captured or described by academic research.
b. Is the media stoking up fear of crime?

The role of the media in contemporary culture and in the political process has been extensively discussed over decades. However, no overall consensus about the importance of the media in influencing public opinion or knowledge has yet been reached. Whereas it seems to have been widely accepted that ‘the media are at the centre of all influences’ (Indermaur & Hough, 2002, 202) in the relationship between media, the public and policy makers in the field of criminology, an altogether different and more complex picture emerges from the media studies literature. Only three per cent of OPOS respondents said that local newspapers were their main source of information but equally only two per cent relied on national tabloids as their main source of information on crime and criminal justice. The biggest group reported that they relied on television (41%) for their information on crime and criminal justice. The in-depth interviews again served to contextualise these statistics. The interviews showed that when people try to make sense of questions about crime and criminal justice they refer to personal experiences where they can, however they also refer to infamous cases as reported in the media. The evidence from the Crime Scene experiment, as well as the analyses from the OPOS, and the data from the in-depth interviews suggest that the impact of the Crime Scene column was slight and that the role of the media in influencing levels of knowledge and attitudes about crime and criminal justice is exaggerated.

Thus, media research needs to be more relativistic, as argued by Corner, et al. (1997, 11) and reject the simplistic idea of causality for a more considered view of ‘constitutive dynamics’ or complex relationships whilst contributing to our understanding of how these relationships work (see also, Jewkes, 2006). It is also important to remember that the media do not single out the area of crime and criminal justice for particular treatment and misrepresentation. Rather the media, influenced by their
organisational, structural, and institutional settings, are treating this subject in the same manner that they treat other aspects of social life. Other areas of social life, other groups, and other institutions similarly complain of perceived misrepresentation (immigration, Muslim communities, the NHS, to name a few). Significantly, it could be argued that public opinion itself is greatly ‘misrepresented’ in the media if one accepts that description of media practices as helpful. However, the concept of misrepresentation itself is dubious as explained above. It suggests that there is a reality of crime (a positivist notion) that can be represented falsely as well as suggesting an ‘intent’ to misrepresent.

4. The crime, media, and public opinion triptych

In this section I want to return briefly to the idea of the crime, media, and public opinion triptych I introduced in Chapter 1. In this thesis I have looked more closely at the relationship between those three issues and their respective disciplines. The rationale for mixed methods research has proven to be a great tool to go beyond testing a particular idea and describing a status quo. Applying the reasoning of pragmatism underlying mixed methods research has enabled me to make use of a valuable source of data, the scribbled, spontaneous comments provided by OPOS respondents. In criminology, the use of such data and the introduction of techniques similar to the ‘Questerviews’ and cognitive interviews introduced above should be supported.

I believe I have shown that overarching theories of crime and punishment tend to underplay uncertainties and neglect nuances revealed in each of the subject areas. Additionally, we (criminologists) should acknowledge that crime and criminal justice is only one of the side panels of the triptych, with the media providing the other side. In my view, what really lies at the heart of this picture are questions about the way forward for
a democratic system which needs to adapt to the changing landscape of late modern/postmodern society. However, questions of that kind go far beyond the scope of this thesis.

As with most research, rather than answering questions, the findings from this study lead to even more questions. Concepts which have been taken for granted need to be re-visited. The notion that it is necessary to increase the public’s confidence in the criminal justice system needs to be examined. Does the criminal justice system deserve a greater degree of confidence than seems to be expressed currently? What level of knowledge of crime and criminal justice do we expect before we call the public ‘informed’? What is the role of public opinion in the development of penal policy when looking beyond political rhetoric? Are trends in public opinion regarding crime and criminal justice discernible (with that I do not refer to representation of public opinion in the media)?

I believe what is needed is a history of the development of public views of crime and criminal justice including, but not restricted to, representations of crime and criminal justice in the news media. Such a genealogy would look beyond the public spectacle of executions or the Paulsgrove ‘Anti-Paedophile’ protests of 2000. It would, ideally, include a comparative element which can show similarities and differences of public opinion – trends and measurements – between societies and cultures. But that is a story for another day.

The End.

Word count (incl. Appendices and footnotes): 82,200
APPENDICES
Oxford Public Opinion Survey
Crime and Criminal Justice

This survey seeks the views of Oxford’s residents on issues of crime, the criminal justice system, and related topics. All replies will be treated in confidence. If you would like further information about this questionnaire, please contact Martina Feilzer at the Centre for Criminological Research on 01865 274459 or e-mail martina.feilzer@crim.ox.ac.uk.

When answering the following questions please tick the box against one response unless indicated otherwise.

1. Do you regularly read a broadsheet newspaper (e.g. Guardian, Times, Observer, Independent)?
   - Yes, six to seven times a week
   - Yes, three to five times a week
   - Yes, once or twice a week
   - Only occasionally, once or twice a month
   - Very rarely/never

2. Do you regularly read a tabloid newspaper (e.g. Sun, Express, Daily Mail)?
   - Yes, six to seven times a week
   - Yes, three to five times a week
   - Yes, once or twice a week
   - Only occasionally, once or twice a month
   - Very rarely/never

3. Do you regularly read a local newspaper?
   - Yes, six to seven times a week
   - Yes, three to five times a week
   - Yes, once or twice a week
   - Only occasionally, once or twice a month
   - Very rarely/never

4. Do you regularly watch/listen to the news?
   - Yes, six to seven times a week
   - Yes, three to five times a week
   - Yes, once or twice a week
   - Only occasionally, once or twice a month
   - Very rarely/never

5. Do you ever read the Oxford Times?
   - Yes, every week
   - Yes, three times a month
   - Yes, twice a month
   - Yes, once a month
   - Only occasionally, less than once a month
   - No, never

6. Which section of your local newspaper are you most interested in?
   - I do not read a local newspaper
   - Main news section
   - Property
   - Appointments (job adverts)
   - Sport
   - Business
   - Other Please specify

7. Which one of the following social issues are you MOST concerned about?
   - Level of unemployment
   - Level of inflation/house prices/cost of living
   - Quality of education
   - Standard of the National Health Service
   - Level of crime
   - Risk of terrorism
   - Level of immigration
   - State of the environment
   - Other Please specify
8. Of the sources listed below which one would you say provides you with the MOST information about crime and the criminal justice system?

☐ Television news
☐ Radio news
☐ Television documentaries
☐ Local newspapers Please specify which
☐ Tabloid newspapers (national)
☐ Broadsheet newspapers (national)
☐ Personal experience
☐ Other Please specify_________________

9. This is a list of the areas on which the Government has to spend money. Which TWO do you think are most important? (Please choose two.)

☐ Social Security
☐ Education
☐ National Health Service
☐ Defence
☐ Roads and transport
☐ Police / Criminal Justice System
☐ Environment
☐ Other Please specify_________________

10. Are you satisfied with your personal financial situation?

☐ Yes ☐ No

11. Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted?

☐ Yes ☐ No
☐ Don’t know

12. Have you ever been...

a. ...in court as a victim, witness, juror, or spectator, in a criminal case?

☐ Yes ☐ No

b. ...in court as the person accused of committing a crime?

☐ Yes ☐ No

c. ...inside a prison or Young Offender Institute for whatever reason

☐ Yes ☐ No

13. Have you ever worked in, or for, any part of the criminal justice system?

☐ Yes ☐ No

14. Do you personally know people who have gone to prison or been on probation?

☐ Yes ☐ No

15. In the last 12 months, have you been the victim of any crime, however minor, that was reported to the police?

☐ Yes ☐ No

16. Have you ever been the victim of a personally damaging or serious crime?

☐ Yes, often
☐ Yes, occasionally
☐ Yes, once
☐ No, never

17. Do you consider it likely that you will be a victim of a personally damaging or serious crime in the next 12 months?

☐ Yes, very likely
☐ Yes, likely
☐ No, not very likely
☐ Not likely at all

18. Thinking about the Criminal Justice System as a whole, that is, the police, courts, prison and probation services, please say how confident you are that it ...

a. ...is effective in bringing people who commit crimes to justice?

☐ Very confident
☐ Fairly confident
☐ Not very confident
☐ Not at all confident
☐ Don’t know

b. ...meets the needs of victims of crime?

☐ Very confident
☐ Fairly confident
☐ Not very confident
☐ Not at all confident
☐ Don’t know

c. ...respects the rights of people accused of committing a crime and treats them fairly?

☐ Very confident
☐ Fairly confident
☐ Not very confident
☐ Not at all confident
☐ Don’t know

19. How effective do you think the Criminal Justice System (police, courts, prison and probation services) is in reducing crime?

☐ Very effective
☐ Fairly effective
☐ Not very effective
☐ Not at all effective
☐ Don’t know

20. Do you think that the level of police recorded crime for the country as a whole has changed over the past five years? Would you say there is....?

☐ A lot more crime
☐ A little more crime
☐ A little less crime
☐ A lot less crime
☐ About the same
☐ Don’t know
21. Do you think that the level of police recorded crime for Oxfordshire as a whole has changed over the past five years?
Would you say there is....?
☐ A lot more crime
☐ A little more crime
☐ A little less crime
☐ A lot less crime
☐ About the same
☐ Don’t know

22. Do you think that the level of police recorded crime in your neighbourhood has changed over the past five years? Would you say there is....?
☐ A lot more crime
☐ A little more crime
☐ A little less crime
☐ A lot less crime
☐ About the same
☐ Don’t know

23. In general, would you say that sentences handed down by the courts, that is both the Crown Courts and Magistrates Courts, are too tough, about right or too lenient?
☐ Much too tough
☐ A little too tough
☐ A little too lenient
☐ Much too lenient
☐ About right
☐ Don’t know

The following questions ask you to assess sentencing patterns, recording and reporting rates of crime, etc. If your tick-box answer is a pure guess please tick the ‘pure guess’ box as well.

24. What do you think is the minimum sentence for an adult (aged 18 or over) who has been convicted three times of house burglary?
☐ 3 months prison sentence
☐ 1 year prison sentence
☐ 3 years prison sentence ☐ Pure Guess
☐ 5 years prison sentence

25. Out of every 100 adult males (aged 21 or over) convicted of robbery, how many go to prison?
☐ 1-20
☐ 21-40
☐ 41-60 ☐ Pure Guess
☐ 61-80
☐ 81-100

26. Out of every 100 adult males (aged 21 or over) convicted of rape, how many go to prison?
☐ 1-20
☐ 21-40
☐ 41-60 ☐ Pure Guess
☐ 61-80
☐ 81-100

27. An adult male (aged 21 or over) convicted of rape will be sentenced to an average prison sentence length of:
☐ Less than 1 year
☐ Between 1-3 years
☐ Between 3-5 years ☐ Pure Guess
☐ Between 5-7 years
☐ Between 7-9 years
☐ Nine years or longer

28. Have you heard of the British Crime Survey?
☐ Yes, and I know what it is
☐ Yes, but I don’t know what it is
☐ No

29. Out of 100 thefts of vehicles, how many are reported to the police?
☐ 1-20
☐ 21-40
☐ 41-60 ☐ Pure Guess
☐ 61-80
☐ 81-100

30. Out of 100 robberies, how many are reported to the police?
☐ 1-20
☐ 21-40
☐ 41-60 ☐ Pure Guess
☐ 61-80
☐ 81-100

31. Out of 100 rapes, how many are reported to the police?
☐ 1-20
☐ 21-40
☐ 41-60 ☐ Pure Guess
☐ 61-80
☐ 81-100

32. Out of 100 rapes, how many are committed by someone the victim does not know?
☐ 1-20
☐ 21-40
☐ 41-60 ☐ Pure Guess
☐ 61-80
☐ 81-100
33. Out of 100 crimes, how many are violent?
- 1-20
- 21-40
- 41-60 □ Pure Guess
- 61-80
- 81-100

34. Out of 100 violent crimes, how many result in actual injury to the victim?
- 1-20
- 21-40
- 41-60 □ Pure Guess
- 61-80
- 81-100

35. Who, do you think, is most at risk of being a victim of a violent crime?
- Elderly men aged 65 or older
- Elderly women aged 65 or older
- Men aged 45-64
- Women aged 45-64
- Men aged 25-44 □ Pure Guess
- Women aged 25-44
- Young men aged 16-24
- Young women aged 16-24

36. Out of 100 rapes recorded by the police, how many result in a conviction?
- 1-20
- 21-40
- 41-60 □ Pure Guess
- 61-80
- 81-100

37. Out of 100 burglaries recorded by the police, how many result in a conviction?
- 1-20
- 21-40
- 41-60 □ Pure Guess
- 61-80
- 81-100

38. Out of 100 males aged 40, how many have a criminal conviction (not including minor offences such as speeding)?
- 1-20
- 21-40
- 41-60 □ Pure Guess
- 61-80
- 81-100

39. How effective do you think a prison sentence is in reducing an offender’s likelihood of reconviction?
- Very effective
- Fairly effective
- Not very effective
- Not at all effective
- Don’t know

40. Do you think those who convict and sentence offenders are in touch or out of touch with what ordinary people think?
- Very out of touch
- A bit out of touch
- In touch
- Don’t know

41. In Oxford, have you seen or been aware of CCTV cameras ...
   a. ...in shops?
      - Yes □ No
   b. ...in a car park?
      - Yes □ No
   c. ...in a city street?
      - Yes □ No

42. How effective do you think CCTV cameras are in ...
   a. ...catching people who commit crimes?
      - Very effective
      - Fairly effective
      - Not very effective
      - Not at all effective
      - Don’t know
   b. ...preventing crime?
      - Very effective
      - Fairly effective
      - Not very effective
      - Not at all effective
      - Don’t know
   c. ...making people feel safer?
      - Very effective
      - Fairly effective
      - Not very effective
      - Not at all effective
      - Don’t know

43. Do you think homeless people ‘sleeping rough’ (on the street) should be allowed to...
   a. ...beg?
      - Yes, wherever they want to
      - Yes, but only in certain places
      - Yes, but only in exceptional circumstances
      - Under no circumstances
      - Don’t know
   b. ...drink alcohol on the streets in the city centre?
      - Yes, wherever they want to
      - Yes, but only in certain places
      - Yes, but only in exceptional circumstances
      - Under no circumstances
      - Don’t know

243
c. Do you think homeless people ‘sleeping rough’ (on the street) should be allowed to sleep on park benches overnight?
   - Yes, wherever they want to
   - Yes, but only in certain places
   - Yes, but only in exceptional circumstances
   - Under no circumstances
   - Don’t know

44. How many people do you think ‘sleep rough’ in Oxford each night on average?
   - 10 or less
   - 11-30
   - 31-50
   - 51-70
   - More than 70

45. Which of the following behaviours do you think are criminal offences?
   Please tick all that apply.
   - Fly-tipping (leaving rubbish on land without the owner’s permission)
   - Begging
   - Drinking alcohol in the street
   - Hanging around in groups (teenagers)
   - Breaking speed limits when driving
   - Cycling through a red traffic light
   - Possession of cannabis

46. Which TWO of the following behaviours do you consider to be the most damaging to the community. Please choose two.
   - Fly-tipping (leaving rubbish on land without the owner’s permission)
   - Begging
   - Drinking alcohol in the street
   - Hanging around in groups (teenagers)
   - Breaking speed limits when driving
   - Cycling through a red traffic light
   - Possession of cannabis

47. Which TWO of the following would you like Oxford City Council to spend most of its crime prevention money on?
   Please choose two.
   - Installing more CCTV cameras
   - More police officers on the beat
   - Better street lighting
   - Setting-up and running more youth clubs
   - Helping people to find employment
   - Other Please specify__________________

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

48. Most offenders can be helped to change their attitudes and behaviour and lead law abiding lives.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree
   - Don’t know

49. My general view towards offenders is that they should be treated harshly.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree
   - Don’t know

50. If prison has to be used, it should be used sparingly and only as a last resort.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree
   - Don’t know

51. Most people commit several criminal offences during their lives.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree
   - Don’t know

52. The behaviour of young people today is worse than it was in the past.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree
   - Don’t know

53. Children and young people under the age of 18 are responsible for most of the crimes committed in this country.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree
   - Don’t know
In order to make statistical comparisons we are now asking you some questions about yourself.

54. Are you…?  
☐ Female  ☐ Male

55. What is your age?  
Please write in ____________________

56. How would you describe your ethnicity?  
☐ White  ☐ Asian/Asian British  ☐ Black/Black British  ☐ Mixed-parentage  ☐ Chinese or other ethnic group  ☐ Other Please specify____________________

57. What is the highest level of educational qualifications you have achieved?  
☐ University degree  ☐ A/AS level  ☐ O level or GCSE  ☐ Other qualifications Please specify____________________  ☐ None

58. What is your working status?  
☐ Self-employed  ☐ In full-time employment  ☐ In part-time employment  ☐ In college/training  ☐ At university  ☐ Not working, but seeking work  ☐ Not working, not seeking work (retired)  ☐ Other Please specify____________________

59. What is your current (or most recent) occupation?  
Please write in ____________________

60. As regards the property you are living in, do you…?  
☐ Own outright  ☐ Own with a mortgage  ☐ Rent from council  ☐ Rent privately  ☐ Other Please specify____________________

61. Would you consider yourself to be politically…?  
☐ Conservative  ☐ Labour  ☐ Liberal  ☐ Green  ☐ Non-political  ☐ Other Please specify____________________

We would like to re-contact you after 9 months to follow up this survey. For every survey returned in the follow-up we will donate 25 pence to Victim Support Oxfordshire. We aim to receive a minimum of 600 surveys in the second round which would enable us to donate at least £150.

If you do not want to be re-contacted please tick here ☐

If you would like to make any further comments please write them here: ____________________
____________________________________
____________________________________
____________________________________

* Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey! *

Code ____/_____________
Appendix 2: Additional questions included in repeat and post-only survey

1. Please indicate whether you filled in Part 1 of this survey nine months ago.*

☐ Yes, I remember filling in this survey
☐ No, someone else filled it in last time
☐ I cannot remember whether I filled it in

When answering the following questions please tick the box against one response.

55. Have you noticed and/or watched the TV programme ‘Beat the burglar’ which was recently screened on BBC1 every morning at 9.15am?
☐ I do not watch daytime television
☐ No, I have not noticed the programme
☐ Yes, I have noticed the programme but not watched it
☐ I have watched the programme occasionally, less than once a week
☐ I have watched the programme once a week
☐ I have watched the programme two to three times a week
☐ I have watched the programme every day

56. Have you noticed and/or read the column ‘Crime Scene’ by Yvonne Crownmiller in The Oxford Times?
☐ I do not read The Oxford Times
☐ No, I have not noticed the column
☐ Yes, I have noticed the column but not read it
☐ I have read the column occasionally, less than once a month
☐ I have read the column once a month
☐ I have read the column twice a month
☐ I have read the column three to four times a month

57. Have you accessed any of the Home Office’s websites, such as CJS online or homeoffice.gov.uk?
☐ I do not use the internet
☐ No, I have not accessed any Home Office websites
☐ Yes, I have accessed a Home Office website once
☐ Yes, I access Home Office websites occasionally
☐ Yes, I access Home Office websites regularly
58. Have you made use of any other sources of information on the criminal justice system in the last 9 months?

☐ Yes  Please specify________________________________________________________

☐ No

66. Roughly, what is the combined annual income for your household (before tax and other deductions)?

☐ Less than £10,000
☐ Between £10,000-20,000
☐ Between £21,000-40,000
☐ Between £41,000-60,000
☐ Between £61,000-80,000
☐ More than £80,000

Please tick the boxes below if you:

☐ want to receive the correct answers to the factual questions about crime and criminal justice included in this survey (Q25-Q39);

☐ want to receive a copy of the 10-page research report available in Spring 2006;

☐ are happy to be re-contacted for an in-depth interview exploring your views on crime and criminal justice. (We will pay £20 for each interview, either to you directly, or to Victim Support Oxfordshire, at your choice.) Please provide a contact phone number here:

____________________________________

*Question 1 was only included on the post-experiment survey for those respondents who had completed the pre-experiment OPOS.
Appendix 3: Covering letter for Oxford Public Opinion Survey

«GreetingLine»

Oxford Public Opinion Survey: Crime and Criminal Justice

You are invited to take part in a survey seeking the views of Oxford’s residents on issues of crime, the criminal justice system, and related topics. The University of Oxford is carrying out this survey with approximately 1,000 people in order to gain a better understanding of your thoughts and concerns. We are writing only to those whose names and addresses are publicly available through the electoral roll.

You can take part in this survey in two ways: by post or by phone. We have enclosed a copy of the survey so you can fill it in and return it in the free to post envelope within the next ten days, i.e. by 17 September 2004. We have kept the survey brief so as to minimise any inconvenience to yourself. If we do not receive your response by the above date we will try to call you to confirm whether or not you wish to take part in the survey. If you do, we will offer to carry out the survey over the phone.
All responses to this survey will be treated in confidence. This means that no one but the research team will have access to your answers and any personal data collected will be stored securely in compliance with data protection legislation and then destroyed at the conclusion of the project. Your details will not be passed to anyone else and will not appear in our report of the results of this project.

If you would like further information about this survey, please contact Martina Feilzer by calling (01865) 274459 or by sending an e-mail to martina.feilzer@crim.ox.ac.uk. For more information about the Centre for Criminological Research, please visit our website at www.crim.ox.ac.uk.

This survey is crucial to our work as University researchers but we hope this study will benefit you too. This project could make a difference to local policies on crime and criminal justice. We will write a report for use by those drawing up local policies in order to ensure that Oxford residents' views about local priorities and problems are taken into account. It is important for us to hear from you, no matter how long you have lived in Oxford and regardless of how interested or concerned you might be about crime. Your views really do matter!

For every survey returned at the follow-up stage we will donate 25 pence to a charity which offers help to victims of crime, Victim Support Oxfordshire. We aim to receive at least 600 surveys at the follow-up stage which would enable us to donate a minimum of £150.

Thank you very much for considering our request to participate in this survey.

Dr Richard Young
Reader in Criminal Justice

Ms Martina Feilzer
Research Officer
Dear Mr X,

Oxford Public Opinion Survey: Crime and Criminal Justice – In-depth interviews

Thank you very much for contributing to Part 1 and 2 of the Oxford Public Opinion Survey.

We are writing to you again because you agreed to be re-contacted for an in-depth interview exploring your views on crime, criminal justice, and the local media. We would like to provide you with some more detail about the interview so that you can decide whether you would be willing to contribute to this stage of the research.

Why?
The in-depth interviews are part of a research study exploring how cultural perceptions of crime and the criminal evolve over time, taking into account various sources of influence in modern society, in particular the local media. The study is independently funded by the Nuffield Foundation which aims to advance social well-being. For more information about the organisation, see http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/.

How?
We are aiming to interview 40 people who have participated in Part 1 and 2 of the Oxford Public Opinion Survey. The in-depth interview would be carried out by Martina Feilzer, face-to-face in a place of your choosing - it could take place in your home, a
public place, such as a Café, or in the University. The interview itself will take about an hour and we will compensate you for your time by paying £20 to you.

Confidentiality
Anonymised data and direct quotes from the interviews may be used in the final report to be submitted to the Nuffield Foundation in Spring 2006. Additionally, the research forms part of Martina Feilzer’s doctoral research and thus data and direct quotes from the interviews may be used in the thesis and in any publications deriving from it. Ideally, we would like to tape-record the interview to be able to reflect your views and experiences more accurately. However, if you would prefer the interview not to be recorded, Martina will take notes instead. Any tape recordings will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project.

All the interview data will be anonymised. Your details will not be passed to anyone else and will not appear in any publications of the results of this project.

Next steps
If you provided a phone number for contact in the survey Martina Feilzer will ring you in the next 1-2 days to confirm that you are happy to participate in this part of the study. If that is the case we can arrange a convenient time and place for interview. If you have not provided a phone number please contact Martina by phone on 01865 274459, by e-mail at martina.feilzer@crim.ox.ac.uk, or by mail to arrange an interview.

Thank you very much for reading this information.

Dr Richard Young
Reader in Criminal Justice

Ms Martina Feilzer
Research Officer
Appendix 5: Interview schedule

It’s your turn
In-depth interview schedule

1. Would you say that you are interested in issues to do with crime, criminals, and criminal justice?

2. Do you like crime fiction/TV crime dramas such as Midsommer Murders or The Bill?

3. When you hear the word crime, is there anything that immediately comes to your mind?
   • What about the word ‘criminals’?
   • What about the ‘criminal justice system’?

4. In general, would you be interested in receiving more factual information (such as reliable statistics) about crime and criminal justice?

5. What would be a good way of making such information available to the public?
   • How would you like to access the information?
   • Who should deliver it?
   For example, what about
   • a newspaper column
   • a Government leaflet/booklet
   • a leaflet/booklet produced by an independent body (such as a university)

6. What, do you think, would change people’s attitudes towards the criminal justice system?

7. Do you believe increased knowledge of patterns of crime, the processes of the criminal justice system (sentencing patterns) could change attitudes?

8. Do you think your attitude towards crime, criminals, and the criminal justice system has changed from when you were younger?

You said in your survey that you read The Oxford Times. Is that correct? Ok, I am going to ask you a couple of questions now which are related to that newspaper.
9. Do you ever read news about particular crime incidents as reported in The Oxford Times?

10. Do you think these reports give a representative picture of crime in the Oxford area?

A column called Crime Scene, written by Yvonne Crownmiller, ran in The Oxford Times for six months from September last year. I have got an example of the Crime Scene column which appeared in The Oxford Times with me for you to have a look at.

11. a) In the OPOS you reported that you read the Crime Scene column. Now that you have seen the column can you confirm that you read the column from time to time?
   • Why did you read the column?
   • What did you think of the column?
   • Do you think the column improved your knowledge of crime, criminals, or the criminal justice system?
   • Do you think the column changed your attitudes towards crime, criminals, or the criminal justice system?
   • Do you think you have been more influenced by the column if it had been written by an eminent criminologist such as Professor Roger Hood, Emeritus Professor of Oxford University?
   • Do you read any other columns in The Oxford Times?

b) In the OPOS you reported to have noticed but not read the Crime Scene column. Now that you have seen the column can you confirm that you didn't read the column from time to time?
   • Why didn't you read the column?
   • Do you think you have been more likely to read the column if it had been written by an eminent criminologist such as Professor Roger Hood, Emeritus Professor of Oxford University?
   • Do you read any other columns in The Oxford Times?

c) In the OPOS you reported that you did not notice the Crime Scene column. Now that you have seen the column can you confirm that you hadn’t noticed the column or read it from time to time?
   • Do you remember seeing this column?
   • Do you read any other columns in The Oxford Times?

I would like to find out a little more about your thoughts on the Crime Scene column. I have got a selection of the three of the Crime Scene columns with me. Would you mind
selecting one of the columns and reading it for me? Afterwards I will ask you a couple of questions about your initial reaction to the column, about the quality of the column, etc..

Ok, thank you.

12. Was there anything in the column that surprised you?

13. Did you find the column dull or interesting?

14. Did you find the column convincing or unconvincing?

15. Can you suggest any ways in which this type of column could be improved so that more people would be likely to read it?

16. Why do you think you chose this column, rather than one of the others to read now?

Show survey(s) to jog people’s memory.

17. Why did you participate in the Oxford Public Opinion Survey on crime and criminal justice?

18. Do you think public opinion polls like this can adequately capture people’s view and attitudes about a particular issue?

19. What did you think of the survey questions?

20. Can you remember survey questions that you found hard to answer?

Finally, I would like to tell you some more about the research you have taken part in and why I asked you so many question about the Crime Scene column that appeared in The Oxford Times. The column was written by me under the supervision of Dr Richard Young, Assistant Director of the Centre for Criminology at the University of Oxford. The aim of the research was to find out what effect the provision of information about crime and criminal justice in a newspaper column would have on readers of that column. We have put together a short summary of the project which I am going to leave with you.

21. Do you have any questions about the research?

22. Do you have any other comments?
Please do get in touch if you do have further questions or comments about the research, the survey, or the interview.

You have not indicated that you would like to receive the 10-page research report which will be sent to the Nuffield Foundation in Spring 2006. Is that still true after the interview?

Thank you very much indeed for your time.

Hand over Factsheet, research summary, envelope with £20.

Questions on behalf of the editor of The Oxford Times:

What would you like to see covered that is not already covered in The Oxford Times?

What changes to the sports section would persuade you to read it/read it more often?
Appendix 6: Fact sheet

Oxford Public Opinion Survey
Crime and Criminal Justice – Fact sheet

Do you think that the level of police recorded crime for the country as a whole has changed over the past five years?

Crime in England and Wales as measured by the British Crime Survey has fallen in every survey since 1995. BCS crime has fallen slightly by two per cent between 2001/2 and 2002/3 and by five per cent between 2002/3 and 2003/4. Police recorded crime has fallen every year from 1992 to 1998/9 when the Home Office changed the way crime was counted. It is known that this change in recording practices which was followed by another change in recording practices in 2002 has led to an increase in the number of crimes recorded (see Dodd, T., Nicholas, S., Povey, D., and Walker, A. (2004) Crime in England and Wales 2003/2004, Home Office Statistical Bulletin 10/04, London: Home Office; available online at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/crimeew0304.html).

Do you think that the level of police recorded crime for Oxfordshire as a whole has changed over the past five years?

On a local level, one has to rely on police recorded figures. According to Thames Valley Police, Oxfordshire has seen a rise in recorded crime of two per cent comparing data from 1998/9 and 2003/4. Again, changes in recording practices are acknowledged by the police to have an impact on the rise in the number of crimes recorded (Thames Valley Police statistics – Performance figures).

1. What do you think is the minimum sentence for an adult (aged 18 and over) who has been convicted three times of house burglary?
   - 3 months prison sentence
   - 1 year prison sentence
   - 3 years prison sentence
   - 5 years prison sentence

Section 111 of the Powers of the Criminal Court (Sentencing) Act (2000) provides for a minimum sentence of 3 years imprisonment for the third conviction for a house burglary.

---

The fact sheet contained the following footnote on each page: Martina Feilzer, Centre for Criminology, University of Oxford, 13 July 2005
2. Out of every 100 adult males (aged 21 and over) convicted of robbery, how many go to prison?
   - 1-20
   - 21-40
   - 41-60
   - 61-80
   - **81-100**

   In 2002, 93 out of every 100 adult males (aged 21 and over) convicted of robbery received a custodial sentence. On average the sentence length was just over 4 years.

3. Out of every 100 adult males (aged 21 and over) convicted of rape, how many go to prison?
   - 1-20
   - 21-40
   - 41-60
   - 61-80
   - **81-100**

   In 2002, 97 out of every 100 adult males (aged 21 and over) convicted of rape received a custodial sentence.

4. An adult male (aged 21 and over) convicted of rape will be sentenced to an average prison sentence length of:
   - Less than 1 year
   - Between 1-3 years
   - Between 3-5 years
   - Between 5-7 years
   - **Between 7-9 years**
   - Nine years or longer

   On average the sentence length is between 7 and 7½ years.

5. Have you heard of the British Crime Survey?


6. Out of 100 thefts of vehicles, how many are reported to the police?
   - 1-20
   - 21-40
   - 41-60
   - 61-80
   - **81-100**

7. Out of 100 robberies, how many are reported to the police?
   - 1-20
   - 21-40
   - 41-60
   - 61-80
   - 81-100


8. Out of 100 rapes, how many are reported to the police?
   - 1-20
   - 21-40
   - 41-60
   - 61-80
   - 81-100

Research carried out in 2000 showed that the police came to know of about 20 out of every 100 rapes (only about 10 out of every 100 rapes were reported by the victim) (see Myhill, A. and Allen, J. (2002), Rape and sexual assault of women: the extent and nature of the problem, Home Office Research Study 237, London: Home Office, at p. vi).

9. Out of 100 rapes, how many are committed by someone the victim does not know?
   - 1-20
   - 21-40
   - 41-60
   - 61-80
   - 81-100

The same research showed that only eight out of every 100 rapes are committed by somebody the victim does not know (see Myhill, A. and Allen, J. (2002), Rape and sexual assault of women: the extent and nature of the problem, Home Office Research Study 237, London: Home Office, at p. vii).

10. Out of 100 crimes, how many are violent?
    - 1-20
    - 21-40
    - 41-60
    - 61-80
    - 81-100

In 2003/2004, 23 out of every 100 crimes as measured by the British Crime Survey were violent. However, only 19 out of 100 police recorded crimes were violent (see Dodd, T., Nicholas, S., Povey, D., and Walker, A. (2004) Crime in England and Wales 2003/2004, Home Office Statistical Bulletin 10/04, London: Home Office; Figure 2.3, available online at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/crimeew0304.html). Neither statistic includes the majority of shoplifting or motoring offences.
11. Out of 100 violent crimes, how many result in actual injury to the victim?
   - 1-20
   - 21-40
   - 41-60
   - 61-80
   - 81-100


12. Who, do you think, is most at risk of being a victim of a violent crime?
   - Elderly men aged 65 or older
   - Elderly women aged 65 or older
   - Men aged 45-64
   - Women aged 45-64
   - Men aged 25-44
   - Women aged 25-44
   - Young men (aged 16-24)
   - Young women (aged 16-24)

Research and surveys have repeatedly shown that those most at risk of violent crime are young men aged 16 to 24 (see, (see Dodd, T., Nicholas, S., Povey, D., and Walker, A. (2004) Crime in England and Wales 2003/2004, Home Office Statistical Bulletin 10/04, London: Home Office; Figure 5.5, available online at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/crimeew0304.html).

13. Out of 100 rapes recorded by the police, how many result in a conviction?
   - 1-20
   - 21-40
   - 41-60
   - 61-80
   - 81-100

In 1999, 8 out of every 100 rapes recorded by the police resulted in a caution or conviction for rape, in total 15 out of every 100 rapes recorded led to a caution or conviction for a serious sexual offence (see Myhill, A. and Allen, J. (2002), Rape and sexual assault of women: the extent and nature of the problem, Home Office Research Study 237, London: Home Office, Table E1).

14. Out of 100 burglaries recorded by the police, how many result in a conviction?
   - 1-20
   - 21-40
   - 41-60
   - 61-80
   - 81-100

15. Out of 100 males aged 40, how many have a criminal conviction (not including minor offences such as speeding)?
- 1-20
- 21-40
- 41-60
- 61-80
- 81-100

The Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development (a longitudinal survey following the behaviour of 411 males) showed that 39 out of 100 males had a criminal conviction by the age of 40 (see, for example, Farrington, D. and Painter, K (2004) Gender differences in offending: implications for risk-focused prevention, Home Office Online Report 09/04). Home Office research similarly found that 1/3 of males and nine per cent of females had a criminal conviction at the age of 46. Prime, J et al. (2001) Criminal Careers of those born between 1953 and 1978, Home Office Statistical Bulletin 4/01.

16. How many people do you think ‘sleep rough’ (on the street) in Oxford each night on average?
- Less than 10
- 11-30
- 31-50
- 51-70
- More than 70

Exact numbers for people sleeping rough are very hard to establish, estimates are that between 11 and 30 people sleep rough on any given night (see, for example, Oxford’s Crime and Disorder Audit 2001 at http://www.saferoxford.org.uk/).

17. Which of the following behaviours do you think are criminal offences?
- Fly-tipping (rubbish which has been left on land without the owner’s permission
- Begging
- Street drinking
- Teenagers hanging around
- Speeding motorists
- Cyclists ignoring traffic lights
- Possession of cannabis

**Fly-tipping** is a criminal offence and can incur fines of up to £20,000 in Magistrates’ Courts, unlimited fines in higher courts, a community service order or even a prison sentence (Control of Pollution (Amendment) Act 1989, see the Environment Agency for more information, [http://environment-agency.gov.uk/](http://environment-agency.gov.uk/)). The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 has now made fly-tipping of non-hazardous waste an arrestable offence.

**Begging** is a criminal offence under the Vagrancy Act 1824.

**Street drinking** as such is not a criminal offence. However, since 2003, the police have the power to direct anybody drinking in areas of Oxford where street drinking has been banned not to drink alcohol and to surrender alcohol to the police officer. Failure to comply with directions constitutes a criminal offence.

**Teenagers** who are simply **hanging around** do not commit a criminal offence. However, the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 states in Section 30 that the police can give direction for groups of two or more persons to disperse if they are believed to have caused intimidation, harassment and alarm to members of the public and if anti-social behaviour is a significant and persistent problem in that particular area. Contravening police directions constitutes a criminal offence.

**Speeding motorists** – breaking a posted speed limit is a criminal offence, Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, s89.

**Cyclists ignoring traffic lights** commit a criminal offence under the Road Traffic Act 1988 sect 35/36.
Possession of cannabis - In January 2004 Cannabis was re-classified to a Class-C drug. However as a controlled drug the possession, supply, or production of cannabis remains criminal. Only the penalties have changed.

More information on crime and criminal justice:

Most of the references provided can be found on http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/index.htm. More information on the criminal justice system is available on the CJS online webpage http://www.cjsonline.org/home.html or contact Criminal Justice IT, Portland House, Stag Place, London, SW1E 5RS, Email: cjsonline@cjit.gov.uk, Fax: 020 7271 3407.

Selected non-governmental organisations supplying information on the criminal justice system and related topics and support services are:

Nacro http://www.nacro.org.uk/ or contact Nacro, 169 Clapham Road, London, SW9 0PU, Tel 020 7582 6500

Howard League of Penal Reform http://www.howardleague.org/, 1 Ardleigh Road, London, N1 4HS, Tel: 020 7249 7373, Fax: 020 7249 7788, Email: info@howardleague.org

Thames Valley Partnership http://www.thamesvalleypartnership.org.uk/, Townhill Barn, Dorton Road, Chilton, Aylesbury, HP18 9NA, Tel: 01844 202001, Fax: 01844 202008.


Oxford Sexual Abuse Rape Crisis Centre, PO Box 20, Oxford, Oxon, OX4 1HQ Helpline: 01865 726295

Childline, 0800 1111 http://www.childline.org.uk/

Thank you again for taking part in the Oxford Public Opinion Survey!
Appendix 7: Summary of research

Oxford Public Opinion Survey – The wider research

Summary of research

This two-year research project funded by the Nuffield Foundation explores how public perceptions of crime and the criminal evolve over time, taking into account various sources of influence in modern society, such as politicians, policy-makers, academics, and, in particular, the media. Polls and surveys routinely show that the public seem to have lost confidence in the criminal justice system. These findings have concerned politicians, policy-makers, and academics for a number of years now, and the role of the media in shaping public fears and anxieties has been much debated.

The study involved a natural experiment, consisting of a large-scale public opinion survey (Oxford Public Opinion Survey) measuring the views of Oxford residents on crime, criminal justice, and criminals; an experimental intervention; and a repeat survey. The experimental intervention entailed writing a weekly column in The Oxford Times, the Crime Scene column under the pseudonym of Yvonne Crownmiller. The column was written by Martina Feilzer and Dr Richard Young, Assistant Director of the Centre for Criminology at the University of Oxford. The Crime Scene column aimed to provide factual information about crime patterns, criminal behaviour, sentencing patterns and the processes of the criminal justice system.
In addition to the experiments, in-depth interviews with a sub-sample of survey participants are being carried out to explore why and how people read the Crime Scene columns.

The aim of the natural experiment was to test what effect the provision of information about crime and criminal justice in a newspaper column would have on readers of that column. Thus, the experiment explored the particular influence of the media on local understandings of crime and crime policy.

A full ten-page report of the result of the research will be available in Spring 2006 and can be requested from Martina Feilzer. If you have any questions or comments about the research please contact:

Martina Feilzer
Research Officer
Centre for Criminology
University of Oxford
Manor Road Building
Manor Road
Oxford OX1 3UQ
01865 274459
martina.feilzer@crim.ox.ac.uk
Appendix 8: Correlations between socio-demographic and psycho-social variables and attitudes to crime and criminal justice: various tables

Table 1. Gender and attitudes to crime and criminal justice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude statement</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Statistical significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sentences are too lenient (1) n=938</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>χ²=7.719, 2df, p&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people commit several crimes (9) n=930</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>χ²=16.317, 2df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude statement</td>
<td>Response</td>
<td>16-29</td>
<td>30-59</td>
<td>60+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences are too lenient (1)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>62.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=928</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime nationally has risen (3)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>66.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=936</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders can be helped to change (6)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>59.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=923</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders should be treated harshly (7)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>50.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=909</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>39.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison should be used as a last resort (8)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>67.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=919</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people commit several crimes (9)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=921</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>66.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour of young people is worse (10)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>72.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=923</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people are responsible for most of the crime (11)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=923</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Educational status and attitudes to crime and criminal justice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude statement</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>University degree</th>
<th>no/other qualification</th>
<th>Statistical significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sentences are too lenient (1)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>72.3</td>
<td>$\chi^2=78.814$, 2df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=926</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime nationally has risen (3)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>$\chi^2=31.018$, 2df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=934</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A prison sentence is effective in reducing an offender's likelihood of reconviction (4)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>$\chi^2=23.540$, 2df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=923</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentencers are out of touch (5)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>$\chi^2=29.929$, 2df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=914</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders can be helped to change (6)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>$\chi^2=39.269$, 2df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=921</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders should be treated harshly (7)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>$\chi^2=74.523$, 2df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=906</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>59.1</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison should be used as a last resort (8)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>66.9</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>$\chi^2=39.877$, 2df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=917</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour of young people is worse (10)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td>$\chi^2=55.939$, 2df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=920</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people are responsible for most of the crime (11)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>$\chi^2=50.079$, 2df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=921</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>69.4</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. OPOS knowledge score and attitudes to crime and criminal justice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude statement</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>OPOS knowledge score grouped</th>
<th>Statistical significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Score grouped</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Score 0-4</td>
<td>Score 5 plus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences are too lenient (1) n=930</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>51.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime nationally has risen (3) n=935</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>60.5</td>
<td>50.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders should be treated harshly (7) n=909</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>38.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>53.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour of young people is worse (10) n=923</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>58.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Criminal justice ‘professionals’ attitudes to crime and criminal justice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude statement</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Ever worked for any criminal justice agency</th>
<th>Statistical significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences are too lenient (1) n=932</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>57.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A prison sentence is effective in reducing an offender’s likelihood of reconviction (4) n=926</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>86.7</td>
<td>68.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentencers are out of touch (5) n=917</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>69.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders should be treated harshly (7) n=909</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>44.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6. Ethnicity and attitudes to crime and criminal justice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude statement</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Minority ethnic</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Statistical significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crime nationally has risen (3)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>( \chi^2 = 13.838, ) 2df, ( p &lt; 0.001 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=940</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>( \chi^2 = 9.153, ) 2df, ( p &lt; 0.01 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A prison sentence is effective in reducing an offender's likelihood of reconviction (4)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>( \chi^2 = 9.504, ) 2df, ( p &lt; 0.05 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=928</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentencers are out of touch (5)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>69.9</td>
<td>( \chi^2 = 7.504, ) 2df, ( p &lt; 0.05 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=919</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people are responsible for most of the crime (11)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>( \chi^2 = 7.357, ) 2df, ( p &lt; 0.05 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=927</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7. Political affiliation and attitudes to crime and criminal justice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude statement</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Else</th>
<th>Statistical significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sentences are too lenient (1) n=911</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>79.1</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>( \chi^2=33.505, 2\text{df}, p&lt;0.001 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime nationally has risen (3) n=919</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>( \chi^2=15.073, 2\text{df}, p&lt;0.001 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A prison sentence is effective in reducing an offender's likelihood of reconviction (4) n=908</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>( \chi^2=14.259, 2\text{df}, p&lt;0.001 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>72.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentencers are out of touch (5) n=899</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>( \chi^2=6.588, 2\text{df}, p&lt;0.05 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders can be helped to change (6) n=907</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>71.6</td>
<td>( \chi^2=45.652, 2\text{df}, p&lt;0.001 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders should be treated harshly (7) n=892</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>( \chi^2=30.172, 2\text{df}, p&lt;0.001 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison should be used as a last resort (8) n=903</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>60.5</td>
<td>( \chi^2=11.767, 2\text{df}, p&lt;0.01 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people commit several crimes (9) n=905</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>( \chi^2=6.637, 2\text{df}, p&lt;0.05 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>59.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour of young people is worse (10) n=905</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>82.2</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>( \chi^2=21.069, 2\text{df}, p&lt;0.001 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8. Regular readership of tabloid or broadsheet newspaper and attitudes to crime and criminal justice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude statement</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Regularly reading broadsheet</th>
<th>Regularly reading tabloid</th>
<th>Reading both types of newspaper regularly</th>
<th>Reading neither type of newspaper</th>
<th>Statistical significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sentences are too lenient (1)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>84.3</td>
<td>72.8</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>$\chi^2=100.592, 6\text{df}, p&lt;0.001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal justice system is effective in reducing crime (2)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>$\chi^2=14.961, 6\text{df}, p&lt;0.05$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=941</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime nationally has risen (3)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>$\chi^2=49.885, 6\text{df}, p&lt;0.001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=944</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A prison sentence is effective in reducing an offender’s likelihood of reconviction (4)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>$\chi^2=19.222, 6\text{df}, p&lt;0.01$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=932</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentencers are out of touch (5)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>$\chi^2=24.077, 6\text{df}, p&lt;0.001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=923</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders can be helped to change (6)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>$\chi^2=28.477, 6\text{df}, p&lt;0.001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=930</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders should be treated harshly (7)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>$\chi^2=92.820, 6\text{df}, p&lt;0.001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=915</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison should be used as a last resort (8)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>72.1</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>$\chi^2=81.041, 6\text{df}, p&lt;0.001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=926</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8. Regular readership of tabloid or broadsheet newspaper and attitudes to crime and criminal Justice (contd.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude statement</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Regularly reading broadsheet</th>
<th>Regularly reading tabloid</th>
<th>Reading both types of newspaper regularly</th>
<th>Reading neither type of newspaper</th>
<th>Statistical significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most people commit several crimes (9) n=929</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>$\chi^2=20.051, 6df, p&lt;0.01$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour of young people is worse (10) n=929</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>86.2</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>$\chi^2=63.573, 6df, p&lt;0.001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people are responsible for most of the crime (11) n=930</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>$\chi^2=27.990, 6df, p&lt;0.001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>65.1</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 9. Perceived risk of victimisation and attitudes to crime and criminal justice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude statement</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Consider it likely to be victim of serious crime</th>
<th>Consider it not likely to be victim of serious crime</th>
<th>Statistical significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sentences are too lenient (1) n=916</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>$\chi^2=7.860$, 2df, p&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime nationally has risen (3) n=925</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>$\chi^2=14.169$, 2df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders can be helped to change (6) n=907</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>$\chi^2=11.088$, 2df, p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders should be treated harshly (7) n=896</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>$\chi^2=29.701$, 2df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison should be used as a last resort (8) n=903</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>$\chi^2=13.003$, 2df, p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour of young people is worse (10) n=906</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>83.6</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>$\chi^2=15.577$, 2df, p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people are responsible for most of the crime (11) n=907</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>$\chi^2=15.011$, 2df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>63.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10. Trust in most people and attitudes to crime and criminal justice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude statement</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Most people can be trusted</th>
<th>Most people cannot be trusted</th>
<th>Statistical significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sentences are too lenient (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=931</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>74.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\chi^2 = 2$, df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal justice system is effective in reducing crime (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=936</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\chi^2 = 2$, df, p&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime nationally has risen (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=940</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>68.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\chi^2 = 2$, df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentencers are out of touch (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=916</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\chi^2 = 2$, df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders can be helped to change (6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=926</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\chi^2 = 2$, df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders should be treated harshly (7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=908</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\chi^2 = 2$, df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison should be used as a last resort (8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=919</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\chi^2 = 2$, df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people commit several crimes (9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=921</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\chi^2 = 2$, df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour of young people is worse (10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=922</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\chi^2 = 2$, df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people are responsible for most of the crime (11)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=923</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\chi^2 = 2$, df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude statement</td>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Satisfied with financial situation</td>
<td>Not satisfied with financial situation</td>
<td>Statistical significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences are too lenient (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=913</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>$\chi^2=19.322$, 2df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal justice system is effective in reducing crime (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=921</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>$\chi^2=12.443$, 2df, p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime nationally has risen (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=922</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>60.6</td>
<td>$\chi^2=7.378$, 2df, p&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentencers are out of touch (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=901</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>71.9</td>
<td>$\chi^2=9.154$, 2df, p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders should be treated harshly (7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=892</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>$\chi^2=24.708$, 2df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison should be used as a last resort (8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=902</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>$\chi^2=45.651$, 2df, p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour of young people is worse (10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=904</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>$\chi^2=11.557$, 2df, p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people are responsible for most of the crime (11)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=905</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>$\chi^2=9.612$, 2df, p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Should those who offend have rights?

This week I want to return to a comment made by Susan Brown, the Oxford City Council executive member for crime and community safety.

In The Oxford Times of October 29, 2004, she was quoted as saying that “in our legal system there has been too much leniency given to the defendant and not enough understanding of the problems of the victim”. This is the favoured mood of the Government as well.

In its 2002 White Paper Justice for All it declared: “The criminal justice system needs to be rebalanced in favour of the victim and the community so as to reduce crime and bring more offenders to justice.”

Thus, whereas the Human Rights Act of 1998 can be seen as placing additional burdens on the state to ensure fair court proceedings, other legislation has eroded defendants’ rights over a number of years.

For example, in 1994 the right to silence was removed, and in December 2004 previous convictions and other past conduct became admissible evidence in criminal trials.

Should offenders have rights?

Clearly, people only deserve the label ‘offender’ once they have been convicted by the courts.

Before that stage every person accused of a crime has to be presumed innocent — even if he or she has been convicted of offences before — something politicians and the media are apt to forget.

To avoid miscarriages of justice, the system (usually) insists that proof of guilt must be established beyond reasonable doubt.

It also insists that accused persons be given rights to defend themselves against the might of the state’s power as expressed through the police, prosecution, and the processes of the criminal justice system.

These are every citizen’s rights — your rights, my rights.

And they are needed to protect all of us from the abuse of police powers, false accusations, malicious prosecutions and even wrongful convictions.

Yet it is often only when someone has had the experience of being caught up in the criminal justice process that they appreciate the need for such rights.

Perhaps it is fortunate that so many of us will have that experience at some point in our lives.

It may be pertinent here to repeat the oft-cited statistic that a third of men will be convicted of a non-motoring offence by the time they are 46.

There have been a number of high-profile miscarriages of justice in recent years.

Two women — Sally Clarke and Angela Canning — had their convictions for killing their babies overturned after spending considerable time in prison.

Another infamous case was that of the Birmingham Six, who were released in 1990 after spending 16 years in prison for murder.

And these are just a few examples of miscarriages of justice.

We should regard the erosion of the rights of those accused of crimes to require compelling justification, given that the social and legal consequences of wrongful convictions can be so dire.

The erosion of civil liberties is not a particularly good way of reducing crime, or increasing the number of offenders brought to justice.

Those who are convicted and sentenced by a court are the tip of a very large iceberg of unreported and undetected crime — for example only half of robberies and less than 20 out of 100 rapes are reported to the police, and an estimated eight out of 100 rapes and four out of 100 burglaries recorded by the police end in a caution or conviction for those offences.

Overall, it has been estimated that only three out of 100 crimes committed against households result in a conviction.

One question thus worth asking is whether crime might be more effectively tackled by the police if more of it was brought to their attention.

Civil liberties safeguard only situations where a citizen has been formally accused of misbehaviour.

Take for example the contentious issue of ‘stop and search’. Since 1984 the police power to stop and search has been increased repeatedly through legislation, and in some situations the police can now stop and search even though they have no reason to suspect the person stopped of having committed a crime.

As with miscarriages of justice, the practice of stop-search undermines the claim that the innocent have nothing to fear from extensions of police powers.

Of those stopped and searched in the Thames Valley in 2003-2004 only a small proportion (about 12 per cent) were subsequently arrested, and still fewer were actually convicted.

Research has shown that those who feel unfairly harassed by stop-search practices tend to lose confidence in the police and become reluctant to report crime or to act as witnesses.

Ironically, measures designed to reduce crime and bring more offenders to justice may have quite the opposite effect.

It is understandable that anxieties about crime bring forth calls for changes in laws and even restrictions to longstanding civil liberties.

The important question remains, however, whether the real, rather than the claimed, benefits of such creations outweigh the problems and intrusions caused.
Should we be afraid of being attacked by strangers?

Appendix 10: Profile of Oxford residents taking part in the survey

The original sample selected through the electoral roll displayed a very similar gender composition to the one established by the Census 2001 for Oxford: 47 per cent of the sample were male, 51 per cent female\(^{150}\) – (Census 2001: 49% male, 51% female). The response rate for the Oxford Public Opinion survey however, varied by gender, and was higher for females (35%) than for males (27%). As a result 59 per cent of the pre-survey respondents were female and 41 per cent were male.\(^{151}\)

The Census 2001 found that the vast majority of Oxford’s residents are white, and that minority ethnic people make up only 13 per cent of Oxford’s population. This was also true for the sample selected from four of the Oxford wards, where 12 per cent of the population in the four wards selected were from an ethnic minority (National Statistics, www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk). Thus, minority ethnic residents of Oxford are under-represented in the survey sample, in which less than six per cent of respondents were from an ethnic minority.

In terms of the sample’s age composition, there was an over-representation of the older age groups, see Table 1 below. Thus, the sample is skewed towards the older generation and in that respect not representative of Oxford’s population.

**Table 1: Composition of OPOS sample by age**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age band</th>
<th>OPOS survey (%)</th>
<th>Census 2001 data (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16-19</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-59</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-74</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 and over</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Oxford is not typical of an average British town, maybe most prominently - because of its status as a University town - in respect to the educational profile of its residents. Less than a quarter of the adult British population have no educational qualifications, and the

\(^{150}\) In 2% of cases gender identification by title was missing.

\(^{151}\) In 5 cases gender was missing, however, respondents were identified as female or male according to the survey’s addressee and their title in the electoral roll.
proportion holding a degree stands at 16 per cent (Curtice & Seyd, 2003, 93). However, in Oxford, according to the 2001 Census, only 19 per cent of adults aged between 16 and 74 had no educational qualifications, and those holding a University degree made up 37 per cent of the population.

However, this picture of educational ‘affluence’ is not consistent across town, the proportion of people without qualifications varies considerably by ward. Some of Oxford’s wards have very high proportions of residents without any educational qualifications, e.g. Blackbird Leys with 40 per cent of residents and Rose Hill and Iffley with slightly more than 30 per cent in that category (Oxford Community Partnership, 2005, 11).

The Oxford residents who chose to respond to the survey were even more educated than the breakdown of Oxford’s general population would have suggested: 54 per cent of respondents identified themselves as having a University degree, while only 13 per cent of respondents stated that they had no educational qualifications.

Half of survey respondents were either in full-time employment (38%) or self-employed (12%) and 27 per cent were not working but not seeking work, most of them having retired. Sixty-two per cent of respondents were home-owners, owning their property outright (35%) or with a mortgage (27%) which is less than the national average in 2003/04 when nationally 70 per cent of dwellings were owner occupied, but higher than the Oxford average of 55 per cent.\(^{152}\)

In 2002, nationally residents identified with political parties in the following way: Conservative - 25 per cent, Labour - 41 per cent, Liberal Democrat - 11 per cent, other - four per cent, no party affiliation - 13 per cent (Curtice & Fisher, 2003: 239). Data on party affiliation is not available for Oxford, however, the political make-up of Oxford’s residents can be deduced from the composition of its City Council. The City Council consists of 48 councillors, 20 of whom are members of the Labour party, 18 are members of the Liberal Democrats, seven are members of the Green party, and three are members of the Independent Working Class Association. Oxford’s residents have sent two politicians to represent them in Houses of Parliament, one of whom is a member of the Liberal Democrats and the other a Labour party member. The wards sampled for the survey elected the following City Council members by party affiliation

(Rose Hill and Iffley – Labour x 2; Headington – Liberal Democrat x 2; North – Liberal Democrat x 2; Hinksey Park – Labour x 2).\textsuperscript{153}

Respondents to the Oxford Public Opinion Survey were asked to state whether they considered themselves to be politically Conservative, Labour, etc.. Although this could be regarded as an intrusive question and one irrelevant in the context of a survey on crime, only three per cent of the sample refused (or forgot) to answer that question. \textsuperscript{0} shows the survey respondents’ political affiliation.

\textbf{Figure 1: Would you consider yourself to be politically…?}

It was recognised that the Oxford Public Opinion Survey sent out to pre-experiment respondents in July and August 2004 was not sufficiently thorough to assess respondents’ class status. The post-experiment survey therefore included an additional question to elicit rough information on the combined annual income for the survey respondent’s household. This information was only available on a third of the sample of respondents and combined with data on educational qualifications, working status, and occupation can only serve as a rough indicator of affluence or even class. Six per cent of the sample refused to answer this question and 15 per cent stated that their annual

\textsuperscript{153} \url{http://www.oxford.gov.uk/council/how-council-works.cfm}
combined household income was low (less than £10,000).\textsuperscript{154} Nearly half (45.7\%) of the sample indicated that their household income was average (£10,000 to £40,000)\textsuperscript{155} and a third (33.9\%) that their combined household income was high (£41,000 or more).

\textsuperscript{154} Low income has been defined where a household income is below 60\% of the median disposable income. In 2002/03 this was equivalent of an annual gross income of less than £10,088 (Source: National Statistics at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nugget.asp?ID=1005&Pos=1&ColRank=2&Rank=224.

\textsuperscript{155} The average annual gross household income 1999-2002 was £26,520 (National statistics webpage, Table 8.1 Household income, http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/ssdataset.asp?vlnk=7747).
Bibliography


