

KEY IDEA: THE POLICE CAN CONTROL CRIME



KEY WORK

Wilson, J. Q., & Kelling, G. L. (1982, March). The police and neighborhood safety: Broken windows. *Atlantic Monthly*, 29–38.

Broken windows theory has profoundly impacted the way that police and city-level political officials view crime and disorder and has fundamentally altered the role of the beat cop in modern cities. Broken windows theory and the policing strategy to which it gave rise have been incorporated into police agency mission statements from coast to coast. Proponents claim that broken windows has caused dramatic improvements in the quality of life in urban areas and has spurred unprecedented reductions in violent crime. Many academics in criminology and criminal justice, however, believe that the theory is fatally flawed and that its associated policing strategy does not reduce crime and can damage police–community relationships. This chapter examines the reasons why broken windows theory caught on, why its popularity continues, and the impact it has had on the way academics, the public, and the police themselves view the law enforcement function.

THE CONTEXT OF CRIMINOLOGY AND POLICING

By the mid-1970s, individual-level explanations for criminal offending had eclipsed macro-level, sociological theories in the public eye. Gone were the ideas that crime could be quelled by improving the lot of the most unfortunate echelons of society (see Chapter 4) or that rehabilitation could help offenders turn their lives around (see Chapter 6). Academics were divided as to the most plausible causes of and solutions to crime (Laub, 2003), but the public and policy makers were not: The latter groups adopted a conviction that crime was the product of personal choice and that the only way to deal with selfish, amoral criminals was to make sanctions harsh to either deter them from committing crime (see Chapter 2) or incapacitate them once they had proven themselves unworthy of living in society with good people (see Chapter 7).

There is a conflict, though, inherent in the belief that crime is the product of individual choice alone. That conflict springs from the fact that crime is concentrated in disadvantaged urban areas. The ecological patterning of crime makes it undeniable that there is something about certain environments that makes crime more or less likely to occur. Social disorganization theory (see Chapter 4) and rational choice theory (see Chapter 2) are not necessarily incompatible insofar as available choices and incentive structures are a function of the sociostructural conditions that characterize a person's environment and affect individual decision making (see generally Nagin, 2007). Even in the heyday of the get-tough movement, then, the ecology of crime could not be brushed aside as easily as some would have perhaps liked.

The institution of policing is, of course, an individual-level mechanism of crime control because an officer's job is not to figure out where crime comes from but, rather, to identify and apprehend those who do bad things. It might seem, then, that social disorganization, as a macro-level theory of crime, would have little or no bearing on police work. In the late 1970s, however, changes began to happen in policing that would soon bring this field to an intersection with social disorganization. Since the 1930s (Langworthy & Travis, 2003), policing had been dominated by an emphasis on the apprehension of serious criminal offenders. Various methods were employed to enable police to react quickly when crimes were reported and to identify and arrest the culprits (Kelling & Moore, 1988). The late 1970s saw this so-called "professional model" of policing gradually replaced by a more "community-based" or "order maintenance" model, which stressed the role of police as agents of *social* control, not just *crime* control (see Kelling & Moore, 1988; Walker, 1984). Social disorganization theory was back but, as will be seen, in a quite different form.

The changes in policing reflected a changing society that required police to reassess their approach (Kelling & Coles, 1996). The civil rights

movement, race riots, and the escalating Vietnam conflict inflamed the country's passions and caused intense violence and widespread fear in some cities. At the same time, the deinstitutionalization movement was spawned by the development of new, highly effective psychotropic medication and civil libertarians' push for less government control over individual liberty. State psychiatric hospitals gradually emptied their wards and closed their doors. Many of the former patients had nowhere to go and no way to care for themselves, and they were simply funneled—some of them in the throes of untreated psychological illnesses—onto the streets to begin lives of begging by day and sleeping in alleys by night. The sociopolitical unrest resulting from the public's disenchantment with current government policies and the increasing visibility of disheveled, ill, and sometimes pushy or even violent vagabonds generated mass unease. To many observers, this general malaise seemed symptomatic of a deep crumbling in society's ability to exercise control over its wayward members and to keep its more "conventional" citizens safe. The public's fear of crime hit record highs (Lewis & Salem, 1986).

Enter the criminologists at this point. Until the 1960s, criminologists did not concern themselves much with empirical testing. During this decade, though, theory testing took off (Laub, 2003). Criminologists were armed with brand-new statistical techniques and the computer software to use them. The public's fear of crime and rising discontent about the government's response to crime and criminality inspired criminologists to analyze policing's effect on crime. The results were almost unanimously depressing: Police, it seemed, had negligible power over crime rates. Focusing solely on serious crimes and responding to these crimes reactively by emphasizing rapid response to calls for service did not appear to exert a material impact on public safety (Sherman, 1997; see also Sherman & Weisburd, 1995).

BROKEN WINDOWS THEORY: REVAMPING THE POLICE ROLE

By the 1980s, social and economic conditions had degraded in inner-city communities ripped apart by drugs, guns, unemployment, and a general sense of hopelessness. City dwellers with the financial means to do so fled to the suburbs, leaving the poor, the unhoused, and the mentally ill in slums and other areas of economic woe (W. J. Wilson, 1987). Violent crime rates were at an all-time high and were still rising (Blumstein, 2000). All across the country, cries went out for better public safety.

Yet some began voicing the idea that crime itself was not the problem. While violence and the fear of violent victimization are central to Americans' fear of crime (Zimring & Hawkins, 1997), many scholars in the 1970s and 1980s pointed out that relatively few people in the United

States are ever victimized and fewer still are violently attacked. What people are exposed to on a regular basis, they argued, are obnoxious structural conditions. Researchers dubbed these irritants “incivilities” or “disorder” (Lewis & Salem, 1986) and proposed that vandalism, graffiti, prostitution, aggressive panhandling, and other socially undesirable conditions and behaviors were the true forces behind people’s fear of crime.

It was at this point that broken windows theory arrived. In 1983, James Q. Wilson (of *Thinking About Crime* fame; see Chapter 7) and George L. Kelling released an article entitled “Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety.” The authors’ central thesis was that disorder, if left unchecked, causes serious crime. Disorder encompasses many conditions and behaviors (see Skogan, 1990). Physical disorder includes litter in public areas, dilapidated or abandoned buildings, graffiti, vandalism, vacant lots, unkempt yards, and other physical conditions that contribute to a generally run-down atmosphere in a neighborhood or community. Social disorder involves activities such as panhandling, prostitution, sale and use of illegal drugs, public urination, and public drinking and intoxication. In its most basic definition, “disorder” is any condition or behavior that fails to conform to traditional standards of decency, cleanliness, and proper conduct (see also Duneier, 1999).

Disorder, so the theory goes, is a visible indicator that a community is out of control. The presence of disorder in an area signals to residents and to criminals that this community cannot regulate itself and that it cannot (or will not) control noxious sociostructural conditions. This perceived absence of control causes fear among residents of disorderly areas because they no longer believe the streets are safe. If nobody can stop gangs from tagging buildings or prostitutes from peddling their “wares” in broad daylight, then who can possibly keep innocent people from falling victim to violent predators? Fear, according to Wilson and Kelling, causes social withdrawal as citizens who once used public spaces for a variety of purposes now stay indoors. They do not socialize with their neighbors and they spend minimal time walking on public sidewalks, visiting public parks, or engaging in other activities outside their homes.

At the heart of broken windows theory is a self-fulfilling prophecy wherein what at the outset had been merely a *perceived* loss of social control becomes an *actual* loss because there are no longer law-abiding citizens monitoring public areas and discouraging criminal activities. Private citizens going about their business in urban centers serve a peace-keeping function by providing “eyes upon the street” (Jacobs, 1961, p. 45). Even though these people may have nothing in common with one another and may never have met before and will probably never meet again, the mere presence of large groups of people means that everyone has one or more guardians. Each and every person in that crowd possesses a pair of “eyes upon the street,” and criminals shy away from victimizing people upon whom several pairs of eyes are trained.

Broken windows theory concerns itself with what could happen when disorderly conditions drive these eyes indoors. Criminals supposedly take the desertion of public spaces to mean that their chances of apprehension are low. There may be no one to witness crimes and, if someone does see something happening, that bystander will be unlikely to intervene and might even be loathe to call the police. Criminals see these areas as perfect places to execute serious criminal activity like street robbery. Wilson and Kelling (1982) referred to the influx of motivated criminals into a disorderly area as a “criminal invasion” (p. 32). It is at this point that the broken windows process has actualized and there is a serious crime problem in a once-safe neighborhood or community.

Broken windows theory bears a strong resemblance to social disorganization theory (see Chapter 4) and can be seen as a modern offshoot of its predecessor. Social disorganization theory links crime to macro-level disadvantage; in particular, low socioeconomic status, ethnic or racial heterogeneity, and high rates of residential mobility are linked to crime via the debilitating impact these structural conditions have on community networks, schools, and other mechanisms and institutions of informal social control (see, e.g., Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Kornhauser, 1978; Lowenkamp, Cullen, & Pratt, 2003; Sampson & Groves, 1989). As Bursik (1988) described it, area levels of (dis)organization affect “the strength of the commitment of the residents to group standards” (p. 521). Where this commitment is strong, crime is kept in check; where it is deficient, crime spirals out of control.

Broken windows posits a process of community decline that is quite similar to that proposed by social disorganization theory, but the former breaks sharply from its parent theory by characterizing disorder as the true villain that sparks community downfall. Disorder, in the broken windows framework, is a manifestation of structural disadvantage; that is, things like graffiti, vandalism, and prostitution symbolize deep and powerful disruptions to the community fabric. Whereas social disorganization theory would seem to suggest that it is the underlying conditions causing disorder that need to be disrupted in order to help repair the community and bring crime down,¹ Wilson and Kelling (1982) argued that the exact same outcome could be achieved by taking the less labor-intensive route of snuffing out disorder. In this way, broken windows theory boils a macro-level process down to the micro level—by targeting *this* panhandler and *that* loiterer, the entire criminogenic “cloud” can supposedly be dispersed (Pratt & Gau, 2010).

So, who keeps disorder in check? According to Wilson and Kelling (1982), the police do. They wrote that, “Though citizens can do a great deal, the police are plainly the key to order-maintenance” (p. 36). This claim was a sharp departure from the conventional image of police as crime fighters who are far too busy collaring bad guys to bother with graffiti and panhandlers (but see Walker, 1984, who refutes this position); however, Wilson and Kelling argued that this departure was justified.

They took the view that residents of inner-city neighborhoods feared encountering unruly troublemakers just as much as they feared predatory street criminals because the existence of the former is an indication of the prevalence of the latter. Wilson and Kelling argued that police should act *proactively*, not reactively, and should stop crime before it starts by taking control of the streets and sending the message that deviant or threatening behavior of any variety will not be tolerated. Quashing the behavior of teenage hooligans, pushy panhandlers, and other miscreants would, the argument went, send the message to serious criminals that the police are in charge and that order reigns.

Wilson and Kelling contended that order maintenance policing would also jumpstart informal social control in areas where it had broken down. Once neighborhood residents saw the police enforcing codes of conduct and norms of order, they wrote, these private citizens would be emboldened and would embark on their own agenda of order restoration and maintenance. Wilson and Kelling believed that police intervention in disorder would churn the wheels of informal social control mechanisms so that eventually, once-downtrodden neighborhoods would regain the capacity to self-regulate.

HOW BROKEN WINDOWS THEORY REACHED ITS AUDIENCE

Broken windows theory quickly attached itself to the public's imagination for several reasons. Chief among these reasons was the form and outlet in which it originally appeared. The debut article was a small, unassuming piece in the popular magazine the *Atlantic Monthly*. This article had no statistics, no criminological jargon, and no talk of theories. It was even illustrated with little drawings of prostitutes and car vandals. Compared to the theory-laden, statistics-based format of standard criminological articles, Wilson and Kelling's piece looked almost absurdly simplistic.

The simplicity of its presentation turned out to be its greatest strength in gaining popular appeal. Police practitioners do not generally make a habit of combing criminological journals—they do, however, read mainstream magazines like the *Atlantic Monthly*. Academics have a poor track record of communicating effectively to policy makers and others outside scholarly circles (see Cullen, 2007). People not trained in theories of crime, not schooled in statistics, and not familiar with the principles of social science have a difficult, if not impossible, time comprehending most criminology and criminal justice research. Rarely do people in academic circles deliberately reach out to practitioners and try to speak in a language that makes sense to them the way Wilson and Kelling did.

Another reason why police administrators liked broken windows theory was that it conceptualized police as being central to crime prevention and reduction. There was mutual animosity between criminologists and

police at the time. Practitioners resented the ivory-tower academics for their snooty mantra about the ineffectiveness of police, and academics saw practitioners as knuckle-dragging dullards who could only understand simple concepts and tiny words. Not surprisingly, police do not like hearing about their ineffectiveness nearly as much as they like hearing what they *can* do. Wilson and Kelling were the first people from the academic sphere to publicly espouse the belief that the police are vital to community safety and can have a dramatic impact on crime. Disorder, according to Wilson and Kelling, was the main cause of serious crime, and police were the only ones who could do anything about disorder.

Broken windows theory was in many respects a reification of what many practitioners already believed: The legalistic style of policing was a fiction. Practitioners had for some time wanted policy makers and the public to adopt a more realistic picture of the police function. Wilson and Kelling offered a way to do this and, even better, a way to do it using a veneer of scientific validity because Wilson and Kelling were academics. James Q. Wilson had already achieved the status of expert in policing and crime policy due in large part to his famous books *Varieties of Police Behavior* (1968) and *Thinking About Crime* (1975; see also 1983; see Chapter 7 of this book).² Few in policy circles questioned his wisdom—if James Q. Wilson said that disorder causes crime, then there was probably something to it.

Police officials also delighted in the straightforwardness of the theory. Practitioners generally found macro-level theories of crime (e.g., social disorganization theory) that focused on criminogenic conditions to be useless because these theories had no direct implications for police policy. Broken windows offered police a refreshingly simple formula they could follow to reduce serious crime (Bratton, 1999): Keep disorder in check. This was something police felt they could do.

THE INFLUENCE OF BROKEN WINDOWS THEORY

Broken windows was a success because it hit multiple facets of public policy in ways that proved productively symbiotic. It provided a way for police to “do something” about disorder and crime, and it fueled the urban renewal movement spearheaded by business improvement districts. Each of these topics is treated in turn below.

Policing, Broken Windows Style

Broken windows theory pandered to popular sentiment about the conditions of urban areas in the 1980s and early 1990s. The theory’s statement regarding the deleterious effects of disorder on people’s quality of life was an echo of the opinion that was becoming more and more prevalent among

the citizenry (Duneier, 1999). The due process and civil rights revolution in the 1960s and early 1970s had left some fringe segments of the population with what many people believed were too many rights; specifically, at the same time that mentally ill persons were pouring into the streets from the closing psychiatric hospitals, laws and ordinances prohibiting panhandling, vagrancy, and loitering were being strongly limited and even struck down by the courts (e.g., *Papachristou v. City of Jacksonville*, 1972; for a modern example, see *City of Chicago v. Morales*, 1999; see also Kelling & Coles, 1996). The police felt helpless as the public became more and more insistent that something be done about the squalor and veritable anarchy that had come to characterize many urban areas.

Wilson and Kelling's thesis solved the dilemma by providing a scholarly basis that police could rely upon to justify widening the category of deviant behaviors that warranted official intervention. By positing a causal relationship between disorder and crime, broken windows theory legitimized an expansion of the police role from the narrow focus on serious crime to a broader, more comprehensive concern with general neighborhood conditions. Prior researchers had linked disorder to the fear of crime (see Perkins & Taylor, 1996), but police are supposed to concentrate on actual crime, not people's fear of it, so these earlier theories did not implicate the police in order maintenance. Broken windows theory went a step further than prior theories had when named crime as the ultimate outcome in the disorder-fear process (Taylor, 2001)—crime is the realm of police, so if disorder causes crime, then disorder is part of the police realm, too. Wilson and Kelling neatly brought disorder under the police umbrella and in so doing equipped police with a justification for interjecting when they saw disorderly behaviors.

Broken windows-style policing owes its popularity in large part to one person: William Bratton, formerly of the New York City Transit Authority (NYTA; 1993–1994) and the New York City Police Department (NYPD; 1994–1996). In these positions and later, as head of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), Bratton displayed antipathy toward criminology and criminologists. He painted himself as a sort of “rogue” who was going to prove everyone wrong and show once and for all that the police can reduce crime (Bratton, 1999; Bratton & Knobler, 1998). He gave broken windows theory trial runs first in the subways and then on the streets of New York City. During his tenure as NYTA chief, he made disorder reduction the primary task of the subway police. With George Kelling as a consultant, Bratton pinpointed what he thought were the most problematic types of disorder in the subway and then formulated plans to rid the system of these problems (see Kelling & Coles, 1996).

At about the same time that Bratton launched his broken windows campaign in the city, violent crime took a sharp downward turn. Bratton and Kelling were quick to credit broken windows policing for the crime drop (Bratton, 1999; Kelling, 2000; Kelling & Bratton, 1998). After all,

street crimes—robberies, muggings, murders—were precisely what broken windows policing was supposed to reduce. Bratton had radically altered the focus and function of the cops on the streets of New York and, as predicted, crime had fallen.

Convinced that what Bratton said must be true and taking the New York City example of broken windows in action as conclusive proof of the theory's validity, police officials across the nation scrambled to install their own broken windows efforts. Though broken windows had only been tried out in one city, two circumstances made the theory and policing strategy uniquely attractive to police officials. First, New York City was infamous for its seemingly intractable crime problems—anything that worked to reduce crime in that city must have potential. Second, the theory aligned very well with popular beliefs at the time—broken windows came along right as the public was clamoring for the police to do something about disorder. This second point segues into the next subsection.

The Economics of Order Maintenance: The Rise of the Business Improvement District

The police were not the only ones who seized upon broken windows theory; small businesses in the commercial centers of cities immediately recognized the theory's financial potential. Broken windows theory hit just at the time that business improvement districts (BIDs) were taking off and, not surprisingly, New York City was the first U.S. jurisdiction to embrace the idea. In 1982, the same year Wilson and Kelling's thesis appeared, the New York City Council adopted local laws making it easier for businesses to form BIDs (Ward, 2006) and in 1984, the first BID in New York City was formed in the Union Square Park commercial district.

BIDs are the product of decades of economic depression in inner-city areas. Booming industry and the rapid growth of cities in the mid- to late 1800s brought jobs and wealth to city dwellers (Frost, 1991). In the 1930s and 1940s, however, large and upper-scale businesses began drifting into the suburbs (Walsh, 2006), following the out-migration of the middle classes into these areas. Smaller businesses were left behind. These businesses floundered. Many of them went under because the residents with disposable incomes had moved away, and the people who remained did not have enough money to spend to keep the local economy moving.

Business improvement districts began as an effort by small, local businesses to stay afloat in inner-city commercial areas. BIDs are created when businesses in a downtown center or other commercial district voluntarily band together. The primary goal of BIDs is to attract business, and the most common strategy is neighborhood cleanup. BIDs set goals and standards in terms of expectations for each business owner and collective goals for the group. Members often pay extra property taxes to the

city in exchange for enhanced public services (e.g., sanitation, graffiti removal, police coverage). BIDs employ private security guards or contract with the city for enhanced police services in their districts so that laws against activities like public urination, aggressive panhandling, and loitering can be strictly enforced. BIDs are thus a nexus where public and private governance of public spaces come together (Justice & Goldsmith, 2006). There are currently over 400 BIDs in the United States (Levy, 2001), and 16 countries around the world have implemented BID or BID-like programs (Ward, 2006).

Proponents of BIDs applaud the public services they provide, such as the installation of more street lighting and the closing off of vacant lots. Fundamentally, though, the BID is a profit-generating entity, and the uplifting effects it has on its surrounding community are really nothing more than positive externalities (Levy, 2001). The “zero tolerance” attitude BIDs adopt toward disorder (Ward, 2006) and the fact that it is the middle class that BIDs try to lure in (Stokes, 2006) set the stage for potential authoritarian rule against lower-class city dwellers who do not conform to middle-class suburban shoppers’ standards of appearance or conduct (see Ward, 2006). Critics of BIDs have charged these agencies with the “Disneyfication” of inner-city areas that were once tolerant of diverse people, activities, and lifestyles but have been forcefully morphed into racially and financially homogenous areas that adhere to narrow norms of “acceptable” behavior (Reichl, 1999; Sites, 2003; see also Duneier, 1999).

Broken windows did not ignite the BID movement, but it greased the wheels and put nitrous in the engine. Broken windows theory armed BIDs with a defense against charges of discrimination and intolerance: Thanks to Wilson and Kelling (1982), BIDs could argue that disorder is not merely in the eye of the beholder, but rather, it actually causes crime and is therefore unquestionably a bad thing. Like the NYPD and other police agencies, business owners and local city councils were legitimized in their order maintenance efforts by this seemingly scholarly delineation of the causes of crime. BID proponents had long believed that disorder hindered business, but now they had what they considered solid evidence that disorder also causes crime. This gave them extra incentive to fight physical and social disorder and left them with an even stronger sense that what they were doing was right.

EMPIRICAL TESTS AND CRITIQUES OF BROKEN WINDOWS THEORY AND POLICING

Broken windows theory continues to be tested, and the results are calling its validity into question. Some studies (Skogan, 1990; Xu, Fiedler, & Flaming, 2005) have shown support for the theory, while others show

either minimal support or none at all (Armstrong & Katz, 2010; Gau & Pratt, 2008; Harcourt, 2001; Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999, 2004; Taylor, 2001; Worrall, 2006a). Disorder and crime are related, but the precise nature of the connection is unclear.

One potential explanation is that broken windows theory made the age-old mistake of confusing correlation with causation. Disorder and crime could be co-occurring problems in areas characterized by a general state of sociostructural malaise, and they may both be outcomes of underlying breakdowns in social ties and informal control (Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999). Both phenomena would, then, bloom simultaneously in certain neighborhoods, but only because they are both produced by the same underlying problem and not because one causes the other.

Another problem that researchers have uncovered is that the early scholars who assumed that disorder and crime were separate, distinct phenomena (e.g., Lewis & Salem, 1986; Wilson & Kelling, 1982) were quite possibly wrong; people may, in fact, not draw a clear mental distinction between these two categories of offenses (Armstrong & Katz, 2010; Gau & Pratt, 2008; Worrall, 2006a). In addition, there are striking differences between the actual prevalence of disorder and citizens' *perceptions* of prevalence (Piquero, 1999)—the level of racial heterogeneity and poverty a neighborhood experiences is a better predictor of people's perceptions of disorder than are the true area rates of disorder (Franzini, Caughy, Nettles, & O'Campo, 2008; Sampson & Raudenbush, 2004). These findings indicate that the logical foundations upon which broken windows theory rests are shaky at best.

Order maintenance policing, the policy arm of broken windows theory, has also met with lukewarm support in empirical tests. There are evaluations that indicate that disorder-based policing approaches can reduce crime (Braga et al., 1999; Corman & Mocan, 2005; Kelling & Sousa, 2001; Sampson & Cohen, 1988; Smith, 2001; Worrall, 2006b), but there are also many studies that find no such effect (Harcourt & Ludwig, 2006; Katz, Webb, & Schaefer, 2001; Novak, Hartman, Holsinger, & Turner, 1999; see also Eck & Maguire, 2000; Fagan & Davies, 2000; Greene, 1999). There is no conclusive empirical evidence supporting broken windows advocates' (e.g., DiIulio, 1995; Kelling, 2000) claims that the strategy was the driving force behind the precipitous New York City crime drop (Fagan, Zimring, & Kim, 1998; Harcourt & Ludwig, 2006; see also Blumstein & Rosenfeld, 1998; Blumstein & Wallman, 2000; Eck & Maguire, 2000; Heymann, 2000).

Broken windows theory and policing both suffer from definitional ambiguity. "Disorder" has never been empirically defined (Gau & Pratt, 2008; Kubrin, 2008) and, similarly, it is unclear just what "order maintenance" means in the context of policing. There is a general ambiguity about what types of conditions or behaviors pose threats to communities and should be the targets of police efforts (Manning, 2001; see also Roberts, 1999). Failing to explore the multiple layers and facets of disorder also poses the risk that police, BIDs, and other anti-disorder forces will

unwittingly invite unforeseen consequences. Breaking up groups of homeless persons, for instance, fits with an order maintenance agenda but puts these people at terrible risk of victimization because they banded together for safety and now must navigate the streets alone (Duneier, 1999). It is hard to implement and evaluate order maintenance policing if there is no solid definition of the concept.

Finally, broken windows–type policing has received criticism for being a threat to police–community relations, particularly in impoverished, high-crime areas where police–citizen relationships are already strained (see Brunson, 2007, 2010; Brunson & Miller, 2006). At the core of many departments’ order maintenance strategies is an emphasis on the use of stop-and-frisks to root out disorderly behavior. Anyone acting “suspiciously” is a target for police scrutiny. This version of order maintenance policing potentially threatens police legitimacy via the resentment it evokes from the people who are subject to police scrutiny and restrictions upon their movement and use of public space (Gau & Brunson, 2010; Solis, Portillos, & Brunson, 2009; Weitzer & Brunson, 2009). Order maintenance can impose a heavy cost on police and on society.

CONCLUSION

Broken windows theory (Wilson & Kelling, 1982) has had far-reaching effects in criminal justice and criminology and, particularly, on police policy. The notion that police could control crime by tackling physical and social disorder was a novel idea and one that caught on quickly, especially with the help of the New York City experience. It is, indeed, hard to find a contemporary police agency that does not practice (or at least claim to practice) some version of order maintenance. Academics, though, have been less enthusiastic about the theory than practitioners have been. The future of broken windows theory is uncertain. Empirical testing continues, and while it appears clear at this point that Wilson and Kelling’s original version of the theory has a lot of problems, it remains to be seen whether those problems can be addressed or whether the theory is irredeemable and must be scrapped. Hopefully, the upcoming years will find academics and police practitioners coming together so that policy and theory can be integrated to eventually produce a policing initiative that carries promise for improving communities and enhancing public safety.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explain the similarities and differences between social disorganization theory and broken windows theory. Which one seems like it holds better promise for reducing crime? Explain your answer.

2. What characteristics of Wilson and Kelling's (1982) original article helped broken windows theory reach a practitioner audience?
 3. How did broken windows theory fit in with the urban renewal movement promulgated by business improvement districts? Why did BID leaders like this theory?
 4. Explain the role of informal social control in broken windows theory and the way in which the theory argues for the use of formal social control to supplement informal control.
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NOTES

1. There is also much literature pertaining to the ways in which the criminogenic effects of structural deficiencies can be ameliorated by informal controls such as local friendship ties, shared expectations for control, community-based organizations, and a neighborhood's ability to secure external resources (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Carr, 2003; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997).

2. In the 1983 edition of *Thinking About Crime*, J. Q. Wilson reprinted the original broken windows article. Those who missed it in the *Atlantic Monthly* thus had an opportunity to catch a rerun in Wilson's book.