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Discipline-switching through a Bourdieusian lens: Examining the experiences of academics moving into criminology

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This paper examines a widespread yet little studied phenomenon in academia: discipline-switching. Given the sizable in-migration of academics into criminology from other disciplines, this paper examines the experiences of academics moving into criminology. It uses data from 40 interviews and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice to consider why academics move into criminology, and what their experiences of teaching and conducting research are. From a Bourdieusian perspective, we demonstrate that the movement and experience of discipline-switchers are shaped by the interaction between their habitus, the fields and sub-fields through which they move, and the capital valued. We also demonstrate that due to the rules of the academic game, discipline-switchers experience most difficulty post-move when teaching.

Keywords Pierre Bourdieu, theory of practice, criminologists, higher education, teaching, research

Introduction

'Discipline-switching'—the movement of academics from one academic discipline to another—is a widespread phenomenon in academia. All authors of this paper have moved

disciplines.[1] Our journeys can be summarized as moving from geography to criminology (Ian), from sociology to criminology (Nathan), from geography to criminology to sociology (Mary), from politics to conflict studies to geography (Daniel), and from psychology to education to criminology (Sophie). We are not alone; we have worked with, supervised and taught many academics and postgraduate students who have moved disciplines. Discipline-switching is particularly pronounced in criminology where many academics have arrived from other disciplines. It is known that criminology is home to many (former and even current) sociologists, but criminology is also, in our experience, a place where many scholars have come from a wide variety of disciplines in the social sciences, humanities, natural sciences and elsewhere.

Discipline-switching has received scant attention within academic research. This is peculiar given the prevalence of discipline-switching as well as other forms of academic boundary crossing that are written about or practiced, often under the name of interdisciplinarity (Callard and Fitzgerald 2015; Frodeman *et al.* 2017). Despite many academics and students crossing the boundaries into and out of criminology, there is little or no academic writing examining the specific experience of criminologists within this phenomenon.

Away from criminology, studies of discipline-switching have drawn on autoethnographic or survey data. Exemplifying the former, Wainwright *et al.* (2014) reflect on their own experiences at Brunel University when forced to relocate—first to education, then to social work—following the closure of the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences. Their article considers their 'negotiation of change' amid the wider repositioning of geography within the neoliberalizing higher education sector. As one of many academics moving from sociology to business schools, Parker (2015) considers the effect of this widely travelled route on sociological studies of work, employment and organization. James *et al.* (2018), meanwhile, conducted a survey of economic geographers who have moved to business and management schools in the UK. The authors highlight the considerable scale of this largely unidirectional migration and the push and pull factors behind it. They also voice concerns, arguing that this migration could result in economic geography research becoming less critical, that the sub-discipline will struggle to 'reproduce itself' within geography departments, and that the decreasing number of departmental 'clusters' of economic geographers will harm not only the development of ideas and theories but also the capturing of grants. In a much earlier study, van Houten *et al.* (1983) draw on a survey of physicists working in non-physics departments in Dutch universities. Reading their research four decades later, it provides evidence that discipline-switching is not a recent phenomenon—indeed, the authors state that a quarter of all university-based physicists in the Netherlands were not working in physics departments when they published their research in the early 1980s. They pointed also to a concentration of physicists in certain disciplines (e.g. medicine, electrical engineering) as well as a divergence in the disciplinary identity and motivations for moving among those switching discipline.

Returning to criminology, the aim of this paper is to examine the experiences of academics who have moved into criminology from other disciplines. Our focus is on three 'practices': the practice of moving to criminology, the practice of conducting research in criminology and the practice of teaching in criminology. To make sense of discipline-switching, we take a novel and illuminating approach, utilizing Bourdieu's theory of practice and three

[1] To avoid unnecessary confusion with the Bourdieusian concept of field, throughout this paper we avoid using the term field as it pertains to a field of study. We accept that discipline and field of study are related ideas, and some might not see certain fields of study as disciplines. However, to ensure clarity we call all subject areas in education a discipline.

interconnected concepts within this: field, capital and habitus. Bourdieu's ideas are used to analyse data collected from semi-structured interviews with 40 academics who have moved into or out of criminology. In the next section we outline Bourdieu's theory of practice and outline its relevance to discipline-switching. The section following this then outlines the power dynamics in what we term the 'fields' and 'sub-fields' through which discipline-switchers move, and the capital that is valued within these fields and sub-fields. We then examine the three practices mentioned above (moving to criminology, teaching in criminology and conducting research in criminology). In doing this, the paper demonstrates that the experience of moving discipline shapes, and is shaped by, the individual's habitus, the fields and sub-fields travelled through, and the valued capital. It also demonstrates that because of the rules of the academia game, our participants usually had most difficulty after entering criminology when teaching.

Field, capital and habitus

Interested in practice—that is, people's behaviour—the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu developed a *theory of practice*. Bourdieu reasoned that practice was primarily shaped by the interplay of field, capital and habitus, and when using these three concepts in tandem, scholars could avoid falling into an 'absurd opposition between individual and society' (Bourdieu 1990: 31). Here, we outline the development of these concepts by Bourdieu and Bourdieusian scholars, and we highlight their relevance to discipline-switching.

Bourdieu argued that to truly understand social phenomena and interactions between people, we must not focus solely on what they do and say, but also on the 'social spaces' in which interactions and phenomena occur (Bourdieu 2005). These social spaces, according to Bourdieu, are fields. He saw fields as 'arenas of conflict and struggle' (Swartz 1997: 291–292) in which actors compete for 'the preservation or improvement of their positions with respect to the defining capital of the field, and to other actors in the field' (Jenkins 2025: 86). As such, Bourdieu viewed the social world as being relational and antagonistic (Shammas and Sandberg 2016; Thomson 2014). He identified and studied a range of fields such as education (Bourdieu 1988), journalism (Bourdieu 1998) and art (Bourdieu 1996). Other scholars have drawn on Bourdieu's ideas to explore different fields, including criminological research on the street field (Shammas and Sandberg 2016) and the security field (Bowden 2021). Bourdieusian scholars often state that fields have sub-fields too (e.g. Shammas and Sandberg 2016; Thomson 2014). Following their lead, then, we situate our analysis of discipline-switching within the field of education and education's disciplinary sub-fields. We, therefore, view criminology as a Bourdieusian sub-field.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, fields—such as education—have their own internal logics and the actors within each field have a relatively coherent shared belief of what the 'stakes' in the field are (Ritzer and Stepnisky 2021). Likewise, sub-fields—such as criminology—and their wider fields—in this case, education—share many similarities but also some notable differences in their logics and values. Bourdieu's theory of practice views fields and sub-fields as semi-autonomous arenas, whose constitution is formed by internal and external forces. Fields and sub-fields have boundaries too. While Bourdieusian field studies say little about the location, policing and permeability of field boundaries, there has been recognition from some Bourdieusian scholars that field boundaries are often objects of struggles within fields (e.g. Swartz 1997). More attention has been paid to the relationship between fields. Here, Bourdieu-inspired studies have noted the presence of people and objects in multiple fields either at the same time

or sequentially. One such study is Shammas and Sandberg (2016), who usefully posit that those 'who pass through the field are affected by it. One undergoes a process of *personal transformation* by sheer dint of being embedded within the field' (*ibid*.: 196). Here, one can imagine the personal transformation of a discipline-switcher after moving disciplines. Continuing this focus on external relations, fields and sub-fields can exert some influence on other fields and sub-fields too. Shammas and Sandberg (2016, 196) summarize this idea effectively when they say: '[a] field possesses an immanent, internal logic, but its autonomy may be subverted as other fields attempt to modify the logic of the field and the direction it takes'.

A field is power-laden. It is 'profoundly *hierarchized*, with dominant agents and institutions having considerable power to determine what happens within it' (Thomson 2014: 71) as well as the field's access requirements. Positioned unequally, agents 'struggle over *positions and prizes* within fields, which is to say that they compete for scarce resources and the right to dominate the direction that the field takes' (Shammas and Sandberg 2016: 196). The entry of agents into the field and their positions in the field are influenced by their access to capital—capital being the things that are valued *within the field*. Bourdieu points to four distinctive forms of capital. The first three are *economic capital* (e.g. one's wealth, income, property), *cultural capital* (e.g. one's knowledge, taste, education) and *social capital* (e.g. one's networks, contacts, group membership). The fourth, *symbolic capital*, is deemed the most valuable, and it is the preferred combination of all the other forms of capital (Addison 2016). The shape and value of these forms of capital can vary—across time, place, fields and sub-fields—as can the preferred combination of capital. The power dynamics and the valued capital in the criminology sub-field and the education field will be outlined later.

Fields and capital are linked by Bourdieu to a third concept: habitus. Habitus refers to the ingrained and evolving thoughts and dispositions of agents. Habitus, as O'Byrne (2013: 209–210) notes, encompasses:

> *an individual's disposition towards the world, a kind of personal culture, a stock of sedimented knowledges, histories, experiences that we acquire over the years and carry with us, which makes us who we are. Our habitus influences how we see the world, our preferences and tastes. As we go through life, we acquire new habitus, but we never lose any of it.*

Habitus informs people as to 'what is possible, impossible, and probable […] in a stratified social order' (Swartz 1997: 107). Habitus is often aligned with the fields that agents are situated in and the capital valued in those fields. Habitus and field do not always align, however. Bourdieu and others have pointed towards moments when there is a disconnect between habitus and field. Bourdieu (1979) directs us towards large and fast structural changes in the field causing disconnections. Here people feel like they are out-of-time or lagging in the field (Friedman 2016). Using his transition from a working-class upbringing to a celebrated academic, Bourdieu (2008) also suggests that people's changing positions within and between fields can cause what he terms habitus clivé—summarized by others as 'a painfully fragmented self' (Friedman 2016: 132) or 'a split or divided sense of self identity' (Andrews *et al.* 2023: 291). Once more, the habitus is misaligned with the field. In habitus clivé, we see important parallels here in the experience of academics moving disciplines as their habitus may not align with the capital and rules of the game in the new discipline (sub-field). The habitus and its connection with capital and field, in short, helps us to make sense of discipline-switching.

Methodology

The data presented in this article come from a wider research project exploring the experiences and identities of academics moving into or out of criminology. The project involved interviewing 40 academics, who since the start of their PhD study or employment, moved into or out of criminology. We deployed a mixture of purposive and convenience sampling. We invited academics (including PhD students) to be interviewed who we were aware had moved disciplines. In addition, we sent out a request for interviewees via email lists, most notably through the Criminology JiscMail list. We targeted a diversity of academics in terms of career stage, discipline backgrounds, gender, age and ethnicity.

Most respondents were based at the time in the UK ($n = 35$), while some were based outside of the UK too ($n = 5$). Most interviewees had moved cities, and several had moved countries during their academic career. Moving, for many, was not simply a matter of moving discipline; it was often a combination of moving places and moving discipline. Geography, therefore, matters. Our data reflect the places that the discipline-switchers moved from, to and through. With most respondents based in the UK, we recognize that this shapes our data—not least because the rules of the game and values in UK criminology and education are, to some degree, context-specific. For instance, unlike some countries, UK higher education institutions do not use the tenure track system. Also UK higher education institutions are more accepting of academics moving into criminology from other disciplines than institutions in certain countries—for instance, Greece and Spain—where there are much more rigid employment criteria (e.g. a criminology qualification being required for many academic jobs in criminology).

The interviews were conducted online, via Microsoft Teams or Zoom, over a 15-month period from June 2022 to September 2023. The interviews were semi-structured. They began with general questions such as 'what is criminology to you?' before focusing on questions related to individual lived experiences such as 'has your academic identity changed?' or 'has moving disciplines changed your research?' The semi-structured approach enabled us to ask pre-determined questions on experiences of discipline-switching but also allowed participants to elaborate on issues that were important to them (Buys *et al.* 2022).

Ethical approval for this research project was granted by Northumbria University. All participants gave informed consent, and standard ethical practices—including (but not limited to) ensuring anonymity, confidentiality and the opportunity to withdraw—were embedded in the project. The interviews were transcribed automatically via Zoom/Teams and then edited for accuracy by the project team. Although our interview participants have been anonymized, we selectively and carefully identify the disciplines connected to some participants in this paper to enhance clarity for the reader. Two rounds of thematic analysis were conducted on the transcripts. The first involved inductively categorizing participant insights into themes and sub-themes, which allowed for an initial understanding of the data (Naeem *et al.* 2023). The second involved analysing the interview transcripts through a Bourdieusian lens—placing data into categories inspired by Bourdiesian ideas (e.g. different types of capital, habitus, the role of the individual/field and rules of the game). These two complimentary rounds of analysis provided a rich and theoretically informed insight into the participants' experiences.

Field, capital and discipline-switching

Discipline-switching involves, in Bourdieusian terminology, moving between different sub-fields while remaining within the broader field of education. As we outlined earlier,

fields and sub-fields have their own power dynamics, border requirements and valued capital. So how do these play out in criminology (the sub-field) and education (the field)? Beginning with power dynamics, Bourdieu (1988) famously described the education field as reproducing rather than reducing social inequalities. Entry into, as well as progression and recognition within education are unequally distributed across social groups; they are socially stratified by intersectional identity characteristics—for instance, class, gender, ethnicity and disability (Kraemer 2026). The sub-field of criminology reflects many of these social inequalities within education. In fact, participant #8 suggested that criminology has exclusionary and inclusionary elements:

> *I would be hesitant to say that criminology is more inclusive. I actually think it's very exclusionary in lots of different ways. But actually, [it has increasingly] more people […] who have criminal convictions, people who are working class, people who've experienced kind of crime and justice and disorder, and things like that. That sort of lived experience and knowledge, actually, is very empowering towards those people. I wouldn't say the discipline as a whole, but I think some elements actually allow people to have a voice and allow people to be part of something.*

Power within education is increasingly a neoliberal form of power. As well as the increasing role of the private sector within education, there has been a growth in market imitation in decisions about who gets what (Brown and Carasso 2013). In the UK, this has involved reducing the power of trade unions, endless league tables and key performance indicators, performance-related funding for research, the (re)positioning of students as consumers, and intensifying competition between scholars, disciplines and educational institutions (Naidoo and Williams 2015). In recent years, this has been compounded by austerity politics and the efficiency mantra that university staff must do more with less. The neoliberalization of universities is also behind the increasingly precarious working conditions and challenging workloads for university staff (Burton and Bowman 2022)—conditions that we argue later disproportionately affect those who move between disciplines. In this marketized environment, universities have sought to meet certain perceived consumer demands—the most pertinent here being large numbers of prospective students wanting to learn criminology. As such, universities have increasingly invested in criminology programmes, staff and resources (while disinvesting in many other disciplines, notably many other social science and humanities disciplines). The relative prominence and power of the criminology sub-field within the education field have grown significantly, especially in the UK (Harris *et al.* 2019). The growing prominence and power of criminology is tied to its growing autonomy—with many of our participants viewing it as an increasingly stand-alone discipline. That said, this understanding of criminology is not universally recognized, with several participants believing that the boundaries of criminology are too diffuse or contested for it to be understood as a coherently defined discipline (see also Garland 2008).

Within higher education, certain forms of capital are valued highly. A privileging of research over teaching is common in many UK universities and, as such, the most valued capital is usually research-based. Entry into, and progression within, criminology, as with other disciplines, is often dependent on academics' research. Within this, while the ability to be interdisciplinary in research is valued (Evis 2022), scholars often have the highest cultural and social capital if their research-focused capital is deemed to be valuable to the discipline they are in or are looking to enter. In terms of cultural capital, then, it is their possession of discipline-focused research knowledge (e.g. key authors, studies, concepts, journals, empirical issues). Likewise, academics' social capital is usually tied to their research rather

than their teaching: their research contacts and collaborators (e.g. on bids and research projects); invitations to and attendance of research-related events (e.g. keynote speeches at conferences); membership of research groups (e.g. research groups, editorial boards); and the journals they have appeared in. Cultural and social capital, according to the rules of the game, must be disciplinary relevant *and* research focused. Or, less preferably, their cultural or social capital should be rooted in disciplines that those in power in the sub-field see as being closely tied to criminology—sociology usually being the favoured external discipline. There is some valued cultural capital and (less so) social capital attached to teaching, but this is significantly outweighed by capital attached to research.

The most valued form of economic capital for academics is their perceived ability to successfully win external grant income. Academics in criminology and elsewhere are increasingly positioned as income generators. Those who do not generate income have little or no economic capital within criminology and other sub-fields. Typically, economic capital is based on the perceived ability to win external research funding. In addition, UK-based academics who have or are deemed able to produce three- or four-star publications in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) assessment system are framed as having valuable economic capital. This is because university research funding in the UK is tied to each university's performance in the REF. As symbolic capital in Bourdieusian scholarship is the most valuable, then income generating academics with discipline-focused research expertise have the highest symbolic capital. They are valued the most within the education field—arguably especially if they are white, middle/upper-class, able-bodied men (Bolton and Lewis 2024).

Practice one: Moving to criminology

In the previous section, we established that the education field has become increasingly neoliberalized, where competitiveness is a driving force, working conditions are too often worsening, workloads are rising, and criminology has become a prominent and powerful sub-field. We also reasoned that universities and criminology attribute the most value to income-generating academics with discipline-focused research expertise. With this context in mind, what are the experiences of academics moving into criminology? We begin with their move into criminology and the motivating factors behind it.

Given the historical proximity of criminology and sociology (Carrabine 2016; Dooley 2019), it is unsurprising that many of our participants previously studied and/or worked in sociology. In fact, some participants viewed themselves as still being sociologists while being in criminology—such as Participant #32, who stated: 'I sit in criminology, lead on [criminology] research for our department, and I don't identify as a criminologist. I identify as a sociologist.' Many other social science and humanities disciplines were highlighted as former 'homes' in the interviews, such as politics, geography, media studies, law and history. Forensic science and psychology were also common former disciplines. Some participants, since their PhD or first academic position, switched discipline more than once, and participants moved into criminology at different stages of their career, ranging from the start of their PhD studies to Professor (to use UK job titles). However, the most frequent career stage for the move into criminology was the taking up of a first permanent academic position. This often involved a quick movement to criminology—overnight sometimes—in contrast to some participants whose move into criminology was 'too incremental' (Participant #6) to pinpoint exactly.

Participants' understandings of the power relations, rules and valued capital within the field and sub-fields influenced the decisions to move to criminology. To demonstrate this, it is helpful to relate these to push and pull factors that influence discipline-switching (following James *et al.* 2018). In terms of push factors—that pushed our participants away from their former disciplines—the most significant factor for many was the lack of employment opportunities within their discipline. There is increasing disinvestment in certain disciplines (including the closure of full departments and degree programmes)—for instance, politics, human geography and, most pertinently here, sociology in the UK (The British Academy 2025). Many UK universities are currently facing severe financial difficulties, freezing/reducing staff recruitment, and running redundancy schemes meaning fewer jobs are advertised. There was a belief among many participants that in 'their' disciplines, competition for the few available positions was exceptionally high, contracts were likely to be fixed term or part-time, and a home relocation would usually be required to stay in their discipline. Participant #21, who moved from cultural studies to criminology, reasoned that:

> *I wouldn't have ended up in criminology if the academic job market wasn't what it was—in terms of, kind of, defunding of universities, defunding of the humanities. […] It's important structurally and I think that's increasingly […] the reason criminology is where it is, is because it's a bit of a refuge for people whose disciplines are no longer viable—because they're not receiving support, they don't get that kind of research funding and things.*

Another push factor is that some participants were dissatisfied with the structural dynamics within their former disciplines, which discouraged them from staying. Participant #1, for instance, stated that 'I'd grown quite bored with what I was doing in sociology', and that they struggled to 'fit in' to—and felt 'alienated' by—a sociology that was 'so painfully middle-class'. Participant #34—moving from public health to criminology—spoke of the rules and rewards in their former discipline: 'I started to become a little bit weary with that way of work and because it was all about, kind of, accolades and status'. These viewpoints of sociology being a middle-class discipline and the inflated significance of status indicators in public health resonates with Bourdieu's idea that the education field can be exclusionary, reproducing class inequalities. Other participants, meanwhile, reasoned that their move into criminology was influenced by the limited funding opportunities for their home discipline. This factor speaks to two recurring Bourdieusian themes: first, the declining status of certain disciplines in the education field and, second, the economic capital that can be attained by winning grants in the education field.

In terms of the pull factors that drew our participants towards criminology, the significant growth of criminology in recent years was an important theme. As participant #32 put it, 'criminology is a boom discipline'—and this is especially so in the UK (Levy 2017; Harris Jones and Squires 2019), where student numbers have expanded, criminology and policing degrees are increasingly offered, lucrative contracts for Police Constable Degree Apprenticeships are being secured by universities (Watkinson-Miley *et al.* 2022), and adverts for criminology academic staff and PhDs have appeared regularly. Given criminology's growth and increased status in the education field, it was seen by many participants as offering attainable positions that were, in many instances, permanent, full-time and/or closer to home. On moving from linguistics to criminology, participant #39 commented: 'it wasn't a discipline-based [decision] or anything'—instead 'it was about having job security and job stability'. Participant #19, who moved from gender studies to criminology, put it boldly:

> *Look, if you want to find a job quickly, then apply to criminology […] If you look at the job market, you never find lecturer or senior lecturer jobs in gender […] Finding a job in criminology wasn't that hard.*

Participant #19 also brought up the issue of time: it was *quicker* to get a job in criminology. This relative speed is likely very important to those who are unemployed or in fixed-term contracts—situations that create financial uncertainty—or those with caring responsibilities (often women), where waiting for a suitable position in their 'home' discipline is rarely viable. For many participants, the time factor of not wanting to be unemployed for long sat alongside—sometimes uncomfortably—the geographical and financial dilemma of whether to apply for or accept a job requiring a home move or a long commute. Women and working-class academics are, therefore, more likely to be compelled to switch disciplines. The disciplinary inequalities in the academic labour market, therefore, meant that jobs in criminology, in some cases, appeared more often and more locally. This was the case for participant #1, who moved from sociology to criminology:

> *Why did I move between disciplines into criminology? Primarily it was a job that was available in in my local area. Yeah, a job that I could commute to easily, and a job working on interesting projects. And I looked at other postdoc opportunities, and there weren't many that I could apply for. […] I saw this opportunity, and it was working on what I thought looked like really interesting projects. […] So, it was across two projects, and I thought I could really get my teeth into that […] And in criminology, at least, there's some quite interesting projects that you can work with.*

Participant #1 spoke of criminology being interesting. This motivating factor was echoed in other interviews. Participants also talked about criminology being *popular* (in terms of student numbers) or *highly valued* (its knowledge, qualifications and academics) within academia. Elsewhere, for participant #23, who had an academic background in politics and law, a key factor in applying for a job in criminology was having connections inside, and insight into, the department they subsequently joined:

> *I was trying everywhere in political science departments and politics and government departments […] when the opportunity to apply to a criminology post at [a UK university] came up. And one of my colleagues, somebody I write with, was already at [the university] and said, 'Oh yeah, they're very open-minded on disciplinary backgrounds. So, you can try that'. And I think very often it's having the personal connection actually; they can make the difference. It just means that you know what they're looking for.*

This reason clearly resonates with Bourdieu's notion of social capital where those with the best connections succeed. Knowing someone on the inside provides a better understanding of the rules of the game within the sub-field, and potentially a smoother transition when switching. There were other pull factors. The most notable were: (1) management realigning existing posts to be criminology-focused; (2) research and/or teaching within criminology appearing to fit with (some) research interests of potential applicants; (3) some themes, theories, publications and scholars associated with criminology being familiar to applicants; and (4) the seeming openness of criminology to people and ideas from outside criminology. Points 2 and 3 above suggest that some interdisciplinary applicants possess enough symbolic capital to be offered a job in criminology. Regarding point 4, this openness takes an explicit form through many job adverts stating that scholars from 'related' disciplines are welcome to apply. It has also tapped into the wider framing of criminology as inclusive,

having relaxed disciplinary boundaries, and being interdisciplinary (Garland 2012). In fact, the commonly-used description of criminology as a 'rendezvous subject'—a phrase often attributed to David Downes (e.g. Young 2003)—was quoted by several participants. Many participants, therefore, applied for criminology positions believing, or hoping, that there would be little hostility towards someone who 'wasn't a criminologist' and that the position would not involve them 'starting from scratch'.

Practice two: Doing research in criminology

We have established that academics' capital (social, cultural, economic and symbolic) is most often tied to their research. Sub-fields within the education field have similarities and differences in the rules of their research game and the value they attach to different forms of research. These similarities and differences shaped the research experience of participants. In this section, we will focus on three research issues that are regularly brought into focus within the process of switching disciplines: the use of ideas from the previous discipline, the selection of research topics, and the selection of journals to write for.

Many participants moving into criminology did not change their research area(s) significantly as their work already aligned with criminology (reflecting the interdisciplinary scope of criminology and the symbolic capital possessed by participants). However, some reasoned that the move did lead their research into new directions. For instance, participant #39, who moved from linguistics to criminology, stated: 'If I hadn't made a full disciplinary shift in terms of where I was housed, I don't think I would ever have started doing domestic violence research'. Their experience, therefore, was shaped by the prominence of domestic violence as a research and teaching issue within criminology as well as the esteem that domestic violence research is given within criminology. Participant #39, however, noted that linguistics remains central to their research: '[linguistics] is still pretty much what I do exclusively […] I'm just starting in that space and I'm comfortable there. It's my happy place—if you can describe working in crime as your happy place!' This participant, like others, felt a sense of belonging to their former discipline, and it was a bond that they did not want to break. Linguistics, therefore, continued being a prominent part of their habitus. Like participant #39, other participants continued to draw on their former disciplines after the move—for instance, by actively using their ideas, reading and citing their literature, using their methods, collaborating with scholars from that discipline, writing in their journals, and attending their conferences. Participant #9, for instance, talked of how their background in philosophy improves their ongoing work:

> *I get a lot of inspiration, conceptually and theoretically, from anything that has to do with the phenomenological school in philosophy. […] I often use at least one concept in my publications that is actually derived from a philosopher.*

Many participants saw value in what their former disciplines offered their current research, and they believed or hoped that those in power in their new sub-field (criminology) would value this too. Some participants also spoke of their own willingness and ability to fuse together ideas and practices from different disciplines, the warmth this receives in criminology, and how this type of interdisciplinary work can bring imaginative, creative and enlightening insights—participant #14, for instance, reasoned that 'going between disciplines helps in producing more innovative work'. Several participants reduced or halted engagements with their former discipline—for example, participant #3 never wanted to 'touch social policy with a bargepole ever again'. Some suggested that their engagement has

fluctuated or faded over time. Participant #25, who studied psychology at university, talked vividly of slowly becoming 'adrift' of psychology:

> *I've lost psychology over the years. I'm still a member of the BPS [British Psychology Society] and I still get their monthly journal, but I don't ever read it; I throw it away and I don't really know why I keep paying my annual fee, but there is something about not quite wanting to lose it entirely. But I don't feel part of the current debates in psychology. I don't know what's going on in psychology. I'm very much adrift from that now, and psychology is my home. I mean, sorry, criminology is my home.*

This quotation reminds us of Bourdieu's idea that the habitus is never fixed—it is a layered, path-dependent, evolving and often contradictory disposition shaped by the sub-fields and fields that it travels through. This participant's habitus, therefore, has mutated as the participant moved sub-fields, encouraging them to keep the membership but also throw away the monthly journal. Habitus—and its interplay with the field, sub-fields and capital—also informs decisions such as where to publish research. Here participant #25 continues:

> *[A]ctually I'd feel very uncomfortable publishing in psychology now […] I'd feel like my submission would maybe miss the mark a bit because you have to kind of be engaged in current debates […] I would feel more comfortable in the multidisciplinary-type—criminology and others—journals, I suppose. (Participant #25)*

Participant #25 raised the issue of comfort. It is an issue we discuss further in the next section as feelings of comfort and discomfort are central part of the habitus of many discipline-switchers—and this is particularly so when teaching. The connected issue, raised above, of which journals to target was also important to many participants—not least because many journals have explicit disciplinary identities—*The British Journal of Criminology* being a pertinent example. Since moving into criminology, several participants have started writing predominately for criminology journals. Participant #1 reasoned 'it's just where the works fit to be honest', while participant #2 said:

> *I was building a career in criminology, you know. I didn't see much benefit of going for geography journals or sociology journals in that regard. […] So yeah, if I wanted to be a success in criminology, it made sense to be going for criminology journals.*

Given the high value attached to appearing in disciplinary journals within sub-fields like criminology, it is not surprising, therefore, that scholars have sought to accumulate capital this way within their new sub-field. Participant #18, who moved from history to criminology, took a similar approach but also noted how they were not set on this approach in the longer term:

> *And now when I moved into criminology, I've made a conscious thing that I was going to be publishing in criminology journals […] Now I kind of think that I want to cultivate kind of an audience in both fields […] I'm always thinking about what's the stuff for historian readers and what's the stuff for criminology readers?*

Continuing to write for former disciplines, some participants reasoned, was a useful way of being seen as employable should they wish to return. In Bourdieusian terms, this constitutes maintaining or enhancing their capital within their former sub-field. Likewise, some participants stated that they waited, or are waiting, to publish in criminology journals—arguing that it takes time to learn the unwritten rules of the game; fearing what might happen if

they are exposed. As participant #2 said: 'if I start writing in that discipline, will I be roasted for not really understanding [it]?' Others were not planning on writing for criminology journals at all—for instance, participant #5, with a background in international relations and politics, stated they resisted institutional pressure to publish in criminology journals, reasoning it would take a 'tremendous investment in actually learning how to publish the criminological way' and that it would be better for them, and the university, if they 'continue doing what I think I'm good at'.

Practice three: Teaching in criminology

Teaching in criminology was challenging for many participants. For them, it was frequently the part of the job where their cultural capital, developed in their former discipline, was devalued and where several experienced heightened and sustained habitus clivé (whereby their habitus became disconnected from their new sub-field). This devaluation and disconnection can be largely explained by the rules of the game in the field and sub-field. Here, teaching has less valued capital than research within higher education. Teaching is also a part of many academic's jobs where training is often very limited, where teaching content (especially in criminology) is regularly discipline-specific, and where academics' *de facto* teaching workloads are often far higher than their *de jure* teaching workloads. These structural dynamics, therefore, make teaching particularly challenging for many discipline-switchers.

Nonetheless, some participants stated that, following the move into criminology, their teaching was relatively straightforward and that teaching criminology was rewarding. Several also reasoned their own presence, and the presence of other discipline-switchers, aided or improved the teaching of criminology in their institution. Participants pointed to skills or pedagogical ideas, developed in their former disciplines, that they drew or sought to draw on within their criminology teaching. Participant #12, for instance, stated that they utilized their statistical training in psychology to teach statistics to criminology students. Their knowledge of (teaching) statistics was transferrable and valued cultural capital, even if it had to be tailored to criminology after entry. For several participants, their disposition—shaped by their experience in their former discipline(s)—provided fresh insights into what was missing and needed in criminology teaching. One example is participant #6 who spoke of their politics background influencing their unsuccessful attempts to introduce a 'politics of criminology' undergraduate module:

> *I think politics is just a really important part of criminology. And we've been sort of advocating—to no effect—that we teach an introductory sort of politics of criminology module to our first year because I think the knowledge of how all that stuff works is really important […] It's partly because our [student] criminologists, some of them lack real political knowledge, and you need to know things like how bills are created and passed, and becomes law, and all this. And then, you need to know what the political parties think. You know, everything from human nature and how that relates to criminal behaviour and all that. So yeah, I do think it's really important, and that's all stayed with me, really.*

The belief in the importance of politics is part of participant #6's disposition that accompanied them to criminology. When people move fields and sub-fields they bring things with them, and this is the case with discipline-switchers: think of the ideas they bring or the digital or physical objects they bring too (e.g. textbooks, PowerPoint slides). These travelling accompaniments are sometimes valued, used and helpful after arriving, and sometimes not. A pertinent illustration of this 'moving-with'—to borrow a phrase used by cultural geographer Peter Adey (2010: 227)—is the setting up of an undergraduate fieldtrip to Amsterdam

by two authors of this paper (Ian and Mary) after moving from geography to criminology. Two related dispositions moved with Ian and Mary: (1) teaching outside of the classroom is valuable, and (2) places are best understood by being there. These are widely held beliefs in geography where fieldtrips are much-used pedagogical tools (Phillips and Johns 2012). Our dispositions were shaped in geography where, as staff and students, we participated in several fieldtrips, and we experienced habitus clivé when faced with a much greater focus on classroom-based teaching in criminology. The fieldtrip has run for many years, and we have regularly adapted the fieldtrip to work in criminology—for instance, engaging with criminological topics, ideas, literature and places. Travelling accompaniments—such as pedagogical tools—often change shape as they move, are used differently when arriving, and they do not always have a smooth landing. On the latter, we have encountered several difficulties with introducing the fieldtrip—for instance, at times it has been hard to find fellow criminologists with fieldtrip experience or willingness to teach on the fieldtrip, and the fieldtrip has received limited institutional funding (unlike many fieldtrips in the university's geography department). Nevertheless, this idea from elsewhere has, we believe, improved criminological education in our institution.

While several participants spoke of positive experiences when teaching criminology and their ability to draw on their travelling ideas and tools, many discussed negative experiences and significant challenges faced—especially in their first weeks, months and years after moving into criminology. Many participants emphasized the differences and difficulties in teaching in criminology compared to their former discipline in terms of content and delivery. Participant #8, for instance, spoke of the 'mental gymnastics you have to do to teach in another discipline'. Participants frequently linked the differences in teaching across disciplines to the issue of time:

> I had two weeks before teaching started to kind of get settled in and get all my training done, get materials together. And then I was straight in as a module leader for two [criminology] modules. So that was where it was 'this is real'. There's no kind of security blanket or safety net for this and, you know, and that's very much then the [question of] 'how do I do research methods for criminology students and undergraduate when I've previously taught it for postgraduate students [in another discipline]?' And when I was getting involved in doing some teaching for criminological theory, it's like, well, I knew all of my theory, and I knew the theory that I had to know to do what I did. Can I say that 'I've never heard of this person before?' […] It's like if I turn around and say, 'I have never heard of Lombroso', I am a fraud! (Participant #39).

> [On arrival] I found myself teaching areas that were completely new to me and had no depth of knowledge in them whatsoever, and I did feel uneasy that I was simply a page ahead of the students at times—teaching myself new theoretical approaches and becoming familiar with different key studies. […] I thought that was unfair to the students and I thought it was unfair to be expected to be in that position. (Participant #34)

Not only were the participants above less able to draw on their cultural capital, but it was also suddenly devalued after arriving in the new sub-field. They also spoke of the rapidness in which they were in the classroom teaching unfamiliar topics. They were not alone here; others also spoke of having limited preparation time, high workloads, little institutional support and unfamiliar teaching material. Participant #30 called it a 'steep learning curve', while participants #1 and #25 described it as being 'thrown in at the deep end'. Participants #21 and #25 described feeling like 'a fish out of water'—bringing to mind and inversing Bourdieu's metaphor of the fish in water: '[w]hen habitus encounters a social world of

which it is the product, it is like a "fish in water": it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world about itself for granted' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 127). Many participants, therefore, felt the weight of the water when teaching criminology, regularly encountered troubling emotions (nervousness, discomfort and feeling unconfident) and troubling identities (the outsider, the imposter and the fraud). One example is participant #25, who moved from psychology to criminology:

> *I was made to teach loads of criminology, which I didn't really expect, and it was quite daunting because I didn't feel like I was a criminologist and I didn't feel I had the kind of background in theory. But I obviously did it because that was what my job was. […] I think institutions tend to think 'it's not a big deal—like, oh, you deal in crime, your PhD's in crime, you can teach criminology'—and it actually felt like quite a big deal to me because in those early years I felt really nervous and lacking in kind of authenticity because I didn't feel like I was a criminologist yet. I was teaching on criminology programmes, modules—and students expect me to know the basics in theory, and I didn't know. And I had all this psychology knowledge, and I felt very comfortable with the psychology basics, but I was never asked to call on that. […] It is a big deal because it's about how authentic you feel, how confident you feel, and how much you're a kind of manager of your expertise and your toolkit and things like that.*

While many participants were attracted to the supposedly rendezvous subject of criminology, the narrowness of interdisciplinarity in criminology also affected the teaching experience for participant #25:

> *Criminologists […] say, 'oh, we're a magpie subject and we draw on lots of things'. But from what I've seen over the 15 years I've become a criminologist, I feel it's very, very sociological. […] It's not really the magpie subject, I think, in reality—certainly not in terms of teaching undergraduate stuff—that it kind of claims to be at conferences.'*

Feelings of being nervous, uncomfortable and lacking confidence when teaching criminology as well as concerns of being perceived as an outsider, imposter or fraud were commonly felt by many participants. Arguably, all academics can experience such feelings (see Addison *et al.* 2022 on imposter syndrome in higher education) but discipline-switchers are highly likely to—especially those based in institutions where workloads are high (especially for new starters), little workload time is given for teaching preparation, new starters are given scant time to 'bed in' before the start of teaching, and ill-suited or challenging modules are allocated to recently-arrived staff.

For many participants, teaching in a new discipline meant a complicated mix of catching up, hiding their lack of knowledge in front of a new audience, and trying to read their new audience's abilities, knowledge and interests. On the latter, some participants felt frustration with criminology students' knowledge of issues beyond crime and the students' willingness to engage with issues beyond crime. When discussing their difficult experiences of teaching on a criminology theory module in their first year of arrival, participant #1 connected their encounters with criminology students with the challenge of preparing teaching material when new to criminology:

> *It was a double whammy. So, it wasn't just that I'm relatively new at the discipline. It was also that the students just hate it [the theory module…] I had the feeling of being just deflated a lot of the time because the students weren't engaged, and so it was even harder work to try and get them to engage while I was also learning a lot of the material myself. […] I got a bit frustrated in one seminar—crim theory seminar—and […] I think I found myself just almost shouting 'this*

> *is all about politics!' […] There are lots of other things going on in the world and, you know, wakey, wakey, start paying attention. And I don't think they liked it.*

Several participants talked about needing to overwork to stay afloat; they had to engage in the hidden and largely unworkloaded labour of learning the basics (alongside everything else) to deliver adequate teaching and not be 'exposed' as an outsider, imposter, fraud, or, in Bourdieusian terms, someone unfamiliar with the rules of the game. While being overworked is common in academia, it seems particularly pronounced among discipline-switchers. If we take over-working to be a (problematic) coping strategy, other coping strategies were also highlighted. Outside of the classroom, coping strategies often revolved around trying to influence their teaching workload—for instance, avoiding certain modules (frequently criminology theory and criminal justice-focused modules where they lacked knowledge); teaching on methods modules (where, certainly in the social sciences, there are considerable overlaps in methods teaching across disciplines); and setting up option modules (where there seemed to be more flexibility in using ideas from outside criminology). In short, playing to their cultural capital. Inside the classroom, while some participants saw hiding their lack of criminological knowledge or disciplinary background in the classroom as a coping strategy, participant #30—who was not educated in criminology—saw value in being 'honest and open' to students about these issues:

> *It just took a bit of time, and I think [it helped] probably being really open and just owning all the mistakes that come with that. The students love […] that chat. So just owning the mistakes and […] just being humble about coming from a different discipline seems to have worked quite well. And just, you know, asking lots of questions, I guess.*

Importantly, many participants who had been in criminology longer suggested that the intensity and frequency of feeling uncomfortable or unconfident when teaching criminology—and feeling like an outsider, fraud or an imposter—reduced over time. Habitus clivé would lessen. For example, participant #38, who studied politics at university, stated:

> *I'm comfortable with what I'm teaching. I'm comfortable with making links across the discipline. You know, I've had enough exposure over the years to people's research and reading, and module content and all this kind of stuff where you go, 'oh, actually, you know this, like, this is fine' and so don't feel generally uncomfortable in it now. But it still took quite a few years to get to that point.*

Participant #6, who also has a politics background and has been in criminology for many years, made a similar point but qualified it by stating that learning the discipline is a never-ending process:

> *Particularly early on, you're just winging it, I think, a bit. You know, trying to stay one step ahead of the students. I don't think it ever entirely leaves you either. Yeah, I don't think so. Just in terms of these are rapidly changing fields and, you know, you might have a sort of reasonably decent grasp of traditional theories, but it's coming up left, right and centre. And criminology is quite multidisciplinary and, yeah, that side of it is hard.*

This quote brings this section to a close. It speaks to the complex and challenging experience of being an academic as well as to the Bourdieusian interplay at the centre of discipline-switching between one's habitus ('winging it' in a world you feel ill-equipped to

inhabit), one's capital (adapting and integrating new forms of capital as old forms lose value), and one's field and sub-fields (whose rules of the game you must learn).

Conclusion

This paper has examined a widespread yet little studied phenomenon in academia: discipline-switching. It has focused on one discipline—criminology—where there has been considerable in-migration of academics moving from other disciplines. It builds on a small number of studies on discipline-switching and is the first study to examine the movement of discipline-switchers into criminology. Our study has drawn on ideas developed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to comprehend the experience of academics moving into criminology. Here, it has utilized Bourdieu's well-known theory of practice with its useful focus on the interplay between habitus, capital and field. The paper has demonstrated that the experience of moving discipline shapes, and is shaped by, the individual's habitus, the fields (education) and sub-fields (criminology and other disciplines) through which they move, and the capital the field and sub-fields value. Bourdieu's idea of habitus clivé nicely captures the disjunction many incomers to criminology experience when their habitus conflicts with the rules of the game and valued capital in their new discipline. The paper has also demonstrated that habitus clivé was often pronounced during many of our participating discipline-switcher's criminology teaching. Having less capital attached to it than research, teaching is a domain where training is often very basic or non-existent, where teaching content is regularly discipline-specific, and where *de facto* workloads are high. It is the part of the job, for many, where it is often difficult to draw on capital accumulated in former disciplines and where discipline-switchers can encounter difficult emotions (nervousness, discomfort and being unconfident) and identities (the outsider, the imposter and the fraud). Teaching too often has the unwritten institutional message to staff of get on with it, quietly, and sort it out yourself. In highlighting this, we are not suggesting that universities should not hire people looking to switch discipline; instead, universities need to change the working conditions of people working for them.

After drawing on Bourdieu's ideas to study the movement of academics into criminology, we end this paper by suggesting two avenues for future research. As Bourdieu's ideas have been under-utilized within criminology, we want to reiterate earlier calls by others (e.g. Shammas and Sandberg 2016; Shammas 2018; Bowden 2021), for criminologists to spend more time reading, discussing and writing about work by Bourdieu and his followers. His ideas—not just his theory of practice—if used and adapted appropriately can help criminologists to better understand crime and the social world around it. Our second recommendation is for more research on discipline-switching. Our Bourdieusian study of academics moving into criminology should be complimented by future research engaging with different theoretical ideas as well as empirical work spanning multiple disciplines—from anthropology to zoology—to consider the similarities and differences in academics' experiences of discipline-switching across higher education in different parts of the world. We also recommend that scholars conduct comparative research into the experiences of both people moving disciplines and people moving into academia from professional practice. We also recommend that future studies consider the intersecting roles of class, disability, ethnicity, gender, race and sexuality within discipline-switching, as well as the ways in which identity shapes and is shaped by discipline-switching. Methodologically, projects looking at these and related issues connected to discipline-switching can draw on autoethnography, interviews and questionnaires—like previous studies of discipline-switching have done (van Houten *et al.* 1983; Wainwright *et al.* 2014; James *et al.* 2018)—but there is also value in engaging in mixed, mobile and/or creative methodologies too. Here, for instance,

participants could express their experiences and feelings through walking interviews, art, creative writing, music, needlework, photography or visual elicitation as these practices could bring out insights that traditional methodologies are less able to.

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