

# EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

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## PUBLIC CRIMINOLOGIES

### Editorial Introduction to “Public Criminologies”

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Criminologists are called on to be relevant to the “real world.” There is no other way to say it. Our students remind us of this, as do our noncriminologist friends as we engage them in casual conversation about our work. Just to say “criminology” to someone is to encounter the expectation that the science will have meaning for practice.

Relevance is a double-edged sword. Joan Petersilia (2008) set up a research office jointly housed in a university and a criminal justice agency, with the express intention that the research carried out by that office be more accessible to the agencies that housed it. At the other end of the spectrum was George L. Kirkham, a criminologist who later became a police officer. His book, *Signal Zero*, (1976) was more of a paean to policing than a serious study, trying to change student perceptions of cop work rather than of policing itself. These approaches are the polar opposite to “relevance,” but they share a common experience: Trying to bring criminology to the real world is not easy.

Paradoxically, although “relevance” is central to our work, it makes us, as a profession, uneasy. The highest award of the American Society of Criminology is set aside to recognize contributions to knowledge, not to practice. Tenure/promotion committees find it ever so much easier to evaluate a candidate’s impact on scholarship rather than on practice. And for every established scholar who advocates for a given new policy, it seems there is an equally established scholar who will argue against it.

Yet when all is said and done, the “call to relevance” for criminology is inescapable. How, then, are we to value the practical significance of criminological work? What weight should we give to the practical implications of knowledge in criminology? What are the costs of taking this orientation in our field?

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These questions come under consideration in the lead article by Christopher Uggen and Michelle Inderbitzin (2010, this issue), titled “Public criminologies,” and they are further explored in the series of policy essays.

*Public criminology* is a term used by Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010), rephrasing Michael Buroway, to refer to the call for criminologists to write and conduct studies in a way that engages the crime/justice consumer publics (both those who make crime policy and those who are affected by it) in the meaning of the work. This entails talking *to*, talking *with*, and talking *about* those publics in the production of criminological scholarship. Public criminologists situate their work in the so-called real world, and they orient their productivity to the way in which the “the real world” needs it in order to be able to use it.

Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010) open the article by describing how the taxonomy of sociological practice that Buroway (2005) laid out in his presidential address to the American Sociological Association applies well to the field of criminology. They then go on to describe how particular attributes of criminology—in particular the distinctly public nature of crime policy and those close links of criminology to practitioner applications—support the relevance of public criminology as an idea. They review citations of criminological scholars in the news media as but one of many indications that there is a public hunger for criminologists to help interpret the meaning of science about crime and to interpret crime and justice in the news. They show that the work of some of the founding scholars in our field was deeply connected to a public agenda and broadly consistent with the framework of public criminology. The concluding section of the article identifies some of the problems confronting both the practice of public criminology and the people who embrace that orientation to their work. Some of these problems originate because public criminologists generally do their work from a university or college base, where there is an uneven appreciation of the contribution arising from this work. Some of these problems come from the inherently contentious nature of policy making and community engagement.

Uggen and Inderbitzin’s (2010) article can be perceived as not so much a call for the practice of a “more” public criminology but as a call for a greater recognition of this kind of criminology as legitimate and important within the field. By pressing for a greater understanding of the place of public criminology in the array of orientations within the profession, Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010) hope that the value of public criminology can be enhanced.

Ian Loader and Richard Sparks, whose recent book, *Public Criminology?* (2010), is a detailed exploration of some of these same themes, are cautiously upbeat about the advent of public criminology. In their policy essay (2010, this issue) to Uggen and Inderbitzin, Loader and Sparks revisit the political and social contexts that make the practice of public criminology not only difficult but also important. They describe the invaluable resource a social scientist brings to crime and justice policy: honesty about the evidence and a more thorough understanding of the complexity of the problem. Surely, they point out, honesty and knowledge are essential elements for an improved public policy regarding crime.

Paul Rock (2010, this issue) and Michael Tonry (2010, this issue), writing separate policy essays, are two lauded criminologists who have done a great deal of their work in the public arena. They are less sanguine about the prospects of public criminology, although not necessarily opposed to it as a form of practice. Both bemoan the regrettable nature of contemporary crime policy for its many injustices and its often overwhelming foolishness. They attribute this in large part (with different examples) to the deeply intractable political forces that undergird the creation of crime and justice policy, and to the circumstantial ways in which policy changes occur. Rock adds his own concerns about the ways the criminological enterprise, when it engages the public agenda, are subject to being hijacked by the baser aspects of that agenda.

The two final essayists, Daniel Mears (2010, this issue) and Kenneth C. Land (2010, this issue), accept as largely self-evident the idea that public criminology is an orientation of value. They offer suggestions in support of the endeavor. Mears identifies ways that the most problematic collateral consequences of public criminology can be minimized. Land suggests potential strategies for institutional support for the practice of public criminology.

It would be a misleading reading of these essays as evidence that public criminology “is here to stay.” Clearly, it has always been with us. The question really is as follows: “What shall we make of public criminology?” This is true not just among us criminologists but also among the larger world in which our work occurs.

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# RESEARCH ARTICLE

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## PUBLIC CRIMINOLOGIES

### Public criminologies

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#### **Research Summary**

*Public scholarship aspires to bring social science home to the individuals, communities, and institutions that are its focus of study. In particular, it seeks to narrow the yawning gap between public perceptions and the best available scientific evidence on issues of public concern. Yet nowhere is the gap between perceptions and evidence greater than in the study of crime. Here, we outline the prospects for a public criminology, conducting and disseminating research on crime, law, and deviance in dialogue with affected communities. We present historical data on the media discussion of criminology and sociology, and we outline the distinctive features of criminology—interdisciplinarity, a subject matter that incites moral panics, and a practitioner base actively engaged in knowledge production—that push the boundaries of public scholarship.*

#### **Policy Implications**

*Discussions of public sociology have drawn a bright line separating policy work from professional, critical, and public scholarship. As the research and policy essays published in *Criminology & Public Policy* make clear, however, the best criminology often is conducted at the intersection of these domains. A vibrant public criminology will help to bring new voices to policy discussions while addressing common myths and misconceptions about crime.*

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## Keywords

*public scholarship, criminologists, policy, history*

The concept of “public sociology,” and public scholarship more generally, has energized and illuminated conversations about what it means to conduct social-science research and the meaning of that research to larger publics. Public scholarship aspires to produce and disseminate knowledge in closer contact with the individuals, communities, and institutions that are the focus of its study. In particular, it seeks to narrow the yawning gap between public perceptions and the best available scientific evidence on issues of public concern. From residents of dangerous neighborhoods to policy makers concerned about the increased costs of incarceration, our publics need high-quality information about the world around them. Nowhere is the gap between perception and evidence greater than in the study of crime and punishment.

Here, we consider the implications of public scholarship for the sociological study of crime, law, and deviance as we outline prospects for a public criminology. As criminology and criminal justice programs have grown and flourished as independent disciplines (Laub, 2005; Loader and Sparks, 2008; Savelsberg and Flood, 2004), so too have the publics with whom academic criminologists are speaking. This expansion brings renewed opportunities to cultivate new audiences and to find innovative ways to bring empirically sound research and comprehensible messages to those diverse publics.

## The Impulse for a Public Criminology

A sense of justice consciousness often draws scholars to the study of crime, law, and deviance. For some, this consciousness derives from personal encounters with crime and punishment (Irwin, 1970); experience as a client or practitioner in the justice system might spark a sense of outrage or a resolve to bring better data and theory to bear on its operation (Jacobson, 2005). However, in criminology, as in other social sciences, graduate training often seems “organized to winnow away at the moral commitments” that inspired the students’ interest in the first place (Burawoy, 2005a: 14). Knowledgeable and capable students emerge from graduate school with a professional skill set and an orientation equipping them to advance scientific knowledge about crime. Although this training provides much of the expertise needed for responsible public scholarship, it generally emphasizes research questions, methodologies, and scholarly products that might be far removed from the justice issues and public outreach mission that originally drew students to the field.

A public criminology could nurture the passion students bring to justice concerns while contributing to professional, critical, and policy criminology. We envision the following crucial tasks in this regard: (a) evaluating and reframing cultural images of the criminal, which is perhaps the clearest example of public criminology; (b) reconsidering rule making, which has deep roots in critical criminology; (c) evaluating social interventions, which derives from policy criminol-

ogy; and (d) assembling social facts and situating crime in disciplinary knowledge, which most clearly maps onto professional criminology. As consumers of media and concerned community members, criminologists often read the papers or hear the news with a world-weary resignation that other citizens and policy makers fail to grasp important points about, say, the age–crime curve or the costs of incarceration. A public criminology attacks such concerns head-on, aiming both to inform the debate and to shift its terms.

This article is in four parts. We begin with a discussion of the move toward “public sociologies” and critiques of the concept and its implementation. Next we consider the contours or shape of public criminologies by outlining a brief history of criminological work that employs similar conceptions, leading us to a discussion of ongoing efforts in public criminology today. Finally, we conclude by addressing the question of meaning for public criminologists inside and outside the classroom.

## **The Public Sociology Debates**

### *Public Sociology Defined*

It now has been more than 5 years since the annual meetings of the American Sociological Association were organized around the theme of public sociology (Burawoy, 2005a). Although criminologists such as Clifford R. Shaw, John Irwin, and Elliot Currie had advocated public scholarship for a long time, these meetings brought the concept and the debate to the forefront. For Michael Burawoy (2004: 5), the Association’s president that year, the kernel idea was to engage “publics beyond the academy in dialogue about matters of political and moral concern” and to promote “dialogue about issues that affect the fate of society, placing the values to which we adhere under a microscope” (Burawoy et al., 2004: 104). The debate over public sociology is built at least partially on the work of Herbert Gans (1989), another former American Sociological Association president; for Gans, the ideal model was one of the “public intellectual,” applying social scientific ideas and findings to broadly defined social issues and serving as a bridge between academics and the rest of the society.

Burawoy (2005a) offered a two-by-two table to distinguish public sociologies from other sociological work, which is reproduced here as Table 1. In contrast to public sociology, professional sociology and critical sociology primarily are written for academic audiences of professors and graduate students. In contrast to policy sociology, public sociology is “reflexive” rather than instrumental. That is, public sociology is engaged explicitly in dialogue with publics rather than being conducted on behalf of policy actors. Burawoy described a career trajectory in which a scholar might move from one cell to another throughout the course of his or her career. In one typical trajectory, a graduate student enters the field “infused with moral commitment, then suspends that commitment until tenure whereupon he might dabble in policy work and end his career with a public splash” (Burawoy, 2004: 8).

TABLE 1

**Michael Burawoy's (2005) Two-by-Two Table for Sociology**

|                        | Academic Audience      | Extra-Academic Audience |
|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Instrumental knowledge | Professional sociology | Policy sociology        |
| Reflexive knowledge    | Critical sociology     | Public sociology        |

*Attacks and Defenses*

Burawoy's (2004, 2005b, 2008) call quickly motivated symposia in journals such as *Social Forces*, *The British Journal of Sociology*, and *Theoretical Criminology* while inspiring attacks to "save" sociology from the forces of public scholarship (Deflem, 2006). These critiques generally concern the out-left political agenda of many public sociologists (Moody, 2005; Nielsen, 2004; see also Wilson, 1975), which is a perceived retreat from scientific standards and methods, and the perception that public sociology is ineffectual as organized and practiced (Brady, 2004). For all these reasons, critics fear that public sociology has the potential to undermine the hard-won legitimacy of the social sciences (Moody, 2005; Tittle, 2004). These critical voices rarely advocate a complete retreat from public activities but suggest that social scientists simultaneously wear two hats—one as citizens in participatory democracies and the other as professional social scientists.

With regard to public scholars' political agenda, Burawoy countered that "the 'pure science' position that research must be completely insulated from politics is untenable, since antipolitics is no less political than public engagement" (Burawoy, 2004: 3). Clear (2010: 717) made the point even more strongly, suggesting that "the absence of a scholarly voice on matters often results in bad policy, and those who (knowing better) remain silent must share some of the blame for that policy." In addressing concerns about scientific standards and methods, public scholars have countered that they advocate and conduct rigorous rather than sloppy research and that they have provided a valuable service in attempting to "explain phenomena that news stories can only describe" (Gans, 2002). Importantly, however, public scholars are *not* simply popularizers. As Gans (1989: 7) conceptualized the term, they are "empirical researchers, analysts, or theorists like the rest of us" but distinctive for their breadth of interests and strong communication skills. As for efficacy, public scholarship can aid in uncovering and publicizing harm or inequity without necessarily redressing it, and it might attempt to do so from a value-neutral perspective. The ambitious new call for a national Council of Social Science Advisors (Risman, 2009) reflects a desire to engage public policy issues from the very core of the field.

Public scholarship cuts across the research, teaching, and service roles of academic life. To provide only the barest outline, it means developing research questions in dialogue with affected communities as opposed to, say, "filling potholes" in the professional literature or answering questions defined solely by others (Becker, 2003). It embraces "big ideas" and "basic" research, "basic in the most profound meaning of the term because it tells us about the world of crime and justice in ways that enable us to imagine new and potent strategies for improving justice

and public safety” (Clear, 2010: 714). For teaching, students play a key role as public criminologists’ “first public” (Burawoy, 2004: 6; 2005c); strategies such as service-learning projects and relevant internships help to bring academics and students out of the classroom and into their communities (Aminzade, 2004). In service, public scholars might offer testimony as expert witnesses, conduct research with diverse community organizations, and disseminate their work in local, national, and international media. For its proponents, publicly engaged work thus is consistent with the traditional activities of academic life.

### **Prospects for a Public Criminology**

In describing its historical trajectory, Burawoy argued that U.S. sociology actually began as public scholarship, then became professionalized, and only then engendered critical and policy sociologies (Burawoy et al., 2004: 106). We argue that criminology is following a similar but distinctive progression. As criminal justice spending stretches far beyond the limits of state budgets, vocal public scholars are returning to criminology’s foundations by again emphasizing public outreach, policy engagement, and research that brings unrepresented voices to debates about crime and punishment.

And this trend is not limited to the United States. Paul Wiles advanced the similar argument that criminology in the United Kingdom has “lost the knack of engaging in public debate.” Wiles suggested that without reasoned debate “the press is always likely to slide into simplistic stereotypes and ignore what evidence we do possess” (Wiles, 2002: 248). As such, it becomes the responsibility of public criminologists to translate their findings and their science into terms that the public and the press can interpret and understand easily (Clear and Frost, 2008). In the United States, for a long time, Elliott Currie (1995: 15) has called for criminologists to shift their attention to the sort of agenda that Burawoy and Gans set for public scholarship.

If there’s one task that we as professional criminologists should set for ourselves in the new millennium, it’s to fight to insure that stupid and brutal policies that we know don’t work are—at the very least—challenged at every turn and every forum that’s available to us . . . To some extent, this will mean redefining what the criminologist’s job is. We will need, I think, to shift some emphasis away from the accumulation of research findings to better dissemination of what we already know, and to more skillful promotion of sensible policies based on that knowledge (Currie, 1999: 15).

### *The Distinctiveness of Public Criminology*

Because crime engenders specific fears as well as vague concerns, many publics think about crime and criminology differently than they do about other social phenomena. As Jacobson (2005: 21) argued, “Such visceral reactions on the part of the public and law makers alike set criminal justice apart from other areas of public policy.” Classic studies in the sociology of

deviance provide concepts and tools that help explain the gap between social science evidence on crime and public concerns.

First, crime often sparks “moral panics,” or periods of intense public fear in which concern about a condition dramatically outstrips its capacity to harm society (Cohen, 1972). Examples of such panics abound, but concern over predatory sex offenders, the proliferation of drugs such as methamphetamine, and the possibility of satanic day care centers (Bennett, DiIulio, and Walters, 1996; Glassner, 1999) offer recent examples.

Second, such fears are stoked by moral entrepreneurs (Becker, 1963) with vested interests in manipulating public opinion (Beckett, 1997). The print and broadcast media serve to transmit such messages while acting as powerful independent forces to shape public sentiment. As a consequence, people often have stronger opinions on crime and justice than on much of the subject matter of sociology, economics, and political science (Beckett and Sasson, 2003). Although they might be concerned about unemployment, sexism, or other social problems, these issues rarely incite the ardently contested moral panics that are routine in matters of crime and deviance. Jacobson (2005: 18) offered vivid examples of the impact of high-profile crimes and their link to punitive policies, referring to the abduction and murder of Polly Klaas, which spurred the passage of California’s “three strikes” law, and the murder of 7-year-old Megan Kanka by a twice-convicted child molester, which led to the federal Megan’s Law. Given this “emotional tone for public discourse about crime and punishment” (Garland, 2001: 10; Garland and Sparks 2000), legislators and politicians largely have replaced academics and researchers in influencing media reports and criminal justice policy (Jacobson, 2005). Public criminologists, armed with peer-reviewed evidence, clear points, and plain language, have an important role to play as experts in the realm of crime and justice, giving voice to the accumulated and emerging knowledge in the field. But they also bear an important responsibility to offer research-based contexts on the causes of crime and recommendations for “criminologically justifiable action” (Clear, 2010: 14) as experts, rather than their own knee-jerk political opinions as citizens.

Third, despite its nascent status as a discipline, criminology continues to be distinguished by its interdisciplinarity. Developmental psychologists (e.g., Terrie E. Moffitt), operations researchers (e.g., Alfred Blumstein), economists (e.g., Philip Cook), and sociologists (e.g., Robert J. Sampson) all contribute important professional knowledge to the field of criminology. This interdisciplinarity is both a strength and a weakness; although a wide range of perspectives are represented in the field, criminologists are often at odds, as they do not necessarily share a core theoretical tradition or a common conceptual language (Hagan and McCarthy, 2000; Savelsberg, Cleveland, and King, 2004). Here, too, public criminologists can provide an important service; by disseminating their ideas clearly in public forums, they educate colleagues and students as well as the larger public about their particular area of expertise. In this way, concepts and evidence from new research can cross disciplines more quickly, and professional criminology will gain strength.

Finally, criminology is unusual for its close connection to practitioner-based fields. Although sociology parted ways with social work a century ago (Finckenauer, 2005), academic criminology retains a strong practitioner base. Participants at the annual American Society of Criminology meetings routinely include judges, police officers, and state and national officials. These practitioners provide “reality checks” to combat the scholarly insulation characteristic of other social sciences (Gans, 1989). Moreover, it is not unusual for such practitioners—many with Ph.D.s in criminology and criminal justice—to collaborate closely with academics in research and data collection. In fact, several respected criminologists, including Jerome Miller, Barry Krisberg, and Jeffrey Butts, left positions in academia and practice to devote their full attention to research and improving justice policy. Others, such as Michael Jacobson, have gone the other direction, moving from leadership positions in criminal justice agencies into academia and back again, as head of the Vera Institute of Justice. This close connection to criminal justice makes some variants of public criminology more palatable for professional criminologists than public sociology might be for professional sociologists. Policy work, in particular, is professionally recognized in criminology and often is rewarded as relevant and appropriate.

Just as overlap occurs between public sociology and public criminology, overlap certainly occurs within the areas of professional, policy, critical, and public criminologies. As noted, many scholars will move between and within these four categories throughout their careers. In Table 2, we offer a glimpse into the goals, attractions, and potential pathologies of each variant and identify a few exemplars of each ideal type.

**Professional criminology.** Table 2 offers an annotated variant of Burawoy’s two-by-two table for criminology. The task of professional criminology is to assemble an evidentiary base and to situate crime in disciplinary knowledge. Just like professional sociology, professional criminology derives its legitimacy from its presumed application of scientific methods. Similarly, self-referentiality represents its greatest pathology. Lacking a strong disciplinary core, however, professional criminology sometimes is chided for its “collective amnesia” about its own past and ignorance of new breakthroughs in related disciplines (Laub and Sampson, 1991: 1345). Nevertheless, it builds on well-developed theoretical traditions and an increasingly solid base of empirical evidence.

Daniel S. Nagin’s development of mixture models for describing criminal careers offers an ideal typical example of professional criminology (Nagin, 2005). These methods have inspired a burgeoning literature that is changing the way criminologists view crime (see, e.g., Piquero, 2008), but their impact is largely occurring *within* quantitative criminology or developing in a “separate but equal” fashion that runs parallel to the development of latent mixture models in the social sciences more generally.

Crucial tasks at the nexus of public and professional sociology involve assembling social facts for broader dissemination and conducting research in partnership with a wide range of publics to inform disciplinary scholarship. The former requires the clearheaded reporting of professional knowledge, whereas the latter involves bringing new voices, issues, and concerns to the scientific study of crime and punishment.

**T A B L E 2**

**A Two-by-Two Table for Professional, Policy, Critical, and Public Criminologies**

|                     | <b>Academic Audience</b>  | <b>Extra-Academic Audience</b>   |
|---------------------|---|--|
| <b>Instrumental</b> | Professional criminology:<br>Assembling evidentiary base and situating crime in disciplinary knowledge      | Policy criminology:<br>Evaluating social interventions and making evidence-based recommendations |
| Knowledge           | Theoretical/empirical   | Concrete   |
| Legitimacy          | Scientific norms (methods)  | Effectiveness (specific)   |
| Accountability      | Interdisciplinary peers and Practitioners   | Clients/patrons (government, foundations, and practitioners)                                     |
| Pathology           | Self-referentiality and collective amnesia  | Servility (“contract work”)  |
| Politics            | Professional self-interest  | Policy intervention  |
| Attractions         | Careers   | Funding (and recognition)  |
| Outlets             | Journals and scholarly monographs   | Research reports (e.g., NIJ Research in Brief)   |
| Exemplars           | Daniel Nagin’s TRAJ models; Laub and Sampson (2003).  | Sherman et al., 2008 What Works? CSPV’s Blueprints for Violence Prevention                       |
| <b>Reflexive</b>    | Critical criminology: Raising questions about rule making, rule breaking, and rule enforcement              | Public criminology: Evaluating and reframing cultural images of crime, criminals, and justice    |
| Knowledge           | Foundational (crime and justice)  | Communicative  |
| Legitimacy          | Moral vision (of justice)   | Relevance  |
| Accountability      | Critical intellectuals (and convict intellectuals)  | Designated publics (citizens, victims, and practitioners)  |
| Pathology           | Dogmatism (and insularity)  | Potential for bias and faddishness (“airport criminologists and homogeneity)                     |
| Politics            | Internal debate   | Public dialogue  |
| Attractions         | Values  | Influence and attention  |
| Outlets             | Journals and monographs   | Mass media and trade press   |
| Exemplars           | Richard Quinney, Meda Chesney-Lind, Kathleen Daly, Jeffrey Reiman, William Chambliss, and Walter DeKeseredy | Todd Clear, Barry Glassner, James Q. Wilson, and Elliott Currie                                  |

*Policy criminology.* Policy criminology involves directly applying criminological theories and methods to efforts to prevent or control crime and delinquency. This entails evaluating social interventions and making evidence-based recommendations to funding agencies. For policy criminology to be most useful, “it needs to be accurate, not just used” (Sherman, 2005: 118). Lawrence Sherman (2005: 118) thus argued that social science is at its “practical best” when it is derived from experimental evidence that points to visibly demonstrable benefits.

Burawoy identified “servility” as the chief pathology of policy sociology, which is likely the case with policy criminology as well. For example, researchers seeking funding from the National Institute of Justice generally must submit proposals within a relatively narrow range of questions identified as important by the agency during the particular funding cycle. Perhaps the most ambitious examples of policy criminology concern the large-scale mobilization by Sherman and colleagues to catalog “what works” (Sherman et al., 1998), the ongoing efforts of the Campbell Collaboration (Farrington and Welsh, 2001) to evaluate experimental evidence

on crime and punishment, the *Blueprints* series by the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, and this peer-reviewed American Society of Criminology journal, *Criminology & Public Policy*. The latter journal now straddles the line between public criminology and policy criminology, publishing accessible cutting-edge research and inviting policy essays from prominent scholars (Clear and Frost, 2008). Along similar lines, a collection of peer-reviewed policy essays were published and disseminated at the 2009 American Society of Criminology meetings (Frost, Freilich and Clear, 2010).

**Critical criminology.** Critical criminology considers foundational questions about the meaning of crime and justice for an academic audience. In doing so, critical scholars emphasize how inequities of power shape the rule-making and enforcement processes that other criminologists might take for granted. For example, some critical criminologists render problematic the definition of crime as a violation of the criminal code, reconceptualizing it as social harm (see, e.g., Quinney, 1977). As with critical sociology, critical criminology is animated by a moral vision, challenging the taken-for-granted assumptions of academics and their publics. It examines the foundations of research programs and aims to make criminology aware of its own biases.

Some variants of critical criminology, however, have moved beyond academic audiences. Convict criminology, for example, is critical criminology written by and for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated persons. Among prisoners, for a long time, the critical press has been viewed as more trustworthy and authoritative about crime than mainstream media or scholarship. Although Burawoy identified dogmatism as the chief pathology of critical sociology, this viewpoint is less likely to be the case in criminology in which many schools of “left realist,” “new criminology,” and structural and instrumental Marxist variants are present. Yet none of these schools have garnered widespread favor within criminology. The following statement by Hayward and Young (2004) on the work of cultural criminology illustrates the point:

Whether we can achieve our goal of derailing contemporary criminology from the abstractions of administrative rationalization and statistical complexity remains to be seen. In the meantime, however, we will continue our work at the margins; for it is here, in these forgotten spaces that the story of crime so often unfolds (2004: 271).

In reconceptualizing notions of crime and justice, critical criminologists consciously distance themselves from mainstream criminology, which might engender insularity and a lively, albeit limited, internal debate.

**Public criminology.** Public criminology helps evaluate and reframe cultural images of crime, criminals, and justice by conducting research in dialogue with communities and in disseminating knowledge about crime and punishment. This work involves listening as well as speaking. For example, a public criminology research project might involve a partnership with a nonprofit or neighborhood group to address the urgent needs of its clients or members while building research capacity in the effected communities. But good public criminology also

advances professional knowledge, as previously unexamined research questions and perspectives are brought to light.

With regard to dissemination, public criminology moves beyond “administrative criminology” (Presdee, 2004) by attempting to give context and meaning to social facts. By virtue of their social networks and close interactions with journalists and policy actors, public criminologists also serve professional criminology. Although the media tend to consult practitioners—chiefs of police, corrections officials, and district attorneys—as the “*real experts*” on crime, public criminologists are often among the first academics to learn of developing stories that might not appear in the scholarly journals for years. They are thus in a position to bring up-to-the-minute information from the field directly to their professional work.

To the extent that public criminology is practiced today, one pathology is the lack of diversity among the voices represented as experts on crime. Feminist researchers and scholars of color, for example, rarely are consulted on general crime trends but instead are relegated to discussions of women and crime or racial minorities and crime.

The potential for bias, uninformed demagoguery and political partisanship represent important pathologies that public criminologists must address head-on. In a devastating 1975 critique, political scientist James Q. Wilson pointed to the dearth of useful criminological knowledge while chiding the pronouncements of left-leaning academic criminologists.

[W]hen social scientists were asked for advice by national policy-making bodies, they could not respond with suggestions derived from and supported by their scholarly work . . . as a consequence such advice as was supplied tended to derive from their general political views as modified by their political and organizational interaction with those policy groups and their staffs (Wilson, 1975: 49).

Although criminological knowledge has advanced greatly since *Thinking about Crime*, the potential for “media hacks” to distort this knowledge remains. Unless they can offer an informed and clear-eyed reading of their own work and the best available criminological knowledge, public criminologists can devolve quickly into “airport criminologists”—so distracted flying around the country as consultants and “experts” that they lose sight of the scientific research base that legitimizes their expertise.<sup>1</sup> Engaging broader publics requires a degree of trust, particularly when we must convey hard truths or confront findings that directly challenge our own preconceptions. Effective public criminology thus demands trust in the knowledge that we produce and absorb, trust in the media’s ability to convey it, and trust in the public’s capacity to grasp its nuances.

In short, a responsible public criminologist is necessarily a good social scientist, attentive to both the scholarly evidence on criminological questions and the broader concerns of affected publics. As Paul Wiles pointed out, “values affect how we go about the business of acquiring knowledge, but that does not mean that our knowledge claims can not be examined against a

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1. Although he did not endorse the term, Robert J. Sampson invoked “airport criminologist” during a presentation at the annual American Sociological Association meetings in Chicago, 2002.

social world whose externality to us gives an empirical force” (2002: 246). Although perhaps not always defined as such, criminology offers a rich history of public scholarship that lays the groundwork for today’s public criminology.

### **A Great History of Public Criminology**

Public criminology today builds on an important legacy of engaged scholarship. Clifford R. Shaw is perhaps the best exemplar of such work, as reflected in his long-standing attempts to better the circumstances of both individuals and communities (Shaw, 1966). As he formulated social disorganization theory and mapped patterns of ethnic succession in Chicago neighborhoods in the 1920s, Shaw met with communities hard hit by crime and delinquency to learn from residents and to share his findings (for accounts, see Krisberg, 2005; Lundman, 2001: 108). As an important and long-lived institutional response, he founded the Chicago Area Project in an attempt to empower neighborhoods and to help ameliorate the conditions that result in high rates of delinquency (Schlossman and Sedlak, 1983).

An impressive range of public criminology was practiced throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In the early 1960s, Lloyd Ohlin and other American criminologists actively were engaged in the Great Society project as advisors to John F. Kennedy and others (Short, 1975). Implementing and popularizing large-scale antidelinquency projects such as Mobilization for Youth, Ohlin was both a public and a policy criminologist (Krisberg, 2005). At the same time, Edwin Schur, Thomas Szasz, Edwin Lemert, and others writing from a labeling perspective adopted an unconventional sentimentality toward those marked as deviants, raised “big questions” about the foundations of the justice system, and offered the public a new context and perspective for thinking about deviant behavior and societal reactions. Howard Becker clarified these issues for a generation of public scholars when he titled his Society for the Study of Social Problems presidential address “Whose side are we on?” (Becker, 1967).

As noted, conservative political scientist James Q. Wilson worked from a much different set of assumptions and evidence. His deterrence-focused neoconservative vision of public criminology later was carried forward by his student John DiIulio (DiIulio, 1995). From the left, Elliott Currie has written numerous well-received works on crime for a lay audience, including *Confronting Crime* (1985) and *Crime and Punishment in America* (1998). Finally, renegade practitioners such as Jerome Miller, who famously closed juvenile reformatories while serving as corrections commissioner in Massachusetts (Miller, 1996; 1998), have emerged as widely read crime experts as have former chiefs of police, such as Tony Bouza in Minneapolis. These scholars and practitioners perform an important service when they offer alternative visions and concrete examples that challenge current thinking in crime, justice, and punishment. Their visible and authoritative public criminology, in turn, might provide the impetus for others to battle the “power of inertia” (Becker, 1995).

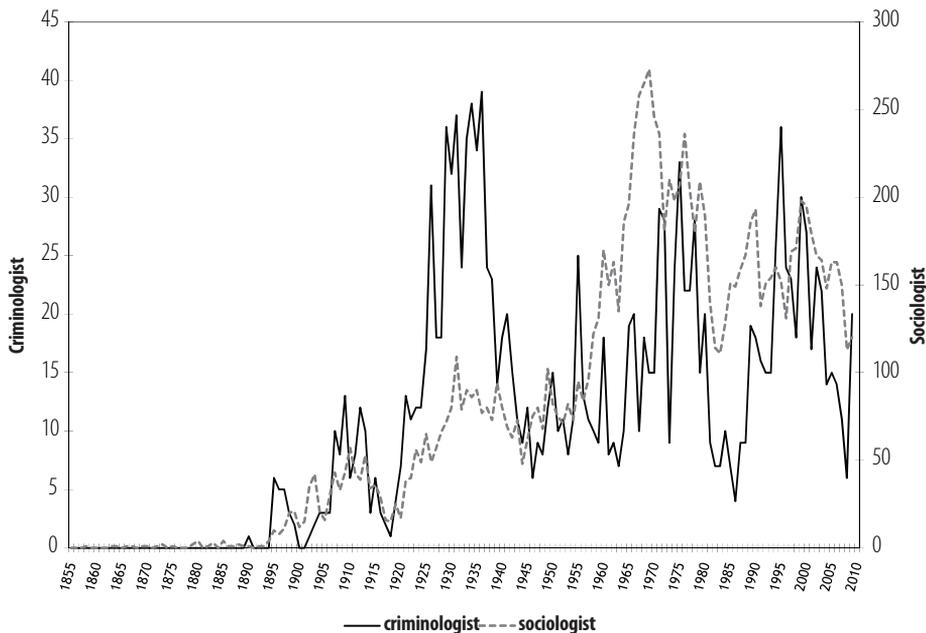
To highlight the importance of the media in defining the cultural image of the criminal (Hayward and Young, 2004) and to provide some sort of historical context for public criminology

in relation to public sociology, we gathered some data on media discussion of criminologists and sociologists. Figure 1 shows the number of *New York Times* articles that mentioned the terms “sociologist” and “criminologist” from 1851 to 2005. The first thing to note from the chart is that neither term appeared with regularity until the 1890s. Second, sociologists have made far more appearances than have criminologists for the past 100 years. The scale of the y-axis differs dramatically for the two groups.

The term criminologist was used most often in 1936 during the period of relatively high incarceration during the Great Depression. The stories that year ranged from debates on the use of parole to the opening of recreation centers to prevent delinquency to the execution of Bruno Hauptmann, who was convicted of murder in the famed Lindbergh kidnapping case. The use

**FIGURE 1**

***New York Times* Mentions Criminologists and Sociologists, 1855-2009**



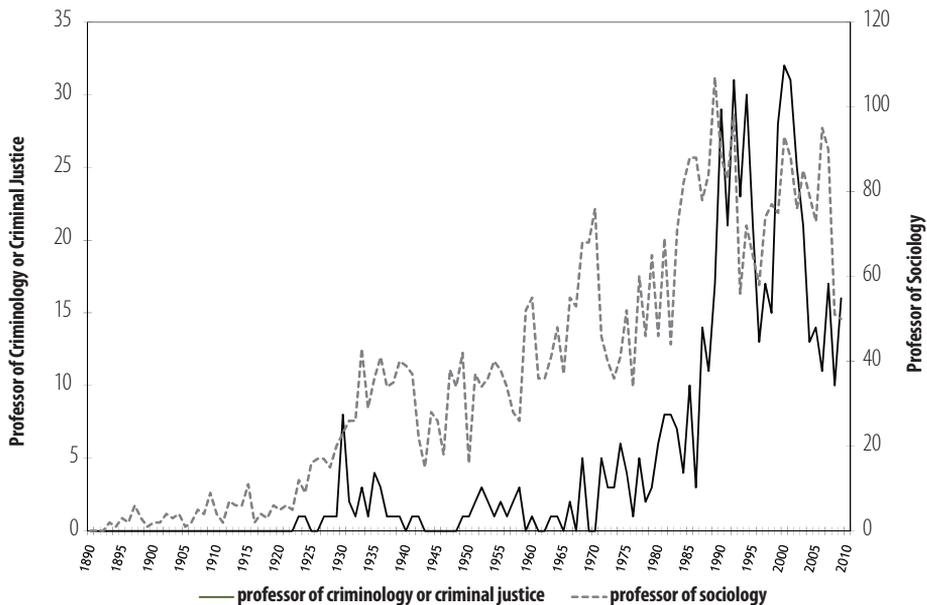
of “sociologist” peaked much later, in the late-1960s period in which American values were being questioned on issues of civil rights, women’s rights, and the Vietnam War. Herbert Gans wrote in 1989 that “the news media pay more attention to us than before,” although only 120 mentions were made in 2009, about the same number of mentions as in 1958. The trend for “criminologist” is erratic in more recent years, peaking during the intense debates surrounding the Clinton crime bill in 1995. We also plotted the mentions of “professor of criminology” or “professor of criminal justice” and “professor of sociology,” as shown in Figure 2. The former

search term is surely a low estimate of public statements by criminologists because many are identified as professors in other disciplines. Professors of criminology or criminal justice rarely were cited until the 1980s, and it is again important to note the dramatic differences in the scale of the data series. The sociology peak of 105 mentions occurred in 1989, whereas the criminology peak of 32 appeared in 2000.

A further illustration of the resonance of criminological work with broader publics is found in Herbert Gans' (1997) compilation of the best-selling sociology books through 1995. Many books at the top of the sociology list have strong currents that involve crime, punishment, and inequality. Books such as Liebow's (1967) *Tally's Corner*, Ryan's (1971) *Blaming the Victim*, and

**FIGURE 2**

**New York Times Mentions of Professors of Criminology and Criminal Justice and Professors of Sociology, 1893-2009**



Whyte's (1943) *Street Corner Society* all sold more than 200,000 copies. Becker's (1963) *Outsiders*, Erikson's (1966) *Wayward Puritans*, Sykes' (1958) *Society of Captives*, and MacLeod's *Ain't No Makin' It* each registered sales in excess of 75,000. Today, such a list likely would include books such as Venkatesh's (2008) *Gang Leader for a Day* and other popular titles.

### Public Criminology Today

From this long history of public criminology, several new strains have emerged. On the research side, we can look to examples such as Africana criminal justice (Ward and Marable, 2003), the Soros Open Society Institute's "new leadership program" for formerly incarcerated persons, the Sentencing Project's numerous reports and initiatives, and many other national and local developments. Public criminology research aims to have an "impact on public policy and the public mind" (Currie, 2007: 178) by building a solid criminological evidentiary base that can be applied to problems that hold public interest. A related goal, however, is to uncover and to build interest in social problems that might have escaped widespread public attention, such as the conditions in prisons or high-crime neighborhoods. Finally, a third goal is to engage seriously the broader impacts of such social problems as well as any proposed solutions, including their scientific, moral, and practical implications. In doing so, we might help "to create the vibrant kind of public research agenda that can sustain enlightened policy and potent innovation" (Clear, 2010: 716).

Good public criminologists are thus well positioned to add valuable information to the national conversation on crime and punishment and to help situate deviance in social life more generally. To do so, they need to invest time in translating their own research and effort in sharing their findings with the larger public (Clear and Frost, 2008; Currie, 2007). As others have noted, "having convincing research evidence and having it influence policy and practice are two very different matters" (Welsh and Farrington, 2005: 350). In fact, Sherman (2005) argued that the greatest disappointment across centuries of experimental criminology is that "most justice remains unencumbered by empirical evidence on its effects" (2005: 119). One task of public criminologists is to highlight and explain the most useful and relevant evidence for any given public. Public criminologists bear the responsibility to educate themselves and their publics on new research and its potential implications. As Clear (2010) suggested:

[I]n an arena where a lot of work (of varying quality) purports to be "evidence" will we have a voice in deciding what research is most important and which studies are most instructive about policy? Will we take responsibility for discussing not only what we know but also how a policy agenda might flow from it? If we do not, then the significance of our work surely will be attenuated by the vicissitudes of the policy process because policy makers will be left to decide for themselves what research matters and why (2010: 720).

By bringing high-quality evidence to bear on hotly contested questions, public criminologists might play a key role in promoting sound policy and averting moral panics precipitated by extreme but rare cases. Such work requires aligning high-quality research with fortuitous timing; as Tonry (2006) suggested, "the receptivity of policy makers to new knowledge depends mightily on the existence of 'windows of opportunity' through which knowledge can pass to receptive recipients" (2006: 54). We also recognize that making such connections is difficult, as public criminologists are increasingly likely to fill a particular niche rather than to possess

the range to speak more broadly as public intellectuals. Although the field of criminology has grown tremendously, scholars' expertise generally has narrowed (Currie, 2007). As Wiles (2002) suggested, today the criminological research community is larger than what existed in the past, but such specialization has made it "more difficult to engage in policy debates unless they are on a narrow and particular point" (pp. 247–248). Along with their own research specialties, the most successful public criminologists necessarily will be generalists, widely educated, and able to speak broadly on issues of crime and justice. They will have to work to stay apprised of the latest research to be accepted as reliable experts or analysts.

Because it tends to reify abstract and artificial boundaries, the two-by-two table presented in Table 1 is a poor reflection of the actual activities of criminologists (see Ericson, 2005, for a similar argument about public sociology). Figure 3 represents public criminology, policy criminology, professional criminology, and critical criminology as interconnected Venn diagrams, with the first panel assigning equal weight to each quadrant and the second emphasizing professional and public work more explicitly. In truth, many criminologists work with a hand or a foot in all four cells, whereas others would self-identify as pure professional criminologists or policy criminologists.

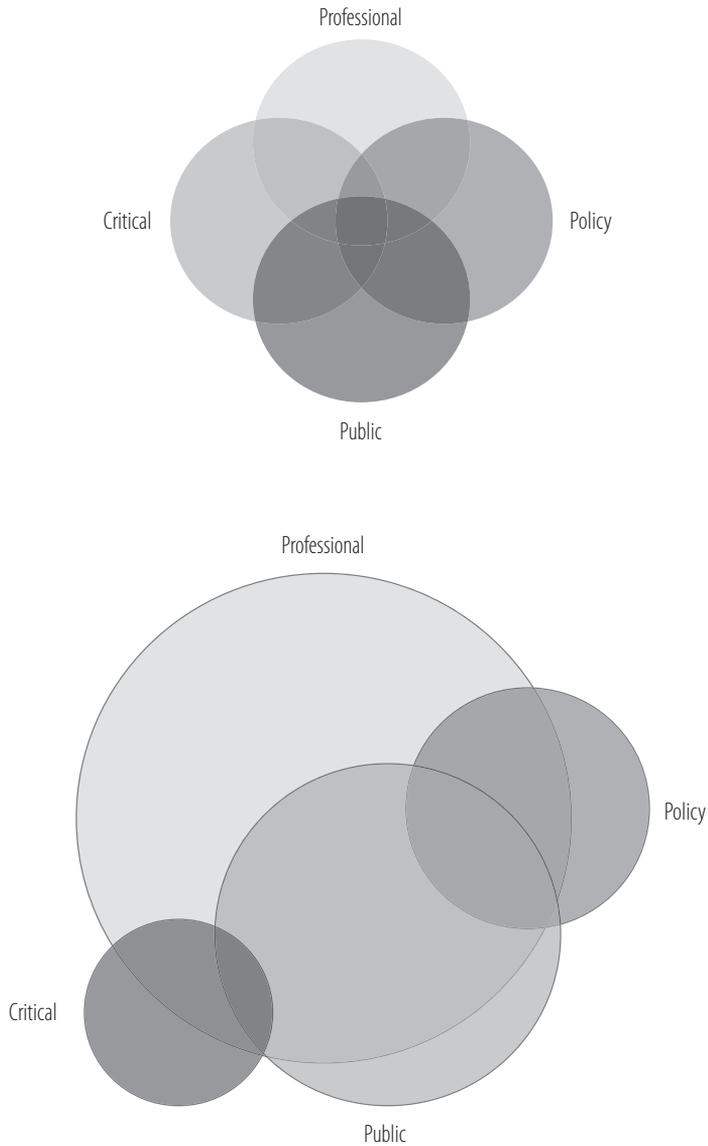
In our view, public criminology is as much about teaching as it is about research. Although criminology has held a place in higher education for nearly a century (Finckenauer, 2005), the mission and content of criminology coursework has changed as these courses largely have departed sociology departments for criminology and criminal justice programs (Best, 2004). Stephen Pfohl observed the following with regard to public sociology:

[The] most common site of public engagement is in the classroom. The general college or university classroom where sociologists typically encounter a public composed of students steeped in the common sense of the dominant culture . . . The point here is not to provide students with a supposedly "politically correct" viewpoint, but to encourage the discernment and thoughtfulness necessary for democracy itself (Burawoy et al., 2004: 113–114).

Faculty members can serve as "transformative intellectuals" (Giroux, 1992), teaching theory-driven models with a sound evidentiary base to both students and the larger public—educating those inside and outside the academy (Currie, 2007). As part of this effort, academics are developing new programs that build the connections among universities, state agencies, and communities. For example, the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program is training faculty members across the country to take college students into prisons in intensive interaction-based courses shared with prison inmates, with the goal of creating a unique transformative learning environment (Pompa, 2004). Inside-Out courses typically culminate in a group project in which university students and inmates work together to make evidence-based policy recommendations. Researching prison issues and articulating specific recommendations thus encourages and empowers students in the class to take their own first steps as public criminologists.

**FIGURE 3**

**Crossover Criminologies**



Teaching as a form of public criminology offers particular relevance and urgency because our classes often comprise future criminal justice practitioners who soon will be in the trenches as lawyers, police officers, parole and probation officers, and corrections and juvenile justice workers. In addition to encouraging students to think critically about larger issues of crime and punishment, criminology classes often ignite the first sparks of student interest in criminal justice

careers. Other young people are drawn to the study of crime and criminal justice because of their interest in popular television shows (such as *CSI* or *Law and Order*) or films; these “undergraduates do not line up to get into criminology departments understanding the realities of the system, and that idealism can be a good thing for thinking more broadly about what real justice is and how it can be achieved . . . we should be supplementing their idealism with eye-opening and empowering exposures” (Tift, Maruna, and Elliott, 2006: 391–392). Perhaps as important as educating these future criminal justice practitioners, classroom teaching influences and informs students who go on to related fields, such as social work or education. Public criminologists who take teaching seriously hope their students enter their chosen professions and indeed the larger responsibilities of citizenship with a more accurate picture and understanding of the causes of crime and the workings of the criminal justice system (Finckenauer, 2005).

Although individual interest and effort is critical to the success of public criminology, so too is institutional support. As Currie (2007) noted, few structural incentives encourage the practice of public criminology in the academy, but some will find it easier than others. Faculty at large land-grant universities, for example, might feel a special responsibility to take their teaching and service into their communities. Because part of the mission is “extension” into surrounding areas, often greater legitimacy is provided and sometimes even rewards for practicing public criminology in such settings. Similarly, faculty who work at Jesuit institutions, such as William Gamson and Stephen Pfohl, might find that public scholarship resonates with their university’s “commitment to ethical reflection and social justice” (Burawoy et al., 2004: 114).

As Burawoy (2004, 2005a) suggested about public sociology, it is likely that these contextual differences lead public criminology to be practiced most widely and valued more highly in large public universities where a high teaching load often exists (Burawoy, 2005a: 12). John Jay College, for example, is among the top-ranked and preeminent graduate and undergraduate criminal justice departments in the United States; yet faculty at John Jay often bear teaching responsibilities far in excess of those in other disciplines and departments. More generally, although faculty members at state institutions might be doing innovative work in public criminology, it often is practiced at the local level, and it might not be recognized beyond its usefulness to community partners and engaged students. Because of their myriad responsibilities in teaching, service, and publishing, faculty members might have precious little time or incentive to document and disseminate their public efforts.

Related to teaching and outreach, the service function within public criminology involves dialogue with communities and with the electronic and print media. Public criminologists should consider their own interests and skill sets and then work to their strengths, which might lead them to “write in forums read by practitioners, to lecture widely, to evaluate and consult, to hold workshops, and to undertake training” (Cullen, 2005: 27). Because academics and researchers rarely are tapped to comment on crime stories on cable news channels or other national forums (Frost and Phillips, 2009), the best strategy might be to publicize one’s work at the local and state level and to contribute to easily accessible media such as blogs and podcasts.

The rewards for such work might be largely intrinsic. Even as they invest effort in educating and working with the public, unless they develop ways to claim and legitimize such service work, scholars' efforts to add to the public conversation and debate on issues of crime and justice are likely to go unrecognized and unrewarded. Additionally, it can be difficult to account for the time and effort that goes into such interactions. For example, in discussing her own experience with public scholarship and with NASA after the space shuttle *Columbia* accident, Diane Vaughan (2005) noted that a great deal of "invisible public sociology" and "invisible work" goes into being a public intellectual (Burawoy et al., 2004).

New media are becoming an increasingly important place within public criminology. Blogs and Web 2.0 technologies quickly are becoming the "preferred newsmaking criminological media of tomorrow" (Barak, 2007: 203). They are without question an increasingly popular forum for innovative scholars to float ideas to interested publics and to receive immediate feedback from thoughtful readers. In practicing our own advice, we started perhaps the first public criminology blog in 2006, and we remain committed to adding content that both educates and reflects on issues of crime and justice ([contexts.org/pubcrim/](http://contexts.org/pubcrim/)). As Chancer and McLaughlin (2007: 169) argued, "[e]vident, at a minimum, is that 'doing' public criminology is closely related to how sophisticated we can become in understanding and participating in a dynamically evolving range of 24/7 mass-media forums."

We note that the discipline of sociology is taking steps to recognize the "invisible" work involved in public sociology; the American Sociological Association's newsletter *Footnotes* regularly publishes a section on sociologists "In the News," touting media appearances and scholars' expert quotes in newspaper and magazine articles. And [contexts.org](http://contexts.org), the website associated with the American Sociological Association's public outreach magazine, was receiving 500,000 page views per month by mid-2009 (Hartmann and Uggen, 2009). As of yet, however, no place exists to recognize criminologists whose work and words appear in the media, as neither the American Society of Criminology nor the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences has a forum to showcase public criminology. The Stockholm Prize in Criminology, however, is awarded consistently to scholars such as John Braithwaite, John Hagan, and Friedrich Losel, in part for their contributions to policy and public criminology.

### **Meaning and Public Criminology**

Any academic discipline has a division of labor, and public criminology is clearly not for every academic criminologist. Those with the skills and inclination to practice it, however, will be more successful when they have the space and support to do so. As but one example, academic departments can acknowledge public outreach as contributing to the service mission of the university. In reigniting some justice concerns that brought them to graduate study, public criminology can be a powerful antidote to what Cullen (2010) called "antiseptic criminology" by bringing scholars out of their offices to engage in their communities. Public criminology has the potential to enliven the research and teaching of those scholars who find "the majority of mainstream criminological scholarship today . . . boring" (Ferrell, 2004: 295) or who

might be questioning what their work means and for whom are they doing it. By building an evidentiary base on problems of public as well as scholarly concern, it is no doubt possible to be good social scientists and social analysts (Currie, 2007) while also working to increase public safety and reduce human suffering.

To communicate effectively with broader publics, however, requires drawing a responsible circle of expertise around oneself, adhering to what Weber called “an ethic of responsibility” (see, e.g., Gitlin, 2003). Such responsibility entails being vigilant about the accuracy of information that is presented in the name of criminology and acting to challenge false statements, question shoddy evidence, and debunk harmful myths and scare tactics. Even while critiquing overblown claims and stereotypes, public criminologists also must be open to having their own ideas and positions challenged and changed as new evidence emerges. Criminologists seeking the public spotlight should be willing to take on other public intellectuals and debate controversial issues, offering communities access to the most complete information available rather than allowing them to be inundated with politically motivated views or pithy sound bites. We must learn to translate our own research into manageable pieces, offering “suggestions that are at once concrete and visionary enough to have a chance of resulting in actual policy effects” (Chancer and McLaughlin, 2007: 169).

We also should acknowledge the potential costs of practicing public criminology. Making one’s work and perspective visible in the media opens the possibilities for threats and hate mail, loss of credibility, or worse from detractors. It can lead to close identification with the populations one studies; for example, attempts to discuss the low recidivism rates of sex offenders can be derailed by venomous attacks from a fearful public. A public identity also positions the criminologist as an “expert” on the given topic, which can lead to additional—and often compelling—requests that far exceed one’s field of expertise or capacity to provide help. As one example, ex-felons might turn to college professors in seeking help to find a job, housing, or hope as they attempt to manage a deviant identity and rebuild lives in the community. Academic criminologists perhaps can point these individuals to other resources, but such exchanges are time consuming and often feel inadequate. In addition, as Haggerty (2004: 212) noted, well-intentioned policy pronouncements can be coopted easily, leading to a “host of unintended negative consequences.” Despite such challenges, motivated criminologists will weigh the costs and choose public scholarship over the more comfortable and predictable world of antiseptic criminology.

Whether public criminologists are successful in their efforts is unlikely to be apparent immediately. As Vaughan explained, “engaging in dialogue about issues of public concern can make change by altering the perspective of individuals or giving support to what they already think—but the full effects of such change are not always measurable or knowable” (Burawoy et al., 2004: 118). Nevertheless, when our students go home and speak with their friends and families about issues raised and what they are learning in our classes, they become ambassadors for and practitioners of public criminology themselves. They perform a particularly useful ser-

vice when they debunk harmful myths or use criminological evidence to tamp down the moral panics created and escalated by television news and entertainment shows.

In terms of research, it is difficult to predict which research topics or projects are likely to make a splash in the public arena. Certainly areas of concern persist that public criminologists currently are using careful research to address, such as mass incarceration and its effect on disadvantaged communities; juvenile justice and policies for very young offenders; felon disenfranchisement; and prisoner reentry, employment, and housing, to name just a few. Perhaps the best strategy is simply to do good work and to share it widely. When journalists seek an expert opinion, it represents an opportunity to share research findings and their implications. Finally, when our publics ask for our opinions and perspectives, we should give them scientifically informed evidence and answers without the jargon that renders academic discourse so inaccessible or the spin that biases political discourse.

But public criminology represents more than media dissemination of professional knowledge. It also means engaging with communities beyond practitioners and funders, reaching out as Clifford R. Shaw once did to neglected audiences and communities affected by crime. If public criminology is to become a public good, then it can build on the rich legacy of engaged scholarship begun by scholars such as Shaw and contemporary criminologists such as John Braithwaite (2005) and Elliott Currie. As Francis T. Cullen made clear in his 2004 Presidential Address to the American Society of Criminology, when a small number of vigilant criminologists “saved rehabilitation” and treatment, it was

not inevitable but a contingent reality. It depended on real people making real decisions about their careers and about the knowledge they attempted to produce ... if the science of criminology is seen as a collective enterprise, I am optimistic that we are not consigned to irrelevance ... together, we have both the scientific expertise and kindness of heart to make the world a better place (Cullen, 2005: 26, 28).

Today, it seems that public criminology is following the path that Burawoy (2004) outlined for public sociology—recognition, legitimation, institutionalization, and finally, defense and expansion. As public criminology becomes more recognized, legitimated, and institutionalized by universities and professional organizations, more scholars might choose to pursue it, and the field will continue to expand. For others, however, the choice was made long ago based on personal conviction and sacrifice; the ideal and practice of public criminology is the impetus and motivating force behind every project they pursue.

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# POLICY ESSAY

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## PUBLIC CRIMINOLOGIES

### Comment on “Public Criminologies”

**Paul Rock**

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**P**ublic criminology is a laudable project, but it does raise some minor problems touching on the law of diminishing marginal returns, lopsided analysis, an overemphasis on the relevant, and the proper appreciation of policy-making processes.

Uggen and Inderbitzin’s (2010, this issue) “Public Criminologies” follows in the wake of the stir created by Michael Burawoy (2005) in his 2004 presidential address to the American Sociological Association and by Todd R. Clear (2010) in his more recent 2009 presidential address to the American Society of Criminology. It is a call for a greater academic engagement with “issues of public concern” in civic, policy, and political debates about crime, criminal justice, and criminal law. There can be little dissent from such an appeal. Who, after all, would not wish criminology to make its mark—especially on a criminal justice system distinguished by a seemingly inexorable inflation of the penal estate? I am not hostile to the emergence or reemergence of a public criminology. Indeed, I support it, and any comments I make therefore should be read as only weakly critical.<sup>1</sup>

More than 3,000 people, from the United States and overseas participated in the 2009 meetings of the American Society of Criminology, the conference at which Todd R. Clear spoke. They attended sessions on African criminology, convict criminology, critical criminology, cultural criminology, feminist criminology, green criminology, international criminology, mathematical criminology, “psychophysiological” criminology, rural criminology, and “theory-based” criminology. They might have been aware that the history of their discipline had been molded by phrenology, criminal anthropology, eugenicist criminology, psychoanalytic criminology, functionalist criminology, phenomenology, conversational analysis and ethnomethodology, symbolic

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I am indebted to David Downes and Tim Newburn, who have made several extremely helpful observations on various sections of this essay. Direct correspondence to Paul Rock, Department of Sociology, Mannheim Centre for the Study of Criminology and Criminal Justice, London School of Economics, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE (e-mail: p.rock@lse.ac.uk).

1. I also will try to refrain from repeating arguments that have been put forward elsewhere.

interactionist criminology, radical criminology, Marxist criminology, left-idealist criminology, left-realist criminology, ecological criminological, and structuralist criminology. They also might have known that its present character is being shaped by other criminologies not formally listed in that 2009 conference program, including existential criminology, constitutive criminology, consumerist criminology, peacemaking criminology, and conservation criminology.

Each of those cadet branches has been championed with apparent fervor and conviction in its time, and the outcome has been a continual clamor of small voices vying for an audience, none in clear ascendancy for very long, and few commanding more than a small following. In an open and contested discipline, no reason exists to resist the addition of public criminology as another candidate for attention; it might affect practice and policy, add to the span of ideas from which scholars can choose, foment debate and intellectual excitation, and undermine the risk of the discipline lapsing into scholasticism. But the proposal leads one to wonder about the marginal utility of introducing yet one more contender into the criminological stable (unless, of course, it is read simply as an encouragement to do criminology, and therefore, any of these criminologies, in a particular way,<sup>2</sup> which is not so new at all.<sup>3</sup>) Uggen and Inderbitzen (2010) themselves acknowledge that “public criminology is clearly not for every academic criminologist,” and they qualify their thesis in other ways, but I will take their call seriously, if only to develop a solid and coherent argument.

The stance I adopt is perhaps a little jaded because my recent experience of attempting a public criminology has not been happy. At the beginning of this century, I acted as the so-called Key Expert on Victims and Witnesses for the European Union Phare Horizontal Programme for Strengthening the Rule of Law (see European Commission, 2002). I participated in missions to report on ten candidate states' compliance with European minimum criminal justice standards for the purpose of assessing their eligibility for admission to the European Union. We visited ten states and delivered reports, but we were told at the very outset by the man leading the missions that nothing we could say would affect whether the accession states were admitted. It was entirely a political decision, and compliance was practically immaterial. My second experience was an evaluation, conducted at the behest of the Ministry of Justice, of the experimental introduction of victim impact statements (or family impact statements) in homicide trials in England and Wales (see Department for Constitutional Affairs, 2005). Halfway through the pilot period, what was called the Victims Advocates Initiative was aborted and replaced by another, the Victims Focus Scheme (see Ministry of Justice, 2008); my report was not read, it was not discussed, and no questions were put to me (see Rock, 2010). It all seemed a little foolish.

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2. I am indebted to Tim Newburn for this point.

3. David Downes has reminded me that criminologists have had a public face for a long time, intervening from time to time at critical points in policy debates. Lawrence Sherman and Heather Strang have mounted a powerful case for restorative justice (although restorative justice has not been adopted widely), and Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin have provided a rationale for themes in Mobilization for Youth (see Mobilization for Youth, 1960: 44–45), although the ensuing projects foundered (see Marris and Rein, 1974: 122–123).

### Some Cavils about Public Criminology

Questions appear, and the first touches on what it is that a public criminology actually might wish to convey to an audience of lay people, policy officials, and politicians. I recall an occasion when a home secretary visited the London School of Economics and asked the cluster of criminologists there assembled what achievements of criminology he should heed, and it was silent. On an earlier occasion, Sir Cyril Phillips (1981), acting as the chairman of the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure, put much the same question to the same group and received much the same response. It is possible that had the questions been put later, or to a different group, the answers might have been different, but Lynn McDonald's (1976) claim, made some time ago, that criminology has done well in puncturing claims, but not in establishing them, still seems to hold.<sup>4</sup> We do know some things, but we do not understand much and much we have not been able to predict<sup>5</sup> about even the most profound transformations in the world of crime and criminal justice (see, e.g., Zimring, 2007). Ours is a largely skeptical science, and skepticism is useful enough in a world of political enthusiasms and simple nostrums, but some *hubris* might be present in imagining we have much that is concrete to offer. One is reminded of John Braithwaite's (2000: 223) observation that "[t]he criminology boom is not fed by the intellectual accomplishments of the field, but by the continuous growth in public sector employment in the criminal justice system."

The second issue turns on the selection of ideas we would wish to expose to greater public scrutiny. Criminology has been a factious, ideologically driven, and sometimes Laputan discipline replete with assertions we might not wish to have broadcast widely. Its practitioners have not always resembled in every particular the pleasing portrait offered by Uggen and Inderbitzen (2010) when they talk of "[p]ublic criminologists, armed with peer-reviewed evidence, clear points, and plain language..." there are warts. Recall the wholesale and lengthy scholarly neglect of the victim and victimization—how crime was represented as functional to the proper working of society without any regard to what Matza (1969: 49–53) once called "pathos"; how the criminal law and criminal justice system were taken by some to be overwhelmingly, unremittingly, and unambiguously repressive in their management of the poor (Center for Research on Criminal Justice, 1975; Reiman, 1979); how property crime was defined as an expropriation of the expropriators and not, as David Downes once put it, a regressive tax on the poor; how the fear of, or anxiety about, crime frequently was dismissed as an ideological distraction, mystification, or moral panic (see Box, 1983; Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts, 1993); how gender first was bleached out of analysis and then crudely reintroduced to convict males *tout court* of violent intimidation (see Madriz, 1997); and how prisoners, on the one hand, were treated as scapegoats herded together to deflect and divide proletarian class

4. McDonald (1976: 15) said that "there is now a whole literature showing that rehabilitation programmes do not rehabilitate and prevention programmes do not prevent."

5. Who, for example, anticipated before the mid-1990s the decline in crime rates across the developed world? Sociology has fared as badly. It failed to envisage the renaissance of religion as a social force, the collapse of the Soviet bloc, and much else. We have been masterly at prophesying the past.

consciousness (Foucault, 1979) and, on the other hand, were treated as primitive rebels who might serve as a revolutionary vanguard (Mathiesen, 1974). To be sure, many of these notions now largely (if not wholly) have been discredited, and they sometimes have been discredited by evidence, but they had their advocates; they were not always vigorously challenged in their day, they were potential candidates for a public criminology, and it almost certainly would have been a kindness to the discipline and to the profession to hide them from public gaze.

Transparency and publicity then might have their costs, unless of course, a public criminology is to be a bowdlerized criminology. And who would be the Bowdler? Uggen and Inderbitzen's (2010) "professional criminology," they say, "derives its legitimacy from its presumed application of scientific methods." But that legitimacy is also the "unchecked positivism" of Young's (2004: 20) "Voodoo criminology"; and Hillyard, Sim, Tombs, and Whyte's (2004: 383) "endless conveyor belt of predictable and auto-suggestive findings, often generated by large-scale, publicly funded, state-sanctioned, evaluation-oriented research projects that are ultimately self-serving." I pass no judgment, but it is evident that one criminologist's authority is another's "number crunching, schematic and instrumental positivism" (Scraton, 2001: 3).

Third is the matter of relevance. A public criminology is a *relevant* criminology, either in the research it conducts or in the manner in which it conveys research to outsiders. How relevance or issues of concern are defined is a matter of political contingency, contested in the past, and is not self-evident; after all, many publics and many criminologies are raising the possibility of too great an attentiveness to one particular set of "public" concerns. Adjudicating that process of contestation might be regarded as part of the work of a public criminology, but it does threaten to promote intradisciplinary quarrels that remove it from the public arena and reduce its potency and authority.

Of course, one working conception of relevance has very real consequences for the discipline, and that is what the state and its agencies deem to be problematic.<sup>6</sup> The criminology commissioned by the state almost invariably is supposed to be relevant in its practical utility to the policy maker. So it is that the National Institute of Justice says of itself that it is "the research, development and evaluation agency of the U.S. Department of Justice. We provide objective, independent, evidence-based knowledge and tools to meet the challenges of crime and justice, particularly at the state and local levels. . . . Our research agenda must be driven by professionals in the real world — those who deal with crime and justice problems every day" (National Institute of Justice, 2010). Its English and Welsh counterpart, the Research Development and Statistics branch of the Home Office, "is an integral part of the Home Office. We manage research and collect statistics in a number of areas. . . . This information helps Home Office ministers and policy-makers address the concerns of ordinary citizens. It also helps the police, the courts and immigration officials to do their jobs as effectively as possible" (Home Office, 2010). Those are perfectly sensible and suitable objectives, appropriate to the institutions that house

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6. To be sure, the state and its agencies are themselves diverse and not in accord about how to identify or confront problems (see, e.g., Boyd-Caine, 2010). Public concern is far from unambiguous.

and finance them. But bodies like the National Institute of Justice and the Home Office—and bodies deferential to them, such as the British Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)<sup>7</sup>—massively dominate the commissioning and supporting of research.

It is not policy-relevant criminology so defined that is at risk of emaciation, but a criminology that is *not* relevant in any commonplace, utilitarian meaning of the term, a criminology for which funds and public support are far less secure. Universities are, like the medieval monastery, one of the very few sanctuaries left for those who might seek to pursue forms of knowledge that have no apparent immediate impact and no utility or that might have potential impact and relevance but not to the questions currently identified as most relevant. Those forms are demanded neither in the market place nor by the government. They are *not* relevant. No doubt, an irrelevant criminology in time could have implications for policy; indeed, it provides much of the intellectual capital of public criminology, but relevance is a dangerous idol. Uggen and Inderbitzen (2010) probably would concede the point, but it is not principally public criminology that needs its champions.

Consider the plight of British universities currently assailed by a government intent on a crude Gradgrindian agenda. Lord Mandelson, the Minister responsible for the Department

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7. The ESRC proclaimed that “[w]e have an international reputation both for providing high-quality research on issues of importance to business, the public sector and government, and for our commitment to training world-class social scientists. . . . The quality of life and economic well-being of the UK and its citizens are just two of the many, policy-relevant issues addressed by our research and training activities. Comparative and international perspectives are strongly encouraged. For example, UK economic performance is increasingly dependent on the global economy, and economic distribution - both within and between countries and regions - is a major issue for social science research. The senior decision making body is the ESRC Council. It includes members of the business, voluntary and public sectors, as well as the academic community. The Chief Executive of ESRC, supported by four main directorates, based in ESRC’s Swindon headquarters, is responsible for the implementation of Council’s policies and decisions, and for the overall management of ESRC” (ESRC, 2010). Similarly, the Nuffield Foundation stated that “Lord Nuffield wanted his Foundation to ‘advance social well being’, particularly through research and practical experiment. The Foundation aims to achieve this by supporting work which will bring about improvements in society, and which is founded on careful reflection and informed by objective and reliable evidence. The Foundation’s income . . . comes from the returns on its investments. It does not fund-raise, or receive money from the Government. The Foundation’s financial independence and lack of vested interests helps to ensure an impartial and even-handed approach to problems in the projects it funds. Most of the Foundation’s income is spent on grants, some of which are for research and others support practical innovation or development, often in voluntary sector organisations. In both cases the preference is for work that has wide significance, beyond the local or routine. The Foundation looks to support projects that are imaginative and innovative, take a thoughtful and rigorous approach to problems, and have the potential to influence policy or practice” (Nuffield Foundation, 2010). The Ford Foundation said “A fundamental challenge facing every society is to create political, economic and social systems that promote peace, human welfare and the sustainability of the environment on which life depends. We believe that finding solutions to the world’s most complex problems requires engaging the people and the communities closest to them, including men and women from diverse backgrounds and all levels of society. We work mainly by making grants or loans that build knowledge and strengthen organizations and networks. These methods of problem-solving reflect our mission and the diverse ways we support grantees. They also describe a model of philanthropy that the foundation has pursued since its inception: To be a long-term and flexible partner with innovative leaders on the frontlines of social change” (Ford Foundation, 2010).

for Business Innovation and Skills (formerly, it should be noted with sadness, the Department for Education and Science) observed:

The Government want universities to make an even bigger contribution to Britain's economic recovery and future growth.

We have therefore decided to give greater priority to programmes that meet the need for high level skills, especially in key areas such as science, technology, engineering and maths. There will be a greater element of competition between universities for new contestable funding as an incentive to fulfil this priority. With employers and universities, we will identify where the supply of graduates is not meeting demand for key skills. And we will seek to re-balance this, by asking HEFCE [the Higher Education Funding Council] to prioritise the courses and subjects which match these skills needs.

We will look to business to be more active partners with our universities. We want employers to be fully engaged in the funding and design of university programmes, the sponsorship of students, and offering work placements (Mandelson, 2009).

The invocation of concern so framed could eclipse the writings of Zygmunt Bauman, Phillippe Bourgois, Manuel Eisner, Norbert Elias, David Garland,<sup>8</sup> Ian Loader and Richard Sparks, or Pieter Spierenberg. It even might inhibit Elijah Anderson, Nils Christie, Mitch Duneier, Malcolm Feeley, Jonathan Simon, or Loic Wacquant. It could strip criminology of some of its intellectual vigor. It could diminish the anthropological distance that is required for effective scholarship.

Problems should be treated as topics as well as resources, as matters for critical, dispassionate inquiry as well as passion, relevance, and commitment, and that sentiment also is offered in "Public Criminologies." But, in echoing Burawoy's (2005) plea, and urging students of criminology to retain their "moral commitments" and concern for "justice issues and public outreach mission that originally drew [them] into the field" (Uggen and Inderbitzin, 2010), Uggen and Inderbitzin put criminology at risk of being thrown back into the cockpit of political and moral struggles from which it once painfully climbed (see Mills, 1943). After all, a superabundance of interested groups is fighting for mastery over the definition and control of issues of crime and justice, groups that are *parti pris*, whose answers have been fixed in advance by conviction or allegiance to one side or another in the conflicts of the criminal justice system. Criminology should be wary of joining them.

It is in that context that the allusion (Uggen and Inderbitzin, 2010) to Howard Becker's (1967) question "Whose side are we on?" and his and others' "unconventional sentimentality toward those marked as deviants" is not helpful. The disinterested observer who seeks to

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8. "David Garland is probably the best known and most cited British criminologist at the moment," but his "work [which] is an extended commentary on government crime control policy . . . is nevertheless largely detached from the day-to-day questions with which politicians and their advisors have to grapple" (Hough, 2010: 12).

understand how interactions unfold—how, in another phrase of Becker’s, “people do things together”—has no business taking sides or giving interpretive privilege or ontological superiority to just one party in a social exchange. We have no sound methodological warrant to populate our analyses, on the one hand, with the fully fleshed typifications of those we acclaim and, on the other hand, with cardboard and motivationally impoverished representations of those whom we deplore. The outcome only can be a lopsided scholarship (see Manning, 1975). For heuristic and hermeneutic purposes, we should not be on *anyone’s* side.

Too few scholars are disinterested. We all know how “victim-precipitation” became reclassified as “victim-blaming” and was removed from the canon of what could be studied safely (Clark and Lewis, 1977); how race and ethnicity became troublesome subjects for the criminologist (see Jones, Maclean, and Young, 1986); how some penologists in the past were reluctant to engage in what Mathieson called the work of “system-strengthening” (1974); and how some colleagues would not have any truck with the police or the state. Such censorship can flow all too easily from “moral commitments.” Far better a criminology that adopts the phenomenological epoché that suspends the natural attitude, retains its integrity, and permits any and all questions to be asked freely, irrespective of moral and public commitments (see Schutz, 1967).

### The Policy-Making Process

Last, I would question how much and what form of impact a public criminology might make on the policy-making process, which requires one to step back and reflect on the way in which that process actually unwinds in routine cases. Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010) quote Clear’s (2010: 717) statement that “the absence of a scholarly voice on matters often results in bad policy, and those who (knowing better) remain silent must share some of the blame for that policy”,<sup>9</sup> but that heaps too much responsibility on a discipline that tends to lack the power to affect much of what is done. A scholarly voice needs an attentive audience, and fewer and fewer officials and politicians are prepared to listen<sup>10</sup> (Loader and Sparks [2008: 19] remarked that “criminology . . . has seen its expansion inside universities coincide with the decline of a receptive constituency within government who shared criminology’s liberal commitments and were minded to call upon its practitioners for advice”).

What can we say about policy making and its receptivity to criminology? We rarely have approached the policy process from within or have exposed it to prolonged observation. When it has considered the matter at all, criminology has taken to viewing it in two distinct ways. One holds that making policy is an end of criminology and that the discipline should be structured so that it is serviceable to practical action through the tendering of advice, the provision of ways of seeing the world, attempts to measure and predict the onset of (and desistance from) criminal careers, the mounting of projects and the evaluation of work done by practitioners and others,

9. Elsewhere, Clear and Frost (2008: 38) stated that “[s]ilence is seen by some as condoning [a] policy or, at the very least, failing to contest it with a strong and potentially influential voice.”

10. Although the appointments of Laurie Robinson and John H. Laub to the Department of Justice in the United States might make some difference there, if only for a while.

and so on. I take it that that is, in effect and very largely, the stance of a public criminology, and there is here a strong remnant is here of blue book ideology, a form of Fabianism, which assumes that policy makers and politicians should be amenable to rational guidance once the facts have been marshaled appropriately by experts. It is rarely so amenable, and criminologists frequently complain that the world of criminal justice politics is often perverse and resistant to reason. It is indeed convenient to argue, as Tim Newburn observed, that it is the scholar who is rational and the politician who is wanting of rationality (T. Newburn, personal communication, April 10, 2010).

The other direction is to take criminal justice policy making itself as an object of scholarly inquiry, examining it as a problematic entity that might be studied in its own right. Here the approach is usually some variant of rational choice theory or of a political economy that places policy making in a larger analytic frame of the social, political, and economic structures of the state and, as is more common these days, configurations of states and transnational organizations. So it is that we read of policies variously presented as instances of the crisis of late capitalism—variously predicted, like Nostradamus, in near-apocalyptic tones, the vertigo of late modernity, the new governmentality, governing through crime, the looming importance of risk and responsabilization, transcarceration (especially in unequal societies), the political economy of the ever-growing carceral state or new *Gulag*, the dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion in societies portrayed as bulemic or as bearing traces of religions of condemnation or redemption, and changing sensibilities and shifts in the culture of control.

These arguments are provocative and interesting, and they have produced what have become authoritative and often fruitful ways of looking at problems of policy formation. But the data (and they *are* characteristically *data*) on which they rest tend to be materials already in the public domain such as the following: published statistics in and around the sphere of crime and criminal justice, public speeches, newspaper articles, public policy statements, and so on—materials of the kind that Cicourel and Kitsuse (1963) represented long ago as the indexical outcrops of lengthy organizational work. They are in great measure what has been *allowed* by politicians, officials, and practitioners, after much deliberation, finally to come into public view—preassembled collections of social facts that compress and stand in diverse ways for a mass of subterranean bureaucratic work. Analysis at the level of public representations is permissible and useful; after all, such representations constitute a realm of social facts, which is not only *sui generis* but consequential, and it has led to powerful commentary, but it is manifestly incomplete. And, in compensation for what it cannot or does not choose to see, it tends to work by descriptive fiat, operating either with an imputed logic of the situation or with a tacit and speculative functionalism or teleology, which maintains that what is visible has latent or manifest purposes that the social scientist is equipped to discern.

All too often, criminologists and sociologists have not interrogated with any curiosity or diligence what takes place in the private sphere *as* policies are formed. They have not peered into the black box of the political process but have become observers after the event when policies

are neatly packaged, discursively tidied up, agreed and coherent, free of discontinuities, false starts, doubts, falterings, and lacunae. They have had to bootleg in assumptions, endowing those processes—for want of a competing narrative supplied from within—with what might be an inappropriate history, telos, and rationale, taking perhaps far too uncritically what is said carefully and for particular rhetorical purposes by calculating people before particular audiences. At the same time, and in accord with social science's penchant to reduce actors on the social scene to serviceable homunculi who have just enough intelligence and sensibility to follow the scripts that the analyst needs to explain action, policy makers and politicians themselves sometimes can be transformed into little more than cut-out figures, who lack an independent capacity for strategy, irony, thought, and reflection. Sometimes, indeed, no reference is made at all to principals, puppet-like or otherwise, but only to structures, modes, sensibilities, mentalities, networks, cultures, and systems. The private world of politics thereby becomes a convenient analytic extrapolation of its public manifestations, and it is small wonder that we fail so consistently to comprehend how it is that the politics of crime take the forms they do. In Tim Newburn's words, we "seriously misunderstand the policy-making process" (T. Newburn, personal communication, April 10, 2010).

It is evident that "Public criminologies" talks almost exclusively to a U.S. readership about the impact of a U.S. criminology on U.S. publics and U.S. policy making.<sup>11</sup> People do things differently elsewhere, and because I am more familiar with policy making in Commonwealth countries with a Parliamentary system, it is of that form of government that I shall next speak.

Policies can be generated by politicians making decisions—sometimes independently—but as is typical, they trickle through the system for long periods before they come to the surface, and in so doing, they might come to possess several distinct traits. The following traits might seem obvious in the telling, but I trust that they will be worth citing because they are so rarely, if ever, invoked in the criminology and sociology of the policy process, a process that almost never has been exposed to fieldwork, and they are prerequisite to a proper appreciation of the impact of research<sup>12</sup>:

1. Policy making is, first, a matter of words. It is *rhetorical*, an activity set within and constitutive of a world of articles, talks, speeches, and committees, and it is centrally concerned with the artful and effective deployment of argument to persuade a succession of critical audiences who must be won over if it is to succeed. It tends inevitably to draw on other arguments already approved that are known to have worked in the pragmatically relevant and usually recent past, to call on mandates, election promises, manifestos, international agreements, declarations, and framework decisions, and in so doing, it tends—particularly when what is proposed is new and perhaps untried—to take on the protective coloring of

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11. Take, for example, the observation that courses in criminology "largely have departed sociology departments for criminology and criminal justice programs." That almost certainly would not hold for the work of criminology outside the United States.

12. I am drawing in what follows on my own experience of fieldwork in Canada and the United Kingdom. See especially Rock (1986, 1990, 1996, and 2004).

a political phrasing already endorsed and potent and will encourage it to sail under flags of convenience. Then from time to time, it might become the business of an astute official, attempting to steer safely an innovative policy to its destination, to smuggle new content into old clothes, to use extant policies as a Trojan horse (as Canadian officials did with the Justice for Victims of Crime Initiative [see Rock, 1986]), to mask the unfamiliar and contentious with the outward appearance of the familiar and uncontroversial. How policies are presented then might require considerable deciphering because they always might not be what they seem, and the language of research might play only a little part because it is not a *political* language or a language entirely amenable to political ends.

2. Second, policy making is *contingent*. It will encounter throughout the course of its development events other policies in train, crises, and opportunities that never can be anticipated initially. Characteristically, and *faut de mieux*, attempts will be made to build on and incorporate the politics of those events in some fashion, to appropriate them to strengthen or protect what is being done, to ride piggyback on initiatives that already have a proven political authority and momentum, to make it seem that what is being done is perfectly consistent with what else is happening and what else has been endorsed in the political sphere. Those attempts will seize the propitious moment when scandals and problems erupt, funding opportunities suddenly present themselves, or as necessary, for some reason, to convey the impression that something is being done to allay fear, criticism, or alarm (see, e.g., the remarks made about police raids in Cleveland, OH, in the early 20th century [Cleveland Foundation, 1922] or in “Wincanton” 45 years later [Gardiner, 1967]). Policy making thereby might be more than a little *opportunistic* and in ways to which a public criminology might make little contribution.
3. Third, policy making tends, by extension, to be *crecive*, which is a tendency that will be amplified because it is more than convenient to allow administrative committees, task forces, and commissions to be laden with additional work that needs to be done or as it crops up during the course of their deliberations. Characteristically, it thus will come to swell, absorbing, and refurbishing materials that are immediately at hand in the public and political mind, leading to the making of some fairly idiosyncratic, context-dependent (or indexical), and expedient fusions of argument.
4. Policy making cannot but be sensed by its principals and close observers as *indeterminate*. In the beginning, they always cannot be aware of precisely where their activity will lead or what they will encounter. How could they? There is a voyage of exploration into what might be unknown terrain, and to paraphrase a symbolic interactionist dictum, no explorer knows what he or she is exploring until it has been explored. It is often difficult to plan ahead or to formulate in advance demands for information and expert knowledge because questions tend to develop only during the course of policy making itself.
5. Policy making is *emergent*. Identities, motives, purposes, relations, facts, and issues might change meaning radically as events unfold, and they will do so in ways that are not always given in any set of initial conditions. Officials might acquire commitments, understand-

ings, and connections that were not apparent when they began work, and it is partly for that reason that, in the civil service of England and Wales at least, they tend to be rotated periodically from post to post lest, as it is said, they “go native” and acquire parochial allegiances and passions that are thought to compete with the overall aims and objectives of the departments and government they serve. What seemed relevant at the outset can seem less than relevant as matters progress. What is useful evidential knowledge at the end might not have been so in the beginning.

6. Moreover, officials and politicians themselves actively will shape what lies before them—that is, how and why policy work is done—so that it becomes a moving synthesis of discovery and something else, the *construction* and *reconfiguration* of contiguous topographical features, which then will become a moving amalgam of old and new rhetorics, facts, practices, and methodologies.
7. Part of that process of construction and reconfiguration lies in the routine practice of engaging in discussion with bodies, the so-called stakeholders, that might be affected by what is projected and who might have views to offer. In so doing, new maps will be drawn and new structures will be created as policy makers peer ahead and transform parts of the world into an evolving timetable of committees, conferences, and consultations. Life, Simmel once said, can become more than life. It can become reified. What might have been given practical organization and significance by policy makers can acquire a capacity to answer back, to make demands independently of the politicians’ and officials’ will, and a dialectic can come into play in which political work creates an exoskeleton of social facts that will constrain and redefine policies in a fashion that at first might not have been sought or foretold.
8. The most important of such stakeholders are those who control strategic sectors lying in and around the criminal justice system because they have the power to block, impede, or accelerate anything that is planned. Policy must appear amenable to their interests because it is likely to fail without at least their passive acquiescence. Read aright, then, any policy almost invariably will bear the impression of those organizations, even if that impression is, as it were, merely a token obeisance to their authority. Whether an objective observer would say that that acknowledgment is actually germane to the ostensible purposes of a policy or to rational decision making is immaterial because it is vital to the pragmatics of statecraft. Lesser bodies, particularly in the private sector, generally count for less because proposals can be ratified without them, which remains the case, even though their interests might seem more central to the substance and form of any sensibly devised strategy.

In this sense, policy making is as much a matter of *Realpolitik* as the application of a disinterested reason based on evidence of what works. After all, *nothing* can work without the approval of the powers of the criminal justice system, and their approval rests on an array of preconditions, including symbolic recognition, the awarding of resources, and the conferring of a freedom to act in certain ways. The criminal justice system is not immune to what is called in

the United States “pork barrel” politics. And that is why criminology itself often plays so small a role in what is done. It might be far less important that criminologists endorse a measure than that, at the outset, the judiciary, or heads of other government departments, or chiefs of police, and then later, politicians on both sides of both Houses of Parliament do so.

What political power does the criminologist wield? How many battalions does he or she have? Of course, it is not necessarily sensible or politic to advance in the teeth of strong criminological advice, but such advice can, as they say, be “cherry-picked”; it is often equivocal, it might lead to political embarrassment, constituencies and electorates might be resistant, and it is not always timely. Politics does tend to trump science. It was for just that reason that the British government’s chief adviser on drugs was dismissed recently because he suggested that alcohol and tobacco are more dangerous than marijuana.<sup>13</sup> What he said might have been credible enough scientifically; it was what would have graced a public criminology, but it was politically and electorally indigestible.<sup>14</sup>

9. Many public utterances by officials and politicians then should not be read as innocent of context; they tend to be genuflections to powerful audiences, to governments, government

13. See “Sacked adviser criticises Brown”:

**The UK’s former chief drugs adviser has accused Gordon Brown of reclassifying cannabis for political reasons.**

Prof David Nutt also predicted there would be further resignations from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs after he was made to quit as its head. The professor said Mr Brown had “made up his mind” to make cannabis a Class B drug, despite evidence to the contrary.

The home secretary said he had “lost confidence” in Prof Nutt, accusing him of “lobbying for a change in policy”.

Earlier this week, Prof Nutt used a lecture at King’s College, London, to say that smoking cannabis created only a “relatively small risk” of psychotic illness and it was actually less harmful than nicotine or alcohol. But on Friday he was forced to quit after receiving a letter from Home Secretary Alan Johnson who said his comments had undermined the scientific independence of the council.

**‘Absurd’**

Prof Nutt told the BBC the government had ignored advice on cannabis “on the whim of the prime minister”. “Until Gordon Brown took office there has never been a recommendation about drug classification from the council that has been rejected by government,” he said.

**“I think it’s a lack of courage from government that is a big issue here ”**

Sir David King Former government chief scientific adviser

“Gordon Brown comes into office and soon after that he starts saying absurd things like cannabis is lethal... it has to be a Class B drug. He has made his mind up. “We went back, we looked at the evidence, we said, ‘No, no, there is no extra evidence of harm, it’s still a Class C drug.’” He said, “Tough, it’s going to be Class B.” Prof Nutt said drug laws should not be influenced “petty party politics” and compared them to interest rates, which are set by the Bank of England not the government. In the same way, he said, an independent committee should be set up to rule on drug classifications. “There’s no point in having drug laws that are meaningless and arbitrary just because politicians find it useful and expedient occasionally to come down hard on drugs. (news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8335189.stm)

“That’s undermining the whole purpose of the drugs laws.”

“I think that the government has lacked courage in backing David’s committee’s advice,” Sir David said. “I think it’s a lack of courage from government that is a big issue here.”

14. Tim Newburn noted that “I am also intrigued that those who argue that criminology has had precious little, or at least insufficient impact in recent times, tend to ignore the likes of James Q. Wilson, George Kelling, and others as if they were not engaged in public criminology. We may not always care for what they say, but say it they have and, I’d argue, been spectacularly influential” (T. Newburn, personal communication, April 10, 2010).

departments, political parties, criminal justice agencies, the mass media, and something reified as public opinion—the potential collaborators or censors who require the uttering of particular forms of words in exchange for their approval and cooperation. They are part of a process of *courtship*. Any sociologist or criminologist who tries to interpret them without a nuanced appreciation of such diplomacy will attain only a very partial reading of what—literally and metaphorically—is at stake. In that sense, policy making is a matter of alliances and dowries, and criminological bride-wealth always might not be enough to tempt the nervous politician and official.

10. It is the big battalions of the criminal justice system who count. Minor audiences might be ignored. But it is obvious that times and places *do* exist in which the role of the lesser institutions of the state and of civil society can be politically significant and that also might be a matter of diplomacy as well as of functional relevance. This situation can be the case especially, say, in federal systems where proposals by central government might require a demonstration of a strong general will to counter claims that it has no legitimate case to intervene in local matters. A clamor from private sector organizations always can be invoked as evidence that provinces or states are trying to override manifest popular demand for change and that clamor, from time to time, might be amplified by a state that funds private organizations to badger it into action. Sometimes, indeed, those private organizations might be *created* or refurbished by the state precisely to create an impression of strong external pressure. Here it is that criminology itself might play its part as an authority that can be invoked or a discipline that might be put to use in what Weick (1979) would call the enacting of an environment, although its role might take odd forms as it is incorporated into the emerging politics of the moment. The first crime surveys, for instance, were justified in Canada as a means of measuring violence after the abolition of capital punishment (Rock, 1986) and in England and Wales as a measure of “doing something” on the heels of a spate of urban riots (Rock, 1990).

### **Conclusion**

A public criminology then might play but a small role in what is at bottom an ineluctably political process. It might enter as part of the rhetoric of justifications that can be cited (particularly if it says the right things and appears at just the right moment to be appropriated in argument), it might underwrite some part of the rituals of rationality that publicly sustain organizations (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), and it might check more egregious ideas, but policy submissions are not academic papers and political decisions are not academic decisions.

In his somewhat bleak contribution to an inquest on a substantial British piece of evidence-based policy making and program implementation, the 2002 Crime Reduction Programme—a program that, it was commonly agreed, had failed<sup>15</sup>—Tim Hope (2004: 287, 302) remarked:

The outcome for evidence-based policy making . . . is that scientific discourse and method itself falls victim to policy pressures and values. . . a government responding to a political mandate—for instance, “tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime”—is likely to be on the look out for ideas, evidence, even legitimacy, to substantiate its promise.

The gloominess of his postmortem verdict was to be reciprocated by a government that increasingly came to distance itself from academic criminology—public or otherwise. A boundary had been crossed, and criminology and policy making have drawn apart. If criminologists were jaundiced about the program, then it was the government’s own view that the *researchers* had failed, and according to Newburn (in press), the following two consequences occurred:

First, and predictably, it led to disillusionment within the Home Office of university-based research, as illustrated both by the expressed views of senior officials . . . and, in part, by the increasing willingness to turn to consultants and other outside contractors rather than university-based researchers. Second, it led Ministers quickly to temper their faith in research.

A public criminology is not impossible. Nor should attempts to establish it cease, but it would not do to expect too much or too naïvely, and it is salutary to recall how research and evidence continually tend to be rebuffed, filleted, appropriated, or reinterpreted in an intensely political environment. A public criminology must be reflexive about itself, its possibilities, and the world on which it seeks to act. Without something resembling an insider’s understanding of the criminal justice policy-making process, we can have no proper conception of the impact we might make. To be sure, in David Downes’ words, it always might not be practicable, responsible, or necessary to wait for that understanding before speaking out on some issue or other. That would, he remarked, be “as stifling as the revolutionary left’s refusal ever to say what they might have in mind after the deluge” (D. Downes, personal communication, April 15, 2010). But a public criminology that is ill informed about the dynamics of policy formation might have to acknowledge that it has exposed itself to the risk of disappointment.

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15. Newburn (in press) quoted Mike Hough’s introduction to the special issue of *Criminal Justice* in which the inquest was published; the criminological researchers commissioned to undertake the evaluations, Hough remarked, “consumed a large amount of public money to mount research that yielded lower benefits than expected either by ourselves or our funders.”

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## POLICY ESSAY

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### PUBLIC CRIMINOLOGIES

# Who will be the public criminologists? How will they be supported?

**Kenneth C. Land**

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Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010, this issue) have written an excellent article on the subject of public criminologies. The article covers a large array of topics on this subject, is well informed with many citations to prior relevant literature, and gives a broad survey of the current status of the field and its relationship to public sociology. I have little to add on many of these topics. I do, however, want to pick up on two topics discussed in the article.

The first question is as follows: Who will be the public criminologists? Given the diversity of ways of conducting public criminology identified in the article, there will, no doubt, be many paths by which professional, policy, and critical criminologists can enter into the public criminology domain. With regard to media presentations/representations of criminology expertise and findings, a principal means by which criminology will become public, at least for the foreseeable future, likely will be similar to what has been the case in recent years—consultations, comments, and quotations from one or more of our colleagues on the role of criminologist-as-expert when, say, the annual Uniform Crime Reports data on crime in the United States are released. Or perhaps when a local community story on crime, policing, or punishment—sometimes sparked by a criminal incident—is covered. Who among us has not read media stories in which one of our colleagues is quoted? And our reaction is: “Oh, I know her/him (and her/his work).” No doubt, this will continue to be a major form by which criminological knowledge and expertise is presented to the public.

Can more be done? Much of the article addresses the possibilities for doing more. One aspect that needs additional attention, however, is the question of how to create institutional structures to support public criminologists outside of academia. As Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010) note, few structural incentives exist for those of us in the academy to practice public criminology on more than an occasional criminologist-as-expert basis. Thus, the second question is as follows: How can full-time public criminology—public criminology as a career—be supported?

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We need, and, more generally, the American Society of Criminology needs, to think creatively about how we can create institutional infrastructures—in the form of free-standing institutes or “think tanks” that can support at least a small number of full-time public criminologists—including those who come from the professional, policy, and critical wings of our community. Another possibility is to work with well-established existing institutes or foundations in Washington, DC, or other cities to create staff positions for individuals with criminological expertise. Because such organizations tend to have a primary focus on the economy or politics, however, it is likely the case that the best that can be gained in such organizations is a single position for a public criminologist. Thus, we should think seriously about how to construct (and gain the financial basis/endowment/funding for) institutes with staff members devoted to public presentations and commentaries on topics in crime, criminal justice, and punishment.

If the American Society of Criminology, perhaps in partnership with other professional organizations such as the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, created such an institute, then its staff members could draw on the work of professional criminologists to create a Research Briefs series of bulletins that summarize major research advances on crime, criminals, community responses, and so on by professional criminologists; a Policy Briefs series that does the same for research by policy criminologists on policing, criminal justice, sentencing, and so on; and a Conceptualizing Crime and Justice Briefs series based on critical criminology studies. The public criminologists housed in such an institute could perform many of the other functions described in the article by Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010). Given that we live in an era in which “evidence-based public policy” is increasingly put forward as desirable, the prospects for such an institute seem to be good.

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Uggen, Christopher and Michelle Inderbitzin. 2010. Public Criminologies. *Criminology & Public Policy*. This issue.

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# POLICY ESSAY

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## PUBLIC CRIMINOLOGIES

### What is to be done with public criminology?

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Christopher Uggen and Michelle Inderbitzen's (2010, this issue) article on "Public Criminologies" is timely and important. The issues it deals with concerning the place and purpose of criminology—indeed, the social sciences generally—in civil society and public policy formation are of long-standing interest and great significance today. The question of the civic missions of the social sciences has exercised and vexed their practitioners ever since their foundation (e.g., Gans, 1989; Wright Mills, 1959). It also has been dusted down and addressed anew in the debate prompted by Michael Burawoy's (2005) effort to articulate and defend "public sociology"—a debate that, as Uggen and Inderbitzen well illustrate, now has found its way into criminology. But these issues have a particularly long provenance and a special purchase in criminology, a field constituted around a social problem and of acute interest to governments, justice practitioners, and citizens alike. It is simply a social fact that criminology historically has tended to attract to its ranks individuals who combine intellectual curiosity and a thirst for knowledge with a reformist ambition of some kind (to prevent crime, rehabilitate offenders, improve the quality of justice, or in some allied way, alleviate avoidable human suffering). It is thus hardly surprising to find the dilemmas raised by the public sociology debate receiving the kind of extended airing inside criminology that Uggen and Inderbitzen have given them or that the general question of how criminological knowledge can (more) effectively inform public policy on crime and justice is just now attracting rather a lot of interest (Clear, 2010).

We are broadly welcoming of the idea of criminology as a field of engaged social inquiry and think much can be gained from sustained reflection on how criminologists can intervene best in societal conversations and social action around their subject matter. Indeed, we recently have completed a book dealing with these very questions (Loader and Sparks, 2010). But such

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willingness to embrace criminology's public purpose should not, and need not, come at the expense of continuing to exercise a critically reflexive orientation toward the issues at stake. What matters is not just getting on and *doing* something called public criminology (whatever that might turn out to mean) or encouraging and organizing others in the field to do the same. It is equally important to think sociologically *about* the phenomenon of "public criminology" and the range of questions that circulate around it. It is this broad spirit—one seeking to appraise the risks and opportunities that attend the idea of public criminology—that informs our reaction to Uggen and Inderbitzen's (2010) spirited and engaging article. One looming risk, as we see it, is of turning inward and becoming mired in discussions that only ever are going to be of much interest to criminologists (how ironic it would be if a debate about *public* criminology ended up taking this form). The chief opportunity is to think afresh, in the altered contexts of the present, about how best to make intelligible and coherent the idea of criminology as a civic enterprise.

### Turning Inward: On a Division of Public Criminology and Related Dangers

The idea of public criminology has surfaced of late in several places, of which Uggen and Inderbitzen's (2010) article is but the latest.<sup>1</sup> In the United States and in the United Kingdom, it has been the subject of articles (Groombridge, 2007), the rousing conclusions of two recent books (Carrabine, Iganski, Lee, Plummer, and South, 2008: 452–454; Hughes, 2007: ch. 8), and a special issue of *Theoretical Criminology* (Chancer and McLaughlin, 2007). This attention has been a response in part to the aforementioned debate on public sociology on which Uggen and Inderbitzen and many other recent contributors explicitly draw. But it also clearly is animated by a concern that the field of criminology has in recent years been a "successful failure" (Loader and Sparks, 2010: ch. 1). The worry expressed by this term is that the flourishing of criminology when measured using the standard yardsticks of jobs, degree programs, conferences, journals, publications, prizes, and so on has coincided with a waning of influence over crime and penal policy that has come in recent decades to be driven more by popular emotion and political calculation than by reason and evidence. The flurry of interest in public criminology, one feels, is driven by a desire to address this situation and lay renewed claim to the field's social relevance.

This context of emergence helps to account for some typical features of how the idea of public criminology is discussed. First of all, contributors to the debate generally have been making an explicit case *for* something called public criminology, and Uggen and Inderbitzen (2010) are certainly no exception to this trend. In many respects, nothing is wrong with such advocacy, and much about the case being made is attractive. However, it does run the risk of

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1. Although to be fair, their article first was presented in 2006 and has been available ever since on the public criminology blog that Uggen hosts—see [publiccriminology.blogspot.com/](http://publiccriminology.blogspot.com/). One should note that the term "public criminology" was championed—even prior to Burawoy's intervention—by Carrabine, Lee, and South (2000), and that it connects with and takes up themes that Gregg Barak and others have been developing for some time in their work on "newsmaking criminology" (Barak, 1988, 2007). We also have made several previous attempts to address the issues at stake (Garland and Sparks, 2000; Loader, 1997; Loader and Sparks, 1993, 2004).

exhortation and sermonizing when what is called for is more patient analysis of why criminological engagement matters and what the obstacles and opportunities involved look like. Such exhortation also might invite a kind of prickly defensiveness among readers who feel (rightly or otherwise) that their preferred way of doing criminology is being called into question as well as unleashing a bid to defend “professional” criminology of the kind that has predominated in the critical debate prompted in sociology by Michael Burawoy (see, among many, Tittle, 2005; Turner, 2005).

Second, a tendency exists to import uncritically into criminology Burawoy’s four-fold typology of “professional,” “policy,” “critical,” and “public” sociologies. In their essay, Uggen and Inderbitzen (2010) proceed largely along these lines, setting out what the equivalent criminologies would look like and even giving each an allotted task—“assembling social facts and situating crime in disciplinary knowledge” (professional criminology), “evaluating social interventions” (policy criminology), “reconsidering rule making” (critical criminology), and “evaluating and reframing cultural images of the criminal” (public criminology). This way of proceeding is not, in our judgment, terribly helpful, and Uggen and Inderbitzen implicitly seem to realize the dangers of this typology and go on to describe how each of the four criminologies fruitfully might overlap. The dangers have to do with placing (even forcing) authors or works into different boxes, of encouraging the view that each stance is a mutually exclusive criminological identity, and of suggesting that “public criminology” is a distinct position that criminologists might or might not choose to adopt. These are outcomes that it is wise to avoid. Although Uggen and Inderbitzen have moderated the dangers involved here by transmuted the fractious typology into a more harmonious division of labor, this arrangement does not in itself overcome the problems associated with thinking about these issues “typologically” in the first place.

In this context, it is worth recalling that the call to practice something called public criminology is raised from within a field that for a long time has been and remains internally diverse, fragmented, and often fractious (Ericson and Carriere, 1994). Criminology is a field of inquiry marked by a disputatious plurality of theoretical assumptions and perspectives, by affiliations to different surrounding disciplines, by a wide range of objects of interest and enquiry, by competing methodologies and ways of knowing, and by a range of different styles of criminological engagement. Uggen and Inderbitzen’s (2010) article confirms this very point, making reference not only to the aforementioned professional, policy, critical, and public criminologies but also to “convict,” “administrative,” “airport,” and “antiseptic” criminology. The salient differences of focus and purpose in the field are given institutional expression in the American Society of Criminology’s (ASC) aptly named *divisions* of corrections and sentencing, critical criminology, international criminology, people and color, women and crime, and now experimental criminology. Cognate differentiations are found in the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (which has nine “sections”) and the European Society of Criminology (with nine “working groups”).

Of course, nothing is very unusual or surprising about the range of groups, organizations, networks, conferences, and journals that now make up the field of criminology; they are valuable, even indispensable, to the production and discussion of knowledge. Nonetheless a potential

pathology persists in all this. As criminology expands and fragments, and the fragments come to exist in a state of passive toleration, it runs the risk of “fixing” these divisions as if they were settled or “natural” and hence of either leaving intact or underscrutinized the mainstream “core” (the one that does not require its own division) or denying that the field has any core concerns or agreed upon body of knowledge at all. It risks positing these various subfields as incommensurable, hermetically sealed clusters of activity that have nothing to learn from each other and between which criminological practitioners (and prospective users of their knowledge) must simply choose. The result, at least potentially, is a series of criminologies that pass like ships in the night—an outcome that might cocoon discrete approaches to, or areas of, criminological inquiry from wider currents of thought and criticism as well as undermine the field’s legitimacy and overall sense of public purpose.

Given this institutional backdrop, and the enthusiasms of some of its adherents, public criminology clearly is at risk of becoming the latest shiny criminological brand, a perspective within the field that seduces and attracts some to its creed while being ignored or derided by others. One even can imagine—heaven forbid—it taking institutional shape as a new ASC division! Uggen and Inderbitzen’s (2010) contribution is at its least persuasive when it leans in this direction. They write, for example, of the “distinctiveness” of public criminology and of the things that “public criminologists” can and should do. They argue that public criminology is an “ideal and practice” based on “personal conviction and sacrifice,” suggest that more scholars might choose to pursue public criminology and evince the hope that “the field” will continue to expand.

It might be that more extensive and convincing criminological engagement with politics and civil society requires impetus and organization of this kind. But there are nonetheless problems with articulating the case in this way. It seems to us that “public criminology” makes the most sense as an umbrella under which it becomes possible to reexamine and foster serious consideration of a set of puzzles and predicaments that vex many criminologists today, from whatever perspective they approach the study of crime and justice. Foremost among these issues are questions of how to reconcile autonomy with engagement and knowledge production with social relevance as well as how and where to make intelligible contributions to public conversations about crime. Such questions no longer admit easy answers in contexts in which the whole climate of policy formation has “heated up,” and reason and evidence competes with—and often loses out to—the clarion calls of a 24/7 media, the righteous anger of victims and those who claim to represent them, and the imperatives of political competition and expediency (Loader and Sparks, 2010: ch. 3). As such, they call for fresh thinking and debate about criminology and its public roles, not for something called public criminology to become a new specialist branch of criminological activity.

One virtue of Todd R. Clear’s recent ASC Presidential Address was that it recognized and addressed relevant issues in something approaching this way—as dilemmas for all those who study crime and justice, whether as criminologists or under some allied banner, not just for a committed band of “public” ones (Clear, 2010). Clear raises some important questions about

the opportunities for public engagement that confront criminology under the Obama Administration and how they might best be understood and grasped. He cautions criminologists to be wary of the conservative implications of demands for evidence and argues for a capacious conception of what can count as such.<sup>2</sup> He defends the value of basic research in underpinning what he calls “criminologically justifiable action” (Clear, 2010: 14) and makes clear that these matters deal with the collective organization of the field rather than simply with the preferences of individual criminologists.<sup>3</sup> He also raises for consideration the thorny question of whether the ASC, qua ASC, should seek to participate in policy-making arenas and even assume public postures on issues such as mass incarceration.

We have no definitive answers to the questions that Clear poses, nor do we have the space to develop them here. But perhaps the answers one arrives at are less crucial than the extent to which relevant issues are taken up and discussed, the spirit in which such discussion is conducted, and the institutional spaces we create in which to develop it. These issues, as we have indicated, can give rise to a parochial conversation that attracts much interest among criminologists but is scarcely likely to hold the attention of anyone else. They also can become—for want of a better word—“managerialized.” This situation is happening in current state-issued strictures about research “Impact” in the United Kingdom,<sup>4</sup> and looms in the wings whenever this subject is reduced to one of creating incentive structures for academics that recognize and reward public engagement. Or one can use public criminology as a springboard for thinking sociologically about the relationship between criminology and its “publics” and about how to make the idea of criminology as a civic enterprise intelligible and convincing in the altered conditions of the present. It is this latter project with which we have been engaged of late.

### **Reaching Outward: On Criminology as a Civic Enterprise**

The overarching “alteration” in the conditions in which criminologists seek to intervene has to do with a “heating up” of public discourse and social action in relation to crime. This term signifies that crime in many, but by no means all, contemporary democracies in recent years has become a prominent token of electoral competition and that governmental reactions to it are swayed heavily by political calculation and expediency. In this hotter climate, crime policy increasingly comes under the influence of mass media and “public opinion” and at the mercy

2. U.S. criminologists might learn something here from the enthusiasm with which many British criminologists greeted the election of Tony Blair in 1997 and what they thought was the advent of an era of “evidence-based policy.” The subsequent involvement of criminologists in seeking to give practical effect to this aspiration ended for several participants in frustration (see, e.g., Hope, 2004). In our view, the British experience underscores the importance of Clear’s constructively sceptical orientation toward the promise of evidence-based crime policy.
3. One might ask in this context whether professional criminology in the United States is well placed to rise to the challenges that Clear outlines. This issue is partly a matter of the narrow horizons and content of graduate education (a point that Burawoy made powerfully in relation to sociology) and partly about the effects of a system of tenure that seems designed—if we might venture an outsiders’ opinion—to stifle creativity, risk-taking, and public engagement.
4. For more on this situation, see [hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/impact/](http://hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/impact/).

of ill-informed and sometimes actively whipped-up popular emotion. The result is a policy environment that is volatile and unstable, one in which it becomes difficult to make reason and evidence the drivers of what is said and done (Loader and Sparks, 2010: ch. 3). These are, as we noted, the background conditions that have stirred interest in the whole question of public criminology.

What does it mean, though, for criminology to make intelligible contributions to public debate and policy formation in this more politicized environment—an environment in which *all* knowledge claims potentially also become politicized and controversial, all the more so when they address major cleavages of world view and ideological commitment (as criminology typically does)?<sup>5</sup> Our argument, which is elaborated more fully elsewhere (Loader and Sparks, 2010: ch. 5), is that we best can give coherence to criminology's civic purpose by understanding its role as one of seeking to foster and sustain better politics of crime and its regulation—or what we term *democratic underlaboring*.<sup>6</sup> Let us try to explain what we mean by this.

One common response from within criminology to the heating up of crime and penal policy is to try to “cool things down.” One suspects that part of what Todd R. Clear finds attractive about “today's ‘evidentiary’ moment in time” (Clear, 2010: 2) is that it offers the opportunity, after several decades of politically driven and often ill-informed crime policy, to move things in a more rational direction. This direction is made more explicit in his concept of “*criminologically* justifiable action” (Clear, 2010: 14; emphasis added). In a similar spirit, Ugen and Inderbitzen (2010) argue that one of the tasks of a public criminology is “to challenge false statements, question shoddy evidence, and debunk harmful myths and scare tactics.” This concept is hardly new but rather expresses a criminological default position. To be a criminologist, to an important degree, is to have committed oneself already to the idea that crime problems can and should be subjected to reason, method, evidence, analysis, and knowledge and to have taken a stand against, or at least assumed some distance from, lay opinion and political judgment. It is thus often to have placed oneself on a collision course with social and political actors who advance their crime and justice projects in ignorance (willful or otherwise) of criminology's hard-earned lessons. Today, however, some criminologists aim to make a virtue of this underlying circumstance. Experimental criminologists defend and use a rigorous method for determining “what works, what doesn't work and what's promising” in crime prevention at least partly to expose politicians who waste tax dollars on programs driven not by evidence but by political and populist considerations (Sherman, Farrington, Welsh, and MacKenzie, 2002). They and others have in addition proposed creating institutions that can “reinsulate” crime policy from the “heat” of political combat and mass-mediated public demands. The hope is

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5. See, on this, Weingart (1999).

6. This role of underlaborer is, of course, an antique one having been formulated originally by John Locke (1975 [1690]: 10) to describe the task of philosophy as “clearing the ground a little, and removing some of the Rubbish” vis à vis scientific knowledge. The revised term, democratic underlaboring, is borrowed from Swift and White (2008), who use it to describe the relation of political theory to real politics.

that in such institutions, scientific expertise and a calm bureaucratic ethos will deliver policy and practice that is underpinned by a reliable criminological evidence base (Sherman, 2009; see also Zimring and Johnson, 2006).

For us, limits as well as strengths are attached to this conception of criminology's civic role—limits that have to do with an inability to *explain* how criminological knowledge in fact fares in settings of contemporary policy formation and what often seems like an undefended desire to somehow *replace* politics with what Bruno Latour calls “calculative devices” (Latour, 2004). Instead, we think much can be gained not from treating criminology as an antidote to democratic politics but from trying to think afresh about criminology's relation to the present pathologies and unrealized promise of modern politics. In the former case, this mentality means trying to make good on the rather remote and thin understanding that criminology too often has of the world of practical affairs by fostering a better appreciation of the forces that shape the treatment of crime in the contemporary public sphere and the reasons why (social) scientific knowledge about crime does or does not get taken up and used in political debate and governmental action.<sup>7</sup> This process, in turn, means acquiring the will and the necessary tools to develop understanding of the “circumstances of politics” (Waldron, 1999: 106) and cultivating a “qualified tolerance” toward those who practice politics as a vocation (Swift and White, 2008: 64). This idea does not, however, mean reconciling oneself to the status quo. In the latter case, reappraisal means reconnecting with and developing those strands of thought that have insisted that crime is “political” (Taylor, Walton, and Young, 1973) and making explicit the connections that inescapably exist between crime and its control and the repertoire of ideas (order, justice, authority, legitimacy, freedom, rights, etc.) and traditions (liberalism, but also conservatism, social democracy, feminism, republicanism, environmentalism, etc.) that comprise modern political thought. It involves folding into our understanding of criminological research and public engagement the fact that any discussion of the criminal question encodes in miniature a set of claims about the nature of the good society, and any attempt to answer it, however apparently “dry,” technical, or limited in scope, carries and projects a possible world, a desirable state of affairs that a political or criminological actor wishes to usher into existence.

To think again and in these ways about the intersections between criminology and politics does not dispose of, or render secondary, the question of *knowledge* and its uses. Having indicated why criminologists might understand better the pathologies of modern politics and be clearer about the relationship of their work to its ideals and possibilities, another set of questions shuffles into view. As we have intimated, most individuals who spend their time or, in many instances, the greater part of their working lives, practicing criminology or an allied craft do so because they believe that acquiring knowledge about crime, or justice, or punishment has some value. It also seems safe to suppose that they think the knowledge they produce and disseminate has a quality—a methodological rigor, respect for evidence, or theoretical acuity that enables it to

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7. It usefully might take its cue here from some recent work within political science; see, for example, Miller (2008).

unearth things about the world or see that world in a revised light—that sets it apart from other claims about crime and its control, such as those claims circulated by politicians, journalists, bloggers, victims groups, offenders, police officers, campaigners, or simply citizens engaged in daily conversation. But what exactly is this “expertise” and what value and place does it have? Here the following questions begin to emerge: What contribution can criminological knowledge make to shaping responses to crime in a polity that acknowledges crime and punishment to be properly political issues? What in a democracy is the public value of criminology? What is the collective good that criminological enquiry seeks to promote (Kitcher, 2001)? What modes of intervention and what institutional arrangements best can realize that good?

To practice criminology as a democratic underlaborer is to be committed, first and foremost, to the generation of knowledge rather than (first and foremost) to scoring a point or winning a policy battle; if the distinction between criminologist and activist is to mean anything, then it must entail something of this kind. What then of the question of public intervention in disputes about crime? We have three points to make on this. We hope that many criminologists, of diverse persuasions, and certainly those who have thought most concertedly about these matters, such as Uggen and Inderbitzen (2010), would feel able to agree with most of these. The first is that engaging in public life—being “political” in some broad sense—does not mean reducing the question of crime to one of political preference, nor positing criminologists as quasi-politicians, nor celebrating folk wisdom over professional judgment and hard-won knowledge. Our task is to be bearers and interpreters of that knowledge and to bring it to bear on matters of public concern and dispute, hence, the importance of a scholarly “formative intention” (Collins and Evans, 2007). Second, this concept does not reduce what criminologists can bring to public debate to matters of evidence narrowly construed. It seems clear that academic criminologists enjoy a degree of freedom that many participants in political and professional struggles over crime and justice lack. They have a certain liberty to refuse to take the social world for granted or to accept received political “imperatives,” to provoke and unsettle, and to pose questions about our responses to crime that security-obsessed and ideology-lite political cultures increasingly seem to have forgotten how to ask. Being critical in *this* sense properly forms part of the social scientist’s DNA (cf. Ericson, 2005). It means that that they can and should bring to public discussion a skepticism that refuses to treat at face value the categories, assumptions, and self-understandings that make up prevailing “common sense” about crime and its control. It also enables them to theorize and set forth alternative institutional arrangements for thinking about and responding to crime and to forge connections with groups in civil society (and *not* simply government) who are seeking to advance a better, or alternative, justice policy. Third, in doing so, criminologists have to give up an illusion of mastery in which they somehow expect their knowledge to engineer outcomes, end political discussion, and trump the ill-informed concerns and perspectives of others. The public role of criminology involves generating controversy, opening up and extending debate, as well as challenging and provoking received public “opinion” and political postures, not closing such discourse down.

Democratic underlaboring is, then, a disposition and a practice whose formative intention is the production of rigorous knowledge but which understands itself as engaging with a field in which applications of that knowledge never reduce to simple and transparent calculations. Criminology inhabits and intervenes in a world composed not simply of “matters of fact” over which it can legislate, but also always one of disputed “matters of concern” (Latour, 2004) that it can, alongside the various “publics” who assemble around such matters, legitimately interpret and contest. The criminologist as a democratic underlaborer has a commitment both to generating and disseminating knowledge *and* to a more deliberative politics of big public questions such as the future of punishment and crime control. She is, as such, necessarily implicated in developing what has been called “argumentative” or “intelligent” rather than simply “evidence-based” public policy making.<sup>8</sup> The underlaboring conception of criminology is committed to participating within and to facilitating and extending institutional spaces that supplement representative politics with inclusive public deliberation about crime and justice matters, whether in local, state, or federal settings or across emergent transnational arenas. In this regard, the public value of criminology as democratic underlaboring lies not primarily in “cooling” down controversies about crime and social responses to it so much as in playing its part in figuring out ways to bring their “heat” within practices of democratic governance.

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8. These coinages are taken, respectively, from Hoppe (1999) and Sanderson (2009).

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# POLICY ESSAY

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## PUBLIC CRIMINOLOGIES

### “Public criminology” and evidence-based policy

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Christopher Uggen and Michelle Inderbitzin (2010, this issue) offer an insightful analysis of the possibilities and pitfalls facing criminologists who want to speak truth, effectively, to power, and to communicate effectively to the public and media. They offer a plausible taxonomy of scholarly divisions within criminology and describe, I think, correctly, a disciplinary history partly paralleling sociology's of a gradual retreat from engagement with public affairs into a more insulated existence as a profession characterized by sophisticated techniques and specialized vocabularies. They provide a full and rich description of the complexity of policy processes and of challenges facing efforts to bring systematic evidence and other fruits of research to public attention.

Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010) emphasize the roles and influence of academic criminologists, whereas my emphasis is on the policy processes and outcomes that they do and do not influence. Uggen and Inderbitzin discuss instances and policy realms when and in which research and researchers do influence policy and have for a long time. Even so, in their words and tone, the plaint persists that criminologists have less influence than they ought. If that were not true, then an impassioned plea for a stronger public criminology would be a surprising thing.

No doubt it is true that the fruits of some kinds of research do not have a great deal of influence on policy. It is also true, however, that some kinds of research, and many researchers, have had enormous influence on policy. Governments worldwide have paid attention to crime-prevention specialists—notably including Ronald V. Clarke, Marcus Felson, Jan van Dijk, Ken Pease, Michael Levi, and Patricia Mayhew—and have enacted and altered policies and practices as a result.<sup>1</sup> Policing scholars—notably including Herman Goldstein, Mark H. Moore, Larry

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1. This and the subsequent lists of names are by no means meant to be exclusive. Others no doubt have played equally influential roles in the areas named as well as in other areas. The people named are simply those of whose work I have personal knowledge.

Sherman, Wesley G. Skogan, Steve Mastrofsky, David Weisburd, and James Q. Wilson—have been in the middle of successive transformations of American policing since the 1970s. John Braithwaite's work has stimulated the flowering of restorative justice programs worldwide as well as a shift in many countries away from law-enforcement-based deterrence strategies and toward collaborative compliance strategies to deal with environmental and other regulatory law breaking. The leading American drug-policy scholars—including notably Peter Reuter, Mark A.R. Kleiman, Jonathan Caulkins, and Robert MacCoun—are consulted regularly by drug-policy people and sometimes are listened to. Corrections policy makers have paid attention to Norval Morris, Daniel Glaser, Don M. Gottfredon, Joan Petersilia, Todd R. Clear and Michael E. Smith. In an earlier time, many states made wholesale changes in their sentencing laws to incorporate the ideas of Norval Morris, Marvin Frankel, and Andrew von Hirsch. More recently, several American states have changed their laws on felon disenfranchisement in reaction—in significant part—to the work of Marc Mauer, Christopher Uggen and Jeff Manza.

Two things stand out in the preceding paragraph's lists. Each person mentioned is a scholar of the first rank and is or was considered as such within the scholarly and disciplinary worlds of which he or she is a part. And, with the exceptions of Christopher Uggen and Jeff Manza, none of them are based in a university sociology department. The rest are or were based in government, public policy, and law schools and in criminology, criminal justice, economics, and political science departments. I do not know what to make of the second pattern; possibly the policy influence view is bleaker from sociology departments than from elsewhere.

Burawoy's (2004, 2005) influential articles calling for a reinvigorated public sociology serve as the framework for Uggen and Inderbitzin's (2010) article in this journal. Burawoy described a disciplinary history that began with engagement in the world of professional practice and ended with at least partial disengagement into a claustrophobic and self-referential academic world. The same thing probably has happened to some elements of modern American criminology. It is hard not to wonder when reading some *Criminology* articles, for example, whether they are not the works of people who carry statistical hammers and look for database nails to hit.

In the early 20th century, the leading European criminologists were based in universities but were engaged deeply with the world. Gabriel Tarde in France; Cesare Lombroso, Raffaele Gaolfalo, and Enrico Ferri in Italy; and Willem Bongers and Willem Pompe in the Netherlands all were concerned centrally with the criminal justice policies of their time. Ferri (1921) drafted a complete proposed criminal code for Italy predicated on then-current knowledge about recidivism prediction.

The same thing was true in the United States—but even more so. Thorsten Sellin, the distinguished professor of sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, was actively engaged in the 1930s and 1940s in policy debates concerning capital punishment and racial disparities in the justice system. The major figures in the first celebrated English-language criminology program at the University of Chicago were doing equivalent things. Ernest W. Burgess in the 1920s was laying a foundation for 50 years of quantitative research on parole decision making and recidivism prediction that provided Ph.D. topics for three generations of celebrated

sociologists—Lloyd Ohlin, Daniel Glaser, Dudley Duncan, and Albert J. Reiss, Jr., among them. Glaser and Ohlin each served as State Prison Actuary in Illinois (Harcourt, 2006). At the same time, Robert E. Park, Frederick Thrasher, Clifford Shaw, and William F. Whyte were writing classic works on gangs and on individual offenders based on the use of qualitative methods. Shaw and Benjamin McKay combined both approaches. Each spent much of his career working in the Chicago Area Project (Schlossman, 1985; Schlossman and Sedlak, 1983). Sheldon Glueck's (1952 [1927–1928]) delinquency studies were motivated in significant part to provide a knowledge base for his detailed proposals for the reform of sentencing.

Thus, a long and distinguished history prevails of what now might be called public criminology, and there is little reason why criminologists should not be more active in it now. Gaining influence and attention is not easy, but it can be done, as the balance of this essay shows.

Evidence sometimes influences criminal justice policies and practices. Other times, it does not. The reasons are usually straightforward. Some subjects raise powerful normative and ideological issues. Few officials, for example, are likely to base their support for or opposition to capital punishment on the evidence concerning its deterrent effects. Other policies in this category (they vary from country to country) include sex-offender registration and notification (“Megan’s laws”), life sentences without the possibility of parole, and—less dramatically—electronic monitoring and drug treatment involving heroin maintenance.

Policies and practices concerning some other subjects change quickly when credible evidence shows that new technologies or techniques are more efficient, effective, or cost-effective than current practices. Policy makers are often eager to learn from and use the fruits of work on situational crime prevention (e.g., Clarke, 1995). Incremental improvements in technology that make credit cards more secure (e.g., use of holograms) are adopted around the globe as fast as news about them can travel. Automobile ignition locks offer another example. Substantial declines in motor vehicle theft in many countries commonly are attributed largely to enactment of laws requiring installation of ignition locks in new cars. In countries that use electronic monitoring of convicted offenders, improved equipment is adopted as quickly as funding allows.

Policy-making permeability to evidence on a third, intermediate set of subjects varies with time and place. Community penalties offer a good example. German policy makers in the 1970s were receptive to evidence about the effectiveness of day fines as prison alternatives; Dutch policy makers in the 1980s and American and English policy makers in the 1990s were not. A similar story can be told about community service. Californian judges showed in the 1960s that it could (then) serve as a credible alternative to imprisonment. British and Dutch policy makers were impressed and quickly followed suit. Policy makers in Germany rejected community service as a form of constitutionally prohibited involuntary servitude. Likewise, in the face of evidence that electronic monitoring of offenders effectively can substitute for imprisonment, German policy makers, for a long time, rejected it as constituting an unacceptable invasion of privacy; American, English, and later Swedish policy makers had no such scruples.

The preceding paragraphs are at best mundane and at worst platitudinous. They are worth writing only to illustrate the silliness of many academics’ beating of breasts and gnashing of teeth

about officials' unwillingness to base policies and practices on evidence. Sometimes, on some subjects, in some places, policy makers and practitioners gratefully take account of evidence. Other times, on other subjects in other places, they do not.

Academics' complaints usually are directed at the most contentious and emotional issues—capital punishment, mandatory penalties, and long prison sentences—and the gravamen of the complaints is less that evidence has been ignored than that complainers disapprove of particular policies. We academics, however, have no special standing that entitles us to have our views given special weight. We are as entitled as anyone else to express our views about controversial issues, but we should do it on the basis that we favor or disapprove particular policies for empirical, policy, normative, or ideological reasons and not on the basis that officials have misread or disregarded the evidence or have not been guided by our wisdom.

On many subjects, however, evidence can and does influence policies and practices. Bureaucratic rationality was a defining characteristic of government for Max Weber and, in many governmental settings, is an ongoing aspiration. It is understandable that most researchers also subscribe to rationalistic views about evidence-based policy.

In the English-speaking countries, at least, the earliest criminology programs in universities and research units in governmental departments were created with the purpose of aiding in the formulation of evidence-based criminal justice policies.<sup>2</sup> The first, the School of Criminology at the University of California at Berkeley, was founded in 1950 under the leadership of August Vollmer, who combined a scholarly career with a professional career as a police executive in part from a “commitment to the extension and improvement of police training” (Morris, 1975: 127). The aim of the first Australian department, in Melbourne in 1951, was the “development of a research base on crime and punishment which might then inform more effective and just policy” (Finnane, 1998: 73). R.A. Butler—the English Home Secretary, who in the 1950s created the Home Office Research Unit and precipitated the formation in 1959 of the first British university-based criminology program at Cambridge—often spoke of his belief that research findings would show the way to the prevention of crime and the treatment of offenders (Hood, 2002; Radzinowicz, 1999).<sup>3</sup> Butler later observed that “The money spent on research . . . could be expected to earn ‘enormous dividends,’ not least by reducing crime” (Butler, 1974: 2). In the United States, the same aspiration suffused the pages of the report of the President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (1967) and motivated the creation and enormous funding of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration.

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2. This essay, alas, draws primarily on English language sources. The beginnings of American criminology in the early 20th century were influenced strongly by earlier developments in, especially, France, Germany, and Italy. Until the 1930s and 1940s (e.g., Edwin Sutherland, and Bernard and Eleanor Glueck), no English-language scholars were equivalent in influence to Cesare Lombroso, Enrico Ferri, Raffaele Garofalo, Gabriel Tarde, Willem Bonger, and Franz von Liszt. The institutionalization of criminology in universities occurred earlier in continental Europe than in the English-speaking countries, including most notably the establishment of criminology programs in universities throughout Belgium in the 1930s (Tonry, 2004a).
  3. Mid- and long-term characterizations and assessments of these developments can be found in *festschriften* for Leon Radzinowicz (Hood, 1974) and Roger Hood (Zedner and Ashworth, 2003).

Similar aspirations existed and institutional developments occurred in many policy realms and in many countries in the 1950s and 1960s. Relatively quickly, it became clear that the relationship between scientific evidence and policy is complex. Evidence, although not irrelevant, is but one of many influences on policy making and often not a major one. Political considerations, public opinion, conventional wisdom, ideology, resource concerns, entrenched bureaucracies, and interest groups are always at least as important and often more important.

A scholarly literature on “research utilization” (horrible choice of terms) began to develop in the 1950s and 1960s and has continued to the present. It explores the questions of when, why, and under what circumstances evidence influences policy and practice. That literature generates four key observations. First, structural differences between the worlds of scholarship and government—including academic career structures and incentives and different notions of policy making—seriously complicate communication between the different worlds. Second, knowledge must pass successfully through a series of filters if it is to influence policy. Third, timing is everything; complexities of policy processes mean that policy makers are more and less receptive to influence. Sometimes “windows of opportunity” open through which knowledge can pass and influence major policy shifts. Other times the windows are closed firmly. Fourth, at particular times in particular places, the windows are wide open and remain open (in recent years, research on crime and human development offers many examples in many countries).

Here is how the rest of this essay is organized. I provide a brief overview of the research utilization literature in the next section as background to what follows. In the subsequent three sections, I discuss subject, time, and place. The final section offers concluding observations.

The most important conclusions are that Weber is right—many policy makers and practitioners much of the time, on many subjects want to act rationally, which means they want to take account of evidence. Linking knowledge to policy and practice, however, is a complex and contingent process. Policy makers and researchers have different conceptions of evidence and often have different notions of how policy processes do and should operate. The challenges of evidence-based policy making are different in policy and practice settings. In policy settings, they include the multiple agendas policy makers pursue and the multiple constituencies to which they relate. In practice settings, although multiple agendas and constituencies are also important, the challenges center on whether, how, and when practitioners learn about new evidence, whether managers are open to new ideas and can implement them, whether funding can be obtained, and whether inertia and comfortable, traditional ways of doing business with which line staff are familiar can be overcome. Put more succinctly, the problems at the policy level are political and at the practice level are managerial.

### “Research Utilization”

The literature on research utilization began to take shape in the 1950s and 1960s. A considerable body of work has accumulated. At least two major journals—*American Journal of Evaluation* and *Evidence and Policy*—specialize in the subject. It is an odd literature in that it is simultaneously mundane and creative.<sup>4</sup>

It is mundane in the sense that experienced policy makers, and others familiar with policy processes, will find little in it that is surprising. Few in either category will be surprised to learn that evidence seldom influences policy or practice directly. Officials must be aware of the evidence; they must consider it credible; they must regard its implications as important; they must believe the effort to change policies to take evidence into account is worth the hassle involved; and they must be able to overcome a series of political, ideological, and bureaucratic obstacles. In some policy realms, the obstacles are daunting, and in others, they are insuperable. Nothing surprising there.

It is creative in the sense that it provides frameworks and vocabularies that illuminate issues and aids in the understanding of why some attempts at change succeed and some fail. First, in the classic work on this subject, Charles Lindblom and David Cohen (1979) explored the ways learning generated by systematic research, which they called “professional social enquiry” (PSI), influences policy. PSI can influence policy, they say, only when “social learning” has occurred that can overcome the influence of “ordinary knowledge.” On important issues, change is difficult until social learning has produced new attitudes and political dispositions.

Second, Carole Weiss (1986) showed that in any place and time, boundaries exist beyond which change is not possible or even politically imaginable. She called this “boundedness.”

Third, David Green and I have shown the importance of “windows of opportunity” (Tonry and Green, 2003). Some policy options are politically or bureaucratically imaginable at some times but not at others. In what follows, I give examples from recent American history when political assassinations opened windows of opportunity through which evidence about the public health effects of handguns could pass and led to the enactment of gun control legislation.

Boundedness interacts with windows of opportunity. When windows of opportunity are circumscribed by boundedness in a particular place at a particular time, policy prescriptions that fail to take account of that—that attempt to push social learning beyond its boundaries—will not be taken seriously (Stolz, 2001).

Fourth, the influence of systematic evidence on policy depends on the permeability of a series of filters through which the evidence must pass (Tonry and Greene, 2003: 486–489). One is the filter of prevailing paradigms. Others are prevailing ideology, short-term political considerations, and short-term bureaucratic considerations (and inertia).

The research utilization literature does not instruct that evidence cannot influence policy, but that whether it can varies with time, space, and subject as well as with how astutely innova-

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4. I do not discuss this literature in detail here. Such a discussion and citations to the most important sources can be found in Tonry and Green (2003).

tors operate within political and bureaucratic settings. Distinct literatures focus on policy (e.g., Lindblom and Cohen, 1979; Weiss, Murphy-Greene, and Birkeland, 2005) and practice (e.g., Walter, Nutley, and Davies, 2005). Education, medicine, and public health are much more often the focus of the literature than criminal justice. One major exception to that generalization was precipitated by the Crime Reduction Programme for England and Wales. Intended as an evidence-based program for the improvement of criminal justice policies, it was a debacle. Budgeted at £400 million over 10 years, it was abandoned within 3 years and illustrates almost every way in which a government program can go wrong (insufficient resources, heavy-handed central planning, failures of planning and implementation, and political interference; Maguire, 2004; Nutley and Homel, 2006).

The obstacles to the adoption of policies based on systematic evidence are far easier to describe than to overcome. Joan Petersilia has written several important articles over nearly 25 years on the influence of knowledge on policy that sketch out all the problems (e.g., Blumstein and Petersilia, 1995; Petersilia, 1991, 2008). Threshold problems include making knowledge available to policy makers. Scholarly journals and books typically are not written to be reader-friendly for nonspecialists, and academic career structures and incentives typically do not encourage or reward writing for practitioners or participating in policy processes. Policy processes are hugely complex and time consuming. Academics often lack the stamina to compete for influence with representatives of organizations, professional associations, and advocacy groups that have vested interests in existing ways of doing business or ideological axes to grind.

## **Subject**

Whether policy makers in particular places and times pay attention to research evidence depends on the subject. On some subjects, they are highly receptive to influence by evidence about the operation and effects of alternative policy options. In the United States, England, and Wales, for example, even in the law and order climate of recent decades, policy makers have been open to evidence about the preventive effects of situational means to crime prevention and about the preventive effects of early- and mid-childhood programs meant to address risk and protective factors. Situational examples include legislation requiring manufacturers of cars to install ignition locks, exact-change policies in transit systems, street lighting, and land-planning programs meant to make spaces more defensible (Clarke, 1995). Developmental measures include the proliferation of Head Start programs in the United States, Sure Start programs in England and Wales, and Communities that Care programs in both countries and elsewhere (Farrington and Welsh, 2007).

On other subjects, American and English policy makers have, in recent decades, been completely unreceptive. The overwhelming weight of the research evidence shows that the three strikes laws are not effective deterrents to crime (Tonry, 2009) and that capital punishment is not an effective deterrent to homicide (Donohue and Wolfers, 2005) or a more effective deterrent than a sentence to life imprisonment (Hood and Hoyle, 2008). Nor, more generally, do laws that mandate minimum prison sentences after convictions for particular offenses produce

measurable deterrent effects (Doob and Webster, 2003; Tonry, 2009). Overwhelming evidence likewise demonstrates that the law-enforcement (supply-side) emphasis of the 30-year American “War on Drugs” reduces none of the things it purportedly is designed to reduce—drug use, drug trafficking, or drug availability (as measured by the street prices of illicit drugs; if they were becoming less available, then prices should rise. Instead, for most of the last 25 years, they have fallen; Caulkins and Reuter, 2010; Tonry, 2004b).

In a rational world, or one in which policies were based primarily on evidence, all of those policies would have been altered long ago. It is not, however, only such high-visibility policies that have proven impermeable to influence by evidence. A large body of evidence accumulated in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s showing that “boot camps” for young offenders, based on the model of basic training for military recruits, had no long-term effects on participants’ reoffending or on their self-discipline or self-esteem (Wilson and MacKenzie, 2007). Decades of evaluations of the effects of Neighborhood Watch programs on crime and of Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) programs on later drug use, in which police officers lecture elementary school students on the dangers of drug use showed that both programs were ineffective. Neighborhood Watch, for many years, could not be shown to affect crime rates (Hope, 1995), while DARE was shown not to diminish drug experimentation or use (Weiss et al., 2005). Both programs continued to proliferate and to attract federal, state, and local funding in the United States, as did Neighborhood Watch in England and Wales. An equivalent English example is provided by the proliferation of the world’s most extensive program of closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras in the face of evidence of a general absence of crime-preventive effects except under very narrowly limited circumstances (Welsh and Farrington, 2009).

Sometimes, governments are so committed to policies that they do not want to have their effectiveness evaluated lest they be shown to be ineffective. One classic example is the unwillingness of Tony Blair’s English Labour Government to evaluate the preventive effects of its trademark Antisocial Behaviour Orders initiative (National Audit Office, 2006).<sup>5</sup> Another vivid example is California Governor Pete Wilson’s statement, in vetoing legislation creating a commission to study the effects of California three strikes law, that the legislation’s aim was to “disprove the obvious positive impact of the Three Strikes law. . . . There are many mysteries in life, but the efficiency of ‘Three Strikes’ . . . is not one of them” (California District Attorneys Association, 2004: 32).

Similar observations presumably can be made about every country. Some initiatives, whatever the strength of evidence as to their effectiveness, are simply not of interest in some places. American presumptive sentencing guidelines have been shown to reduce sentencing disparities, especially affecting members of ethnic minorities, and to make correctional resource needs predictable (Tonry, 1996), but they have been adopted nowhere in continental Europe,

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5. The National Audit Office (2006: 5) observed of antisocial behavior orders: “The absence of formal evaluation by the Home Office of the success of different interventions . . . prevents local areas targeting interventions in the most efficient way to achieve the best outcome. . . .”

because they are regarded as mechanistic and are believed to diminish the human dimensions of sentencing decisions. During a period in the 1980s when community-service orders were adopted as prison alternatives in some European countries, most prominently Scotland and the Netherlands, based on empirical evidence that judges would use them as alternatives with no higher breach rates than those that characterize short prison sentences, Finnish policy makers rejected them as unduly paternalistic and intrusive. German policy makers rejected them because they were believed to violate a constitutional prohibition against involuntary servitude. Likewise, despite evidence from Germany and Scandinavia that day fines successfully can be used as prison alternatives, Netherlands policy makers rejected them on principle.<sup>6</sup>

### Space

The preceding paragraph describes various evidence-based policy initiatives that found favor in some countries but not in others. I elaborate some of those examples in this section but move away from a narrow focus on evidence-based policy making to the wider subject of policy transfer across national boundaries.

Community penalties provide a good illustration of national differences in policy interest (Tonry, 1999). Community service as a prison alternative first was developed in California as a device for avoiding imprisonment, and removal from their children, of poor women convicted of minor welfare frauds. English policy makers showed interest in the new sanction and established pilot projects in the early 1970s to see how it worked. Evaluations showed that in half of the cases in which judges imposed the new sanctions, the offender otherwise would have gone to prison and that rates of reoffending were no worse than if they had been imprisoned. Based on that positive evidence, community service was authorized throughout the country. Scottish policy makers followed suit in the late 1970s, and after their own evaluations of pilot projects, so did Dutch policy makers. Many other European countries did likewise.

Day fines provide another example. First developed in Scandinavian countries in the 1920s, they were adopted in Germany in the 1970s as sanctions to be used after German policy makers radically chose to diminish use of short prison sentences. The notion of a sanction that can be tailored both to the offender's means and to the severity of his crime should commend itself to policy makers in any country who believe in rational policy making and who doubt the desirability of imprisonment. The American federal government invested in day-fine pilot projects throughout the country in the early 1990s. In none of the sites where the pilots were carried out were local policy makers willing to use day fines in lieu of prison sentences. In no pilot site, and in no other American jurisdiction, were day fines established as authorized sanctions. The English government also showed interest: after successful evaluations of pilot projects, the Criminal Justice Act 1991 authorized the use of day fines throughout the country. In the face

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6. More details, including citations to major sources, can be found in Tonry (1999).

of hostile media coverage and resistance from practitioners, the legislation was rescinded within 1 year of taking effect.

The larger question of policy transfer shows similar geographical variation. Within the United States, the demonstration of the effectiveness of sentencing guidelines in the bellwether states of Minnesota and Washington led to their adoption in a dozen or more states and to consideration (but not adoption) in the 1980s and 1990s in Australia and Canada. The English Criminal Justice Act of 2003 created a sentencing commission charged to create sentencing guidelines. No continental European country has done so.

Sentencing guidelines are an evidence-based innovation. The same broad pattern of geographical differences can be observed in the presence or absence of the influence of other American policy initiatives. The most famous, or notorious, American policy initiatives of the past 20 years are three-strikes-and-you're-out laws, mandatory minimum sentence laws, and sex-offender registration and notification laws (generally called "Megan's Laws"). None can be described as evidence-based; none have been shown to be an effective deterrent or crime-preventative.<sup>7</sup>

None of those initiatives has caught on outside the English-speaking countries. Although the rhetoric of zero-tolerance policing captured the imaginations of conservative politicians and police officials in many countries, only in a few English police forces (most notably, Manchester) has it been adopted in its repressive New York City form. No other country besides England has enacted three strikes laws. Only England, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa have adopted U.S.-style mandatory minimum sentence laws and then in much milder and more narrowly-focused forms. No other jurisdiction, including England, has adopted Megan's Laws (the English have adopted sex-offender registration laws but without allowing—as in the United States—public access to the information).

Even in the Anglo-Saxon countries that have followed U.S. leads, the punch usually has been pulled.<sup>8</sup> The English Crime (Sentences) Act of 1997 did enact a three strikes law (and one two strikes law), but unlike in the United States, judges were given authority to impose another sentence when they believed justice so required. Mandatory minimum sentence laws in Canada, Australia, and South Africa called for sentences far short of the 10- and 20-year minimums common in the United States (Tonry, 2009) and pulled the "mandatory" punch by authorizing escape hatches for cases in which judges believed the mandated sentence was too severe.

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7. Tonry (2008) summarized the evidence on the deterrent effectiveness of capital punishment, and Tonry (2009) discussed the three strikes and mandatory minimum sentence laws.

8. Jones and Newburn (2007) provided the fullest case study of policy transfers from one country to another; they examined English receptivity to American initiatives concerning private prisons, zero-tolerance policing, and mandatory minimum sentence laws.

## Time

When a new initiative is considered, whether or not evidence-based, often determines whether it will be enacted. In the key phrase from the research utilization literature, it is critical whether “windows of opportunity” are open. In Finland, for example, to refer again to developments mentioned earlier, the window was not open to evidence concerning the effects of community service when its adoption first was considered. Later, motivated to continue a decades-long strategy of reduction of the prison population, the window opened. The evidence had not changed; policy makers’ willingness to act on it had (Lappi-Seppälä, 2007).

Recent American history provides vivid evidence of the importance of windows of opportunity. Although the lethal effects of private gun ownership in the United States on rates of suicide, homicide, and accidental firearm deaths are well known, political considerations have precluded enactment of meaningful federal gun control laws. The two exceptions are in the late 1960s, immediately after the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, when the most ambitious federal antigun laws ever were enacted, and in the early 1980s after the attempted assassination of President Ronald Reagan, when the Brady Laws on gun sales were enacted. Those windows remained open only for a short time, however. Major provisions of the 1968 law were fundamentally weakened. More recently, federal legislation forbidding the sale of some semiautomatic weapons to individuals was repealed.

Two other examples, however, are more heartening. Research on correctional boot camps showing no effects on subsequent offending had no discernible influence on policy for 20 years (Wilson and MacKenzie, 2007). However, the political climate began to change in the early 21st century. Abusive incidents in several states in which young people died at the hands of authoritarian guards (often during strenuous exercise) led to a sudden loss of enthusiasm for boot camps. The research evidence suddenly became influential in many states as policy makers and correctional administrators considered closing or transforming boot camps. Few of the no-frills camps that were popular in the 1980s and 1990s survived.

The story with DARE is similar. For 20 years, support was impervious to the influence of consistently negative evaluation findings. Federal policy makers during the Bush II administration began to focus on evidence-based educational policies, and drug-abuse education was not exempt. DARE within a couple of years ceased being politically untouchable. The absence of evidence of effectiveness precluded federal support. Programs closed across the country (Weiss et al., 2005).

## Conclusion

Research-derived evidence influences policy and practice in some places, at some times, and on some subjects. On some subjects, especially those that implicate important normative and ideological concerns, such as capital punishment or severity of sentences, evidence is seldom likely to make much difference. On other subjects, especially those that can be characterized as primarily technological or technocratic (e.g., the crime-preventive effects of ignition locks), evidence is often likely to be influential. For subjects falling in the great middle, evidence might

or might not matter depending on the political and policy weight of considerations that point in other directions. The presence or absence of windows of opportunity in specific times and places makes all the difference.

Evidence is, however, intellectually and socially important on all these issues. Even concerning the relatively impervious issues like capital punishment and sentencing severity, evidence sharpens the debates and clarifies what the issues really are. It is important to show and know, for example, that no credible empirical evidence suggests that capital punishment is an effective deterrent of homicide. If the evidence is absent or unclear, then people who support the death penalty for ideological reasons, but feel uncomfortable saying so, can hide behind claims that they support capital punishment as a means to saving innocent victims' lives. If the evidence clearly shows that death does not deter, then the debate must be made in the moral terms that really motivate opponents and supporters. Likewise, if the evidence shows that California's three strikes law has no discernible effects on crime patterns or trends, its defenders must be prepared to defend the savage sentences it requires in moral terms. That is a good thing.

The accumulation of evidence is also important concerning midlevel issues as to which windows might open. American critics of boot camps, DARE, and Neighborhood Watch have been frustrated for decades by policy makers' failure to take account of evidence. However, when policy makers' minds finally opened concerning boot camps and DARE, the evidence had a devastating effect. The same thing probably will happen eventually concerning Neighborhood Watch and, in England, CCTV.

Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010) are correct in their diagnosis of a problem—the marginalization from the worlds of criminal justice policy and practice of some segments of American criminology. Scholars in earlier times were much more actively engaged in policy processes, and appear to have been more influential. The reasons for that marginalization are not uncomplicated—university insularity, academic incentive and reward systems, career structures, and emphasis on cutting-edge technologies and techniques—and are hard for affected individuals to resist. That is a pity. Policy makers yearn for evidence, although not at all times or on all subjects, and are susceptible to influence by it. And many academics have fun, occasionally, being invited into the corridors of power. Some even have influence on the decisions that are made there.

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## The role of research and researchers in crime and justice policy

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If criminology is to have an impact on public policy, then presumably it should take steps to encourage research that is relevant to policy. Such a claim presumes, however, that criminology *should* have a role in public policy discussions and debates. Whether it should or should not is ultimately a moral question, and it is one that I will side step conveniently here by suggesting that most research has the potential to contribute to public policy and might do so through a myriad of ways, regardless of the intentions of those who produce the research. Imagine, for example, that we line up 100 criminologists who aim to change the world through their research. Then we line up another 100 who would prefer to focus on “basic science” scholarship that aims to unpack the causes and effects of various phenomena (e.g., variation in property crime rates) or to measure certain constructs (e.g., self-control) better (Merton, 1973; Rossi, 1980). I submit that it would be unclear which group would exert the greatest influence on policy.

Such a claim ultimately would have to be evaluated empirically to test its veracity. As far as I know, no studies exist that document in a rigorous, generalizable manner how research influences public views and the programs, practices, policies, laws, and court decisions at local, state, and national levels. Consequently, it seems to be an open question whether one approach would improve policy more than another and respond better to public needs and desires.

So, should those who want to promote policy-focused criminology, or its reflexive variant—“public criminology” (Uggen and Inderbitzin, 2010, this issue)—give up? I do not think so. Rather, I think the implications of the claim are mundane. What, for example, should policy-focused criminologists do? Continue as they have and hope for the best. What about criminologists who are more interested in “basic” research? Continue as they have and, again, hope for the best.

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### A Balanced Portfolio of Research

Yes, but what about specific types of “public criminology” research and activities that should be pursued to ensure that the goals of public criminology are achieved? I will answer the question differently at the end of this essay. Here I would argue that what criminology should do is to pursue what in economics would be described as a balanced portfolio of investments. This approach involves diversifying one’s investments into different sectors of the economy. Doing so allows one to reduce the risk—in particular, a dramatic decrease in the value of one’s investment—associated with pursuing any one stock, fund, or part of the economy and to increase the chances of a sizable return. Such a strategy seems particularly indicated in a context in which investment returns are uncertain and in which substantial profits or losses can be made in almost any sector of the economy, depending on the country, year, stock, bond, fund, and so on.

The potential benefits of a balanced-portfolio approach to criminological research are similar. By investing in all types of research, including the four described by Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010)—professional criminology, critical criminology, policy criminology, and public criminology—the field of criminology maximizes the likelihood of returns not only for public criminology but also for the others. The reason? One never knows how one type of research might inform another. Certainly, one could pursue the research equivalent of individual stock selection (e.g., investing considerable resources in a large-scale, multisite experimental evaluation of some policing program) and potentially obtain larger returns. The risk, however, is that the expenditure gains one nothing, whereas an alternative investment, spread out over different types of research, might produce at least some return.

That said, the argument for a balanced portfolio of research begs the important question, “What *should* the distribution of investments be?” For example, among all criminologists, how many should focus on a given type of research? Or, given a set amount of research dollars, how much should be allocated to each type of research? Answers to these questions would depend greatly on the current status quo. If criminologists paid virtually no attention to policy-focused research, then clearly it would be necessary to prioritize funding for such research, at least for a few years. If, however, criminologists collectively paid equal amounts of attention to each type, then perhaps we would want to allocate new labor or resources equally across each type.

Perhaps not. Such investment allocations ultimately involve value decisions, not scientific ones. For that reason, it is relevant that, to my knowledge, no consensus has been reached about the proper amount of attention that should be given to each type of research or, to make matters worse, the empirical evidence about the distribution of current research efforts. Given that state of affairs, it is difficult to know whether we in fact need more of any type of research, whether it be professional criminology (e.g., basic research), public criminology, or any other. A needs evaluation thus might be helpful before dramatically changing criminologists’ research priorities.

### **Empirical Evidence of a Need for Public Criminology?**

In evaluation research, a “needs evaluation” stands at the foundation of the evaluation hierarchy (Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, 2004). The basic idea is that before devising a policy, you should measure the amount and nature of the problem before assuming that anything needs to be fixed. Assuming that a problem does exist, it is important to describe not only its nature but also what caused it. Measuring need in this way is challenging but essential. For example, armed with this type of specific information, we would have a better chance of devising a policy that would be targeted sufficiently as to have a chance at being effective.

The relevant question here is whether a need exists for public criminology. Let us assume that, yes, as a general matter, a need exists. That understanding takes us only a short distance. The larger challenge is measuring the *amount* of need and its *nature*. For example, perhaps we have a large shortfall of research that focuses on practitioners, and perhaps the shortfall is especially acute in the area of prison officer victimization. Armed with such knowledge, we can direct our attention in a way that addresses the shortfall and, at the same time, addresses the goal of increasing public criminology efforts.

Unfortunately, as far as I know, little systematic empirical evidence indicates one way or the other about the amount or the nature of need for particular types of public criminology research. Of course, any assessment of need would require defining and operationalizing “public criminology.” Because many research activities might not appear to be “public criminology” at first blush, an assessment would be challenging. Indeed, if we hired an army of researchers, then what would we tell them to tally? That is, which research would count as public criminology and which would not? At present, I do not think that a clear answer exists.

### **Empirical Evidence of Public Criminology Impact?**

The premise of any policy is that it should have an impact. That means it produces a positive outcome of some type—an improvement for society. What are the measures that we would use to examine whether public criminology produces improvements?

Some outcomes are intrinsically difficult to measure. What exactly, for example, would be an improvement in public dialogue or in responsiveness to or help for victims and practitioners? No set of researchers is likely to agree on the answer.

Even so, studies might focus on specific dimensions in which perhaps some common ground could be found. For example, efforts to communicate research findings to the public could be assessed using questionnaires. We might monitor on an annual basis the public’s knowledge about various crime and justice topics and determine whether various strategies increased the accuracy of public perceptions about such topics (in those cases in which objective facts exist). Other outcome dimensions likely would be considerably harder to measure. Public criminology aims, for example, to reframe cultural images of justice, as per Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010). Some heavy lifting would be required to provide sufficiently nuanced and valid measures of such

images. And, of course, the reframing is not the ultimate goal. Rather, the larger goal presumably is one of helping to make society a better place. Measuring that goal is no small task.

The perfect is the enemy of the good, according to Voltaire. Perfect measurement of public criminology's goals is simply not feasible. But that does not mean that measurement would not help matters. To the contrary, it might help clarify precisely what public criminology is and what outcomes are relevant to assessing its contributions. Absent such measures, proponents must take recourse in what they hope are its benefits, and critics simply can assert that public criminology achieves nothing. This situation is less than ideal.

### **How to Increase Public Criminology?**

If we accept that a policy-focused public criminology is greatly needed, then the following question results: How do we increase such research? For some, the answer is clear—support more policy-focused research (“policy criminology”) and policy-reframing research (“public criminology”). But that solution assumes a questionable causal nexus. In particular, it assumes that efforts, say, to evaluate a community-policy program will offer more to public dialogue (one of public criminology's goals) than, say, the effort to develop a special measure of self-control.

Such a contention rests, I believe, on shaky grounds. Scholarship on the sociology of science (see, e.g., Merton, 1973, 1982) and criminal justice policy making (see, e.g., Stolz, 2002) highlights that the causal links are diverse. A better measurement instrument might achieve even greater advances in policy and public understanding than an overtly “public criminology” undertaking, such as partnering with a neighborhood group. Perhaps, for example, a researcher with a “basic science” bent aims to develop a more refined measure of inequality. The research then unexpectedly sparks a line of policy-focused studies that builds on that measure and leads to new policies (Mears and Stafford, 2002; Rossi, 1980; Rossi et al., 2004). Perhaps this new line of research involves studies that tap into public views toward the topic, views that then might inform the new policies. In this scenario, we have something akin to a public criminology outcome emerging from a basic science endeavor.

Because we have little basis for knowing what kinds of research ultimately will contribute to or become public criminology, pursuing a portfolio of diverse types of research would seem the better part of wisdom. One simply never knows what will happen with a given study or what forces will shape policy.

I recall talking with a member of a state legislative criminal justice committee and asking whether the state's investment in supermax prisons would be swayed one way or the other by a large body of studies showing that such prisons are not cost effective. The conversation to that point included a discussion of possible benefits and costs of supermaxes. I then asked the following question: What if supermaxes were found to be effective but not more so than cheaper alternatives? The legislator said that it would not matter. The mood among the state lawmakers was that supermaxes were a good idea, and they wanted one regardless of cost.

If the legislator's assessment was correct, then it suggests that a mountain of well-conducted, policy-focused research would not have shifted the legislature's decision. It knew what it wanted.

That said, perhaps one research study or another might have influenced the decision. Perhaps a public criminology enterprise that aimed to educate citizens and legislators about prison-order problems and solutions might have shifted the discussion and led to the consideration of alternatives. Perhaps a cost–benefit evaluation might have achieved the same result. Perhaps a “basic science” study widely covered in the media might have weaved its way into the legislature’s deliberations or into those of the criminal justice committee. Perhaps not. The point is that it frequently might be the case that public criminology is achieved best through efforts that, on the face of it, do not look obviously like “public criminology.”

At the same time, it merits emphasizing that overtly “public criminology” efforts might backfire and so undermine the goals associated with these efforts. For example, because public criminology more directly addresses the political dimension of crime and justice, its efforts entail a greater involvement in political discourse. I am no political scientist. But I do know that political winds can shift quickly. That means that a mishandled public criminology effort might create a political backlash. This possibility does not mean that public criminology should not be undertaken. It simply means that this type of work is not without risks and that in some circumstances alternative types of research might achieve public criminology’s goals better.

So, absent clear guidance from empirical research about what actually influences policy and about what really counts as public criminology, what is a criminologist who wants to make society a better place to do? The answer seems simple, if mundane—keep the faith. Pursue research that you believe will make a difference. For some, that might mean policy criminology or public criminology. But for others, it might be basic research or “critical criminology” efforts. They all constitute important investments that might pay as yet unknown dividends.

### **Taking a Stand?**

All that said, should criminologists take a stand on issues? Here, I think the policy prescription is self-evident, if self-serving—more funding should be provided and a better infrastructure should be implemented for crime and justice research. Many social scientists, such as Alfred Blumstein and Joan Petersilia (1995), have lamented the woeful state of funding for such research relative to other social policy areas. In the end, I think it is reasonable to say that criminology as a discipline produces a remarkable amount of policy-relevant research given the relative paucity of funding for basic or applied research. More and better research would position the discipline better as well as its professional organizations to take policy stands. Even then, the fact that many criminologists differ about the state of research in different areas suggests to me that it might be more productive in the long run for these organizations to focus more on ensuring that more and better research occurs and that it sees the light of day through a variety of dissemination strategies. Taking a stand on some issues, however warranted, raises the real risk of undermining the perceived credibility of criminological research in general (see, e.g., Basu, Dirsmith, and Gupta, 1999), which in turn might undermine the effort to achieve a particular policy outcome.

## Conclusion

I am highly partial to the argument that criminology should aim to improve society and to inform policy discussions and debates. I also am partial to the view that too little policy-focused research occurs. Not least, I am partial to the public criminology argument that greater attention should be given to helping to reframe some debates, if only through illuminating unknown facts or helping to make a wider swath of views heard.

However, I do not believe that one has to adhere to these views to engage in meaningful or important research. Science is in no small part justified by curiosity—how does the world work? From that perspective, it is not necessary to take recourse in the notion that greater understanding will improve the world. Yet, greater understanding sometimes *can* lead to big changes. And because we cannot know which types of understanding will yield such changes, it seems important to support a wide range—a balanced portfolio—of research.

In the end, I do believe that more policy-focused research is warranted, both to increase the evidence base for the crime and justice societies we have and to contribute to more “basic science” research. Many scholars have identified ways to increase the amount and quality of policy-focused criminological work. Among the steps that could be taken, which I discuss elsewhere (Mears, 2010), are the following: Educate and train students in evaluation research; promote and reward applied research among those who work in universities and colleges; integrate applied and basic research where possible; create better ties among researchers, policy makers, and practitioners; institutionalize evaluation research into criminal justice system operations and activities; create independent criminal justice research agencies; and develop accessible sources of information about basic facts concerning crime, criminal justice operations, and a range of programs and policies. The list is not exhaustive, but it underscores the idea that pragmatic strategies exist for promoting research that better informs public policy and perhaps that in turn helps shift discussion and debates in productive ways.

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