

## **PUBLIC CRIMINOLOGIES**

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## **PUBLIC CRIMINOLOGIES**

### **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. We here 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 media discussion of criminology and sociology and 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 is often 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.

## **PUBLIC CRIMINOLOGIES**

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.

We here 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 (Savelsberg and Flood, 2004; Laub 2005; Loader and Sparks, 2008), 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 may 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. While this training provides much of the expertise needed for responsible public scholarship, it generally emphasizes research questions, methodologies, and scholarly products that may 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 at the same time contributing to professional, critical, and policy criminology. We envision four crucial tasks in this regard: (1) evaluating and reframing cultural images of the criminal, which is perhaps the clearest example of public criminology; (2) reconsidering rulemaking, which has deep roots in critical criminology; (3) evaluating social interventions, which derives from policy criminology; and, (4) 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 policymakers 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 to both inform the debate and to shift its terms.

This paper 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 of the classroom.

## **THE PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY DEBATES**

### **PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY DEFINED**

It has now been more than five years since the Annual Meetings of the American Sociological Association were organized around the theme of public sociology (Burawoy 2005a). While criminologists such as Clifford Shaw, John Irwin, and Elliot Currie had long advocated public scholarship, these meetings brought the concept and the debate to the forefront. For Michael Burawoy, 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" (2004: 5), 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 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, reproduced here as Figure 1. In contrast to public sociology, professional

sociology and critical sociology are primarily 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 explicitly engaged in dialogue with publics rather than being conducted on behalf of policy actors. Burawoy describes a career trajectory in which a scholar may move from one cell to another over 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).

[Figure 1 about here.]

## ATTACKS AND DEFENSES

Burawoy’s call quickly motivated symposia in journals such as *Social Forces* (2004), *The British Journal of Sociology* (2005b), and *Theoretical Criminology* (2008) 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 (Nielsen, 2004; Moody, 2005; see also Wilson 1975), a perceived retreat from scientific standards and methods, and the perception that public sociology is ineffectual as organized and practiced (Brady, 2004). For all of these reasons, critics fear that public sociology has the potential to undermine the hard-won legitimacy of the social sciences (Tittle, 2004; Moody, 2005). These critical voices rarely advocate a complete retreat from public activities, but rather 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 counters 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) makes the point even more strongly, suggesting: "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" (p. 717). In addressing concerns about scientific standards and methods, public scholars counter that they advocate and conduct rigorous rather than sloppy research, and they provide 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) conceptualized the term, they are "empirical researchers, analysts, or theorists like the rest of us" (p. 7), 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 may 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 may 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 is thus quite consistent with the traditional activities of academic life.

### **PROSPECTS FOR A PUBLIC CRIMINOLOGY**

In describing its historical trajectory, Burawoy argues 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 has advanced the similar argument that criminology in the United Kingdom has "lost the knack of engaging in public debate." Wiles suggests 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 easily interpret and understand (Clear and Frost,



2008). In the United States, Elliott Currie has long 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) argues, "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 also acting as a powerful independent force 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). While they may 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) offers 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 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 (p.18). Given this "emotional tone for public discourse about crime and punishment" (Garland, 2001: 10; Garland and Sparks 2000), legislators and politicians have largely 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 context on the causes of crime and recommendations for "criminologically justifiable action" (Clear, 2010) as experts, rather than their own knee-jerk political opinions as citizens.

Third, in spite of its nascent status as a discipline, criminology continues to be distinguished by its interdisciplinarity. Developmental psychologists (e.g., Terrie Moffitt)

operations researchers (e.g., Alfred Blumstein) economists (e.g., Philip Cook) and sociologists (e.g., Robert Sampson) all contribute important professional knowledge to the field of criminology. This interdisciplinarity is both a strength and a weakness: while 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 et al., 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 more quickly cross disciplines and professional criminology will gain strength.

Finally, criminology is unusual for its close connection to practitioner-based fields. Whereas 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 closely collaborate with academics in research and data collection. In fact, a number of 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 may be for professional sociologists. Policy work, in particular, is professionally recognized in criminology and often rewarded as relevant and appropriate.

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

[Figure 2 about here.]

### Professional Criminology

Figure 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 situate crime in disciplinary knowledge. Just as 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 is sometimes 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 upon well-developed theoretical traditions and an increasingly solid base of empirical evidence.

Daniel 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 clear-headed reporting of professional knowledge, while the latter involves bringing new voices, issues, and concerns to the scientific study of crime and punishment.

### 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) thus argues that social science is at its “practical best” when it is derived from experimental evidence that points to visibly demonstrable benefits (p. 118).

Burawoy identifies “servility” as the chief pathology of policy sociology and this is likely the case with policy criminology as well. For example, researchers seeking funding from the National Institute of Justice must generally 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 ASC meetings.

### 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 rulemaking and enforcement processes that other criminologists may take for granted. For example, some critical criminologists render problematic the definition of crime as 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, the critical press has long been viewed as more trustworthy and authoritative about crime than mainstream media or scholarship. While Burawoy

identifies dogmatism as the chief pathology of critical sociology, this is less likely to be the case in criminology, where there are many schools of “left realist,” “new criminology,” and structural and instrumental Marxist variants. Yet none of these 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 (p. 271).

In reconceptualizing notions of crime and justice, critical criminologists consciously distance themselves from mainstream criminology, which may 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 may involve partnership with a non-profit or neighborhood group to address the urgent needs of its clients or members while also building research capacity in the affected 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. While the media tend to consult practitioners – chiefs of police, corrections officials, district attorneys – as the “*real experts*” on crime, public criminologists are often among the first academics to learn of developing stories that may 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, are rarely consulted on general crime trends but are instead 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 (p. 49)

While 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 quickly devolve 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 points 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 social world whose externality to us gives an empirical force" (2002: 246). While 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 upon an important legacy of engaged scholarship. Clifford Shaw is perhaps the best exemplar of such work, as reflected in his longstanding 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

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<sup>1</sup> Although he did not endorse the term, Robert Sampson invoked "airport criminologist" during a presentation at the annual American Sociological Association meetings in Chicago, 2002.

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 Lundman, 2001: 108; Krisberg, 2005). 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 gave rise to 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 were actively engaged in the Great Society project as advisors to John F. Kennedy and others (Short, 1975).

Implementing and popularizing large-scale anti-delinquency projects such as Mobilization for Youth, Ohlin was both public and 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 above, conservative political scientist James Q. Wilson worked from a much different set of assumptions and evidence. His deterrence-focused neo-conservative vision of public criminology was later 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, 1998; 1996), 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 may, in turn, 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 3 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 hundred years. The scale of the y-axis differs dramatically for the two groups.

[Figure 3 about here.]

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, convicted of murder in the famed Lindbergh kidnapping case. The use 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 there were only

120 mentions in 2009, or 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,” shown in Figure 4. The former search term is surely a low estimate of public statements by criminologists, since many are identified as professors in other disciplines. Professors of criminology or criminal justice were rarely 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, while the criminology peak of 32 appeared in 2000.

[Figure 4 about here.]

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 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 McLeod’s *Ain’t No Makin’ It* each registered sales in excess of 75,000. Today, such a list would likely 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 "impact on public policy and the public mind" (Currie, 2007: 178) by building a solid criminological evidentiary base which can be applied to problems that hold public interest. A related goal, however, is to uncover and build interest in social problems that may have escaped widespread public attention, such as the conditions in prisons or high-crime neighborhoods. Finally, a third goal is to seriously engage the broader impacts of such social problems as well as any proposed solutions, including their scientific, moral, and practical implications. In doing so, we may 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 (Currie, 2007; Clear and Frost, 2008). 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) argues 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) suggests:

in 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” (p. 720).

By bringing high-quality evidence to bear on hotly-contested questions, public criminologists may 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) has 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” (Tonry, 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. While the field of criminology has grown tremendously, scholars’ expertise has generally narrowed (Currie, 2007). As Wiles (2002) suggests, there is today a larger criminological research community than 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” (Wiles, 2002: 247-248). Along with their own research specialties, the most successful public criminologists will necessarily 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 in order 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 5 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.

[Figure 5 about here.]

In our view public criminology is as much about teaching as it is about research. While 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 have largely departed sociology departments for criminology and criminal justice programs (Best, 2004). As Stephen Pfohl has observed 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 between 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.

Teaching as a form of public criminology offers particular relevance and urgency because our classes are often comprised of future criminal justice practitioners who will soon 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” (Tifft, Maruna, & 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).

While individual interest and effort is critical to the success of public criminology, so too is institutional support. As Currie (2007) notes, there are few structural incentives to practice public criminology in the academy, but some will find it easier than others. Faculty at large land-grant universities, for example, may feel a special responsibility to take their teaching and service into their communities. Because part of the mission is “extension” into surrounding areas, there is often greater legitimacy 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, may find that public scholarship resonates with their university’s “commitment to ethical reflection and social justice” (Burawoy et al., 2004: 114).

As Burawoy suggests about public sociology (2004, 2005a), it is likely that these contextual differences lead public criminology to be most widely practiced and more highly valued in large public universities where there is often a high teaching load (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, while faculty members at state institutions may be doing innovative work in public

criminology, it is often practiced at the local level and it may not be recognized beyond its usefulness to community partners and engaged students. Because of their myriad responsibilities in teaching, service, and publishing, faculty members may 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 the electronic and print media. Public criminologists should consider their own interests and skill sets and then work to their strengths, which may lead them to by “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 are rarely tapped to comment on crime stories on cable news channels or other national forums (Frost and Phillips, 2009), the best strategy may 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 may 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 following the space shuttle *Columbia* accident, Diane Vaughan notes that a great deal of “invisible public sociology” and “invisible work” goes into being a public intellectual (2005; Burawoy et al., 2004).

New media are becoming an increasingly important place within public criminology. Blogs and web 2.0 technologies are fast 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 ([www.contexts.org/pubcrim/](http://www.contexts.org/pubcrim/)). As Chancer and McLaughlin (2007) argue: “Evident, 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” (p. 169).

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 Association’s public outreach magazine, was receiving 500,000 page views per month by mid-year 2009 (Contexts, 2009). As yet, however, there is no place 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 consistently awarded 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**

There is a division of labor within any academic discipline, 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 of the justice concerns that brought them to graduate study, public criminology can be a powerful antidote to what Cullen (2010) calls “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 may 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 must also 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 should also 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 may 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 can perhaps point these individuals to other resources, but such exchanges are time-consuming and often feel inadequate. In addition, as Haggerty (2004) has noted, well-intentioned policy pronouncements can be easily co-opted, leading to a “host of unintended negative consequences” (p. 212). In spite of 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 immediately apparent. As Vaughan explains, “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 service 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 there are areas of concern that public criminologists are currently using careful research to address: 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 to simply 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 Shaw once did to neglected audiences and communities affected by crime. If public criminology is to become a public good, 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 Frank 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 (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 may 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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**Figure 1. Michael Burawoy's (2005) Two-by-Two Table for Sociology**

	<b>Academic Audience</b>	<b>Extra-Academic Audience</b>
Instrumental Knowledge	<i>Professional Sociology</i>	<i>Policy Sociology</i>
Reflexive Knowledge	<i>Critical Sociology</i>	<i>Public Sociology</i>

**Figure 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>	<i>Professional Criminology: Assembling evidentiary base and situating crime in disciplinary knowledge</i>	<i>Policy Criminology: Evaluating social interventions and making evidence-based recommendations</i>
· Knowledge	Theoretical/empirical	Concrete
· Legitimacy	Scientific norms (methods)	Effectiveness (scientific)
· Accountability	Interdisciplinary peers <i>and practitioners</i>	Clients/patrons (government, foundations, practitioners)
· Pathology	Self-referentiality <i>and collective amnesia</i>	Servility (“contract work”)
· Politics	Professional self-interest	Policy intervention
· Attractions	Careers	Funding ( <i>and recognition</i> )
· Outlets	Journals and scholarly monographs	Research reports (e.g., <i>NIJ Research in Brief</i> )
· Exemplars	Daniel Nagin’s TRAJ models; Laub and Sampson (2003).	Lawrence Sherman et al., <i>What Works? CSPV’s Blueprints for Violence Prevention</i>
<b>Reflexive</b>	<i>Critical Criminology: Raising questions about rulemaking, rulebreaking, and rule enforcement</i>	<i>Public Criminology: Evaluating and reframing cultural images of crime, criminals, and justice</i>
· Knowledge	Foundational ( <i>crime and justice</i> )	Communicative
· Legitimacy	Moral vision ( <i>of justice</i> )	Relevance
· Accountability	Critical intellectuals ( <i>and convict intellectuals</i> )	Designated publics ( <i>citizens, victims, practitioners</i> )
· Pathology	Dogmatism ( <i>and insularity</i> )	Potential for bias and faddishness (“airport criminologists,” <i>homogeneity</i> )
· Politics	Internal debate	Public dialogue
· Attractions	Values	Influence and attention
· Outlets	Journals and monographs	Mass media, trade press

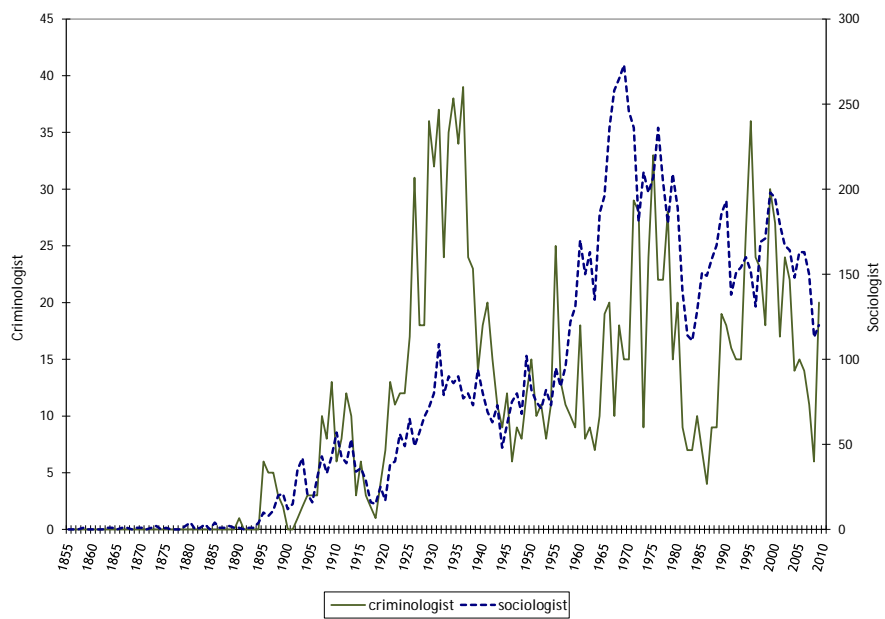


· Exemplars

Richard Quinney, Meda Chesney-Lind, Kathleen Daly, Jeffrey Reiman, William Chambliss, Walter DeKeseredy

Todd Clear, Barry Glassner, James Q. Wilson, Elliott Currie

**Figure 3. *New York Times* Mentions of Criminologists and Sociologists, 1855-2009**



**Figure 4. *New York Times* Mentions of Professors of Criminology and Criminal Justice and Professors of Sociology, 1893-2009**

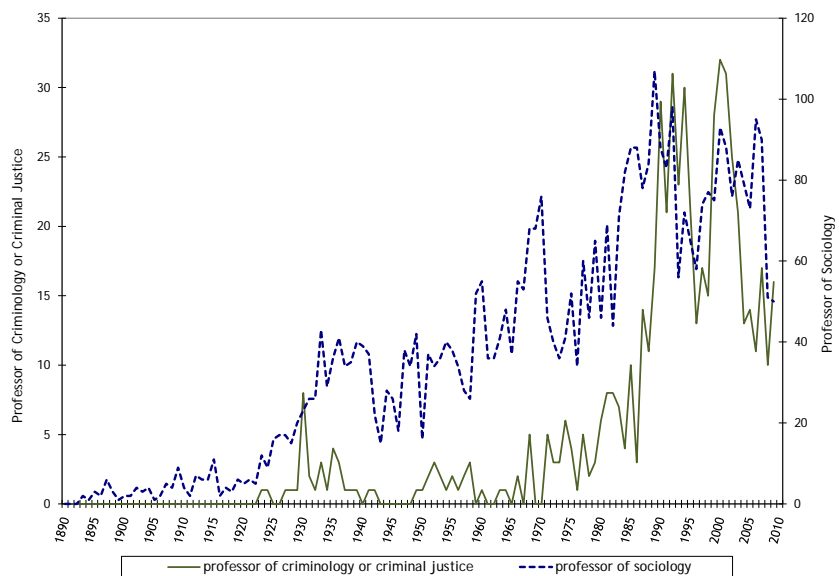


Figure 5. Crossover Criminologies

