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# The State of Criminology in the 21st Century: A Penpal Roundtable

Larry Tifft, Shadd Maruna & Elizabeth Elliott

*Many criminologists in North America, Europe, and the world generally have embraced new paradigms of criminology. In this roundtable discussion, three noted criminologists, Larry Tifft, Shadd Maruna, and Elizabeth Elliott, share their views on the state of criminology as an academic discipline in the early 21st century, questioning the boundaries and value of the new paradigms.*

*Keywords:* Criminology; Critical Criminology; State Crime; Criminal Justice; Restorative Justice

*Editorial note:* Thank you Larry, Shadd, and Liz for agreeing to be part of our roundtable discussion; as you know we have not published one for such a very long time. Here I am hoping that you will consider the state of criminology as we move further into the 21st century.

The three of you have been involved differentially in the fields of sociology, criminal justice, and criminology for some time now and have a great feel for the paths those disciplines have taken and are taking with respect to promoting justice and human well-being around the globe. My sense is, especially in the areas of criminology and criminal justice, that scholars have aligned themselves, in sometimes subtle ways, with nation-state policies and the dictates of capitalistic and fundamentalist religious institutions.

With respect to gross human rights violations and peaceful ways to resolve conflict at all levels of relationship, I do not think it an exaggeration to say that these two areas of scholarship remain stranded on the shore having missed—or maybe cast off—the criminological boat a long time ago. Rarely do we see the new generations of criminologists and ‘criminal justicians’ give any substantial attention to what a just society might look like or show concern for how the kinds of demonstration projects

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currently in existence might shine a light on us as we struggle to create a collectively peaceful future.

So allow me to start you off with these few statements as a route to examining the state of criminology today, and that includes criminal justice and areas of sociology that concern themselves with deviance, delinquency, and the state's management of 'social troubles.' What exactly is going on, or not going on, in these areas of study? Perhaps we can begin with you Larry.

*LT:* First of all, I agree with you that most of the current research and scholarship in criminology proceeds from an unquestioned acceptance of state definitions of crime and is largely divorced from an analysis of the nature of the political economic arrangements and inequalities in and between societies. One has to wonder how it is possible to study crime, reactions to crime, and processes of criminal justice divorced from the larger context of the arrangements of social injustice/justice in society. I used to think that sociologists would make a concerted effort to bring criminology back into sociology, where the dynamics of institutional arrangements and systems of stratification were a central focus. But much sociology has been individualized and, except for the recent excellent scholarship in integrative criminology, little criminology has moved in this direction.

On the other hand, I want to say that there has been a considerable move in criminology to understand better the crimes/harms of nation states, the crimes/harms that involve state–corporate relations, the crimes committed by global corporations, and the crimes committed by international organizations that are beyond nation-state and international law. Crimes against the environment and humankind are receiving much more exposure than ever before. With regard to the state's management of 'social trouble,' I think that many more criminologists, transcending their academic training, are coming to realize that the state functions via law to secure an order, and that this order and the social policies that uphold this order are often not only criminogenic, but are themselves criminal—thwarting the human potential of both individuals and collectivities in society.

*SM:* No argument here (hmm, not an auspicious start). Like Larry, I also welcome the recent interest in state crime, political crime, and so forth in the mainstream journals. In a sense, though, it would fairly amazing if these topics did not emerge in criminology considering the individuals ruling Washington over the past decade.

I also agree regarding the point about criminology's Achilles heel. It seems to me that when you get enough beers in almost any criminologist (with a few exceptions, which I'll talk about in a bit), she or he will eventually admit two rather remarkable things: (1) our discipline does not have a legitimate dependent variable (this undefined thing called crime); and (2) when one sets out to study this thing called crime one finds that it can't be understood outside of those 'arrangements of social injustice/justice' described above. In other words, most of us know at some level, mostly buried, that criminology as we practice it is something of a fraud or at least an intellectual distraction.

As someone interested in the subconscious, I think that this can help explain a great deal of the social dynamics one can observe and experience at any criminology

conference: the occasional nastiness, petty bickering, back stabbing, pretension, and arrogance. A non-academic colleague who witnessed one such collision of criminological egos once asked me: 'What's the deal with you people? You've got such fun jobs, what are you all so bitter about?' To me, the problem is easy to diagnose. Basically, I think that the vast majority of us became criminologists (rather than bank managers or property developers) because we care deeply about social harms and wanted to make a real difference in the world. Finding out the sad truth that criminology may not actually be a good route for doing this can be a painful realization, and all of us deal with it in different ways. One extreme is to leave active criminological research altogether and (forgive the LBJ phrase, but I can't think of a better one) piss in the tent from the outside. At the other extreme, you've got a group of folks in what can only be described as denial. This hardcore seems to involve mostly baby boomers and a few older individuals who have made a very good living in criminology, devoted their lives to it, and consequently find any suggestion that the discipline has 'issues' to be a direct attack on their lives and their identities. Both are perfectly understandable manifestations of the same underlying condition, but the combination of the two makes for predictably nasty social dynamics.

A rather optimistic hope of mine is that those of us who continue to work in this field will begin a more mature discussion about reinventing criminology *sans* the name-calling and stone-throwing of the past critical/positivist debate. Maybe we could even try a bit of reintegrative shaming, atonement, and forgiveness. I'm happy to be the first recovering positivist to admit to my intellectual mistakes and work with more critical criminologists toward building a better, shared future in the same tent.

Incidentally, if I depart from Larry's comments in any way, it is that my fantasy vision of that better future would go beyond sociologists bringing 'criminology back into sociology, where the dynamics of institutional arrangements and systems of stratification were a central focus.' I'd also like to see humanistic psychologists bringing criminology back into psychology, where the dynamics of identity, beliefs, meaning, consciousness, and self are (or at least used to be) a central focus. In other words, good criminology definitely needs to bring macro-sociology back in, but it also needs to bring back the individual person, with the humanist focus on life stories and ways of forging meaningful lives. The combination of these two used to go by the term 'biography and society' (Bertaux, 1981; Mills, 1959) and now can mainly be found in this journal and other research influenced by the restorative justice movement (see Sullivan & Tift, 2005, or is that too blatant a plug?).

*EE:* I'd like to pick up on the comments about the state and crime as well—both dependent variables that are amorphous and that tend to defy definition and research in criminology, positivist or critical. I've found that this is the first hurdle to overcome when teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in criminology, where the students are motivated by prospective work in the field of criminal justice and are products of a society where the dominant source of information is the mass media. To suggest that 'crime' is a merely a legal construct and the 'state' a constellation of shifting, contingent variables is almost blasphemy to students on either end of the political spectrum. We

like the comfort of absolutes. So does the criminal justice system, which could hardly function without them.

For me, the struggle of criminology today is its subtle absorption by *criminal justice*. In the realm of theory, as Frauley (2005) suggests, there is a struggle in criminology between *practicing* theory (thinking theoretically) and *referring* to it (the technocratic 'protective service' orientation of criminal justice). Criminology today is contextualized in a framework of criminal justice for both academics and those seeking information from the discipline. In the university, academics who secure large research grants are lauded, and we all know that grants in criminology are routinely given to projects that enhance the protective service orientation of the discipline. These grants are conduits to the production of more criminological knowledge that expands the technocratic view that we see reflected in American Society of Criminology (ASC) annual meeting programs.

But we can look beyond the limits of academia and see an even broader context in which criminology is embedded. To usurp a silly metaphor, there is an 'axis of evil' of the media, politics, and bureaucracies that seems to dictate the terms of engagement of criminology in the wider world. Crime and justice issues are staple fodder for these domains individually, never mind the explosive energy of their interconnections. The role of the academic in these realms—as 'talking (egg)heads,' strawmen/women, or technocratic consultants—is not particularly enticing to criminologists considering larger philosophical and theoretical aspects of the discipline. In Canada lately we have been witnessing a return to 'macho politics,' where criminological phenomena are constructed by and amplified by the media, where crimes are seen as opportunities for politicians to get tough with criminals, and where criminal justice bureaucracies are gearing up to process and incarcerate more lawbreakers. Sharing a long border with the US doesn't help. I know this is old news but perhaps that's the point. Why has criminology been so silenced in the public realm, even where the research routinely suggests that these approaches to community safety yield marginal or compromising results? This is where Larry's point about criminologists and the understanding of criminogenic state law and order policies resonates for me. It's not that I don't trust criminologists to figure this out, it's that I am less optimistic about our potential to be heard within this particular context. I also appreciate Shadd's call for the reintroduction of criminology to psychology which, in combination with some of the work in the education literature, offers some intriguing analytical possibilities for *a priori* assumptions of criminal justice. Perhaps you could offer us some suggestions here, Shadd, about how to deal with some Canadians' wistful gaze south of the border and our malignant 'penal envy'?

*SM:* Some great points here to pick up on, but let me try to jump the first hurdle Liz mentioned: overcoming students' media-driven orientation toward state definitions and orientations. I think this is absolutely right, but I'd like to complicate this a bit and pry around for a silver lining (as I'm prone to do). For a few years, I was the undergraduate admissions coordinator for a selective department of criminal justice studies. Because it was a well-regarded department we were able to refuse entrance to a reasonable percentage of students on the basis of grade point average, test scores, and an essay

on why they want to study criminology. The first two were a matter of bean counting mostly, so I focused my attention on the third—the self-definitional essay. Sometimes these were inspired and inspiring: descriptions of an older brother who turned to gangs out of self-protection or an aunt who had been a victim of a serious crime. However, 90% of the time, the young applicants either had no such life experiences (even secondary experiences) or else did not understand how to write a good personal essay. Instead, the vast majority of applicants answered the essay question in a painfully honest way: They admitted they wanted to study criminology because they grew up watching some television program (*CSI* or *Law and Order*) or film (usually *Silence of the Lambs*). Since the essay was supposed to be 1000 words long, they would sometimes stretch out this description of how frequently or obsessively they watched the thing (“All of my friends knew I’d go on to become a police officer because I had every episode memorized”). Only occasionally did applicants look inward and try to discern what it was about the characters depicted that convinced them that this was the life for them.

After overcoming my initial horror at these essays (‘Do adolescents do anything else but watch TV these days? Was I like that? Are my kids going to write essays about watching the *Teletubbies* in the first grade?’), I decided to do a bit of this armchair analysis myself (again, as I’m prone to do). I decided that maybe these essays were saying something potentially very positive about young criminology students and indeed about the next generation in general. Viewers of cinema and television have long been attracted to themes of justice and righting wrongs (Sparks, 1992), but these young people are going one step further. They are so attracted to these themes that they are willing to make huge life identity choices based on them. It seems to me that those young people who eschew schools of business, science, arts, and so forth to choose criminology or (more commonly) criminal justice departments are saying something quite profound with this choice. It is a decision to devote their lives to a type of heroism—a moral heroism, probably a masculine/macho form of heroism (but see previous about *Silence of the Lambs* and *CSI* and note how many of our criminology undergraduates are increasingly female). Most interestingly, it is a heroism that is outside of (although not necessarily opposed to) the capitalist framework. That is, except for those who want to become lawyers, the students have to be aware that they are unlikely to achieve great riches in the field of criminal justice. From what I can glean from the application essays and from my interaction with first- and second-year undergraduates, the thing they most want is to right wrongs, do battle with the bad, make things right, etc. Not get rich.

To me, this is a useful starting point for teaching about justice. Indeed, to most Justice Studies Association members, the idea that young people are being drawn in droves to study ‘justice’ in an era of advanced capitalist selfishness is a fact worthy of some celebration. Of course, in reality, we know that criminal justice as it is practiced and taught is a far cry from justice. (I remember back when I was a young grad student, a Chicago cop, who was desperate to meet my expectations of him as a weather-beaten and world-weary old warrior, said to me, ‘Kid, there’s no such thing as criminal justice—that’s a contradiction in terms.’) Yet our 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. The 'lock 'em up' machismo and 'penal envy' that Liz so rightly identifies is so pathetically transparent and intellectually flimsy that we should have no problem convincing these legions of justice-hungry, idealistic students that there are other ways forward.

At least in theory, that seems right. I'll admit that I haven't had any better luck than anyone else at making that actually happen.

*LT:* My interactions with undergraduate students desiring to pursue careers in criminal justice occupations confirm your understanding—that these students are moralistic in wanting to make our society a better place and largely unaware of the realities of the operations of the criminal justice 'system.' In my interpretation, their idealism grows out of their desire to do worthwhile work and live a meaningful life—to make a difference. Many wish to work with children or youth, feeling that they can help these young persons overcome their struggles with life and turn them around. I believe that we, as teachers, can begin to expose them to the realities of the complex structural life contexts within which many young persons make decisions to harm others. We can also begin to inspire them to want to know how different ways of responding to these harms affects those who have been harmed, those who have undertaken the harm, those in the larger community, and those who do the responding. This last set of persons would of course be them, if they became police officers, probation officers, juvenile court referees, program managers, mediators, circle conveners, etc.

We can begin to encourage them to question how we most regularly respond with punishment and coercive programs, rather than responding with full conference experiences as in Australia and New Zealand or with circle experiences as in some First Nation communities in Canada. Reading about these different ways of responding opens up the need to study history, anthropology, and political economy. It can inspire them, if they do become engaged in the world of criminal justice, to be open to creating different programs and responses, to meeting the needs of those who have been harmed, to trying to undertake one's work with an eye to creating a more civil society, perhaps one that is far more just. It can expose these students to differing conceptions of justice and the big picture context within which they are trying to make a difference. We can teach them critical thinking and problem solving skills.

It seems to me that resistance to the learned openness I have described often comes from a criminological discourse that is closed to where they are coming from and discouraging of their choice to enter criminal justice work, thus thwarting their dreams and schooling focus. Rather, we should be supplementing their idealism with eye-opening and empowering exposures. I am certainly not saying this is an easy task but it is at least a clear educational strategy. It is a strategy with which one can easily move the discussion to that of gross human rights violations, war, secretive violations of constitutions, and to alternative conflict resolution strategies at home, in school, and at work. It is essential that students discuss and understand organizational cultures, organizational dynamics, and the larger contexts within which organizations operate, or their attempts at bringing about change are likely to be futile and

alienating. To understand and discuss how organizations operate and how social change is thwarted or takes place leads to an exploration of the world of power, stratification, inequality, the social construction of self, and, conversely, the worlds of equality, the negation of power, and self abnegation. It seems to me that it is worth learning about multiple criminologies, for each perspective offers an additive exposure to our understanding.

*EE:* Both of you make several important points about the internal state of criminology in the academy, and I appreciate the lean towards an optimistic view of the potential for critical thought in our students destined for work in criminal justice. This has also been my experience, and I know of many progressive and positive initiatives of former students now in the field. Once there, however, they are confronted by the many macro-issues that Larry raises and, despite their good work, they are still operating within a context of monolithic institutions, partisan politics, and the big business of the mass media. These are daunting forces that still shape public discourses on crime and how to respond, so the discussion is always confined by the parameters established by these forces.

As a criminology academic with social worker roots and ongoing engagement with a community development orientation to the ‘crime problem,’ it is the wider discursive and practice context within which criminology operates that persistently interests me. I still go into prisons once a week and am active in my own community’s restorative justice initiative, and I have regular contact with prisoners, prison staff, police officers, lawyers, and social workers. Most of the people I encounter are good people trying to make useful contributions to their area of the bigger criminal justice picture. Almost none of them believes that she or he can change the context of their work. The healthiest of them find value in what they do through the relationships they have with individuals in their work. There is a sense that they cannot change the system but they may have an impact on some people along the way.

What has this to do with the state of criminology today? It seems to me that there is plenty of varied research and theory all along the criminological spectrum, that there are well-motivated criminology students, teachers, and criminal justice workers, yet the context of it all seems immutably the same. It’s business as usual, with the same familiar constructs, modified by all the refinements furnished along the way by criminological theory and research. The modern criminal justice system is a perfect demonstration of the adage that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. The relevance of criminology for systemic change seems to me to be wasted energy. At this point, I would turn to the wisdom of the folks I mentioned in the previous paragraph, and suggest that criminology become more focused on *relationships*—which covers at least sociology, psychology, law, and education.

The idea of relational justice and how to guide our relationships with one another as civilians in a democracy interests me more these days than how to diagnose psychological or sociological illnesses in (criminal) individuals or (criminal) public institutions. If democracies are to work, the people who live in them need to be able to act in ways that enable them to live freely, with minimal intervention from state authorities

operating from public institutions that should only be there for back-up. The values that we say we ascribe to, and how we operationalize those values, emerge in the relationships we have with others. Conflict is an inevitable feature of such a world.

Criminology might have more potential for impact if it focused more on these basics, working towards a positive rather than negative peace. Walt Kelly's classic line in his Pogo comic strip—'We have met the enemy and he is us'—summarizes a potentially fertile ground for criminology. On the west coast of Canada, we are fortunate to have the influences of a thoughtful restorative justice movement and several aboriginal communities, and the idea that social change has to begin with oneself is beginning to take root. As a social being, each self has relationships with others. In a description of Navajo justice, Yazzie and Zion have noted: 'It is said of a wrongdoer that "he acts as if he has no relatives"' (1996, p. 126). I think that there is much in this for criminology to unpack.

*SM:* Greetings from Glasgow, where I've just seen off another British Society of Criminology meeting. I must say, I now feel a bit sheepish about my earlier characterization of criminologists as back-biting, frustrated jerks. This particular conference had what I thought was an extremely good vibe. Like recent American Society of Criminology conferences, this BSC had a remarkable preponderance of panels on the theme of offender reintegration (or what is being called 'reentry' in the US). As this is an area where I have done some work, I try to attend these when I can, and I was extremely impressed with the batch at this year's BSC. The conference has also got me thinking about some of the positive directions (and institutional barriers) that Liz and Larry mention above.

For instance, although I am happy that ex-prisoner reintegration is now receiving so much attention (after being forgotten for much of the 1980s and 1990s), I do remain somewhat confused by this remarkable trend. Such is the popularity of the 'reentry' movement (see Travis, 2005) that I've met several prison administrators in the UK who say that reintegration (or 'resettlement' as it is called here) should become the *raison d'être* of the prison system. To me, this—better than almost anything—demonstrates the remarkable chameleon-like ability of the prison to reinvent itself as allegedly fulfilling whatever purpose the political wind blows its way. That is, of all the ridiculous things that prisons are suppose to be about ('reform,' 'correction,' etc.), resettlement strikes me as the strangest of the bunch. After all, if it weren't for the state taking people out of their communities and sending them to prison, they would not need resettled to begin with. If the correctional system wants to make resettlement its core business, it should forget about all of this tinkering around with the parole process and just cut out the middle man: stop sending so many people to archaic prisons. It is sort of like a doctor who says she specializes in fixing broken legs. When the patient, reasonably, says, 'But I don't have a broken leg,' the doctor breaks it for them and says, 'You do now.' It is great job security for broken leg specialists, but don't call it practicing medicine. And if you do the same thing to prisoners, don't call it justice.

Anyhow, what is fascinating about reintegration research, as it was presented at the BSC this year at least, is how it necessitates an examination of precisely the relational

dynamics that Liz describes above. Exploring the migration from total institution to the community really lays bare the intricate webs of attachment and responsibility within which all of us live. Presenter after presenter talked about the difficulty they were having trying to capture and make sense out of these social dynamics within existing sociological and criminological theory. None of us had anything like *the* answer to how to make sense of these processes, but the research forced us all to ask all the right questions and I for one am leaving Glasgow inspired and reinvigorated (if a bit hung over) as a criminologist.

*LT:* I am curious as to what all the right questions about resettlement or reintegration might be. Into what sort of ‘community’ are those persons who have been sent to prison expected to be reintegrated or resettled? It seems to me that there are many areas, especially urban areas, into which it would be unjust to settle a person—a place where most residents are themselves unsettled. It may not simply be that many of those who have harmed others act as though they had no relatives. In fact, they may have no relatives, no set of others with whom they interact in just ways. Are the settlements into which the engineers of resettlement propose to resettle those who have done their time organized to provide meaningful work, to meet everyone’s needs? Is food produced and distributed so that not a single relative is hungry? Is housing organized such that there is no-one without an affordable home? Is work organized so that all the relatives have a voice and a hand in major investment decisions—major decisions affecting the conditions of work and how these relatives will relate with people in other settlements? Does one of the right questions concern the relationship of relational justice and how these persons’ talents, gifts, and potentialities are to be developed in the settlement?

These questions seem to me to be pivotal to living a just life. Justice is inseparably personal and structural. Are those who are genuinely excited about resettlement agreeable to resettling those who have been behind bars into locations where the bars are simply less material?

*EE:* The reintegration aspect of the criminal justice system is one of its weakest components and I believe it is actually worse now than it was 25 years ago. Liability, law, and the actuarial risk model seem to form the rationale for decision-making in the reintegration process now, and people spend more time doing paperwork than they do actually engaging with their parole clients. The tendency is to focus on detecting whiffs of possible wrong-doing so that parole can be suspended or revoked to avoid the possibility—sometimes remote—that a released prisoner might do something to make the system look bad. That system concern is real, because the media, certain special interest groups, and the occasional enterprising lawyer will capitalize on the bad events, but I rarely hear of the success stories. And I know that where I live, there are many folks released from the system struggling and trying to live decent lives.

The other problem with reintegration—and this is related to Larry’s last comments—is that communities are not healthy themselves. Many may be struggling with the problems that brought the parolees to prison in the first place, such as substance abuse, broken relationships, and lack of safety and general belonging. These

are not places that necessarily have the capacity to host a healthy and sustainable reintegration. Not only that, but many such communities may be resentful of people released from prison for ‘causing’ some of their problems in the first place. Broken people usually come from broken communities, but few people these days seem willing to take personal and collective responsibility for the problems as a whole.

Again, I return to the emphasis on relationships, and I think Shadd’s reflection on the struggles of criminological researchers to capture and make sense of the social dynamics of reintegration is about the problem of connection. Connection is the glue, is always an affective experience, and perhaps for many a spiritual one too. I, for one, have no interest in, capacity for, or desire to quantify or measure this more ambiguous understanding of connection. But it does seem to me to be essentially important. Over the years, when I ask people I know who have been released from prison, and do not return, what made the difference or what was the turning point, they always tell me a story of a connection they have or had with someone; the answer has never been that motivation came from a prison program or even the fear of reincarceration. Sometimes the connection is with someone they encountered for a brief time, who might not even have had a sustained relationship with them. Other times it was a prison teacher, a prison officer, a volunteer, a family member, a friend, and so on.

The question of reintegration in criminological discourse, for me, seems to be missing a very critical and, as Bianchi as noted, often ridiculed component—that of *reconciliation*: ‘the royal way toward peace of mind and peace in society’ (1994, p. 132). Sustainable reintegration requires more than covering the obvious basics of food, shelter, and work; it is also about having difficult conversations about frayed relations in which both the community and the released prisoner move towards healthier mutual understanding. In Canada, we have been working with warrant expiry sex offenders, most of whom are ostracized and marginalized, in community circles of support where these conversations can safely take place.

SM: I worry that I have (maybe unconsciously?) steered this discussion away from the state of criminology and on to a terrain on which I’m more comfortable: a discussion of ex-prisoner reintegration. Apologies for that. I could go on forever about recalls to prison, changes in parole culture, and the needs of prisoners post-release, but that wasn’t my intention. I think I was just momentarily caught up in the excitement of a good academic meeting. It doesn’t happen often, but it does happen now and again thankfully, and it keeps me going as a criminologist despite my ever-present doubts and occasional despair.

To answer Larry’s many rhetorical questions: the answer is yes, yes, yes, and yes. These were precisely the sorts of questions that the folks at the BSC were raising. My original point was that these sorts of questions/realizations are almost inevitable when doing this sort of research, or at least doing it well like my colleagues at the conference do—i.e., getting off the couch and immersing oneself in the communities and the lives of ex-prisoners. But I was probably wrong in implying that this is the *only* sort of research where these much bigger and deeper questions become manifest. No doubt, criminologists who pour themselves into any research question—whether it is etiology,

‘crime prevention,’ domestic violence, whatever—will also come back to these vexing questions of a ‘just life’ that Larry raises (unless of course they never progress beyond secondary examinations of quantitative data where such issues appear to be constricted).

I worry, however, that these big questions threaten to overwhelm smaller questions like the one that Liz raised: What helps some folks stay out of prison? When you actually set out to explore a question like this as I also have (insert endless self-plugs here), the bigger questions certainly come to the fore. That is, when one talks to ex-prisoners one cannot miss the grotesque inequalities in our society, the massive structural impediments that keep the poor in prison while the rich get richer (Reiman, 2003). The question for me (and this is a real question I have, not a rhetorical one) is what should one ‘do’ with those bigger questions about justice and society? It seems to me there are a number of options:

- 1) Maybe the most common route (and the most difficult to measure empirically—the dark figure) is to become so overwhelmed by the bigness of the real questions out there that you just chuck in the towel, drop out of grad school, and go start your own business painting houses or growing organic tea or whatever. The problems of the world are just too massive, there’s nothing you can do about them with a peer-reviewed criminology article, so why bother?
- 2) Alternatively, one could stay in criminology for the job security, the health plan, etc., but give up on criminological research, instead becoming essentially a paid anti-criminologist (akin to Cohen, 1988) pointing out the foolishness of asking little questions in light of the much bigger questions. Perhaps the considerable resources devoted to asking the smaller questions are specifically intended to distract us from asking the big questions; hence jobbing criminologists on the ground are just dupes of some master strategy of control.
- 3) Keep asking the smaller questions and basically forget about the bigger questions. Keep your job, feed your kids, do your bit on the side to change the politics of the day (e.g., vote, send a check here or there), focus your criminology work on making the world better in whatever marginal way you can (e.g., slight improvements to job training or rape crisis center provision, etc.), and leave the bigger problems (e.g., alienated labor, the rape culture, etc.) for others.
- 4) Keep asking the smaller questions but, if these raise bigger questions (e.g., why is our society the way it is) you raise these too. It is unlikely, as a criminologist trained and experienced in asking the small questions, that you will have much to say or do about the bigger questions. I know I don’t have a magic blueprint for creating a better society, at least. Yet it would be criminal to try to address the small questions (of crime prevention or resettlement or rape crisis intervention) without at least acknowledging the bigger context (capitalist economics, power, class interests, patriarchy). So, focus on the smaller questions but recognize the bigger ones.

I guess my strategy is most like Plan 4, although I certainly dabble in 2 and 3, and consider Plan 1 almost every day. I wouldn’t, however, necessarily criticize any of my colleagues for choosing an alternative route as none feel perfectly satisfactory to me.

Indeed, maybe other colleagues have developed a better strategy altogether? If so, I for one would love to hear it, which is why I think that autobiographies/oral histories of academics and informal discussion forums like this one are far too rare.

*LT:* I certainly agree with Liz; I am for creating and facilitating connection and circles, or any other modes, of support for those who have been harmed and for those who have harmed them, whether they have been confined or not. Simultaneously, I consider myself an advocate, like Liz and Shadd, of social policies and programs that connect and support people in the first place, thus decreasing the prevalence of crime/harm and victimization.

In contrast to Shadd's reflection on the vexing 'larger' issues or contexts of harm and our reactions to it, I doubt that criminologists who pour themselves into research most frequently come back to the vexing questions of social justice, stratification, power, patriarchy, and the cultural/ideological components that support political, economic, and social inequalities. If this were true, most of the articles in our professional journals and most of the social policies influenced by criminological research would address or mention these vexing realities. They do not. I wish they did.

On the set of ethical options (1, 2, 3, 4) available to criminologists that Shadd has constructed, I think they form an instructive insight into the 'state of criminology.' With a forced choice, I would select option 4 and agree that it would be supportive of violent social arrangements, injustice, and oppression to address, for example, crime prevention, resettlement, battering, or restorative justice without integrating one's inquiry with questions of social justice. Most criminological work, when it does address crime prevention, battering, resettlement, or restorative justice, ignores the structural, political-economic, cultural, and historical context of the phenomena under study. Here, I do not apologize for repeating the fact that most of the substantive content of criminological inquiry is concerned with street crime and our responses to street crime and its effects, rather than, for example, being concerned with and understanding corporate and state crime, which is far more disastrous in terms of health and life.

Just imagine scientists with an interest in inquiring about disease and our responses to disease largely focusing their research on questions of individual life-style choices or genetics and responding after the fact with meds and toxic chemicals, rather than addressing how the prevalence of many cancers, for example, varies in accord with how we interact with the environment and with one another in our places of work. It seems to me that criminologists are no more or any less reluctant to challenge the social arrangements that produce the harms they study. Scientific inquiry is at times in human history largely in the service of upholding the sacredness of specific social arrangements and thus promotive of the illnesses/harms these arrangements produce and distribute. Public health and conviviality sound like desirable social conditions but neither appears to be central to the political-economic arrangements within which we live. I think most criminologists and medical researchers like and dislike the social disorder within which they live and therefore want to create a healthier society and preserve the unhealthy arrangements that create disease and crime.

EE: Perhaps some of the problems we have been exploring here are manifestations of our own fallibility as human beings working in the role of criminologists. Intellectually, it is easy to see the connection between individual and structural violence but it is quite another task to actually live our own lives in ways that challenge or shift the foundations of that structural violence. Gandhi's claim that we had to *be* the change we wanted to see in the world is much more daunting than teaching or writing about it. Criminologists move through life changes that color their academic standpoints. I remember watching some of my older, former Marxist colleagues embrace Left Realism for awhile. It seemed that when they were young and had no property of value, they saw themselves as socialists, but as soon as they had accumulated enough property and were concerned to protect it from the predations of young thieves, they were Left Realists.

This is the essence of the notion that the personal is political. And I don't think we can ever separate our real selves from the work we do. When I began my master's degree in the mid-1980s, Ian Taylor (who was one of my thesis committee members) challenged me on aspects of my thesis plan; before I left the meeting, he said that he wanted to know what my motivation was for the project. Until that time, no-one in academia had ever asked me why I was doing anything, assuming, I suppose, that I was doing whatever was required to jump through the hoops and get the degree I was pursuing. That question about personal motivation has stayed with me ever since and has become part of my work with my own graduate students. Why are you doing this? What difference will it make? How will the world be a better place because of this thesis?

Social arrangements that hinder or prevent us from being just individuals can also be tied to our thought processes and the barriers they present. Justice as a concept has been narrowed to a service or some commodity that is delivered by institutions. There is some interesting writing in the area of moral education in which authors question the interpretation of justice 'as a virtue of *social institutions* ... rather than as a virtue of *individual persons* and their decision-making' (Kristjánsson, 2003, p. 185). Justice has become the property of *law* and consequently the domain of legal professionals. Of course it is important to ensure that laws and their implementation are just, both on the macro and micro levels. But it seems to me that human agency is still at the root of the structural problems.

Perhaps what the three of us have been talking about in this roundtable is the paradox of being a critical criminologist. We must contend with problematic concepts such as justice and crime within a context generally limited by domain assumptions about the inevitability of 'criminal justice systems,' where the kinds of questions Dennis posed at the beginning are no longer seen as radical but instead are seen as irrelevant. Richard Quinney offers us an alternative:

As a critical criminologist, I find it ever more difficult to witness crime or to think about crime. Instead, I envision a world without crime, and that vision comes from imagining a world that would not produce crime. To be critical, to be a critical criminologist, is to imagine what might be possible in this human existence. (2000, p. 21)

In imagining a more just, healthy world for everyone, we might begin with the first mandate of the traditional Iroquois chiefs: to guide our decision-making by considering the welfare and well-being of the seven generations to come.

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