

# British Society of Criminology

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## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

### Tim Newburn and Jon Vagg

It is only ten years since the first British Criminology Conference. In that time much has changed. In 1987, at the time of the first conference in Sheffield, most criminological research was carried out by a small number of researchers who, if they were not at the Cambridge Institute, the Oxford Centre for Criminological Research, or the Home Office Research and Planning Unit, were most likely to be found in a sociology department, or occasionally a law department, in a provincial university - and would often have been the sole representative of criminological inquiry there. Now, criminology courses and criminologists proliferate, and the subject is no longer dominated in the way it was then by what Rock (1988) has called the 'fortunate generation' - that cohort of criminologists who were recruited in the 1960s and 1970s.

At the Sheffield conference, just over 50 papers were given. Eight years later in Loughborough there were approaching 250 papers, and almost 500 participants. There is no longer any doubt of the capacity of British criminology to support a large bi-annual conference - the only question is whether this is frequent enough. The likelihood is that it will become an annual conference by the year 2000.

This volume contains 14 papers, chosen from a much larger number submitted to the Editorial Advisory Board. The decision was taken to limit the publication of papers, ensuring both the quality of the final volume while giving a flavour of the variety of contributions on offer. We have not attempted to order the volume thematically. As is almost inevitably the case with conference publications, the imposition of such a structure would be rather forced. Rather, we have simply found a way of ordering the papers that seems to us to flow fairly smoothly.

Chapter 2 is Debbie Archer's paper on female gang culture. Using published sources from both sides of the Atlantic, together with interviews with police officers in London, she builds up a picture of female gang identity, and of the centrality of 'appearance' and 'attitude'. Identity within the female gang, she argues, 'is a way of obtaining respect, marking out territory, and of challenging and fighting other female gangs if necessary'. We are back in the world of oppositional sub-cultures here, and a history that can be traced from punk straight through to hip hop. As the Au Pairs put it in 1981, this is 'playing with a different sex'.

Gang culture, of course, has a variety of different connotations. One of these resonates with the view that more and more criminals are getting 'tooled up'. There was an increase of 142 per cent in the recorded use of handguns in crime in the decade to 1994. In his paper, Peter Squires questions whether the 'democratic peace', so celebrated by Critchley and others, was merely the high point of state monopolisation of 'firepower'; something we are now seeing disintegrate as the authority of the liberal state is itself undone by post-industrialisation. Writing at the time of some of the early Dunblane-inspired campaigns against gun ownership, Squires argues that firearms are emerging as a critical and often divisive issue in contemporary societies. Though the North American experience is very different from that in Britain in many very obvious respects nonetheless, he suggests, on both sides of the Atlantic 'more guns are seen to be the solution for increasing gun-violence'.

Though the use of handguns in the commission of crimes has increased markedly, and has been paralleled by an increase in the number of occasions on which firearms are issued to the police, these firearms are still rarely used by the police. Tank Waddington, drawing on his study of public order policing, argues against the view which presents such policing as essentially conflictual, as something whose intended or unintended consequence is the suppression of the legitimate dissent of the deprived and disadvantaged. He suggests that the

more institutionalised public gatherings are, the more likely they are to be facilitated by policing practices. The police seek to avoid trouble; it is in their interests to do so. The other arm of the law - the 'strong arm' - exists, of course, but is used relatively rarely. Coercive policing is more likely to appear on those occasions when the protesters don't 'play the game'. Being outside or distant from the mainstream institutional channels of political influence is an ongoing experience for young people generally and for ethnic minority youth in particular. Colin Webster's study of racial violence in Keighley, West Yorkshire therefore asked both victims and perpetrators why racial violence occurs and, to the latter, what their reasons were for perpetrating violence. The survey data throw up their own surprises, leading Webster to describe the unitary categories of 'white perpetrator' and 'black victim' as 'unsustainable'. The Keighley survey found that a greater proportion of whites than Asians said they had suffered racially-motivated violence, and similar proportions of Asians and whites admitted perpetrating racial violence. In his analysis, Webster distinguishes between 'normal', 'aggressive' and 'violent' racists, each of which, he suggests, differ in their justifications for their racism, and show different patterns in their desistance from such activity.

The next two chapters address rather different sides of an emergent and important aspect of criminology, women's experiences of victimization and issues of how the police and the courts respond to them. Building on Manning's (1993) idea of the 'preventive conceit', Betsy Stanko questions police claims to expertise in the provision of protection for women. Being able to claim such expertise is vital to police legitimacy, she argues, and consequently disputing this claim necessarily challenges our understanding of policing (if by this we mean what the police do). In this light, innovations in the response by police to domestic violence - and to racial and homophobic attacks - are, at least in part, viewed as attempts to reassert police legitimacy. Rather than protecting, the police are increasingly engaged, Stanko argues, in the provision of advice about safety. The assumption is that the 'responsible woman' will take heed, take responsibility, and avoid risk. The responsible woman is sufficiently self-disciplined not to need protection. Bartal's chapter takes a different slant on the issue of victimization. Using material from Australia and the UK, it considers, firstly, whether there are evidential grounds for a 'battered wife syndrome' - a situation in which women become 'locked into' long-term relationships with abusive men. This is of no little importance, since there have been a number of cases in recent years in which women have killed men who abused them over lengthy periods, albeit not at a point in time when their own lives were immediately threatened. The second issue is, therefore, one of whether claims about such a syndrome have been, or could be, accepted in full or in part as a defence to a charge of murder - and if so, what the trial outcomes have been.

That said, the 'bread and butter' of police work is usually held to be the more-or-less routine task of responding to reports of property crime, and burglary in particular. Coupe and Griffiths report the results of a study in the West Midlands examining police operational responses to residential burglary with a view to discovering opportunities for improvement. They identify opportunities for increasing primary detections through changed response practices, and recommend that the police switch resources away from the least 'cost-effective operations' toward those which provide the greatest likelihood of boosting detection rates. How this would be squared with those victims is an important issue. However, Coupe and Griffiths suggest that the streamlining of activities would have positive human resource implications which could be used to facilitate improvements in the delivery of victims' services.

The next chapter turns from a concern with catching offenders to an analysis of what is done with those who are convicted. The probation service has traditionally defined the components of its role as 'welfare', 'caring', or 'helping' - or so said John Patten in his speech to the Association of Chief Officers of Probation in 1988. This was at the time when 'punishment in the community' was being launched, and community sentences were being recast as tough and demanding. 'Punishment in the community' has affected men and women differently, and Anne Worrall seeks an explanation for the simultaneous rise in the numbers of male offenders and decline in the number of female offenders on probation since the early 1980s. The paradox, she shows, is that the 'just deserts' philosophy resulted in more rather than less punishment for women. Central to this was the way in which the thresholds of 'seriousness' introduced by the Criminal Justice Act 1991 were operationalised. Worrall argues that the continuing dominance of a binary model of female offenders (good but sad or bad and/or mad) means that in sentencing terms, for a woman to cross the threshold of being considered 'serious enough' to warrant a community sentence under the 1991 Act seems to be discursively almost inseparable from crossing the threshold of being 'so serious' that a

custodial sentence is necessary. At a practical level, she suggests, the Probation Service should be much more concerned than it appears to be about keeping women out of prison. During the period Worrall describes, crime rose dramatically, with age and gender differences remaining relatively constant throughout. David Downes explores the trends in contemporary social and penal policies and what they have to tell us about the debate over the relationship between crime and inequality. Initially in the USA but more recently in the UK, successive governments have made talking of the social and economic causes of crime almost inadmissible. Simultaneously, however, the constituents of anomie and youthful alienation - possessive individualism and increasing inequality - have become ever more firmly embedded. Inequality and crime remain strongly linked, Downes argues, but there remain some tricky comparative (Sweden) and historical (the 1930s and 1960s) counter-examples to be tackled. The challenge for criminologists, Downes suggests, is to provide firmer foundations on which theories of crime and inequality can rest, thereby making life more difficult for those who seek to dismiss such links.

With some important exceptions (inter alia, Garland 1994) the history and genealogy of British criminology is a much under-researched subject. Claire Valier's account of psychoanalysis and crime in Britain during the inter-war years is therefore to be welcomed. This period was crucial, she argues, in the developing application of psychoanalytic theory to crime, though many of the practical developments occurred outside the formal criminal justice system. The 1920s and 1930s, for example, saw the emergence of both the Tavistock Clinic and the Institute for the Study and Treatment of Delinquency. Moreover, of course, this whole field of practice gave rise to its own class of criminological theory and, of particular interest as far as this volume is concerned, via the work of Edward Glover and Emanuel Miller, gave birth eventually to the British Society of Criminology and the *British Journal of Criminology*.

As we implied above, despite the fact that criminologists devote considerable time and energy to the study and analysis of theories and practices of crime and criminal justice, and despite exhortations to be reflexive, they rarely study what they do themselves. There are a number of exceptions to this in this volume, however. Philip Rawlings, for example, focuses on what he calls 'popular criminology' and, in particular, on 'true crime' books. He is critical of the lofty disdain, as he puts it, with which this literature is generally treated by academic criminologists. By combining biography and detection this form of literature has managed to all but monopolise the study of murder for example. More importantly, however, by eschewing the methodological concerns (and some of the conceits) of academic criminology, popular criminology is not only popular with the reading public, but there have also been some notable occasions when it has impacted on policy or has been central to the overturning of major miscarriages of justice. Might these not also occasionally be goals for the academic criminologist?

Jill Peay's chapter was initially written quite deliberately as a 'postscript' to Rawlings' critique. Written against the backdrop of what she and others perceive to be the 'growing impotence of academic criminology and its power to influence', Peay asked a sample of academic criminologists to make a non-attributable statement about criminological knowledge with which they believed most other criminologists would agree. The result was enlightening for it illustrated the difficulty academic criminologists have in making any sort of categorical statement. One sees this most frequently when criminologists and journalists come face-to-face. The desire of academics to be true to the 'on the one hand and on the other' quality of social scientific knowledge leads to some of the most anodyne and tedious radio and television. Similarly, it can be no surprise that such 'knowledge' is so often overlooked by politicians and policy-makers. That said, Peay argues, the 'certainty' offered by popular criminology is often largely spurious. Where we might learn a way forward, however, is through paying closer attention to the process of common law reform which, because it so often proceeds on the basis of single cases, offers a way of combining the best of popular and academic criminologies.

Finally, and like Peay, responding to a perceived 'crisis' in criminology, Frances Heidensohn and Marisa Silvestri ask how we can best assess and bring about the 'renewal' of criminology that so many current authors seek. One of their concerns in this is how we can understand 'influence' in criminology. They explore measurement indices (citation analyses, surveys of criminologists) network and process analysis, and historical approaches (contrasting 'big bang' and 'slow burn' models of the development of the discipline). They argue that what appears to be a resistance to innovation in contemporary British criminology is, in part, merely a reflection of the relative lack of new opportunities for young criminologists. Here we are

back almost to where we started with the 'fortunate generation' who, Heidensohn and Silvestri argue, are perhaps 'holding on to place and position while pioneers from younger generations, even if they have found their place, have as yet little space of their own to express themselves in'.

Emerging Themes?

This collection is entitled 'Emerging Themes in British Criminology'. Taken as a whole, this collection demonstrates at least two healthy trends in current criminological work, both likely to become mainstream criminological concerns in the near future.

First, while women have until recently largely escaped serious criminological attention. Yet a strong and growing movement is afoot to remedy this deficit. Whether as offenders, victims, victim-offenders (as in the case of Bartal's concern), or as the objects of crime prevention policies of dubious merit (as in Stanko's chapter), there should no longer be doubt that women face specific problems, and require forms of attention, support, and treatment from the police and the courts that are now coming to be articulated, if not yet built explicitly into criminal justice and crime prevention policies. Moreover, it seems clear that the sentencing of women offenders still has some features that discriminate against women. While the papers in this collection document the issues, they also begin to envision how real change could be achieved in the not too distant future.

Second, there is a strong introspective concern in many of the chapters. This comes from the bruising experiences, over a period of about two decades, of being ignored by policy-makers and often trivialised in the media. Yet it has not been a completely negative experience. It has sometimes been said that a period in which funding for empirical research becomes more difficult is a period in which work on new theoretical perspectives can emerge. And in these chapters, there are traces of new departures for criminology - the re-thinking of issues in relation to the gendering of criminal justice; the relationships between guns, violence, and gun control; the scope and implications of racism; the legacy of psychoanalysis; and the idea that single cases come to have a symbolic power and a hold over policy are all examples. Whether these 'departures' can be turned into 'arrivals' - in other words, forge new perspectives around which there can be substantial agreement within the discipline - remains to be seen. There are, however, important prizes to play for, not the least of which is the development of new criminal justice policies that benefit women.

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