

The Role of Criminology in Public Policies

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ABSTRACT

Thus, the discipline of criminology moves toward an undetermined ideology, one that cannot be changed by arguments based on experience and logic. Through the systematic articulation of value premises and the recognition that criminological theory is an example of an under-determined or rational ideology, the gap between policy and the practice of social science can be considerably narrowed. This recognition in turn will lead to an appreciation of how the discipline of criminology has been part of the policy arena. The role of history is viewed as one in which public exposure and debates of ideas have sharpened definitions, procedures, and conclusions. History, however, has tended to be interpreted within a framework of mythic science in which earlier theories are simply criticized for their scientific inadequacy. More attention needs to be paid to the contribution of criminological theories to policy and to how policy applications contribute to the development of criminology. Implications of policy for both theory and practice in the field of criminology are discussed.

KEYWORDS: *Criminology, Rational Ideology, Public Policy, Role.*

INTRODUCTION

Criminology would seem to have a natural connection to public policy. Many, if not most, of the questions that criminologists seek to answer directly or indirectly impact questions of public policy. Criminologists seek to understand the nature and extent of crime, to explain why people commit crime, and to advance knowledge as to how crime might be prevented. Policymakers seek to address an array of social problems, including the problem of crime. Despite this seemingly natural connection, the field of criminology had an uneasy relationship with public policy and has somewhat less of a direct effect on matters of public policy than some might expect.

There have been some notable instances in which criminological research has impacted public policy. For example, Lawrence Sherman's randomized field study in Minneapolis (often referred to as the Minnesota Domestic Violence Study), which focused on policing domestic violence, led to widespread reforms in the way that police departments responded to domestic violence calls (Sherman et al., 1999). The work of George Kelling and his colleagues as they developed the "broken windows" model of policing similarly led to important changes in police strategies, first in New York City and later in other major jurisdictions. More recently, the research of Joan Petersilia (2008) has led to the adoption of "earned discharge" parole in California. Although there are a number of instances in which criminological work has directly impacted policy, much

of the policy-relevant criminological research has little to no measurable effect on public policy. This lack of effect can be attributed in part to the reluctance among some academics to engage directly in the policy arena. In a provocative essay lamenting criminology's irrelevance, James Austin (2003) argued that "in terms of having any effect on criminal justice policy, there is little evidence that any criminologist's career has made much of a difference".

Although criminology's policy impact has been largely inconsequential to date, there have been renewed calls for a policy-oriented approach in criminology. Leading criminologist Ronald Clarke (2004) proposed that the field of criminology be reconfigured as a field of "crime science" that has as its main focus studying crime in ways that 'inform policy. Prominent criminological theorists David Garland and Richard Sparks (2000) suggested that the coming generation of criminology be one that takes the problem of crime as a serious concern, with a renewed commitment to reducing the impact of crime on everyday lives.

THE EMERGENCE OF CRIMINOLOGY

Criminology began as a theoretically oriented field of study. Notably, the early criminologists were drawn from various disciplines (Sociology, psychology, medicine) and would likely not have self-identified as "criminologist". Nonetheless, early writers about the social science of crime such as Emile Durkheim (in the field of sociology), sought to explain the existence of crime in society. Durkheim and others also set out to explain patterns of crimes trends in the examination across time and place. Shortly afterward, writers sought to explain why some people engaged in crime when others did not. In the late 1800s, Cesare Lombroso, who is often referred to as the founder of modern criminology, launched the science of criminology through his explanations into differences between criminal and non-criminal populations. As Lombroso's biological explanations for criminal offending waned in popularity, the field has experienced a proliferation of theories of crime, such that an entire college semester is no longer enough time to adequately address all of the theories that have been advanced to date. There is no one uniform theory of crime, instead, there are multiple and competing theories. For most of criminology's history, developing and testing these theories has been the focus of the field. Throughout its early history criminologists now and again have attempted to explain some of the mechanisms of justice, but this was "mostly a philosophical project regarding the law. Critical theorists (e.g. Marxist theorists), for example, began to take on the justice system, in particular its relation to larger social structures and mechanisms. By and large, though, the core concern of criminology was crime and its causes.

CRIMINOLOGY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON PUBLIC POLICY

The role of criminologists in our society is to study data and form theories on how to deter crime, based on what they find in that data. They then advise criminal justice policy makers on how to implement these theories into a public (social) policy. The concept of public policy is based on a series of theories constituted by criminologists and sociologists, and put into practice by lawmakers. Each theory is comprised of its own subset of theories. Choice theory, trait theory, social structure theory, social process theory, and developmental theory all contributed to the formation of social policy. Choice theory has four base theories, which have separate policy implications: rational choice, general deterrence, specific deterrence, and incapacitation theories. Trait theory is comprised of two major themes, with policy factors: primary prevention programs, and secondary prevention programs. Social structure theory deals with concepts such as conventional rewards and values of American society, and dealing with the stratification that

our capitalist society dictates. Social process theory, which is concerned with the way people learn crime through each other, and argues that if criminal behavior is learned, then it can be unlearned as well. Developmental theory policy involves multi systemic treatments aimed at children who are at risk for turning to criminality. It is through understanding each of these theory groups and the subsets of theories that mould them that you will have an appreciation of how social policy is formed, and begin to see amendments needed in these policies to make them work efficiently. (Siegel, 2010)

CHOICE THEORY

Choice theory has four policy based theories which are established on the "just desert" concept that severe punishment deters crime. These theories are rational choice, general deterrence, specific deterrence, and incapacitation theories. Rational choice theory states that crime is based on a person weighing what they personally need or want against their own situation and whether or not the risks are worth the benefits of committing the crime. General deterrence, theory digs deeper into the risks versus benefits of committing the crime. It also believes that if punishment for a crime is severe, certain, and swift that most people would deem the risks far greater than the benefits. Specific Deterrence focuses in on severe punishments to make sure the offender learns their lesson and never commits the crime again. Incapacitation theory states that by keeping criminals out of general population reduces the rates of crime. In essence, choice theory plays a part in building social policy because it makes sure that society knows that crime is not acceptable to the society that we currently live in. (Siegel, 2008).

TRAIT THEORY

Trait theory is based on the premise that crime is committed because criminals have either mental or physical defects. The theories are composed of: biological trait theory which supposes that biochemical genetic, and neurophysiologic conditions cause crime, and psychological trait theory which assumes that mental issues are the causation of crime public policies developed from these theories include primary prevention programs which focus on the treatment of individual personal issues and defects before they display themselves through criminal activities, and secondary prevention programs which focus on psychological therapy to prevent people from violating laws, and tertiary programs which focus on helping criminals make their way back to operating under normal social rules and conventions. It is through these policies that programs such as mental health associations, family therapy groups, and substance abuse clinics have been opened. It is also through these polices, that rehabilitation programs such as halfway houses, anger management classes, other programs have been implemented throughout our criminal justice system spanning the entire course of criminal development from preventing children from turning to crime in the first place, to rehabilitation of criminals already incarcerated in our prisons and jails. (Siegel, 2008)

SOCIAL STRUCTURE THEORY

Social structure theorists believe that it is the socioeconomic structure of our society, which causes crime. These theories focus on the social and economic structures of our society working together to cause lower class people to turn to crime to achieve goals and success because they do not have conventional means to do so. These theories fall into three categories: social disorganization, which deals with the actual stratification of our society, strain theory that discusses the difference in classes, and the means they have to achieve success. There is also

cultural deviance, which argues that people who turn to criminality do so for relief of the strain caused by not having the means to attain conventional success. This causes them to form their own subcultures, which accept and even condone criminal behavior. Policy implementations on social structure theory have been important to the lower class society, with programs such as welfare, Aid to Dependent Children, food stamps, Head Start programs, neighbourhood self-help legal services, extra help with education, and job opportunities, and recreational programs to children who would not have access to these without federal help. (Siegel, 2010)

SOCIAL PROCESS THEORY

These theories are based on the principle that people having adverse relationships with family, peers, and institutions they are around on a normal basis cause crime. Family relationships play a large part in deciding criminality. If the relationships are positive than anyone can succeed within the normal boundaries of law. It is when these relationships are negative that the criminality is formed. Since they cannot realistically expect to succeed in the acceptable ways of society, committing crimes may be their only practical way to achieve success sought after by most members of American society. This subgroup of theories includes, social learning which denotes that criminals learn criminal behavior from other criminals. Differential association theory proposes that people learn to commit crime through antisocial definitions. Neutralization theory, where criminals drift between conventional acceptable behaviors and criminal behavior learning to rationalize crime and their behavior, by neutralizing moral restraints with ideas such as the victim had it coming to them. Social reaction theory (Labeling Theory) states that people enter into criminality when labeled negatively for behavior committed or social groups one may belong in. It goes on to assume that once labeled, always labeled, therefore people organize their personalities around the label. Social control theorists follow the logic that we are all born potential criminals, and that it is our ties to conventional society, that keep almost everyone from committing crime. These ties are formed through family, peers, mentors, and institutions, and when these social bonds do not exist, it is easier for people to commit crime. Implications of policy effects more young people than already hardened criminals, because after the age of eighteen, our impressionable years are over, and most people become set in their ways and are not prone to unlearn their behaviors. These programs teach young offenders about the dangers associated with drug use and how to survive in society without resorting to criminality, coupled with how to achieve success in school. Theories regarding labeling have caused criminologists to warn society about the dangers of negative labels, and diversion programs which attempt to rehabilitate people in respect to their Crimes, such as alcohol and drug treatment programs. (Siegel, 2010)

DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY

Developmental theory attempts to reach younger people throughout the course of their entire lives to prevent criminality from taking place. These are made up of life course theories which argue that social and personal traits change throughout their lives, and Integrated Cognitive Antisocial Potential (ICAP), which assumes that anyone with antisocial tendencies are prone to commit antisocial acts. The theories also include the general theory of crime and delinquency, which states that there are different life domains, which shape criminality, and latent trait theories, which follow the thought that we have master traits that influence our criminal behavior. Another theory is the general theory of crime that supports the school of thought that the lack of self-control causes crime. Still another theory called differential coercion theory,

which denotes that individuals exposed to environments of intimidation and crime develop defects of a psychological and social nature; influencing the probability that a person will commit crime. Policy implementations developed through developmental theory involve the attempt to reach children who are at risk as early as preschool, and certainly 'through their developmental years, including but not limited to: The Boys and Girls Clubs of America, substance abuse prevention programs, and Fast Track. All of these programs are designed to deter criminality from becoming a factor in someone's life at all. (Siegel, 2010)

CONCLUSION

While public policy plays an extremely important role in American society, and these policies have shown to be effective tools in deterring crime, problems still exist in the implementation of the policies. These problems include narrow-minded policy makers, and making sure that there is enough funding, to actually support the program's intended cause. In order to change this, the American public will have to become more involved in the process of electing our public officials, thereby sending the message that you must be on our side, instead of big businesses and people serving their own interests, if you want to hold public office in our country.

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