



Research Statement

My research examines criminological areas of inquiry through a sociological lens. Through this lens, I analyze issues of social deviance, crime, and crime control as cultural products, i.e., creative human constructs that are real in their consequences. In particular, I focus on the cultural and discursive processes through which the meanings of crime and its control are socially constructed. Given that crime and other social problems are always and already defined subjectively, it is necessary to understand the distinct processes through which such issues are socially constructed and defined as meaningful. My research positions these subjective definitions as surface-level manifestations of underlying ideologies and critically engages those mobilized to create social difference and/or justify unequal power relationships. This focus on the interplay of meaning, power, crime, and control directs my agenda toward specific areas of inquiry concerning both crime and its representation: (1) crimes of the powerful (e.g., white-collar crime, political crime, sexual violence), (2) cultural representations of criminalized and/or deviant subcultures (e.g., rap/Hip-Hop artists, drug users), and (3) scholarly representations of criminal motivation, or theories of crime and deviance.

My dissertation, entitled “Never Forget: The Meaning of the Global War on Terror in Post-9/11 U.S. Presidential Discourse” examines the construction of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) in 190 public speeches made by U.S. Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama. The project is methodologically grounded in discourse and ethnographic content analysis, which I conducted using the qualitative data analysis software program, NVivo. Drawing from a variety of conceptual frameworks (i.e., criminology of the state, cultural criminology, constructionist sociology, American studies, critical theory), I examine the GWOT as a cultural project. In contrast to other scholars who have examined the state’s instrumental reasons and motivations of waging war, in my dissertation I posit that the GWOT should also be understood as an expressive, emotional response to national trauma. In this context, I argue that the transgression of U.S. ideals within the GWOT serves as a reassertion of American exceptionalism in the face of perceived national identity crisis and widespread ontological insecurity. Further, I argue that this discursive response is criminogenic, as it defines absolute military victory in the GWOT as an end that justifies any means.

The next step in my dissertation-related research agenda is to integrate this analysis of U.S. Presidential discourse with (1) analyses of secondary interviews with U.S. soldiers at Abu Ghraib, (2) social media responses to the death of Osama bin Laden, and (3) in-depth semi-structured interviews I conducted with international travelers about these events. The formation of interconnected ideas expressed within U.S. Presidential discourse serves as a signifier of American discourse at the macro-level. The first integration elucidates the connections between U.S. Presidential discourse and events of torture and detainee abuse through examining the logic and motivations provided by U.S. soldiers at Abu Ghraib. The second integration focuses on micro-level constructions of American discourse through analysis of statements posted on social media during the twenty-four hours immediately following the announcement of the death of Osama bin Laden. The final integration builds upon interviews I conducted abroad, in which international respondents explore their shifting opinions of the United States throughout the

GWOT. I will turn this deconstruction of the ongoing, public negotiation of the meaning of the Global War on Terror into a book-length manuscript for a major scholarly press.

In addition to my dissertation focus on the relationship between state discourse and crime, I have a manuscript currently under review that examines the meaning of sexual violence on U.S. college campuses. This project compares the logic of prevention strategies as they are constructed in (1) mainstream media and (2) scholarly discourse. I find that both are driven by the logic of routine activities theory. I argue that media, by presenting the abstracted logic of routine activities without the literature's acknowledgment of the necessity of cultural change, contribute to the embedding of crime control strategies into the daily lives of U.S. college women while leaving the perpetrators of sexual violence relatively unexamined. Representing my second stated area of inquiry, I have a manuscript in preparation that analyzes the scholarly representation of rap lyrics. Therein, I examine several studies that attempt to create a representative sample of rap lyrics for content analysis. Among these studies, I compare sample selection criteria as well as the measurement and contextualization of lyrical violence. Finding myriad contradictions and contrasting definitions, I highlight the value of such studies but call for greater contextualization of research findings and explore the potential problems associated with creating a representative sample of any form of cultural expression.

My third and final area of inquiry is represented by a study of the relationship between indicators of social disorganization, collective efficacy, and perceptions of neighborhood safety. I conducted this analysis using data from the American Social Fabric Study, a large-scale network survey containing demographic and geographic information as well as respondents' perceptions of neighborhood cohesion, disorder, informal social control, and crime. My findings suggest that the normative component of collective efficacy (i.e., social cohesion) is a significantly stronger indicator of perceived neighborhood safety, relative to its regulatory component (i.e., informal social control). Though this project constitutes a significant methodological shift from my prior projects, it is driven by the same determination to analyze criminological phenomena through a sociological lens. Through this lens, I conceptualize scholarly literature as yet another arena in which the meaning of crime and crime control are constructed. Different theories of crime and deviance address different components of the social problems we call crime and thus, produce different forms of knowledge. To further any such theory is to provide a deeper understanding of crime in modern society. To foster this understanding, these and other criminological discourses must be engaged on their own terms, whether metaphysical or computational. It is by this logic and for this reason that I will continue to develop and conduct research that seeks to penetrate the meanings of crime and crime control, wherever they may be found.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'L B', with a stylized, flowing script.

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