
Preface

The central argument of this book is that crime policy ought to be guided by science rather than by ideology. This provides a vital role for criminologists—one that has largely been ignored, especially by theorists, who “rarely contemplate the policy implications” of their work (Barlow 1995, 7). This book seeks to change that trend by having a group of the field’s most acclaimed scholars identify the policy implications of major theories, often their own.

The policy implications of criminological scholarship have been getting more press in recent years, at least within the field. The American Society of Criminology (ASC) established a new journal, *Crime and Public Policy*, with the first issue published in November 2001. This was a step in the right direction, certainly, but the new journal has focused on the link between empirical research and policy, with no space set aside for papers on the policy implications of criminological theory.

Since 1995, outgoing ASC presidents have given public policy issues greater attention in their annual addresses, which are subsequently published in the ASC journal *Criminology*. In the past fourteen addresses (1995–2008), ten presidents brought up the topic of crime policy, and six made it a major theme of their talk. Freda Adler, for example, reminded the criminologists in attendance that it was their “obligation” to reach out to policymakers on a global scale. Optimistically, she asserted that the ASC “had an ear at the highest level” of national criminal justice policy (1996, 2). An ear, of course, is not the same as the pen with which to write policy. The pen remains firmly in the hands of politicians and legislators, whose allegiance is less to the products of science—for example, how to deal with the AIDS pandemic, warnings about global warming, and the ineffectiveness of the Strategic Defense Initiative, or SDI (otherwise

known as “Star Wars”)—than to the whims of voters and the personal agendas of their counselors and financial supporters.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that current crime policies are far from benign in their social consequences. In his 2007 address, Michael Tonry (2008) explored the violation of human rights resulting from American public policy, particularly that dealing with crime control. Trends such as the increasing emphasis on imprisonment, life sentences without the possibility of parole, “three-strikes” laws, the prosecution of juveniles as adults, and the weakening of procedural protections since 1970 all exemplify the harshness of American crime control policy compared with the policies of European countries, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Further, Tonry showed how American policies systematically undermine the welfare of already disadvantaged black Americans. For example, even with declining racial disparities in arrests for serious crimes since 1987, black imprisonment rates remain seven times higher than those of whites, and a similar disparity exists for those on Death Row. In large measure, Tonry argued, this situation is explained by cultural and historical traditions in America that support the strategic regulation and control of marginalized groups through harsh criminal justice practices that are reinforced by the intolerance arising from paranoia and religious fundamentalism.

So it remains important to ask *how* criminology can turn its products into action. Frank Cullen addressed just this question, saying that the “science of criminology is capable of making an important difference in the correctional enterprise, if not far beyond” (2005, 1). He went on to suggest five ways that this could occur, the first being to develop a “theory of when criminology makes a difference in policy and/or practice” and the second being to engage in rigorous science. “Why should anyone listen to criminologists?” he asked, rhetorically. Because, he explained, “as scientists, we have a form of knowledge—scientific knowledge—that has a special legitimacy” (27).

The special legitimacy of science comes not just from its emphasis on systematic research methods but also from the core of theory that not only drives the research but is also, in turn, advanced by it. As John Laub noted in his presidential address, “Successful theories organize the findings of an area, attract the attention of a broad spectrum of researchers and scholars, and provide influential guides to public policy.” Thus, he observed, “in order to enhance policy and practice one needs not only sound research but strong theory” (2004, 18). Fittingly, the 2003 ASC meeting was titled “The Challenge of Practice, the Benefits of Theory.”

The policy implications of the interplay between theory and research in good science had come up in Lawrence Sherman’s discussion of restorative justice the year before. With illustrations from New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom, Indianapolis, and Pennsylvania, Sherman described a cyclical pattern, “with research informing theories, changes in theories guiding changes in inno-

vations [read “policy and practice”], and research on innovations leading to further modification of theory” (2003, 12). This model encourages the formation of global links between theorists, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers of the sort proposed by Adler and subsequently illustrated by David Farrington (2000) in his remarks on the “risk factor prevention paradigm.” Experiments designed to assess different technologies of intervention (e.g., improving parental supervision of at-risk children) “ideally” also test causal hypotheses.

The idea that criminologists could (even should) be in the business of transforming the lives of people and places through effective and just crime policy is not new. But the idea has gained momentum in recent years, in part because ASC presidents have taken their annual address as the opportunity to show American criminologists—and their colleagues abroad—that thinking about policy is part of the field’s scientific mission. The costs of *not* addressing the policy implications of our work can be seen in the remarks of ASC President Charles Wellford:

Our field should help people understand the consequences of their actions and how their actions relate to their values and standards. . . . Our work should assist people in assessing the degree to which what we are doing in the area of crime is *effective* and *just*. . . . Until we accept our transformative mission we will support reward systems that emphasize only what we produce not what the knowledge we produce produces. (1997, 3)

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