THE POLITICS OF TEACHING SOCIOLOGIES OF CRIME

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ABSTRACT

The politics, morals, and ethics of teaching sociologies of crime within contemporary university settings are described in this paper. My hope is to cause reflection on teaching sociologies of crime and sociologists' participation in such, the possibilities for critical distancing from current punitive, state-driven policies and mandates, and on advancing vastly different curriculums to impact both education and crime control strategies. Also addressed are moral and political concerns for educators who (although perhaps with good intentions) participate in advancing a crime control industry that remains class and race biased and based on rational-legal logics, force, and repression.

> A good number of those who describe themselves as sociologists or economists are social engineers whose function is to supply recipes to the leaders of private companies and government departments. (Bourdieu 1993)

Given the current state of criminal justice education, Bourdieu's words could not be more appropriate. As a sociologist teaching criminal justice courses, I have written this essay to both raise questions and take positions with the hope of causing reflection and generating debate on ongoing developments within academic departments, curriculums and on the politics and moral implications of teaching courses in the sociology of crime. I especially focus on our roles as educators, the state's subtle and not-so-subtle co-optation of academic criminology and criminal justice, and the (ir)relevance of criminal justice instruction to a social science, liberal arts education and to students' eventual careers. My questions and positions are germane to any critical assessment of criminal justice education (however we may define it) and are especially apropos to the many sociologists teaching sociologies of crime and to their students.

While teaching scholarly, academic issues, educators are regularly confronted with the assumed necessity to placate to policy relevant, applied, useful job skills. As a result, classroom and extra-curricular behaviors, if only subtly, ultimately are affected by changes in administrative and student expectations (reflecting bureaucratic streamlining, consumer demands and the encroachment of the applied world). Nowhere in academics is this more apparent than in business and criminal justice/ criminology (excepting, of course, professional vocations such as medicine and law, in the U.S.). Business schools increasingly work with private companies in research, teaching, and in bestowing credentials on the future's profit-driven workers. Business schools are rewarded for their cooperation in the form of endowments and subsidies of various sorts. Likewise, academic criminal justice and criminology increasingly cultivate reciprocal relationships with public (and to a lessor extent private) agencies of various sorts as each plays specific roles in the expansion of crime control policies and practices. This relationship, to some extent, is unfortunate since the many criminal justice and criminology programs had matured beyond their rather unsophisticated Law Enforcement Assistance Administration origins and had periodically critically challenged the status quo. But, given recent encroachments, policy changes, political rhetoric, and swings in public opinion, they seemingly are returning to their earlier roles of supporting state-centered agendas. Criminal justice and criminology, for various reasons (from networking to status and moneys), are crawling deeper into bed with the state, its missions, and its agenda-setting research agencies. T.R. Young (1983) once characterized criminology as a "disreputable discipline on the take from the state" which certainly seems the case if we only slightly peel back the facade and peek into academic funding, affiliations with the crime control industry, and training of students who anticipate playing various roles in containing crime.

THE DISCONCERTING ROLE OF EDUCATION

No matter how we educators may describe our roles, one function of sociologies of crime (or cynically, one objective) is sending workers into the crime control industry, an expanding complexity of industries with increasingly sophisticated technologies and control apparatuses. For many sociologists, this very field that we send our

graduates into is one characterized as negative rather than positive and for specific groups in society (especially the young, poor and non-white) as a repressive, racist, and brutal system of pain infliction (Christie 1981, 1993; Currie 1996; Gans 1995; Hagan 1994). Although students' objectives and intentions for earning degrees and working within the criminal justice system are in many cases genuinely positive and service-oriented, we undoubtedly are accrediting growing numbers of individuals who nonetheless will function, in one form or another, as agents in an increasingly policed society. These realities likely trouble sociologists teaching criminology courses and are cause for concern as they encroach on our curriculums, missions, and autonomy.

A central concern for contemporary pedagogy is with the contradictory positions that we sociologists of crime share. On the one hand, our purpose is to educate with the freedoms enjoyed in inter-disciplinary academics, while on the other hand our missions are becoming ever more closely affiliated with an increasingly larger crime control machine. My concerns are that we are moving away from educating and toward technical training; away from critical teaching and toward serving as lackeys for the system; that we are becoming not just occasional but permanent bed partners with government agencies. In other words, I fear that we, as Bourdieu cautioned, are supplying recipes to those in positions of power and authority which will be used to cook up state operations against mainly poor, young and non-white individuals. One example among many of these encroachments into education (both in teaching and research), is the inter-dependent functioning of academic criminology/criminal justice and the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the research branch of the Justice Department. Although criminal justice traditionally has had close connections with applied communities, it seems worthwhile to question if academic research particularly and teaching generally are becoming co-opted by such agenda-setting agencies (Platt 1974). Of course, such relationships are nothing new for criminal justice particularly or academics generally (Hutchins 1936; Platt 1974). Although such funding and academic entrepreneurship have waxed and waned across the years, criminal justice and criminology academics have consistently, and especially in recent years, engaged in research that has dovetailed with the interests and agendas of the state and that nearly always center on the crimes of the powerless rather than the powerful.

Such developments in academics beckon a return to Pirsig's (1974) Phaedrus and his lecture on the Church of Reason, the real university, that struggles in its search for truth as if it doesn't hear the whims of state managers, the cries of legislators, the monetary offers of state agencies, and the demands of administrators and students to increasingly engage in applied research and teaching. State managers, administrators, alumni, trustees, and students, each investing in the university infrastructure, believe that they have direction over the real university. But, the legal corporate university, that rational bureaucracy, is not the real university at all. It is merely the building and not the academic struggle for truth. Failing to hold fast to such positions jeopardizes our freedoms, effects our research, and further politicizes our scholarship and teaching.

We sociologists of crime increasingly are asked to focus on the useful, practical or applied for our students, their career choices, and their situations within the larger criminal justice system. But as Bourdieu (1993) observed, "To ask sociology to be useful for something is always a way of asking it to be useful to those in power." These words--a warning of sorts--seem equally relevant to criminology and criminal justice as appendage academic disciplines of sociology. Educators are faced, then, with the conflicting demands for usefulness all while holding fast to a sense of freedom and separateness from the state and its various missions of control, a freedom that is oftentimes difficult to maintain but one that is solidly located within the realms of the real university.

FROM STUDENTS TO AGENTS

Recently, and especially in the face of swelling criminal justice enrollments, I have contemplated why we recruit students for this discipline. A primary, yet unstated reason is to ensure our own continuance and growth. Yet apart from this cynical response, we must, for our students' and society's sake, look further. Employment placement for prospective graduates is one

oft-given response. Yet, even in the face of national pledges to put "100,000 more police on the streets," is there a real need to create those many additional jobs in the crime control industry? Citizens concerned about increasing powers of the state, disturbing and misplaced spending priorities, and the growing numbers of incarcerated individuals must also question the social necessity of adding those many jobs and positions to the crime control machine. For such expansions translate into increased numbers of controllers, guardians, and experts all working toward propping up, and worse, expanding the scope and power of the crime control industry. Such issues are not solely moral or philosophical, but pecuniary. Regarding outlays of public money, current growth in the U.S. prison industry (due largely to the escalating war on drugs) is unparalleled in the world and is the "second fastest growing item, after Medicaid, among state government expenditures," paradoxically all during a time when trends in index crimes have either declined or remained stable and well below the rates of the 1970s (Christie 1993; Garland 1995; Irwin, Austin 1997; Rothman 1995; Tunnell 1992).

By continuing to recruit students into these disciplines, we may well be dis-serving and deceiving those who ultimately might discover that a college degree does not necessarily guarantee work and especially in their major fields given expectations of surplus numbers of qualified and credentialed crime fighters. Moreover, according to national GRE scores, graduate students whom we recruit into criminal justice programs, compared to graduate students across disciplines, may be the least academically prepared for graduate school. Indeed, their scores are 84, 93, and 76 points below social science students in verbal, quantitative, and analytical measures, respectively (Graduate Record Examination 1993). If indeed their test performance measures preparation, then we are confronted with a frightening scenario since criminal justice graduate students are preparing themselves to manage and administer, rather than staff the front lines of, the crime control industry. By conferring credentials, we teachers are giving them license to do just that. Even with a graduate degree in hand, it is a disconcerting thought that graduates, many of whom are ill-prepared and academically disinterested, will be entrusted with the supervision of a machine with such awesome powers. It's analogous to entrusting a military bomber squadron to a grunt soldier. In both cases, the individual's academic preparation is wanting, the intellectual and critical interest puny, and the power of the machine monstrous. Also, similarly to undergraduates and their job prospects, students earning graduate degrees are having increasing difficulty locating employment (Gilbert 1996).

The market of crime repression and control is drawing greater numbers of students (as would-be agents) into colleges and universities. We, as teachers/trainers then prepare them (by nothing more than according credentials) for inner-city and borderline warfare. Yet, there is little sustained dialogue about this troop preparation or by their swelling numbers. Little concern is voiced over NIJ's central presence within the discipline and at national academic meetings. Often universities organize and sponsor annual Career Days which consists of inviting law enforcement agencies to campus. There educators go arm-in-arm with crime control industry representatives, literally steering them to our students and vice versa. Where is the critical distancing central to academics? Sanctioned by university departments and engaged in by well-meaning faculty, teachers are not only supplying recipes but playing match-maker between our young, credentialed crime fighters and agencies of repression.

As teachers, we no doubt constantly assess and advise our students by learning of their interests, hopes, skills and needs. And although our students express some skepticism about the crime control machine, to work within it those ideas certainly must be suppressed. Their doubts of say, the efficacy of the war on drugs, will be replaced with the more immediate necessity of fighting such a war. For they may discover that one cannot simultaneously oppose and participate. Yet, the majority of criminal justice and criminology undergraduate and graduate students simply accept state missions and seek degrees in order to work within the criminal justice system. Their allegiances already are sworn, ideologically at the least, to the status quo, the expanding crime control machine, and the hope of ever increasing numbers of employment positions within both public and private systems

of domination. Today's students want to be a part of the system for a variety of reasons (e.g., from thrills and violence to genuine desires to help and serve).

Anecdotal evidence of their commitment to crime control, I have collected from junior and senior students' written journal entries on their experiences in field placement, an internship, whereby college credit is earned for working within a criminal justice agency. Evidently, after having spent three or more years in college, having taken academic criminal justice, social science, humanities, and liberal arts classes, these students, upon entering the field placement, seemingly ignore the critical distancing, thinking, and knowledge that they have acquired and are, to some extent, co-opted by and socialized into a system with powerful and firmly entrenched organizational cultures.

For example, one female student, while interning with a small city police department, was asked to address local high school students. Given all the topical possibilities, she chose to speak on offensive and defensive weaponry of policing, of which most students are enamored. Her words follow:

> I spoke with students on being an officer and the various equipment used in law enforcement, specifically the stinger spike system and bulletproof vests.

A male student who interned at a juvenile detention center reported the following about institutional policies, rule infractions, and his tacit support of them, that on their face, at the least, are racist:

> It is against the rules of the facility to let the inmates watch the Black Entertainment Channel on their television. The administration of the facility says it is too influential and causes problems. One kid in one of the cells turned their television to BET and I had to tell him to change the channel. After several times of this, the officer who was helping came over to my area and told them to just turn the tv off.

A female intern's words are illustrative of the organizational culture of policing and the insular interaction among police officers with whom she clearly sympathies.

> In courses that I have taken, I have heard about the stresses continually faced by officers. I believe one way to relieve such stress is to bond with other officers by telling their "war stories" to each other. I don't believe a person in any other occupation would be able to relate or understand, and acknowledge the importance for officers to bond with one another...Police work demands isolation from a large portion of society.

And another, reporting on his experiences with a large city police department, made sweeping generalizations about criminals, crime patterns, and the boredom of policing, all while, paradoxically, aggrandizing the dangers and excitement of police work.

> While patrolling, an officer's activity level depends on the night of the week and the type of weather. On this night the activity level was very low due to the snow and cold temperatures. This type of weather helps keep the criminals indoors. This night I found out that patrolling is not always exciting, but you must keep on your toes and keep your eyes open.

The same intern, during a respite in his patrolling, had the following conversation, which he concluded with a defense of police behavior:

> I asked the officers, "Aren't we supposed to look for crimes being committed and traffic violations?" And the answer was, "No, not when we do not have to." Most of the officers have meeting places where they go to talk and relax. As busy as they usually are, I guess they deserve a little peace and quiet when they can get it.

Another female student who interned with a small city police department described her role in investigating an apparent suicide. Her words indicate the elevated sense of her investigatory powers and social-psychological insights.

> I helped go through evidence from the suicide. I read letters and the scrapbook to determine [the victim's] state of mind.

Such evidence, alas, is only anecdotal, yet it is typical of the 30 or so students' journal entries that I have read over the past four years and similar to that communicated to me by other faculty who administer such

programs. Their words, nonetheless, are illustrative of their commitment to rational-legal crime control systems and strategies.

TEACHING, POLITICS AND ETHICS

What are the ethical and political implications for teachers who train individuals for work in a class-biased, punitive system that continues to operate on fear, misinformation, lies, brutality, sexism, racism, violence, force, and secrecy? We are responsible, at least in part, for both certifying careers and in continuing systems that treat these characteristics as positive, indeed necessary subcultural properties. For our participation in legitimating prospective and current crime control employees promotes, perhaps ensures in some measure, the continuance of such structures. Our brief and limited contact with students cannot possibly offset the powerful subcultural norms, values and role behaviors within crime control industries. Indeed, even with the best of intentions, we may be fooling ourselves in believing that we can affect attitudes of future agents who immediately upon finding employment encounter decades-old organizational cultures.

Our responsibility as educators seemingly extends far beyond those students whom we encounter over two or three decades of teaching. Rather than simply hope that our efforts affect the occasional exceptional students, perhaps we need strategies for addressing these structural, political, and cultural problems specific to crime and justice and to teaching sociologies of crime. For example, what if concerted efforts were made to steer prospective students away from criminal justice education and working toward decreasing enrollments? Or, what if we no longer bestowed credentials on the swelling ranks of criminal justice students and sent no more soldiers to the domestic front, until fundamental and systemic changes were made? While unlikely to materialize, and also perhaps unreasonable, such initiatives might play a small part in stopping wars against the young, the non-white, the poor and powerless. However, history advises caution since radical activist politics in academics, in some cases, has resulted in the elimination of entire academic programs and departments (Geis 1995; Platt 1974). But criminal justice programs are growing at unprecedented rates, producing unforeseen revenues through FTEs and research/training grants. Since business is up and demands high, now may be the most advantageous time for concerted action of some sort to slow down, indeed, stop the machine and build something else.

There are less antagonistic measures that we might well consider. For example, re-designing criminology and criminal justice curriculums may prove more advantageous than activist politics. Contemporary curriculums typically require students to take a very few hours in the social sciences, which often are spread across two or three academic departments. My experiences are that students take introductory classes in sociology, political science and psychology. A few seek out another course or two in sociology. We just might better impact our students and the cultural norms of the industry within which they likely will work if we better integrate sociology into criminal justice and criminology curriculums, forcing students to get beyond the narrow strictures of their current curriculums. They deserve exposure to courses in class and stratification, race relations, social problems, gender, community, and on and on. These topics and classes are squarely relevant to crime, justice and contemporary systems of control (Akers 1992). Furthermore, students could well use greater exposure to the social problems of crime and its control from sociological rather than legalistic and punitive perspectives often found in criminal justice curriculums. In the long run, it seems likely that students would be better served if required to take various social science courses rather than the more typical criminology and criminal justice classes. Our graduates will have ample time in their careers to learn such things as police management, laws pertaining to their everyday work, correctional procedures, etc. Classes in these topics, when compared to other broader social science courses, seem trivial to a college education. Changes of this nature, however, undoubtedly are difficult to implement. Academic turf, conflicts over university monies, and not the least of problems, the historical hostilities between sociology and criminal justice/criminology disciplines and departments may impede such innovations. However, academic criminal justice and criminology owe their two most central elements--theory and methods--to sociology, and it may well be that each has something to offer the other (Akers 1992).

Perhaps too we could address the political concerns raised in this paper by implementing an anarchist pedagogy in sociologies of crime. In other words, we could teach against state-organized politics of legislating and controlling behaviors (as we know them). This would mean a change in dialogue from apologist or critical to highlighting anarchism's chief concern for individuals--gaining freedom from the restraints of government (Goldman 1967)--by explicating Thoreau's (1957) thesis that "government is best which governs not at all." Although many academics currently engage in critical pedagogies of crime and justice through teaching from radical or conflict perspectives, that alone may not be enough to impact our students and certainly not enough to effect the cultures of public and private systems of control. Rather than critically assessing current systems and offering one over another as solutions to our crime, justice, and systemic criminal justice problems, perhaps a sociology of crime needs a pedagogy, broadly informed by anarchist perspectives, that speaks against systems of appropriated force, law, and administration and that speaks for a new social order based on freedom from hierarchical and rationalized systems of dominance (Goldman 1967; Tifft, Sullivan 1980).

An anarchist pedagogy would stress the need for dismantling and disrespecting authority rather than reproducing and respecting it. An anarchist pedagogy would look for meaning in the actions of those at the receiving end of authority, that is, those labeled criminal, not necessarily to romanticize or reify crimes and criminals, but to understand the moment of action and conflict with authority, what that means to the actors and how such is politically interpreted and responded to. At the least, it would highlight the dialectic of structure and agency and their interplay with shifting power relations. Such also would emphasize the inequities of the law, the sheer force of the state in organized policing, and the state's persistence resting squarely on organized and legitimized coercion, force and death (Ferrell 1993; Horowitz 1964). Furthermore, an anarchist pedagogy would highlight 1) the war of authority most often waged on the young, the non-white, and the poor, 2) the illogical, immoral, and oft-times hilarious nature of much of crime control and controllers, and 3) the need for countering the various campaigns initiated by moral entrepreneurs. In other words, it would encourage actively making fun of authority with the hope of ultimately negating it all while highlighting the necessity of participating in direct action (Ferrell 1993; Horowitz 1964).

An anarchist pedagogy for a sociology of crime would show the illogics and the unlikelihood of the crime problem being thwarted by a government machine. Indeed, it would turn the tables and demonstrate how the crimes of unbridled force and repression are requisites for the rise and continuation of the machine itself--the state (Tifft, Sullivan 1980). It also would stress that not only have the greatest numbers and most horrific crimes been committed by the state, but it has also failed miserably at controlling what it defines as crime. More specific to the academic discipline, an anarchist sociology of crime would unmask criminology itself by showing it for what it is--an apologist for the state and its agendas--and a discipline that, if at all possible, needs rescuing from the state. Such a pedagogy also would stress the need for separating ourselves from an escalating American style fascism that engages in increasingly punitive policies (Tifft, Sullivan 1980). Needless to say, an anarchist pedagogy would seek ways of dismantling formalized hierarchical structures, including that upon which we teachers are materially dependent--formal education.

Peacemaking criminology and abolitionism would be central to such a pedagogy (van Swaaningen 1997; Ward 1982). Redefinitions of crime rather than explications of current systems of law and domination would also be fundamental. Furthermore, community responses to deviance (short of rationally organized systems of conflict resolution) would replace the typically taught (and dismal failings of) community based policing (Pepinsky 1993; Pepinsky, Quinney 1991; Sullivan 1980). Within an anarchist pedagogy, there would be little need (and then only for comparative purposes) to give attention to the logics of contemporary laws, policing, and control. Rather, by speaking against, we could teach of what could become and hopefully impact our students and their future employers in manners far beyond our current efforts while living our lives as "a counter friction to stop the machine" (Thoreau 1957).

Efforts at negating tensions between sociology and criminal justice are also laudable. Given such efforts, it is essential that our students, many of whom are first generation college students from oppressed and poor communities, be shown respect and understanding as pedagogy meets their lived realities. Furthermore, we must be honest with our students who desire working within the criminal justice system by making them aware that while serving the community, they also will be required to repress it and that laws, whether or not they support them, must be enforced.

These are my experiences of and thoughts on the politics of teaching sociologies of crime and justice. They probably resemble those of some sociologists but not of others. My hope is to spark reflection on these issues and questions about our roles in and indeed about the current state of sociologies of crime, criminology, and criminal justice academic education.

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