

What is criminology?

Criminology- the scientific study of crime

Crime = an act punishable by law

The discipline of criminology is a relatively recent development.

Systematic study of crime did not begin until the 19th century

First criminology program in Canada appeared in 1951, at the university of British Columbia, in the department of social science.

- School of Criminology created at the university of Montreal in 1963
- Centre of Criminology created at the university of Toronto in 1963
- Department of Criminology established at University of Ottawa in 1967
- School of Criminology established at SFU in 1973

Criminology as an Interdisciplinary Social Science

- Draws on sociology, psychology, biology, law geographic, economics
- Includes the study of law; history of law; the criminalisation process; crime prevention and crime control; policing, corrections and penology
- Sociological explanations
- However earlier 19th century explains- eg - the positivist school and “criminal man”- were biological or physiological

Criminalization

- Criminologist study the “criminalization” process- how certain behaviours become criminalized over time, while others become decriminalized (ex. Abortion was illegal in Canada but now legal.)
- Also study the “stigmatization” process- how offenders come to be “demonized” and “labeled”

The media:

The fascination of crime:

- Crime is a popular topic for newspaper, TV shows, books and movies.
- There is little relationship between crime news and actual amount of crime.
- Media focus primarily on violent crimes, even though such crimes form only a small part of all criminal activity.
- Appears as though police solve more crimes and arrest more criminals than they do in reality

The appeal of crime stories:

- Crime related stories are often dramatic and lurid.
- Deal with moral questions of good vs. evil.
- Criminals appear in short time span- between newscast or newspaper editions.
- Easy for the public to understand (Sacco & Kennedy, 2011)

Crime comics

- In 1940s, Canadian government passed a law making illegal “to make, print, publish, distribute or sell crime comics.”
- Section 163 of criminal code is still in effect today.
- Back then, it was believed that crime “comics would increase psychopathology among young people (Steeves & Milford, 2015)

Influence of the media

- The average child spends 5+ hours a day, watching TV, movies, playing video games.
- Two-thirds of what they watch involves violence.
- By age 18, average child will have seen 200,000 violent acts, and 16,000 murders

Media effects

- Social scientists began to study relationship between crime and the media in 1960s-1970s
- Early studies of “media effects” suggests that children who watched a lot of violence on TV were more likely engage in violence in real life.
- Some social scientists have rejected this approach, whereas others are still interested, claiming that violent video games are related behavior problems, and that certain youth who are predisposed to violence may copy ideas that they see in the media.

Cultural Criminology

- Cultural criminology is sub discipline of criminology, that explores “links between culture, crime and crime control in contemporary life”
- Explores cultural meaning of media violence, and emphasizes significance of “active audiences”
- ****“Active audiences” means that people do not consume media messages passively; rather, “the meaning of the messages is negotiated or constructed” actively, through interaction between those who produced the message and those who consume it.

The Production of the News

- Journalist consider crime to be newsworthy, often to the exclusion of other types of stories.
- Crime is often central component of “entertainment” – grips the imagination of TV viewers, moviegoers and etc.
- News organization and producers of popular media are primarily interested in clear (unambiguous) stories that will attract immediate attention, are easy to understand, and that will have a resolution (or conclusion) within a short time span.

The Problem Frame

- A “problem frame”
 - a) a is a narrative that is easily understood
 - b) Focuses on something extraordinary “bad”, that affects many people

- c) Calls out for the solution to the “problem,” to be provided by the police, the government.
 - Problem frame for the columbine focused on exceptionally “bad” nature of the school shootings, the “horror” that they generated in the community and across the nation, and identified violent video games as “the cause”
 - US government responded by legislating label and content warnings for media content

Moral Panics

- Stanley Cohen explored relationship between media and moral panics in 1972 book, *Folk devils and Moral Panic: The Origins of the Mods and Rockers*.
- Cohen identified the media as a crucial factor in stirring up moral panics
- According to Cohen, when there is no news to report, the media engage in muck-raking and moral entrepreneurship (actively searching out social “problems: to sensationalize)

Amplifying the Problem

Policing the Crisis

- Title of 1978 book, by Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher. Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts (often referred to as Hall et al.)
- Book was about “mugging, the state and law and order”; built upon Cohen’s work on folk devils and moral panics
- Supposedly “new” crime of “mugging” became subject of intense media reporting in UK
- More policing resources devoted to catching “muggers,” which resulted in increase in arrest, and stiffer sentences

The “Bad Guys”

- Media representations often stereotype racial minorities as “bad guys,” to be feared
- Black offenders often portrayed by the media as more violent and aggressive
- Can have real social consequences, because readers or viewers may come to perceive stereotyped minorities as more dangerous than other groups.

The “Ideal” Victim

- The “ideal” victim comes from a “majority status” background (i.e., he or she is not usually from an ethnic minority or socially marginalized group).
- The “idea victim,” preferred by the media, is a white female, victimized by an ethnic minority male.
- Victim from ethnic minorities or socially marginalized groups are often ignored by the media, or portrayed as “blameworthy,” because they are “in the minority,” or are engaging in “deviant” behaviour.
 1. Weak, female, sick, very old, very young, or a combination of the above.
 2. Going about their routine- “respectable” and “legal”- activates at time of victimization
 3. Unrelated to (unacquainted with) the offender (i.e., stranger-on-stranger crime)

The “Good Guys”

- Police often portrayed as heroic crime fighters
- Police described by media as “hyper-competent” - able to solve crimes quickly and effectively, catch criminals, maintain law and order
- Creates “exaggerated public expectations for real-life police performance”
- Media also tends to conceal “the darker side of policing” (abusive of power, inability to solve many Cases)

Reality TV and News Media

- Journalist face pressure to report about police in a positive way, since positive relationship with police ensures access to interviews/news tips.
- Police are sometimes given “ultimate control” over footage that appears in final broadcast (ensuring that the material will be favourable).
- Media portrayals usually show police fighting crime, when in reality, most time is spent keeping the peace, directing traffic, doing paperwork, etc..