This is the first in a three-part series examining the basis on which criminologists can better engage what Jock Young has called 'the criminological imagination.' We consider developments in the UK, USA and Canada and argue that criminology faces external challenges that constrain how crime is interpreted and how criminologists can communicate the results of an ever-growing, international evidence-base into the public realm. In our view, future efforts to re-define criminology as contentious, as in some cases, or conciliatory, as in others, require a new way to conceive of the intersections between crime, power, and society.

To understand the predicament faced by contemporary criminologists, it is useful to recognize that various factors have undermined the traditional relationship between criminologists and criminal justice policy . [i]

These challenges can be divided into factors that are external to criminology and those that are internal to the field. In this piece, it is the external factors that are of most interest.

As Kevin Haggerty has explained these factors take the form of shifts in the political ideology of crime control.[ii] These include:

(1) the rise of neo-liberal forms of governance, a new emphasis on individuality and individual responsibility and the rise of neo-conservative philosophies in Canada, the US and UK;

(2) the ascendancy of a highly symbolic public discourse about crime; and

(3) the transformation of the criminal justice system by new technologies of detection, capture and monitoring.

Us vs. them in crime policy: criminalizing mental i.0llness

On the first point, by using the mantra of personal responsibility to advocate less government, criminal justice policymakers have moved away from traditional reliance on the welfare state's provisions for security. This focus on individual responsibility plays into the drug war, the denial of addiction, and unequal application of criminal sanctions between financial crimes and street crimes. It is, however, perhaps most evident in the criminalization of the mentally ill.[iii]

While this is an issue in the US and a growing concern in Canada, in the UK official prevalence rates of mental health are significantly higher among the prison population than the general public. It is argued that, for certain diagnostic categories, specifically 'antisocial personality disorder' and the now discredited 'dangerous and severe personality disorder', criminality is all but a prerequisite. We suggest this as further evidence of the criminalization of mental illness, and as a prime example of positivist ideology that is rife in today's society.

Table 1 *Rates of Mental Illness in general and incarcerated populations* [iv]

Diagnosis	Prevalence (General)	Prevalence (Prison)

Depression/Mood Disorder
5-20%
28%

Anxiety Disorder
5%
42%

Schizophrenia
0.05%
24%

Substance Dependency
2%

18-30%

Personality Disorder - Cluster B

	Antisocial Personality

Disorder

Borderline Personality

Disorder

Narcissistic Personality

Disorder

Histrionic Personality

Disorder

0.7-3.6%

0.7-2%

0.8-1%

1.8-3%

50-70%

28%

7.5%

4%

These prevalence rates seem to have a knock-on effect on public attitudes towards the mentally ill. Since Lombroso's biological theories of criminality, society has tried to find ways to segregate and set apart criminals – a bid that has led to these offenders being considered physically different, morally different, socially different, and now mentally ill. This is reflected in the most recent *Attitudes to Mental Illness* survey, which found that over 30% of the British public believed people with mental illness, are more likely to act violently than those without mental health problems. [v]

The central issue is that the public seems to have lost faith in the ability of the criminal justice system to change offenders and the social welfare system to provide support to those at risk. Consequently, the criminological theories and approaches that are most influential in a policy sense tend to address public concerns fed less by evidence, and more by a media culture in which crime is both glorified and vilified.

We are surrounded by crime – or are we?

Another external issue for criminologists is the way crime is presented in the media. While crime and the media has been a longstanding concern, recent developments in the UK, Canada, and the US require that criminologists re-consider how crime stories often evoke strong emotional reactions, and the consequences of "if it bleeds it leads" journalism. In the UK, a 2006 report [vi] by researchers from the University of Cardiff found that crime stories made up 20% of all print media and 26% of broadcast media news stories – more than all home affairs stories combined (including stories on the health service, the education system and immigration) – but, officially,

crime rates are falling throughout the developed world.

In Canada, these drops in crime rates were associated with data suggesting the public's stated fear of crime has also dropped. However, media portrayal of crime and criminal justice is widespread, with crime often considered both a source of news and entertainment.

The rise in the presentation of crime has coincided with specific decisions about how it should be portrayed. In the UK, television programs such as the *BBC*'s "*Hustle*", showcase great minds using a variety of tricks and techniques in order to swindle money and possessions out of supposed 'bad guys'. Episodes typically portray a team of con artists getting together, selecting targets, and planning the scam that they'd like to carry out. This particular program led to a reality-based spin-off, "
The Real Hustle
", which presented some ingenious ways in which people carry out scams, just like the starts of the fictional show. Granted, the overt premise of
the Real Hustle
was to educate the public about how to avoid becoming a victim of con-merchants, shows of this nature almost glorify the "art" of the con – using immoral, and often illegal, means to obtain financial or material wealth. The saving grace, of course, was that targets in
Hustle
were never random – always pre-selected based on the past misdemeanours of a third party. So that makes it OK?

We would suggest not. As well as essentially teaching the public how to carry out illegal acts, shows such as *Hustle* present a view of the world that suggests that it's OK to act illegally, so long as your victim has been bad too. This "eye for an eye" approach to justice could be responsible for the high percentage of the public who argue in favour of the reinstatement of capital punishment (estimated to be around 55% of the British public – or 98% of the readership of the Daily Express!). [vii]

In the US, researchers have shown how consumption of television news and crime-based reality programs has been shown to increase the odds of selecting punishment as the most important goal of criminal sentencing, and data from both the UK and US suggests punitive views are a function of the emergent emotional element to the criminal justice system.[viii]

For example, Devon Johnson has shown that anger about crime is a significant predictor of

punitive attitudes.[ix] This may be connected to media portrayals that crime is the result of individual failings as opposed to social factors such as poverty and inequality. Crime in the media is often presented in unsophisticated terms, where common-sense solutions are favoured over more complex inquiries. At issue is the way the increasingly vivid portrayal of violence on television provokes emotive responses to crime and criminals. [x]

While public knowledge about crime and offenders remains fairly limited, attitudes have hardened. This notion of ‘‘popular punitiveness’’ has radically altered the government response to crime as demands to ‘‘do something’’ about offenders who commit crimes of violence. This has created a situation in which crime policies have become what Nils Christie has called ‘‘...a central arena for presentations by politicians’” [xi] and led to support for mandatory consecutive sentences and mandatory minimum sentences. These approaches ensure that a very limited category of offenders spends a longer period of time behind bars, regardless of individual circumstances or future risk. While politically popular, they have yet proven to have much utility in actually reducing or addressing crime.

The politics of crime control

Despite rather good data on what works, or perhaps more specifically what does not, governments in Canada and the UK are both in the process of implementing the failed “tough on crime” policies of the USA.

In Canada, the next decade will be deeply depressing for many criminologists. As the influence of evidence to guide policy wanes, the nonsensical “get tough” on crime approach will result in huge financial and social costs. Canada will now implement a series of measures designed to increase the length of sentences and expand prisons at a time when the crime rate is at an all time low. If the US example is any indication, prison expansion will require a significant reduction in funding for community corrections and undermine efforts to address underlying and systemic challenges for those in conflict with the law. It might also be seen as an opportunity. It is ironic that policies recently adopted by Canada in Bill C10 are the same as those identified as contributing to the current challenges of the American justice system.

In the UK, through the Cabinet reshuffle of August 2012, David Cameron removed Ken Clarke from his post as Justice Secretary, the member of the Government responsible for crime affairs and penal policy. Clarke had attempted to reform sentencing policy by announcing plans to

strengthen community sentencing and reduce prison numbers. Not only did this policy make economic sense in a time when the UK were struggling through recession, but it also took notice of, and adopted, a sound evidence-base emerging from theories of criminal desistance. He was, predictably, criticised by many in the mainstream populist press, and to appease back-bench MPs and the populist press Clarke was replaced with the darling of the Government's far-right-wing, Chris Grayling.

Grayling is notoriously conservative in his outlook, and has bragged he will ensure the prison environment will become harsher.[xii] Overcrowding and longer waiting lists to access offending behaviour programmes will lead to an increase in the number of low-level offenders, who leave prison with more knowledge of how to commit crimes, and less support to get educated, learn a trade, and overcome past substance abuse.

Ironically, it is the US in recent years that have acknowledged the errors and costs of the tough on crime movement. For example, the US Sentencing Commission (2011) found that mandatory minimum sentences apply too broadly, are excessively severe, and are applied inconsistently. Additionally, mounting evidence suggests that mandatory minimums contribute to the racial inequality within the system, are ineffective overall, and result in inefficiencies that add to the growing expense of the system.

While the next decade will require Canadians and Brits to confront the consequences of the politics of crime control, in the US there are significant reform efforts underway. The broadest is Senator Jim Webb's effort to establish a Commission to engage in a top to bottom review of the existing justice system. Despite some set backs, Webb has committed to working toward the establishment of this Commission before leaving the Senate in 2012. The Legislation would empower the Commission to investigate and issue recommendations for policy reforms to better protect society, reduce costs, and reduce recidivism while improving treatment and correctional outcomes.

The overt politicization of crime tends to divide society into the classes. The 'them and us' mentality that views those caught up in the system as part of the perpetual 'criminal underworld' feeds a vicious circle of misunderstanding, manipulation, and anger. Simplistic media accounts and depictions of crime, influence perceptions of criminals and stoke anger at those who "choose" a criminal lifestyle. The notion that criminals are just plain different from the rest of society leads in turn to more frequent and punitive crime stories in the press, providing the political impetus for more dumb crime policies.

A recently published prison ethnography, based on interviews in five men's maximum-security prisons in England, provides one way to understand why this view remains so persistent, despite the lack of any evidence that severe approaches to crime control make society safer. Deborah Drake argues the purpose of prison is essentially political. Designed to showcase severe sanctions as a means provide the public with a false sense of security.[xiii] The consequence is another generation lost, and the missed opportunity to make society safer by implementing and testing the programs associated with evidence-based criminology.

While the above external factors are significant, internal developments within the field of criminology cannot be ignored. In our next essay, we turn a critical eye to the false certainty of calculator criminology, the ascendency of careerism, and the failure to consider the criminological legacy we are leaving the next generation.

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[i] For more on the challenges for criminologists related to influencing criminal justice policy see http://www.academia.edu/875128/Bridging_the_Gap_a_Pragmatic_Approach_to_Understanding_Critical_Criminologies_and_Policy_Influence

[ii] Kevin Haggerty's piece is here: http://tcr.sagepub.com/content/8/2/211.short

[iii] For more on the criminalization of mental illness see http://www.nami.org/Content/ContentGroups/Policy/WhereWeStand/The_Criminalization_of_People_with_Mental_Illness___WHERE_WE_STAND.htm

[iv] For details on Psychiatric morbidity among prisoners in England and Wales see http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsStatistics/DH_4007132

[v] For the full survey results see http://www.ic.nhs.uk/pubs/attitudestomi11

[vi] The full report is available here: http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/jomec/resources/QualityIndependenceofBritishJournalism.pdf

[vii] Hardly a random sample but still surprising. See http://www.express.co.uk/posts/view/347088/The-death-penalty-Lord-Tebbit-and-our-readers-call-for-its-return

[viii] For more on similar findings in US and UK see http://tcr.sagepub.com/content/6/3/299.short and https://www.ncjrs.gov/App/publications/Abstract.aspx?id=185336

[ix] See Devon Johnson's paper here http://pun.sagepub.com/content/11/1/51.abstract

[x] For more on the influence of television viewers and mediators see http://www.academia.edu/739055/Mediators_of_the_association_between_television_viewing_and_fear_of_crime_Perceived_personal_risk_and_perceived_ability_to_cope

[xi] Nils Christie's A Suitable Amount of Pain remains prescient http://www.unafei.or.jp/english/pdf/RS_No67/No67_05VE_Christie.pdf

[xii] For more on Graylings public statements see http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/chris-grayling-to-review-prison-regime-8159207.html

[xiii] A review of Drake's book by Johannes Wheeldon is available here See http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2012/10/26/book-review-prisons-punishment-and-the-pursuit-of-security-deborah-drake/

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