

# Bridging Divides in Canadian Criminology: Some Thoughts on a Possible Future<sup>1</sup>

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*The field of criminology has experienced impressive institutional growth and its current popularity among students suggests that this growth will continue into the future. At the same time, criminologists are working within a fragmented discipline, with disparate theoretical, methodological, and empirical concerns. This lack of a single focus has led to conflicting views as to what should be considered appropriate work or an appropriate approach within the field. Thus, a fundamental question for criminologists is, How can we build a strong collaborative community of scholars that will withstand the challenges posed by real and potential divides? In 2009, the University of Western Ontario hosted a group of multidisciplinary scholars for the purpose of identifying, discussing, and ultimately, attempting to bridge the divisions within contemporary criminological circles. The result is this special issue of the Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice.*

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From its inception, the discipline of criminology has been “highly differentiated in its theoretical, methodological, and empirical concerns” (Garland 2002: 15). Its diffuseness is as a consequence of the fact that the roots of criminology lie in multiple fields – sociology, psychology, law, political science, history, philosophy and economics, among others – marking it as a truly interdisciplinary field (Jeffery 1978; Osgood 1998). Thus, as an umbrella discipline, it encompasses a wide range of academic and practical pursuits that have as their central focus problems related to law making, law breaking, and social reactions to both (Sutherland 1924). The lack of a single focus or approach, however, has led to disparate views as to how criminologists should consider their discipline and what ought to be considered appropriate work or approaches within the field. The result is that criminology is often “beset by its own disciplinary struggles, internal divisions, competing allegiances, and the familiar irritations of departmental and personal politics” (Menzies and Chunn 1999: 291).

Over the past few decades, the field of criminology has enjoyed a dazzling rise in institutional support in Canada (Huey 2010; Menzies and Chunn 1999). Each year we see increasing numbers of students enrolled in criminology courses, as colleges and universities across Canada implement new programs to keep up with student demands for programs (Huey 2010). Despite these successes, the discipline continues to face a daunting set of challenges inherited from the past. As criminology expands within Canada, a new generation of criminologists is grappling with some thorny questions, including a number of important praxeological and pedagogical issues. For instance, we might consider in what ways criminologists could intervene in social and political life, whether they should so intervene, and what possible implications could such interventions have for the discipline. We might also consider the question of how we can maintain quality education in the face of ever-increasing institutional and other demands. Although different criminologists will answer these questions differently, a fundamental question is, given the tensions that exist within and across the discipline, How we can we build a strong collaborative community of scholars that can withstand the challenges posed by cultural and language divisions, as well as by epistemological, theoretical, and empirical differences in approach?

In 2009, the University of Western Ontario hosted a group of multi-disciplinary scholars for the purpose of identifying, discussing, and ultimately, attempting to bridge the divisions within contemporary criminology. To that end, participants were invited to identify, discuss, and propose solutions to such problems as the divisions caused by differences in methodological or theoretical approaches, the various disputes between critical and orthodox criminologies, particularly in relation to the necessity for a criminological praxis, and the linguistic barriers or *solitude* separating French and English criminological traditions. Participants were also invited to suggest new ways to push the disciplinary boundaries and to explore subjects and objects deemed missing from the discipline.

The Bridging Divides conference was the result of two events. The first was a 2005 conference hosted by Aaron Doyle, Kevin Haggerty, and Dawn Moore that sought to explore the future of criminology in Canada. Out of discussions held in 2005 came the idea of engaging in further debate and dialogue in order to recognize and strengthen the diverse field that is Canadian criminology. The second event was a luncheon at which two very different criminologists (Laura Huey, a

qualitative criminologist with a critical theoretical focus and Paul Paré, a quantitative criminologist working within the orthodox criminology tradition) decided to set aside epistemological and other potential differences in order to work together to develop a mixed-methods criminology program at the University of Western Ontario, offering students a broader base of knowledge and training. These two events, and the subsequent discussions they produced, convinced us that it was not only necessary but imperative that criminologists begin tackling the issues that divide rather than bring us together.

In the pages that follow, readers will find articles that speak from a range of different perspectives and engage with a number of themes of interest to criminologists. The article that begins this collection is Maritza Felices-Luna's "Criminology against Criminology: Debates over Objects, Theories and Methods," which highlights the issue of disciplinary divisions by examining our methodological and theoretical differences, the tensions between orthodox and critical criminologies, and questions related to the desire for disciplinary boundaries and the equally compelling wish to push those boundaries by creating new objects. Using her work on political violence to illustrate her argument, Felices-Luna contends that debates over *traditional* and *alternative* criminologies actually serve to make the discipline richer by ensuring that it does not remain trapped within a single perspective that treats only particular objects, theories, or methods as being criminological. Further, she advances a compelling case for treating these debates as contributing to a more dynamic criminology by enabling the discipline periodically to redefine or reconfigure itself.

Michael Kempa's "Academic Engagement of International Policing-Reform Assistance: Putting Foucauldian Genealogy to Practical Use" picks up the theme of theoretical and political divides by positing that Foucauldian genealogical inquiry, often applied to critiquing objects of study, can also facilitate policy making and institutional reforms. More specifically, Kempa presents a case study of work previously conducted with the RCMP in which a Foucauldian genealogical method was used to institutionalize a discursive space in which alternative ideas might be heard, debated, and considered by decision makers. Scholars interested in the potential of criminology to contribute to public policy domains or as the basis of institutional reforms will find this article compelling reading.

Taking a different substantive topic as her field of inquiry, Jacqueline Lewis, in "Shifting the Focus: Restorative Justice and Sex Work," simi-

larly challenges us to reconsider not only the role of criminology in public policy debates but our own past contributions to such debates in relation to sex work. Drawing from her own substantial body of research in this area, Lewis argues that, although governments have recently adopted the concept of restorative justice (in no small part thanks to the contributions of criminologists interested in arresting the tide of punitive sentencing), in the case of criminalized sex work, so-called restorative justice policies can harm those they are supposed to help. Lewis believes that a shift in the focus of these restorative justice policies is necessary, particularly regarding conceptualizations of *victim*, *harm*, and *reparation*. Such a shift must reflect, she argues, the real roots of restorative justice and protect the health, safety, and well-being of sex workers.

One of the central themes of the Bridging Divides conference in 2009 was that of *missing objects* – that is, those objects of analytical inquiry that receive too little scholarly attention within criminological circles. In response to this call, Carla Cesaroni and Shahid Alvi have given us an article that focuses our attention on those who often serve as the basis for public fears and thus public policy but whose voices are generally silenced: adolescent male offenders. In “Masculinity and Resistance in Adolescent Carceral Settings,” these authors present the results of three different studies that examined the experiences of young incarcerated males. Rather than accepting the stereotypic depiction of “young monsters,” we learn that their rebellious behaviour (often demonized by adults) can also be understood as expressions of identity and masculinity in the face of totalizing institutions.

The article that rounds out this issue is one whose author asks us to remember the inter-disciplinary roots of criminology by considering the potential of other fields to contribute in meaningful ways to the work that we do: Troy Riddell’s “What Can Political Science Contribute to the Study of Criminology and Criminal Justice in Canada?” Riddell, himself a political scientist, suggests that, although those within his field have paid more scholarly attention to criminal justice than is commonly believed, there is a potential for further contributions. To this end, he identifies ways in which his discipline can offer analytical and normative perspectives that run counter to prevailing perspectives in criminology and law as well as ways in which Canadian political scientists can use their training to understand impacts of the policy-making process on criminal justice issues.

We hope that readers will enjoy this special issue and find that the works contained here stimulate further thought and dialogue on bridging divides in Canadian criminology.

## Note

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