The Public Would Rather Watch Hockey!
The Promises and Institutional Challenges of ‘Doing’ Public Criminology within the Academy

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ABSTRACT
With growing academic interest in public criminology there has been little beyond theorizing as to the ways in which one could actually ‘do’ public criminology within the academy. With this as our challenge, we implemented a departmental initiative that brought students into a for-credit course which was also open to the general public. For this paper, we utilize epistemic reflexivity to identify potential challenges and promises for public criminology that we encountered while undertaking this project. Specifically, we uncover an engaged public who are looking for ways to participate in public

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discussions concerning crime and control. We also illustrate the importance of methodology and storytelling as a tool for engaging the public. We conclude by drawing attention to the institutional and structural challenges posed against public criminology by the increasing marketization of the university.

**INTRODUCTION:**

**IS ‘PUBLIC CRIMINOLOGY’ A CRIMINOLOGY FOR THE PEOPLE?**

Since Michael Burawoy’s 2004 presidential address to the American Sociological Association entitled *For Public Sociology*, there has been a renewed interest and growing debate regarding public intellectualism. In this address, Burawoy implored sociologists to engage “publics beyond the academy in dialogue about matters of political and moral concern” (2004, 5) and to “promote dialogue about issues that affect the fate of society, placing the values to which we adhere under a microscope” (Burawoy et al., 2004, 104). The debate has been carried over into other disciplines, such as criminology. There are few topics of greater public concern than crime, criminality and crime control. Media accounts, as well as their ability to shape public sentiment of crime, can spark “moral panic” (periods of intense public fear that far outreach the harm) (Becker 1967). As a result of this emotionally charged discourse, “legislators and politicians...have replaced academics and researchers in influencing media reports and criminal justice policy” (Uggen & Inderbitzin 2010, 730; see also Garland & Sparks 2000; Zimring 1996). Public criminology, therefore, provides an avenue for academics and researchers to enter into a dialogue with various publics to attempt to shape “the ways in which crime has been apprehended and governed” (Loader & Sparks 2011, 7) and to promote the development of “sound policy and averting moral panics precipitated by extreme rare cases” (Uggen & Inderbitzen 2010, 738).

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4For the remainder of the paper we use public sociology and public criminology interchangeably.
Much of the focus has been on the development of newsmaking criminology as a means for individual academics to engage in public criminology. Newsmaking criminology refers to “the conscious efforts and activities of criminologists to interpret, influence or shape the representation of “newsworthy” items about crime and justice” (Barak 2007, 191; Barak 1994). Although newsmaking criminology has provided an important avenue for academics to participate in public criminology outside the academy, there have been no proposals or descriptions of ways in which departments or institutions, as acting bodies, can engage in public criminology (Brady 2004). As such, we executed a departmental initiative for engaging in public criminology since, as Brady (2004) states, we need a “concrete set of proposals” if public criminology is to “make a real impact” (p. 1631).

Recognizing that teaching “as a form of public criminology offers particular relevance … because our classes often comprise future criminal justice practitioners who will be in the trenches soon…” (Uggen & Inderbitzen 2010, 740) we used teaching as a means to open a dialogue on crime and its politics. However, we expanded our publics by making a 4th year credit course open and free to the general public. Using the classroom as a means to bridge the gap between the academy and the public, we resurrected a truly “public sphere” by providing a space where academic knowledge could be brought into the public culture, and public discussion could be integrated into the academic culture (Bender 1993). As such, we attempted to legitimate and validate public criminology by making it an “integral part of our discipline” (Burawoy 2004, 9). The present paper, therefore, makes an important contribution by providing an empirical example of a departmental initiative for doing public criminology.

In this paper, we focus on this departmental initiative and explore the promises of ‘doing’ public criminology within the academy. Specifically we identify an engaged public that is interested and looking for ways to participate in discussions con-
cerning crime and its regulation. We also highlight the importance of methodology, emotionality and storytelling for public engagement. Further, by employing epistemic reflexivity and “dissecting the social conditions and techniques of production” (Wacquant, 2011: 441) of our engagement in public criminology, we critique the institutional shift toward ‘public’ engagement and intellectualism to better understand the “science-politics nexus” operating in criminology (see Wacquant 2011; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). From this analysis, we illuminate how institutional challenges stemming from the commercialization of the academy pose significant impediments for conducting public criminology from within the walls of the academy.

In what follows, we begin with a discussion of the present debates concerning public criminology. Next we provide a description of our 4th year colloquium series, entitled “Crime, Deviance and the City: Public Criminologies” and discuss the promises, such as an informed and engaged public, and challenges facing public criminology, specifically the commercialization of the academy. The challenges experienced implementing our colloquium, we argue, are illustrative of the broader critiques posed against public criminology.

PUBLIC CRIMINOLOGY: CHALLENGES OF COMMUNICATION AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Buroway’s public sociology has been described as “advocacy on behalf of ‘the public’, against trends of exclusion and injustice, and for human rights and social justice” (Carrabine et al. 2000, 206). Public sociology builds upon C. Wright Mills’ (1959, 226) conception of the sociological imagination, which required sociologists to situate human biography in history and in social structure to understand how personal troubles are connected to public issues. Mills argued that for sociology “to be of any significance, [it] must link the inner lives of people to the structures of power and ideology and the historical period in which they live” (Young 2012, 3). Without a sociological imagination, personal troubles remain that: “personal, individual and isolated pains often tinged with self-blame and doubt” (Young 2012, 4). However, “with imaginatively help, the personal troubles of the many become collective issues: the personal becomes the political” (Young 2012, 4). Criminologists, there-
fore, employing a “criminological” imagination have been able to draw attention to harm and inequity.

Burawoy differentiates public sociology, which has a “commitment to dialogue around issues raised in and by sociology,” from policy, professional, and critical sociology (2004a, 8). Policy sociology, as described by Burawoy, focuses on solving questions posed by clients, or legitimating solutions that have already been identified (2004a, 9). Professional sociology “supplies true and tested methods, accumulated bodies of knowledge, orienting questions, and conceptual frameworks” (2004a, 10) and critical sociology examines the “foundation—both the explicit and the implicit, both normative and descriptive—of the research programs of professional sociology” (2004a, 10). These four ‘ideal types’ represent four perspectives that are internally complex but reciprocally interdependent (2004b, 1611). For example, the “core activity of public sociology—the dialogue between sociologists and their publics—is supported (or not) by professional, critical and policy moments” (2004a, 12). Yet, connections across these four ideal types, Burawoy argues, are challenged by their own cognitive practices, legitimacy, accountability, politics and pathologies (2004a; 2004b). Public sociology, Burawoy argues, loses its “moral integrity when it panders to public concerns, losing its connections to critical and professional sociology, and thus devolving into “pop” sociology” (2004b, 1611).

Criminologists working within a field of public criminology recognize their public role as “contributing to a better policy of crime and its regulation…” (Loader & Sparks 2011, 117). Loader and Sparks refer to this role as the ‘democratic under-labourer’ who is “to be committed…to the generation of knowledge rather than…to scoring a point or winning a policy battle…” (2010, 778). In this regard, public criminology is not solely focused on activism, but instead is concerned with generating knowledge and communicating that knowledge to multiple publics. It is about acting as a ‘cooling device’ and injecting rationality and civic mindfulness into debates concerning crime and its control (Wacquant 2011). Further, public criminology is concerned with evaluating and reframing cultural images of crime and criminals by designing and conducting research in conversation with communities, and disseminating that knowl-
edge within, as well as outside, the academy (see Uggen & Inderbitzen 2010, 733-4).

Although democratic underlabouring is not necessarily concerned with activism and “winning a policy battle,” for others engaging in public criminology activism is central. For those interested in activism and grassroots movements, Burawoy (2012) contends that we need more than a sociological imagination; rather we need to invoke a political imagination. For Burawoy (2012), the “political imagination depends on an organic connection between sociologists and their publics…[and]…is an essential intervention, necessary to save the university under siege from state and market…” (2012, x-xi)

Thus, much of the research conducted under the umbrella of “public criminology” aims to have “an impact on public policy and the public mind” (Currie 2007, 178) by using empirical findings to: (i) illustrate problems of public interest; (ii) draw attention to problems that may be unrecognized or ignored by the public or; iii) “engage seriously the broader impacts of social problems as well as proposed solutions, including their scientific, moral, and practical implications” (Uggen & Inderbitzen 2010, 738).

To maintain moral integrity, public criminology,

…explicitly breaks boundaries and makes positive connections with other arenas of social action—agendas for improving services for people and communities, local and national political debates that shape policy and social provision, and crucially, with the means by which the “ordinary people”, so often disillusioned and disempowered, can make claims for social justice and their human rights…[it] would be “transparent, “applied” in orientation, evidenced based, and committed to empowerment and practical (not idealistic) change (Carrarbine et al. 2000, 206-207).

Public criminology, therefore, is a call for greater academic involvement, and subsequent engagement, with issues of public concern. Not withstanding the many promises of public criminology, it has been met with resistance by some professional sociologists and criminologists who “fear public involvement will corrupt science [and] threaten the legitimacy of the discipline…” (Burawoy 2004a, 15). The purpose of the present analysis is not to discuss each critique, but instead to highlight those critiques that are relevant to the challenges met when imple-
menting our public criminology colloquium. In what follows, we look at the challenges presented by: (i) the institutional structure of academia; (ii) problems of emotionality and storytelling, and; (iii) objectivism and the science-politics nexus. We now turn to a detailed discussion on each of these critiques.

**CHALLENGE 1: INSTITUTIONAL INCENTIVES AND REWARDS**

Numerous scholars have argued that for academics to engage themselves in the *doing* of public criminology requires a change to the institutional culture of academia (Brady 2004; Currie 2007; Tittle 2004). Specifically, the incentive structure of the organization, which is used to make decisions regarding tenure and promotion, needs to be changed in order to recognize “public contributions” (Sprague & Laube 2009). As Brady (2004) argues, many of the scholarly pursuits academics engage in—such as publishing in high impact, mainstream journals and with ‘big’ university presses—are situated within a clear incentive system that impede faculty from deviating from this “unless new incentives emerge for public sociology” (p. 1632). As such, scholarship needs to be redefined if academics are to take seriously the idea of “going public”. Further complicating the institutional reception of public intellectualism is an inability to both clearly define and measure public criminology. What exactly constitutes public criminology? Is it about informing public debate, or developing research with affected communities, or is it about political activism? Without a clear definition of what public criminology is and what constitutes an empirical example of public criminology the field itself cannot advance. A subsequent challenge is an inability to measure the impact of public criminology both within and outside the academy.

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6There are some very important critiques concerning Burawoy’s typology and its division of labour. Feminist scholars, for example, have critiqued this ‘typology’ as being “overly bounded, static and nonvariable” and, as a result, unable to “adequately account for such multidisciplinary fields as social gerontology, or feminist sociology in which distinctions between professional, critical, policy, and public domains are blurred” (Creese, McLaren & Pulkingham 2009, 605). Further, Canadian scholars have correctly identified how Burawoy’s description of public sociology does not consider how Canadian and American sociology differ (Davies 2009; Helmes-Hayes & McLaughlin 2009).
can one measure the success or impact researchers have to public debate?

**Challenge 2: Storytelling & Emotionality**

Just as the academy is not institutionally set up to reward the work of public criminologists, methodological and disciplinary training does not provide academics with the tools necessary to engage the public. As Burawoy notes, “in our attempt to defend our place in the world of science we do have an interest in monopolizing inaccessible knowledge which can lead to incomprehensible grandiosity or narrow “methodism”” (2004, 17). For example, much of the research conducted within professional criminology focuses on answering a small aspect of much larger social problems and is often highly technical and quantitatively daunting, often relying on objective, cold-hard facts (see Currie 2007; Uggen & Inderbitzen 2010, 729; Young 2012). Yet, as Mopas and Moore (2012) illustrate, “taking this detached and ‘objective’ stance …often does very little to garner media interest and public attention” (191). For public criminologists to shape public sentiment and opinion they “must go beyond basic appeals to reason, integrating fact at the level of emotion…[and] appreciate the messiness of ‘doing’ public criminology” (Mopas & Moore 2012, 194-195).

Public criminology requires academics to be able to “tell good, if complex and subversive, stories which make sense to, and can be understood by, the different publics they may be addressing” (Fielzer 2009, 482). Storytelling and public engagement are challenging for a number of reasons. They require more than simply building bridges between scholars and their respective communities. They require gaining media attention, but

…in the current political economy in which the ownership of mass media is so highly centralized, news operations are driven by profit rather than journalistic values, and political leaders are actively engaged in suppressing data and corrupting science to serve their own ideological ends, it is unlikely that much sociology will get into public discourse without the strategic coordination of the efforts of many sociologists. (Sprauge 2008, 702)

Challenges of gaining access to media have been well documented by newsmaking criminologists. Barak (1994) acknowl-
edges these challenges and contends that newsmaking criminologists need to “build relationships” with media people, network with the organizations and participate with the newsmaking organizations that seek to influence policy. Yet, such networking requires time, patience and great energy. As a result of criminologists’ inability to translate their findings and tell a story, the public, and more importantly, the media are not interested and most of what academics know “generally stays in the journals and no one … knows about it” (Currie 2007, 180-183). Such hyperprofessionalism and insularity, some argue, has led to a self-inflicted irrelevance (Wacquant 2011).

**Challenge 3: Relevance and the Science-Politics Nexus**

Not withstanding the importance and relevance of the challenges associated with storytelling and institutional recognition, the biggest impediment to the success of public criminology comes from the institutional and political context in which criminological research is conducted. Burawoy argues that public criminology, like critical criminology, engages reflexive knowledge, “which interrogates the value premises of society as well as our profession” (2004a, 11). He contends that in the United States it is this reflexive dimension of public and critical sociology that is in danger and not the instrumental dimension employed by professional and policy sociologies:

> Professional and policy sociologies—the one supplying careers and the other supplying funds—dictate the direction of the discipline. Critical sociology’s supply of values and public sociology’s supply of influence do not match the power of careers of money… This power of domination derives from the embeddedness of the discipline in a wider constellation of power and interests. In our society money and power speak louder than values and influence. (Burawoy 2004a, 18)

Canadian institutions, unlike private universities, are public institutions and as such, “public-based researchers, largely funded by public dollars feel increasingly obligated to demonstrate to the public the importance of their research and scholarly activities” (Creese, McLaren & Pulkingham 2009, 610). This has resulted in a federal government funding research that “facilitates
forms of public criminology” (Creese, McLaren & Pulkingham 2009, 610).

Wacquant argues, and we agree, that public criminology lacks an “objectivist analysis of the tangled circuits of production, distribution and consumption of criminological knowledge, and of the power relations that articulate them” (2011, 444). For example, how do public criminologists determine what topics of crime and crime control are ‘relevant’ for the public? As Rock (2010, 754) argues, “how relevance or issues of concern are defined is a matter of political contingency…one working conception of relevance has very real consequences for the discipline, and that is what the state and its agencies deem to be problematic”. Politics, therefore, trump science (Rock 2010, 762). Lastly, public criminology has largely overlooked the power of the structural determinants of its production. Thus, being attentive to the “corporatization of the university” is essential for understanding the construction of criminological knowledge (Burawoy 2012, xi). As Wacquant (2011, 442) argues, before criminologists can engage in “democratic underlabouring” they need first to be reflexive and analytical about the impact of the “managerial makeover of the university…”.

Public criminologists, Wacquant argues, are so profoundly immersed within the institutional culture and structure that they are unable to reflect on the impact these structural conditions have on their own research and the co-construction of knowledge.

Having presented the numerous promises and challenges of public criminology, we now turn to a reflexive analysis of our departmental engagement in public criminology to uncover the promises and institutional impediments to ‘doing’ public criminology within the academy.

**CRIME, DEVIANCE AND THE CITY:**
**PUBLIC CRIMINOLOGY COLLOQUIUM**

In thinking about a way in which we could, as a department, participate in public criminology we looked at teaching as a mode of informing public conversations about crime and its control. Not unlike Burawoy (2004b, 8) we did “…not think of publics as fixed but in flux and that we can participate in their
creation as well as their transformation” (Burawoy 2004, 8). As such, we used a 4\textsuperscript{th} year special topics course designation created by the Department of Criminology to allow for experimentation with new courses as a space to ‘create’ a public by opening the classroom up to the general public.

**How did we fund it?**

Before we could offer the course we needed to first secure funding. Although senior administration expressed enthusiasm for the idea it quickly became apparent that there was little understanding of what the objectives of the course were and how it fit with the institutional goals expressed in the university’s strategic plans. Initially we received an institutional special initiatives grant of $5000 to design the course. We approached the VP of Research for funding, but she argued that it was not “research oriented” and therefore outside the purview of her accounts. This was particularly surprising to us since knowledge translation and mobilization are key components to all research grants and projects. We then approached our Dean’s Office, as well as the Office of the President who both declined funding noting they would not support a “revenue costing” speakers’ series. In the end, we received funding from the VP Academics office ($2000) and the Principal of our campus ($3000) with a note stating that this was a one-time-only contribution. Shortly after securing these funds we were approached by our Development Office and told that a private donor who was a member of the community was looking to invest in a project he believed would make a significant contribution to our campus. We met with the donor to explain our vision for the course and he matched our enthusiasm and belief in the potential of the colloquium. As a result of this meeting he contributed $5000 to our project. In total we collected $15000 to cover all costs associated with the course.

**How did we teach it?**

The colloquium consisted of 10, three-hour classes for approximately 40 undergraduate students (for course credit) and members of the general public. Each session featured a different scholar to present their research in a publicly accessible manner
to both students and members of the general public. When we chose topics of interest for the weekly presentations we tried to pick topics that would be suited to the programs offered on our interdisciplinary campus (such as Journalism and Contemporary Studies). As our campus is located on the borders of The Six Nations reserve, in a city that has, in the recent past, been identified as having a high crime rate and a socially disorganized downtown, we wanted topics that would be relevant and of interest to the surrounding community. We decided on the following topics: media constructions of female criminality; policing and crime control; cultural criminology; social media and crime; Canada’s war on drugs, restorative justice; sexuality and the law; Aboriginals and the law; violence and sport; and surveillance and everyday life. After selecting the topics, we developed a list of researchers whose work we were familiar with, or whom we knew personally; if possible, we chose individuals that we had seen present in other venues. In the end, we were excited to showcase the work of Meda Chesney Lind, Peter K. Manning, Jeff Ferrell, Christopher Schneider, Andrew Hathaway, Judy Eaton, Melanie Heath, Paula du Hamel Yellowhorn, Michael Atkinson and David Lyon.

The public presentations ran for an hour and were followed by a 30-minute question-and-answer period open to students, faculty and members of the public. Following this discussion, members of the general public left and the undergraduate students, instructors and presenter used the remaining class time to engage in critical dialogue and discussion focused on the issues raised in the presentation. We constructed the colloquium in this format in the hopes of disrupting the power relations found in traditional classroom settings\(^7\) by: (i) opening the course up to members of multiple publics and; (ii) providing a space where students and teacher could engage in meaningful and critical communication (see Freire, 2011). In this format, we not only provided an opportunity for the students to become “critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher”, but also for the teacher, after presenting her research, to “re-consider her

\(^7\)In order to avoid what Freire refers to as “banking education” whereby the teacher (i.e., the oppressor), as authority, lectures to uninformed students (i.e., the oppressed) we attempted to shift the power relations by enabling a space where both parties are “simultaneously teachers and students” (Freire 2011, 72).
earlier considerations as the students express their own” (Freire 2011, 81). Thus, we attempted to create a space where knowledge generation was not linear—with researcher informing public—but circular, where the public can also inform academic research.

**HOW WAS IT RECEIVED?**

The colloquium was well received and drew approximately 90 members of the public each week. The public was truly heterogeneous, including, but not limited to, active and retired police officers, police inspectors, deputy chiefs, as well as chiefs of police, students and faculty from neighbouring institutions, social service providers, judges, retired men and women, and family members of the enrolled students. The presentations were also recorded and live-streamed for others to view. Online viewership ranged from 7 to 50 viewers, with Jeff Ferrell’s presentation on drift as a new contemporary crisis drawing the largest viewership. Following each presentation, participants were asked to fill out comment forms so that we, as course designers, could assess the impact and reception of the colloquium. These forms asked participants to identify whether they were enrolled in the course or were members of the general public. It also asked them how they had heard about the colloquium and then provided space for them to reflect on their general thoughts about the presentation and the colloquium. For the remainder of this paper we use these responses as well as our own experiences in designing and implementing this course as sources of data for an ‘epistemic reflexive analysis’ of doing public criminology within academe (Wacquant, 2011).8 Through this reflexive analysis we draw attention to the cultural and institutional elements that both shaped and impeded our public criminology colloquium, while further illustrating how our experiences are not unique but are instead symbolic of the broader structural challenges facing public criminology.

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8As we continue with this colloquium we would like to conduct interviews with members of the public who have attended the lectures to acquire an in-depth understanding of how their participation in this education practice impacted and / or reoriented their understandings of the topic.
TELLING GOOD STORIES TO AN UNINFORMED PUBLIC?

As we designed the colloquium we were most concerned about identifying and inviting speakers who could easily translate their research to the general public. Being mindful of the critiques regarding academics’ inability to both synthesize and communicate the importance of their research to the general public, we wondered how we could build a course that overcame this difficulty in communication. We questioned, for example, how we could provide enough background information and theoretical depth to our students and yet remain accessible to the general public. Could a public criminology course that brought together students and members of the general public, “nurture the passions students bring to justice concerns” while at the same time “narrow the yawning gap between public perceptions and the best available scientific evidence on issues of public concern” (Uggen & Inderbitzen, 2010, 726)?

A challenge, therefore, was finding the balance and finding scholars who could achieve this balance. There was the need for charismatic speakers who could be understood by a ‘perceived uninformed public’, as well as enhance and educate students who are familiar with the literature and field of research. The feedback from students and the general public indicate that, at least in some small way, we achieved our goal. Both students and community members reported being engaged by the issues and the format of the course. One community member provided the following feedback on the course:

The public lectures are filling a void between the public and the university. While topics need to be appropriate and stimulating for a 4th year seminar style class, they also need to be accessible to the public –something which the public can see in everyday life. Explaining a complex theory to a member of the public that is not relevant or cannot be discussed with other members of the public doesn’t bridge the gap. But if the topic was something that an attendee can discuss with his or her neighbor or colleagues, then it is accessible and will have a ripple effect in the community.

Like Fielzer (2009, 480), we found that it was important to find speakers that were able to tell good stories “through the medium of case stories and as narratives with a human interest angle”. For example, the most well received lecture (by both students and the general public) was Jeff Ferrell’s presentation on
drift as the new contemporary crisis. Opening and closing the lecture with Woody Guthrie lyrics to, *I Ain’t Got No Home*, Ferrell illustrated his theoretical arguments through the use of ethnographic examples—engaging the public on both an intellectual and emotional level (Mopas & Moore, 2012).

While we were in the processes of designing our course we heard from a variety of sources that this course would be beneficial for our students but would not succeed in attracting members of the public—as the research office exclaimed, “they would rather watch hockey”. It was pointed out that people were generally uninterested in academic research findings and were content to rely on mainstream media for their sources of information on social issues. *Our experience with the course contradicts this notion and instead points to a public that is searching for ways to engage in dialogue about current social issues.* A number of members of the general public who attended the lectures stated that they wished they had access to the same materials / readings our students had prior to the presentation. They believed that access to these materials would have allowed them to be better prepared for the subject presented and to engage in dialogue with the presenter. As one community member stated, “I would have found it helpful if the public had access to suggested readings/resources on-line for further investigation either before or after the lecture.” Other attendees felt that “most sessions contained enough information for you to do more research into that topic to better prepare you for the upcoming session as well as what you were able to learn from their lesson” (member of the public). This feedback challenges the notion of the uninformed and uninterested public--the public that “would rather stay home and watch hockey” (research officer). Instead it points to a public who is looking for relevant information and to engage in dialogue on social issues they feel are important. In the word of one attendee:

> I found the course gave me a renewed interest in taking more classes. Being the fact that I am over 65, the journey to get a degree does not interest me but taking subjects that interest me would be welcomed. It has awakened the drive to learn and get other views which had been gone. It has given me a purpose in life and not just to park and wait for death. Thanks. (member of the public)
That being said, our biggest impediment was drawing media interest in the series. Although our local paper ran three articles (two advertising the colloquium before it started and a third running a few weeks into the term), we were unable to get other coverage, or to even entice the local paper to meet with the presenters. Not unlike the experiences of newsmaking criminologists, we recognize that gaining access to mass communications networks requires networking—something we did not put as much attention and time towards as we should have.

**THE CHALLENGES MEASURING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

Although our initial concerns focused on the need to find researchers who could “tell good stories” to an “uninformed” public, we were quickly faced with the challenge of measuring the success and impact the course would have on both the students and the general public. For example, we continually asked ourselves if we could engender change by making students and community members aware of the important social and political issues that criminologists deal with through the dissemination of academic research. We strongly believed that to affect social policy we needed to do “more than simply gain access to policy makers; we needed to engage the broader public as well…in a word, we have to educate—educate, that is, outside the classroom” (Currie 2007, 178-179). Even though we expected students to absorb and retain the knowledge presented and constructed during the lectures we did not know what type of impact the knowledge would have on the participating community members. Would they take the discussions home with them and use the information as a means of generating conversation and debate with others? Or, would the course simply act as a new form of reality crime media that the attendees would enjoy while it was running but once they left the campus they would cease to think about the issues and the implications for political and social policy? In other words, would the colloquium be reduced to a form of infotainment? As such, we were cognizant of the challenges posed against public criminology and constantly questioned if we were “simply replacing ‘one symbolically-constructed reality’ ‘that of mass media operatives’ with another, that of academics” (Ericson 1991, 220). We did not know how to overcome these challenges because we
were unclear on how to measure the impact and outcome of the course. Thus, we acknowledge the challenges of measuring success; indeed there are significant challenges in defining what success actually is (see Brady 2004). If we define success as the potential to influence social and institutional change through participation in public criminology, we acknowledge that change will take time and be measured in small increments. As Diane Vaughan explained, “engaging in dialogue about issues of public concern can make change by altering the perspective of individuals or giving support to what they already think—but the full effects of such change are not always measurable or knowable” (Burawoy et al., 2004, 118). In order to determine whether or not the course was successful we considered the potential community and institutional impact.

**COMMUNITY IMPACT**

The public criminology course brought members of the general public to our small campus of approximately 3000 students located in southwest Ontario—some of whom had never experienced a university setting prior to their participation. One community member captured the importance of this cultural impact by stating that

> This colloquium was valuable beyond public criminology awareness. It provides a forum where community members interact with the university and helps break down the “mysteries” of higher education for those who never exposed to it. (Community member)

The course provided researchers with a unique opportunity for knowledge generation and transmission that was *cyclical* with academic knowledge translation and generation occurring from the researcher to the general public, as well as with the general public *informing* academic knowledge generation. For example, following her public lecture on regulating polygamy, Melanie Heath exclaimed, “This was an amazing experience. I have a renewed interest in my project. I was asked questions that challenged me and made me want to collect more data and ask new questions”. The colloquium, therefore, challenged the traditional hierarchical structure of knowledge mobilization by providing a space for a cyclical and multi-way flow of knowledge
generation with public discourse informing academic research and vice versa.

The course also provided an avenue to bring “rationality” (Kalleberg 2005) and thoughtful reason back into public discourse on crime and social control. A space that has the potential to bring “new voices to policy discussions while addressing common myths and misconceptions about crime” (Uggen & Inderbitzin 2010, 726). Although some have criticized this goal of public criminology as being “esoteric and elitist...in that experts working in academia seem to seek the help of experts working in adjacent areas and, while begging for their benevolence, try to improve the lives of others, namely non-expert actors” (Ruggiero 2010, 208), we believe that the colloquium provided a space where academic discourse and public debate could jointly influence and shape one another. Although we recognize the critiques posed against public criminology we strive to continually address these critiques in our future colloquiums by expanding the presenters to include academics as well as victims and advocates. Second, the colloquium may provide a cultural shift in the way we, as criminologists, view our relationship between academia and the public. By offering the colloquium within the academy we were hoping to challenge the status quo while securing legitimacy for public criminology within the academy (Mavis et al. 2012). If more public criminology courses were to develop, perhaps we would begin to see an institutional shift take place that would begin to value the work that public criminologists do—“extending peer review, testing ideas in the broader public sphere, and [thereby]...provid[ing] a career track to reward academic workers who use their positions for explicitly public purposes” (Stevens, 2008, 733).

**Institutional Impact**

Further, not unlike other public criminologists’ experiences, our colloquium brought positive attention to our academic institution (see also Grauerholz & Baker-Speery, 2007). For example, the public criminology course successfully introduced Laurier Brantford, a campus of Wilfrid Laurier University, to students and faculty from other universities. A number of faculty members and graduate students from neighbouring universities at-
tended sessions. Further, it drew attention to our program to prospective university students in the geographical area. This may have a positive impact on their decision of where to attend university, not only for the criminology program but for other programs at Laurier Brantford as well. In addition, the invited speakers had the opportunity to learn about the criminology program and Laurier Brantford and will take this knowledge back to their home institutions. This may have a positive impact on our MA program, in that these speakers will potentially recommend our program to their students who are considering graduate school. Also, students (both those enrolled in the course, and students who attended the course but did not receive a course credit), had the opportunity to hear from experts whose research they have read and discussed in class but would not otherwise have the opportunity to hear in person. One student summed it up by stating:

I feel that this course was an excellent course for Laurier Brantford. It not only contributed to my learning as a student, but also invited the public and the university together [as] one. Also, personally, this course appeared to be a great fit for students in, and aspiring to attend, graduate school. It creates discussion on unconventional topics and brings a new perspective to society.

Finally, students enrolled in the course may have also benefit- ted by seeing how extra-academic publics interact with crimi- nological ideas and arguments—an experience that is not only rare, but also novel within academe⁹.

**Acquiring Institutional Support and “Buy-in”:**
**The Science-Politics Nexus**

Although our initial concerns were centred on knowledge dis- semination (i.e., storytelling) and mobilization (i.e., impact) the biggest obstacle we encountered was acquiring institutional support in regards to both funding the colloquium as well as being rewarded for engaging in this “pragmatic endeavor” (Braithwaite 2005). These challenges, we argue, are symbolic of the broader science-politics nexus in which criminological knowledge is constructed.

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⁹We are indebted to Justin Piche for identifying this potential benefit.
INSTITUTIONAL SHIFT TOWARD PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION

At first we believed finding support for a public criminology colloquium would be easy as we had noticed an organizational shift towards knowledge mobilization and community partnerships. For example, much of the discourse embedded in the university mission statement fits nicely within the goals of public criminology—and more specifically, with democratic underlabouring. As the university mission statement notes: “Our commitment is to justice and sustainability…so we strive to ignite the minds, spirits and hearts of our communities through excellence in teaching and learning…”.

This mission is carried through by the university’s guiding principles. Of specific interests are the principles concerning “…community citizenship, realizing an appropriate balance among research, teaching and service, recognizing the linkage between research and teaching, [and] learning and advancing knowledge across boundaries” (http://www.wlu.ca/page.php?grp_id=28&p=188).

The importance of community partnerships and academic community engagement are further emphasized by the efforts of our research office to foster knowledge mobilization through the creation of “community profiles”. These profiles provide a means for the research office to advertise the research being conducted within the institution in “accessible language” (research office, fieldnotes). The growing interest by the research office in “research stories and knowledge mobilization activities” has been established to:

- build new bridges between universities and other communities, connect university researchers with the general public, and to help broaden and deepen the public’s understanding of academic research by showing its impact where they live, work and play. Having public understanding, support and pride in academic research is of the upmost importance to have academic research continue to strive and advance. (Research Office, fieldnotes)

Knowledge translation activities, therefore, are described by the university to be an essential element of the research process. In light of the University’s emphasis on knowledge translation and community partnerships we were surprised when our request
for funding support from the Office of the President, as well as the research office were declined on the grounds that the colloquium (an activity centred on translating research findings to the general public) was not considered a research activity.

Not unlike the university discourse supporting knowledge mobilization and community partnerships, there is also a growing trend toward knowledge mobilization and community connections from the major granting agencies in Canada (such as Natural Science and Engineering Research Council of Canada [NSERC], Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council [SSHRC], and Canadian Institutes of Health Research [CIHR]). In fact, one of the major grants offered by SSHRC—a connection grant—was established to enhance and reward knowledge mobilization activities:

Knowledge mobilization in the social sciences and humanities facilitates the multidirectional flow of research knowledge across academia and society as a whole, in order to inform Canadian and international research, debate, decisions and actions. Those who stand to benefit from publicly funded research results in the humanities and social sciences—diverse groups of researchers, policy-makers, business leaders, community groups, educators and the media—should, ideally, have the knowledge they need, when they need it, in useful forms...The Connection program aims to support knowledge mobilization activities—such as networking, disseminating, exchanging and co-creating research-based knowledge—as an important element of publicly engaged scholarship, and as means of strengthening research agendas. (SSHRC)

The Canadian federal government, therefore, has established a grant that fosters the dissemination and exchange of knowledge. In fact, the first two (of the five) goals of this grant are to:

- Facilitate the multidirectional flow of social sciences and humanities knowledge among researchers and between the campus and the larger community, in order to enhance intellectual, cultural, social and economic influence, benefit, and impact.

- Increase the accessibility and use of social sciences and humanities research knowledge among academic and non-academic audiences. (http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/umbrella_programs-programme_cadre/connection-connexion-eng.aspx)

The stated goals and objectives of the connection grant are befitting of the goals of public criminology, and more specifically, of democratic underlabouring as they demonstrate a com-
mitment to “the generation of knowledge…to be bearers and interpreters of …knowledge and to bring it to bear on matters of public concern…” (Loader & Sparks 2010, 778).

Yet, even with this growing interest in community connections and knowledge mobilization we struggled to receive institutional funding support. We wrote a SSHRC connections grant for the purpose of acquiring funding for the colloquium. When we first submitted the grant to our research office it was returned to us with editorial suggestions and some comments regarding the purpose of the project, as well as our proposed budget. It also had a note attached that identified some concerns regarding the intellectual goals of the colloquium. Specifically, the research officer noted that the media would not be interested in the presentations and the general public would “rather watch hockey”. We did not know how to address the grant officer’s personal criticisms regarding the intellectual merit of our initiative, but instead focused our revisions on the editorial suggestions and budgetary concerns. Once completed, we submitted the application through the granting agencies online form. A number of weeks later it came to our attention that the research officer withdrew our submitted grant. The grant manager, who withdrew our application, did not inform us of his decision, nor did he explain why it was removed. Instead, a few weeks into the colloquium, a different grant manager stated that she would like to meet with us to assist us in revising the grant. By this time, however, it was too late to reapply, as the series would be over before we could be awarded the grant11.

This experience was not only frustrating and disheartening, but made us question the role of the grant manager and their impact on research developments. For example, are they to act as administrators, assuring that all parts of an application have been completed and the application is clear of glaring grammatical problems, or, is it their job to assess the academic merit of the research being proposed? Part of the problem, we believe, was connected back to the lack of definitional understanding of what ‘public criminology’ is and how the university could measure the success of this endeavor. For example, the research office did not believe this endeavor was research oriented and the office of the president felt it was a revenue costing event (even

11SSHRC funds awarded cannot be used retroactively.
though the tuition fees paid by the 35 students enrolled in the course offset a significant portion of the costs of the colloquium and the costs associated with the course were far less than the cost of running a science lab for one course in other disciplines). Nevertheless, our experiences with the research grant officers illustrate Wacquant’s (2011) argument that “research administrators have more impact on what kinds of knowledge reach policy makers than the ‘formative intentions’ of scholars on the side of production” (444).

**THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF ACADEMIA**

Our experiences in regards to acquiring institutional funding and support made us question the notion of knowledge mobilization. If the central goals of the institution and of granting agencies is knowledge mobilization and community partnerships, what exactly constitutes “knowledge mobilization”? And, how do they assess the “impact” of the knowledge being mobilized? “Governments are required to make judgments about the value of research funding and, to do so, they require information on the tangible benefits or “value” provided by each program” (SSHRC 2010, 10-11). Our experiences with the research office led us to research Tri-council agencies claims regarding “knowledge mobilization” and impact assessments. From this analysis, we uncovered that the goal of funding Canadian research was not necessarily about connecting the community to the university, but instead focused on connecting researchers with partners for commercialization.

For example, the first three recommendations by the tri-council funding agencies on knowledge mobilization are to:

**Recommendation 1:** Support strategic partnerships connecting researchers with business, other sectors and society at large...Effective partnerships between the academic and private sectors connect researchers and scientists with business people so that new ideas and inventions generate tangible benefits for society. We need to overcome the barriers that prevent Canada’s excellent research from being commercialized into new Canadian products, services and processes...

**Recommendation 2:** Attract and develop talented people to meet Canada’s labour market needs …The jobs of the future will be driven by talented, skilled and creative people who will commercialize
innovative ideas and ensure long-term economic growth and an enviable quality of life for Canadians….

Recommendation 3: Maintain Canada’s leadership position in research excellence….World-class research with global impact underpins all that the federal research granting agencies achieve for Canada…We must partner the powerful generators of new ideas with the creators of new products and services… (Tri-agency Council).

Federal government granting agencies, such as SSHRC and CIHR, “devote billions of dollars every year to research and are responsible for showing that publicly supported research and related activities lead to tangible short—and long-term benefits” (SSHRC 2010b, 1). As such, commercialization and ‘tangible’ outputs appear to supersede community partnerships and engaged discussions concerning crime and its control. As long as research impact is measured in ‘tangible’ ways public criminology initiatives are challenged.

Further, allowing criminologists to report their research findings, which often go against everyday understandings of crime and its control, places the university—and more importantly, its ability to establish strong working relations with industry and political figures—in a tenuous position. In fact, the importance of maintaining positive relations with the public was something that we were consciously aware of during the design of the course. For example, we selected topics that were ‘hot topics’ as they were prevalent in the news, and we believed would be both relevant and of interest to the public. We were also cognizant to not be too risqué in our choices because our future funding would rest on the success and reception of our first colloquium. Through this experience, we recognized that defining relevance was a political matter that can “lead people to choose sides and through commitments, fears, and concerns can lead to censorship of topics” (Rock 2010, 762). As such, notions of relevance can have significant consequences not only for academics and their ability to acquire funding and conduct research, but also for the public who can remain uninformed about topics that may cause greater harm than those that are perceived as more relevant (Rock 2010, 762). Thus, our own concerns regarding attracting and sustaining public interest while maintaining institutional support and buy-in for the collo-
quium draws important attention to the ways in which societal and institutional structures shape criminological engagement more generally.

For public criminology to succeed and receive institutional support we believe that knowledge mobilization and impact must be redefined. If academic institutions and granting agencies are truly interested in knowledge mobilization then understandings regarding knowledge translation need to be expanded and appreciated.

Translation of knowledge gained has to be integrated into the research plan, not merely an add-on. If societal impact is truly a desirable goal, then all funders of research need to take seriously how challenging, difficult and time consuming it is to actually engage with stakeholders to make research knowledge more community oriented (SSHRC 2010b, 8).

The institutional challenges that we faced in implementing this colloquium, stemming from the commercialization of the academy, therefore, are illustrative of broader critiques posed against the notion of democratic underlabouring and the broader idea of public criminology (see Wacquant, 2011).

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

With growing interest in public criminology it is imperative that we move beyond merely theorizing to instead exploring ways to breakdown the institutional and structural challenges posed against public criminology. Although newsmaking criminology provides guidance for criminologists to participate “… in the newsmaking process as credible spokespersons, … [and] to redefine the parameters of acceptable or favorable themes about crime and justice” (Barak 1994, 250), there has been little guidance for departments to participate in public criminology (Brady 2004). We have attempted to address this gap in the literature by outlining our own departmental initiative as a resource for future reference and adoption.

Reflecting on our own experiences doing public criminology from inside the academy we identify a number of promises and rewards. For example, our colloquium provided a means for us to live out the mission of our university by advancing knowledge across boundaries and to deepen and broaden public un-
derstanding of academic research by showing its impact where they work, live and play. The colloquium, we argue, created a truly “public sphere”—a space many have argued has dissipated - and enabled new voices to be brought to policy debates (Bender 1997). It also provided evidence against the notion of an uninformed and uninterested public and brought a renewed interest and respect to academic’s work in the public arena. Our reflexive analysis highlights the importance of storytelling for public criminology. Our experience, in watching the public’s reception of criminological research, reaffirms feminist critiques concerning the importance of methodology and emotionality in public criminology. The presentations that moved beyond a narrow methodological discussion focused solely on ‘objective’ statistical facts and instead incorporated case studies and ethnographic data engaged the community on both an intellectual and emotional level and were by far the best received (Mopas & Moore 2012).

Further, we believe that our engagement not only enhanced the reputation of our academic institution, but may have also provided personal and professional rewards for the individual presenters (for similar arguments see Grauerholz and Baker-Sperry, 2012). For example, we faced a number of challenges acquiring institutional support when designing the colloquium. This lack of support, we argue, was connected to the varying definitions and understandings regarding public criminology. However, following the end of our first colloquium we received recognition for the success of the series as well as financial support from the Dean and the office of the President to offer the colloquium again. Such benefits, we contend, may lead to a cultural and institutional shift fostering a new type of respect and recognition of public engagement. Thus, by promoting public criminology from within the academy we have attempted to legitimize and validate the practice.

Although our colloquium uncovered a number of promises for public criminology, it also illuminated important institutional and structural challenges facing public criminology. Our desire to have ‘relevant topics’ that would be of interest to our publics and garner positive attention for the series, as well as

12Presently the Dean is working to establish permanent funding for this colloquium.
for our department and institution, illuminates the political nature inherent in public criminology. As Burawoy cautions, “public sociology, no less than policy sociology, can be held hostage to outside forces. In pursuit of popularity public sociology is tempted to pander to and flatter its publics, and thereby compromising professional and critical commitments” (2004 17). As such, we cannot ignore the intensely political environment in which criminological knowledge is constructed (Rock 2010, 764).

Additionally, by analyzing our challenges in acquiring institutional support we were able to locate our struggles within the broader structural changes occurring across Canadian universities. Specifically, we have illustrated how the increasingly managerial makeover of the university shapes the work that occurs within it. For example, by examining the institutional and Canadian federal government granting bodies’ shift toward community engagement through knowledge mobilization and translation initiatives, we have uncovered the ways in which commercialization supersedes community partnerships. Our experiences have also reinforced the need to redefine our understanding of impact. As long as impact is measured in ‘tangible’ ways, public criminology initiatives will remain challenged. Further, knowledge mobilization and translation needs to be redefined to acknowledge the importance of methodology and storytelling in order to support public engagement. We believe our public criminology colloquium, which brought together members of the public, students, and faculty in partnership to examine and discuss a wide variety of important social issues represents one small positive step in this redefining process and in the development of a truly public criminology.

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