RESEARCH ARTICLE

Towards a Pedagogy of Public Criminology

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Abstract

In light of recent debates on 'public criminology', this article chooses to focus on teaching as a way of reaching more publics. The various characteristics of a more public and engaged discipline are discussed and applied specifically to the teaching of criminology, including the relative merits and demerits of reorienting teaching in this way. Following on from this discussion, the article outlines some practical ways in which this vision can be realised. Given the many affinities between the Burawoyan concept of public '-ologies' and the scholarship of learning and teaching, an argument is advanced for teaching as one of the first steps towards the practice of a more public criminology.

Keywords: public criminology, pedagogy, practice implications

"But where is the student? ... How can an analysis of the success/failure paradox of criminology ... be complete without criminology's role in education and the ways student attitudes, experiences and careers become part of publicness?"

Walters 2011, pp732–733

Introduction

The concept of 'public sociology', *qua* an approach to sociology that aims to communicate with and actively engage wider audiences, has been hotly debated within the academy in recent years (Burawoy 2005). This has sparked analogous debates in the criminological field on the appropriate role and value of criminology in democratic society, or, as Loader & Sparks have termed it, the discipline's role as a 'democratic under-labourer' (Garland & Sparks 2000, Groombridge 2009, Loader & Sparks 2010). Questions about the appropriate role of the academy in public life have a particular purchase in criminology as it is constituted around a social problem of great interest to policymakers. Yet paradoxically criminology continues to flourish in tandem with its diminishing impact on political discussion on crime, raising questions about whether we have become a 'successful failure' (Loader & Sparks 2010). There have been many laudable efforts to address these and related questions (Wiles 2002, Currie 2007, Uggen & Inderbitzin 2010, Sim 2011, Tombs 2011, Wacquant 2011, Walters 2011), however, there has been a significant failure to address the

implications which a more 'public' criminology holds for teaching and learning. This article seeks to make a beginning at least to this endeavour. From the definition of 'public criminology' given in the opening section the article moves to 're-imagine' the teaching of criminology in line with the requisite characteristics. The relative merits and demerits of reorienting teaching in this way are outlined as appropriate. Following on from this the article outlines some practical ways in which this vision can be realised. It should be noted that what follows is not a debate on the intrinsic worth of the concept of 'public criminology'; rather it is a discussion on the pedagogical implications for those academics who choose to respond to calls for a more engaged and outward looking criminology.

Operationalising 'public criminology'

First, it is necessary to define what is meant by the term 'public criminology'. This is more challenging than might be anticipated, particularly given the difficulty inherent in defining 'public' or 'publics'. The obvious starting point is the definition advanced by Burawoy, public sociology's major proponent, given that the current discussion of public criminology shares many ideas with the debate over public sociology. In his 2004 presidential address to the American Sociological Association (ASA), Burawoy located public sociology within a fourfold typology: professional sociology, critical sociology, policy sociology and public sociology. In this framework professional sociology with its scientific knowledge base acts as the foundation stone of the discipline with critical sociology effectively acting as its 'conscience'. Critical sociology challenges existing arrangements and practices but also looks for hidden assumptions in given positions and examines what other perspectives are possible. The third quadrant is policy sociology, which is defined as 'sociology in the service of a goal defined by a client', usually the government or some other social institution. At the core of the address, however, is Burawoy's call for a public sociology that is integral to the discipline and which "strikes up a dialogic relation between sociologist and public in which the agenda of each is brought to the table, in which each adjusts to the other" (Burawoy 2005, p9). This type of sociology requiring direct engagement with public issues is currently the main preserve of NGOs and other campaigning organisations. Public sociology (with its outward orientation) is therefore the conscience of policy sociology just as critical sociology (with a more inward disciplinary focus) is the conscience of professional sociology. While controversial, it is clear that public criminology therefore involves an interrogation of societal values by the academy or, put simply, some degree of critical or moral judgment.

Within the criminological field, various definitions have been offered. In the flurry of interest surrounding the notion of public criminology, some contributors (eg. Loader & Sparks 2010) have largely followed Burawoy's lead in drawing a distinction between public criminologists and those within the academy "who dedicate themselves ... to a dispassionate, curiosity-driven search for knowledge and understanding of crime and justice" (Loader & Sparks 2010, p6). One may question, with Walters (2011), whether such dichotomies are helpful in its suggestion that public criminology is something which is not done by the broad swathe of scholars loosely described as 'professional criminologists'. As Walters (2011, p732) writes, these criminologists also "work in publicly funded institutions, teaching members of the public, making their ideas public". Burawoy's definition outlined above, therefore, may be accused of compartmentalising public sociology/criminology within the discipline without due regard to the sense of public purpose felt by the majority of the academy, particularly the public role lecturers play serving the teaching mission of higher education institutions (Hays 2007, Uggen & Inderbitzin 2010).

Currie (2007, p176), for his part, argues for an assertively public criminology, defined as "one that takes as part of its defining mission a more vigorous, systematic and effective

intervention in the world of social policy and social action". Taking their cue partly from Currie, Carrabine & Lee (2009, p453) offer a description of public criminology as "working in the spaces where policy and practice meet" and "mak[ing] positive connections with other arenas of social action". Their initial exposition of public criminology, notably formulated long before Burawoy made his impassioned address to the ASA, advances a set of propositions against exclusion and injustice and for human rights and social justice (Carrabine *et al.* 2000). In a later book, they also helpfully propose the following five characteristics of a more public criminology:

- 1. transparent;
- 2. 'applied' in orientation;
- 3. evidence-based;
- 4. committed to empowerment; and
- 5. committed to human rights and social justice (Carrabine et al. 2009).

There is no one definition of public sociology on which all sociologists or criminologists agree. (This is explicitly acknowledged by Loader & Sparks (2010, p772), who talk about the concept of public criminology as a work in progress, or "whatever that might turn out to mean".) There is little doubt that the concept has come to be associated with Burawoy's presidential address to the ASA but this has been heavily criticised for the ambiguity surrounding its central concepts – professional, critical, policy and public sociology (see eg Boyns & Fletcher 2007) – and the failure to elaborate concrete proposals for practice (Brady 2004). Given the contested nature of the Burawoy typology and the uncertainty which surrounds it; the systematic way in which the concept is operationalised by Carrabine et al.; and the comprehensive nature of their definition, it is this definition of 'public criminology' that this paper adopts. The next section uses this framework to examine the shape that a more public criminology would take in the classroom.

What would a more public pedagogy look like?

Transparent

Criminology differs from professional disciplines in that the curriculum is not determined by professional bodies or accreditation boards from industry. Lecturers therefore enjoy considerable freedom in determining what skills, knowledge, attributes, etc., a graduate should have and this latitude raises questions of accountability. A greater contribution from criminologists towards the scholarship of learning and teaching is one concrete way in which teaching criminology can be rendered more transparent (Persell 2009). Indeed, transparency about what goes on in the classroom is central to the purpose of scholarly teaching. As Trigwell et al. (2000) note, if the aim of teaching is to make student learning possible, "the aim of scholarly teaching is to make transparent how we have made learning possible". In practical terms, this involves opening up our teaching to critique and evaluation through initiatives such as making annotated syllabuses available online, inviting peer observation and dissemination of aspects of practice and theoretical ideas about teaching and learning within the discipline. In this regard, the section on teaching sociology on Chris Uggen/Doug Hartmann's (Uggen and Hartmann 2010) website, The Society Pages (TSP), provides an interesting model for criminology lecturers. This section on the TSP website, which aims to bring social scientific knowledge and information to broader public visibility and influence, includes syllabuses, readings, activities and teaching tips for those who teach sociology, and also hosts a blog.

Another critical issue in terms of rendering the discipline more transparent is whether we make explicit the values we hold and choices we make as criminologists. While a tendency towards 'liberal pessimism' (Matthews 2009) may be discerned within criminology generally and certain values may be 'read off' from a lecturer's publication record, these are rarely articulated and communicated to students. The concern in this instance is the risk that lecturers making clear their identification with a certain school of thought or approach may unintentionally alienate students with differing views. Lecturers should be cognisant that oftentimes it is a certain worldview which brings students (particularly mature students) into the discipline. On the other hand, as discussed below, the nature of the subject matter is such that it would be difficult to effectively teach students about crime and societal reactions to it without adopting certain normative standpoints. If so, it is difficult to see why these positions should not be made clear as part of the overall curriculum.

'Applied' in orientation

Carrabine *et al.* (2009, p454) describe an applied criminology as "pursuing work that is applied to publicly *relevant* issues informed by theory and debate and conveying the details of criminological knowledge to *external audiences*" (emphasis added). These two aspects of relevance and external communication merit further explication. Relevance first is arguably one of the greatest challenges presented by public criminology to its professional counterpart. Criminological journals are becoming increasingly prolific and specialised and discuss research findings in arcane statistical language (Young 2011). The danger, as felt by many, is one of "applying progressively greater rigour to even more trivial questions" (Braithwaite 2011, pix). Certainly, the language used in criminological journals is at times off-putting to students who also become frustrated with criminology's distance from 'real-world' issues (Persell 2009). The task which falls to faculty is to convince students of the relevance of criminological theories in understanding the contemporary landscape or amend the curriculum accordingly.

The second issue concerning the effective dissemination of research is what Burawoy (2008, p1) terms the "teaching of public sociology". Service (or community-based) learning where students are sent out to serve civic organisations immediately suggests itself as an important way in which both the student and the educator can engage with and learn from the wider community. This has been enthusiastically embraced by some third-level institutions which see advantages for students in terms of the acquisition of transferable skills and potential employability. Examples on the 'criminology case studies' section of the HEA website include a community links module offered to third-year BA social science and criminology students at Glasgow Caledonian University (Frondigoun 2010, np). The aim is to provide "students with experience of working within an agency external to the university in order to allow them to further develop their research skills in a context which enables them to understand the relevance of theoretical studies to practical social issues". Students undertake a placement with a statutory or voluntary agency in the criminal justice sector and write a research report or briefing paper on a specified problem or issue. Assessment is based on the report, feedback from the agency, their research plan and diary. Smaller, more incremental changes can also be made to assessment strategies to better enable students to communicate with 'lay publics'. Persell (2009) cites examples of assessment requiring students not only to write up the results of their research into the effects of TV violence as a thesis but also to write a letter summarising its findings to a newspaper and a TV network president. In addition to disseminating the results of research to wider publics, this encourages students to develop the writing skills necessary to convey complex ideas with clarity.

Evidence-based

This aspect of public criminology is obviously most relevant to academics seeking to enhance the impact of evidence-based criminological research on policy. Yet, linked with the argument made above about the relevance of criminological theory, an important part of criminological education should be about emphasising to the student research evidence that supports or (more often) contradicts government policy. As already noted, popularisation of research evidence about the realities of crime, imprisonment, the quality of justice, etc., can be incorporated into formal assessment. Inquiry-based learning approaches, or approaches to learning driven by a process of inquiry, can also be very effective in requiring a student to obtain evidence to support their ideas and take responsibility for them. An interesting practical example of this method is provided by Paul Almond (2009), a criminology lecturer at the University of Reading, who assigns his students a fictional scenario of a minister for justice requiring the expenditure of £100m on a range of criminal justice policy options. Students must allocate the expenditure, justify this in terms of criminological theory, and implement their policies in the face of changing circumstances and requirements.

Looked at another way, the focus on evidence can also relate to our receptiveness as criminologists to evidence-based or scholarship-informed practice in the classroom or lecture hall. This may be defined as the collection and analysis of relevant data and research and the application of this evidence to teaching and learning. It is ironic that, despite the commitment within the discipline to evidence-based policy in responding to crime, many lecturers prefer to rely on common sense or anecdotal evidence when it comes to the choice of teaching strategies (Groccia & Buskist 2011).

Committed to empowerment

The notion of empowerment goes to the heart of public criminology through its prioritisation of the interests of the public (individual/communities) over those interest groups that seek to disempower people, disregard their rights to justice or harm their human rights. The notion of student empowerment is also relevant here. Burawoy (2004, p1608) has previously spoken of an 'organic' conceptualisation of teaching sociology where "the underlying presumption is that the teacher and taught have an organic relation, that the educator too must be educated". In this conception of teaching, students are recognised as carriers of accumulated experience engaged in a dialogue with their instructor. Burawoy's vision for student empowerment sits comfortably with student-centred pedagogies which reject the notion of the student as a passive consumer of information and seek to empower students to take charge of their own learning. Indeed, the 'organic' method of teaching draws on critical pedagogy which views students as active, critical subjects rather than "empty vessels to be filled with sociological truths" (Burawoy 2008, p9). One of Burawoy's influences here is critical theorist Paulo Freire, who in his landmark book Pedadogy of the Oppressed (Freire 2007 [1970]) criticised the 'banking model' of education in which the teacher 'deposits' his/her ideas in the learner's mind and 'withdraws' them via assessment. The practical import of greater empowerment for faculty is a reduced reliance on the 'banking' model of education and an increased focus on group work, selfreflection, and action-oriented community-based learning (Stoecker 2005). Empowerment can be effectuated through the use of group work where collaboration is encouraged and diverse views and experience welcomed (Suoranta 2008). Another means of student empowerment, both as active learners and as agents of social change, is the service or community learning model discussed above. As Munter (2002, p154) observes "the dual and integrally linked notions of student empowerment and community empowerment are central to the service-learning approach to teaching and learning".

Committed to human rights and social justice

Greater integration of criminology with human rights and social justice raises the prospect of exciting interdisciplinary projects that would likely be of great benefit to all these disciplines. Despite criminology's position as a multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary social science embracing a wide range of traditions, there has been a failure to connect with other disciplines in understanding crime and societal reactions to it. McEvoy (2003, p39), for one, laments the failure of criminology to grasp the significance of the human rights agenda, writing that it "appears to have made little genuine inroads into [the] conceptual or practical frameworks" of criminology. This returns us once again to the role of values in teaching criminology. There are those who may argue, following Neustadt (1965) in sociology, that their role as teachers is to impart to students the results of a scientific study of crime/punishment and the research methods and techniques for this study. However, there is a long tradition of scholar activism in criminology, ranging from the work conducted in partnership with communities by those in the Chicago school in the 1920s and '30s to more recent research carried out by those within the feminist school (Risman 2006). Further, as Braithwaite (2011) observes, teaching criminology from a purely value-neutral perspective may not even be achievable; normative and causative theoretical criminology are of necessity intertwined. To cite his example: if it was discovered that boiling offenders in oil in the town centre acted as an effective deterrent this could hardly be recommended to students as a crime control strategy. The idea is not to induct students into an ideology or social justice value system but rather to introduce them to data that indicate the links between social inequality and crime/punishment together with the theory which may assist them to interpret this data. If critical thinking skills are also effectively developed, a new generation of students may adapt these ideas and use them in their own way (Risman 2006).

Summary

A survey of the above reveals that several of the key characteristics of a more public criminological pedagogy share an affinity with some of the core principles of the scholarship of learning and teaching. Those conversant with these principles will easily recognise the empowered, active student and critical thinker who learns collaboratively and through participation in the community. They will similarly recognise the reflective, engaged instructor whose teaching is transparent, evidence-based and relevant. Clearly these are ideal types but the commonalities between the two fields are nevertheless evident. As Suoranta (2008, p720) observes in her discussion on dialogical teaching methods in sociology, there are many common themes between the Burawoyan concept of public sociology and critical pedagogy, most notably, the emphasis on interpreting the world critically and on social transformation through transforming the social relations of learning and teaching. If this analysis is correct, a strong argument can be made for teaching as the first move towards the practice of a more public criminology. Burawoy (2004, p1608) himself, through his statement that "students are our first public" has recognised the importance of the relationship between teaching and public sociology in realising his aim of a more public sociology. Given the small number of people who actually read social scientific journals (Wolff 2008), it is also probable that students are our largest public. Further, it is important to remember that education can act as a powerful tool for social change. Even students who find jobs outside the academy continue to apply their knowledge of crime, punishment, etc., in the diverse settings in which they live and work (Walters 2011). The next section focuses on three potential ways of 'doing' public criminology in the classroom, namely, through greater dialogue, interdisciplinarity and engagement in 'real-world' issues relating to crime and punishment, drawing on examples of best practice from sociology and criminology lecturers.

Doing teaching as public criminology

Encouraging dialogue

Building on the critical approach outlined above in which the lived reality of students is used as a point of departure for teaching, Burawoy (2008) advances the idea that students themselves may form a public or potential public through the interplay of three dialogues: first, with sociological texts, second, with fellow students and third, with secondary publics beyond the university. The first dialogue uses the student's biography and places it in a contemporary social context. Thus, the personal experience of the students is given meaning through engagement with the sociological literature and the subsequent internal dialogue which students enter into with themselves. Students also engage in dialogue with other students "around the interpretation of divergent lived experience through common texts and assignments". The final dialogue sees students engage with publics beyond the classroom (Burawoy terms these constituencies 'secondary publics'), whether through the formal education process or simply as part of their everyday lives.

An excellent practical example of how this can be achieved in a sociological context is related in an online video by Burawoy's colleague in Berkeley University, Mary Kelsey (2005). As part of the assessment for an introductory sociology class, Kelsey asked students to gather data on schools in their own home communities using an electronic dataset and to write an assignment on class and inequality in education with reference to their own experience. Lecture notes and other literature relating to education and society, particularly its role as an equaliser, were made available to students online throughout the semester. In a second research project, students were asked to work in groups and invited to peer review each others' papers using a guide sheet. The final element consisted of three short quizzes comprised of multiple choice and short-answer questions. The experience aimed to help students understand their place in the wider social structure (in particular the considerable social and cultural capital which assisted them in gaining admission to Berkeley), to develop research and other skills and ultimately to transform or adjust their world view. The assessment methods reflect many of the goals outlined above for a more public pedagogy in terms of its relevance, emphasis on empowerment and critical interpretation of social data. As Kelsey (2005) observes, students must feel as if they have a 'stake in the class' in order to be motivated to articulate their views through their assignments and this is effectively achieved through the focus on inequality as it plays out in the familiar high school context. Kelsey also argues that empowerment is achieved both through the emotional impact of the data and through the fact that the students in the class who went to public schools became the experts on inequality through their lived experiences.

While few would disagree with the above as a model, Kelsey's approach does not translate so easily into the criminological arena. All undergraduate students have some experience of high school and gender, race or class issues yet the same cannot be said of crime or offenders. One highly innovative project which has managed to facilitate dialogue between students and offenders is the 'Inside-Out' Prison Exchange Programme which has operated in several universities across the US since 1997. In its typical format, a small group of sociology or criminology ('outside') students spend a semester studying with a similar sized group of inmates ('inside' students) in a state prison or correctional facility. Galardi (2009), a student at Oregon State University who participated in the programme, writes how small group discussions on the causes of criminal behaviour allowed students to measure criminological theory against the lived realities of some offenders and also reflect on their own perceptions of inmates. In line with the aims of public sociology and criminology, the programme serves as an engine for social change by facilitating student experiences that emphasise dialogue, collaboration and reflection.

An important obstacle to realising projects of such scope and ambition concerns the heavy workloads of many academics. Kelsey (2005) herself is at pains to emphasise the significant amount of work required for the project which was developed under the sponsorship of the Mellon Foundation. Similarly, Michelle Inderbitzin (2009), an instructor who is heavily involved in the Inside-Out programme at Oregon State University, describes Lori Pompa's work in founding the programme as nothing short of a 'bureaucratic miracle'. A further constraint is the institutional imperatives of third-level institutions which, despite teaching's 'sudden renaissance' (Sim 2011, p726), continue to lay primary emphasis on research activity, particularly the acquisition of research grants, as markers of success. For many academics, it is the teaching role which occupies the bulk of their time, yet (at least in Ireland and the UK) it is the research role that is privileged. This renders it difficult not to view teaching commitments as a "drag on our professional careers" (Burawoy 2007, p255) and recalls Wacquant's (2011, p440) critique of Burawoy, namely, that the public sociology typology has been elaborated "with only passing reference to the ... material conditions of work in the university". The development of a scholarship of learning and teaching may assist faculty in forging a 'third way' between these two imperatives yet this will require parity of esteem with traditional subject research.

'Keeping it real'

As discussed above, Carrabine *et al.* (2009) contend that a more public criminology would require a style of teaching that ensures its relevance and engages seriously with moral and political questions. As lecturers in criminology or criminal justice, we are 'lucky' given the broad appeal, emotional impact and perpetual topicality of our subject matter to students. The concrete nature of the crime problem also provides an excellent means of understanding macro-historical drivers of change and relating the personal to the political (Braithwaite 2011). Despite this, it is disappointing to witness how the process of inducting students into the theoretical foundations of the discipline sometimes appears to dim their sense of intellectual optimism and excitement about the subject. While clearly the fundamentals of theory have to be taught, there are surely ways in which we can better relate these to the gritty problems of crime which initially caught their attention.

Lecturers seek to do this every day through use of newspaper reports, anecdote and case studies in class and also through the incorporation of guest lecturers and field trips into the curriculum. Even such a deceptively simple exercise as asking students to choose a current crime policy such as mandatory prison sentences or restorative justice and critique it from one or more theoretical angles illuminates the relevance of theory to real-world policies and allows theory to be built up around these examples. The use of new digital technologies such as blogs and Twitter may also play an important role in striking up a dialogic relationship between student and instructor and the students themselves (Sherratt 2008). One illustration of how this can be put into practice is the teaching model put in place by the criminology team at the University of Kent. Their efforts at linking criminological theory with current affairs - including regular updates on their Moodle and Twitter pages and videoed round tables responding to events such as the 'Arab Spring' uprisings - won them the British Society of Criminology's National Award for Excellence in Teaching Criminology in 2011. Various other media may also be employed to reconnect students with the 'real world' problem of crime as illustrated by the innovative approach taken by the School of Law at the University Centre at Blackburn College. Lecturers teaching criminology in this school decided to get students involved in a photography competition organised by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies entitled 'What is Crime?'. Students were asked, as part of their formal assessment in the first year of the Criminology HND, to take photographs of 'hidden crime'. Benefits to the students included higher levels of enthusiasm and engagement and better recall of the issues involved. Importantly, the use of photography also enabled the students to identify with contemporary civil liberties debates as the

sessions included an evaluation of the law on taking photographs in public places (Johnson 2010).

Greater interdisciplinarity

British criminologist Dick Hobbs (2005, as cited in Groombridge 2009) has recently suggested that sociology and criminology require a spin doctor to get politicians and the media to pay attention to our work. While Hobbs may be speaking with his tongue firmly in his cheek, it is difficult to deny that effective communication forms a pressing issue for a discipline which oftentimes finds itself on the fringes of policy debates or, still more often, in an isolated and defensive position in the national media. Writing as academic criminologist turned senior civil servant, Wiles (2002, p248) relates the growing irrelevance of criminology in policy circles to the inability of criminologists to "express their ideas in everyday language and summarise complex evidence in straightforward points". If it is imperative that the next generation of criminologists are educated in popularly based languages and "the latest scholarship and technical practices of journalism and communication and new media studies" (Chancer & McLaughlin 2007, p164) one may legitimately ask how this is to be achieved by their instructors. A modest start could be made by, as suggested above, requiring students to write letters or essays addressed to wider publics as part of their formal assessment; for example, to summarise research dissertations in ordinary language as well as the disciplinary argot of criminology. A not-so-modest proposal, on the other hand, could involve cross-disciplinary synergies between criminology, political science and journalism. For example, Gans (2009) in a paper on disciplinary changes for creating public sociology suggests a joint module for graduate sociology and journalism students which would allow students to benefit from journalists' jargon free writing style and focus on topicality. From a criminological perspective, this idea holds considerable merit. Not only would this acquaint postgraduate students with writing in a non-technical manner but it would also (as Gans notes) reduce criminologists' and media students' "distrust and disparagement" (Gans 2009, p131) of one another.

Conclusion

To conclude, Loader & Sparks (2010) have been criticised for excessive navel gazing and failing to elaborate precisely how public criminology may contribute to a better politics of crime and its regulation (Tombs 2011, Walters 2011). While the authors provide an important examination of the 'big picture' role of criminology in contemporary society, it is also important to consider how public criminology can best be put in practice by academics in the field. To date, the role of teaching and students in achieving this aim has been largely ignored by the discipline in the debate over public criminology. This is despite the many affinities which exist between a more public criminological pedagogy and the core principles of the scholarship of learning and teaching, particularly a *critical* scholarship of learning and teaching. If criminology is to become a 'democratic under-labourer' we may join with Sim (2011) in arguing that positive difference can be achieved by the more prosaic but no less powerful means of dialogical teaching, interdisciplinarity and engagement in 'real-world' issues relating to crime and punishment. As Bute (2009) argues, perhaps a more humble (though nevertheless challenging) conception of public '-ologist' can be realised through a rediscovery of the teaching mission as a genre of 'public criminology'.

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