

Whither Criminology?: On the State of Criminology's Paradigm

Ph.D Dissertation

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Abstract

What is the condition of criminology's paradigm? The reply to this question has implications bearing on the profession's bona fides as a science as well as its sustainability as an independent academic enterprise. The work attempts to capture the elusive term through the use of five themes: theoretical consensus, methodological consensus, boundaries, the departure from sociology, and the current and future status of the field. In approaching this question the work presents an analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seventeen renowned criminologists. The centerpiece of the latter data set was assembled and analyzed in prior research (Savelsberg et al. 2002). A content analysis of 2,109 peer reviewed articles appearing in the field's top journals from 1951 to 2008 produced numerous findings. Criminology lacks a hegemonic theoretical orientation but a consensus is evident in the peer-reviewed publication data in terms of its methodology. The field defends its prerogative to draw from any tradition it sees fit to. A review of the content of the field's research and the debates discussed with the interviewees suggests a somewhat amorphous, yet still discernible, definition of the field's identity, one that is dedicated to the process of science. This can be seen in terms of the parameters of the seminal theoretical and empirical debates recounted by the interviewees. What is clear is that the field has successfully emancipated itself from the discipline of sociology both professionally and in terms of its content. Concerns were offered in terms of potential threats to the continued growth of the profession resulting from a reduction in funding and its becoming fractured and isolated organizationally but there are reasons for optimism in terms of the expansion of its research horizons into exploring state crime, overcoming the macro/micro divide and incorporating biological, international, cultural/anthropological, and power oriented themes. Discussion of the prospects for how the current work may come to inform a large scale research agenda conclude the work.