

Why journalists study criminology?

Dr. Sohail Ansari
Hassan Latif Shaikh

Abstract

Journalists may fail to convey truth despite being tied to the apron strings of truth as things are not as they appear to be. Objectivity is the philosophical underpinning for the enterprise known as news reporting but honesty for facts is not the honesty for relaying information in the honest format. Theories of criminology help journalist to understand things below surface and capture realities beyond their face value to be in the right perspective of a crime through engagement with nature and nurture debates. Disservice to truth occurs with the failure to come to grips with links between internal and external influences. This article identifies theories of criminology helpful in understanding influences those fashion the attitude, thus helps journalist to do justice to truth.

Key Words: Apron strings of truth; philosophical underpinnings; honesty for facts; honesty for relaying information in honest format; below surface; face value; nature and nurture debate; disservice to truth; internal and external influences.

Introduction

The principal objective of this article is not to offer illumination of the interplay of these two disciplines through the identification of the boundaries existing between media studies and criminology but to identify and briefly explain theories of criminology in order to stimulate interests (in readers) to study in depth the identified theories and to explore further areas in the field of criminology.

The importance of criminology for context-orientated crime analysis:

Journalist need to study criminology to understand things not as they are; for example a fact is that man has stolen; therefore, reporting it is not wrong as it has happened; but it is superficiality; a skimming over the surface not plunging below to discover reality. Man if has theft an article because of hunger so bracketing it with the one who has done because of habit is wrong.

Various factors are at play: irrational reactions can have rational reasons; a violent behavior may be the response to cultural and social snubbing and a desperate call for addressing inequalities. Crime may be the by-product of poverty; and people resort to crime in the last resort or people commit crime as crime runs through their genes. Objectivity is to see things in impartial light; journalists; however may fail to convey truth despite being tied to the apron strings of truth as things are not as they appear to be and actions have to be understood in the light of theories of criminology so to grip the underlying motives.

Journalists understand that objectivity is disinterestedness and non-partisanship; it is the philosophical underpinning for the enterprise known as news reporting; but they must understand as well that they can do disservice to people if they fail to attempt to seek truth because of not looking at issues from cultural, social, and historical perspectives.

Journalists must understand that honesty for facts is not the honesty for relaying information in the honest format that requires journalists to be objectively accurate and not to be on the either side of the arguments. This regimen of objectivity requires balanced reporting and truth is often the casualty as then lynching is provoked by the transgressions of

the people subjected to the fury of lynch mob; and immolation or mutilation is explained with clinical detachment; inhumane practices are normalized not because of the honesty for facts but because of the honesty for the honest format.

Whatever pathway journalist pursue to be in the right perspective of a crime; he has to introduce himself to the social, cultural, and historical facet of criminality; or in other words, journalist has to be well-engaged in nature and nurture debates to come to grips with dynamic link that exists between external and internal influences on attitude.

Theories of criminology not only help journalists to have context-orientated crime analysis but also foster in them the optimism in relation to the possibilities for the reformation of society.

Importance of criminology for journalism

It is significant for journalists not to see things as they are as there does exist a great deal of consensus between state crime policy and media content. Articles of journalists do set the parameters if not frame laws as journalism though is not the legal forum to legislate, it is the social institution to deal with and play out essentials of crime policy.

Only media can counteract the media contracted hate phenomena that is often because of the failure to have context-orientated crime analysis. Theories of criminology help writings to be characterized by the optimistic faith in the incorporation of 'scum of earth' dregs of society' and 'social liabilities' into society.

The psychological theory

Realization on the part of people that liberty of theirs can be rendered useless by the uncertainty of preserving it gave birth to laws. Laws are set of rules that guarantee happiness to all people. Yet people don't obey laws freely just for the sake of the common good because it entails the sacrifice of a portion of personal liberty; therefore people are to be goaded by the consequences of crime. Punishment hence holds a tangible motive to suppress the evil part that resides in every person.

Reporting of crime is dictated by the principle of utility. The principle of utility maintains that human as rational creatures choose course of action and are in pursuit of pleasure by avoiding pain. People do crimes to obtain pleasure (for example raping) that ultimately guarantees pleasure (robbery). It follows that to pre-empt crime, punishment must administer pain in an appropriate amount to counter balance the joy expected to be gained from crime.

The psychological view helps journalists to link insanity and criminal behavior: 'Crime is a sort of outlet in which their unsound tendencies are discharged; they would go mad if they were not criminals, and they do not go mad because they are criminals' (1) Journalists can understand that deviants are inherently damaged or crime-prone mental degenerate by reason their inferior genetic makeup and therefore can suggest remedies other than harsh imprisonment.

Sociological approach

Journalist can glean insights from the study of sociological approach to have demonstrated ability to clarify the etiology of social problems and to analyze more exactly their aspects and identify dimensions that appear most amenable to solutions. Sociological perspective can help establish the link between behavior and social context; for example reporting and analyzing juvenile delinquency starts with perception that it can be the reaction or reflection of many dimension of one's cultural experience. Observation must include understanding that laws are not always perfect and even they are; there is always the scope for their

improvement in their application. Journalist can have understanding that laws are mores considered vital to the survival of society and codified into legal statutes; however consideration can be wrong in itself or wrong in a sense that thing is not as vital as thought to be. Journalists driven by all these consideration treat juvenile delinquency in broadest social and cultural context and may reject it as threat to norms and the encouragement of other forms of deviance; but in contrasting deviance with conformity he may regard it as warning device that norms may have failed to create the conformity as they have failed to arise out of general social consensus. Journalist informed by sociological perspective do not simply report delinquency as the failure to internalize the norms of society and may see it as the safety value to release anger against organization of society in the least harmful way or a call to bring about social and cultural change.

Bio-criminology

The study of bio-criminology helps journalist to focus on human heredity and its relationship to criminal behavior. Journalist can link crime to crime to criminogenic families; they can not only identify and analyze crimogneic families but also suggest measures to handle them and to reform them. Theories of heredity hold that criminal behavior is produced by physical traits such as abnormalities those can be transmitted genetically from one generation to the next. Journalist can suggest measure to separate children of crime-prone families from normal children and to give them special education in an attempt to prove that these studies may be right in seeing criminal 'as being born and not made' but not right in their immediate implication that 'heredity characteristic are enough to condemn succeeding generations of a family to a life of criminal degeneracy' (2).

Soma type approach

Theories of body build, or of somato type school can teach journalists about distinct physiques those make people vulnerable to criminal tendencies. Journalists can write articles for basic body types so to link crime with types of body. Journalists can be instrumental in making studies of Ernst Kretschme and of William H. Shelon well known, thus facilitate the establishment of a relationship between body build and psychiatric disorder. The job of a journalist does not end with popularizing theories those prove that criminals are hereditary inferior in mind and in body; he no doubts helps to make known distinct physical factors associated with criminology such as 'tattooing, thin hair, straight hair, red brown hair, low sloping foreheads, mixed eye color (a sign of racial impurity), thin lips, long thin necks, and several other features'(3) but he also suggest measures to improve social and environmental factors 'associated with crime those include lack of education and lack of means for a good life'.

Sociological criminology

'Crime has existed in every age in both poverty and prosperity' it seems part of human nature; hence it is normal and necessary social behavior' (4). Crime as it is and should be understood the fundamental conditions of social life; however Sociology as the ideal perspective to 'study the nature and direction of another behavior that involves social forces: crime' (5) helps journalist to analyze crime in terms of motives, hence same crime can be seen differently. Journalist can learn from the distinction Durkheim made from altruistic criminal type to common criminal type. Common criminal sees the law violation an end unto itself; altruistic criminal makes destruction to imply that a way is open for cultural change; the violation of former manifest no interest in moral conduct and of latter seeks improved moral climate. Works of sociological criminology helps journalists to understand crime as

the instrument to challenge universal conformity that stifles independent thinking and can identify in criminals the parallels example of the 'Greek philosopher Socrates sentenced to death for defiling morals'(6). People follow various forms of attitude and resort to criminality in pursuing their needs; however this turn to criminality is beneficial if it indicates the inflexibility of social structure and rigidity of cultural consensus. The study of sociology helps journalist to understand this beneficial turn.

Concept of Anomie:

The study of Anomie is especially helpful in a country, off and on, bedeviled by human-made or natural calamity. Disruption in social world renders rules of norms inoperative and undermines the society's social and cultural control on its members. Activities of individuals during famine, drought, and flood and in economic depression are to be covered with understanding that these individuals are overwhelmed by miseries and therefore are doing things they would otherwise be not doing.

The study of the concept of anomie of prosperity helps journalist to analyze the impact of a boom. Journalists instead of flinging oversimplified epithet such as reprobate, licentious blob or debauchees understand that logical consequence of sudden good fortune is the disruption of rules of behavior and the concept of life. Journalist can help society realize that it is at the threshold of a new era dominated by the tendencies of flaunting wealth and parading good fortune in most ostentatious manner.

The concept of anomie can help journalist to understand crime as the inevitable alternative behavior choice. Journalist can suggest measures to bring in harmony conflicting social rules so that compliance to legal codes ceases to be strained; thus journalist helps to make society less complex, its rules less abundant; making appropriate behaviors possible.

Sociological Positivism

Journalist can build the pressure of public opinion for taking crime-causing conditions and traits beyond the control of criminals as a significant force in legal policy and jurisprudence. Journalists can develop social understandings that approach of classical criminology that punishment should fit the crime is cruel and measures instead be taken for rehabilitation.

The ecological view of crime

'Sociologist known as the Chicago school pioneered the research work on the social ecology of the city' and concluded that 'crime was a function of where one lived' (7). The study of the Chicago school sociologist provides journalist deep insights for examining social forces those create criminal interactions and turn certain areas 'natural areas for crime'. The works of Chicago school sociologist focuses on the working and break down of social institutions and examine how their collapse influences attitude. The study of the breakdown of the school and family__ the critical social institutes__ help journalist to understand social disorganization and the reduced ability of these institutes to direct social behavior; thus journalist can not only understand the underlying reason for the high crime rate but also can suggest remedies accordingly.

Socialization view of crime:

Journalist must understand the individual's interaction to significant cultural and social processes; for example peer relations; family life and education as the key to penetrate human behavior. Interpersonal addition to criminological theory added by sociologist and influenced by psychology helps journalist to link criminology to the failure of socialization. Journalist can highlight the perils of homes wrecked by conflict; dangers of inadequate

intuitions of learning; and possible consequences of association (of youth) with pro-crime forces. The writing of journalist; thus, aims at improving the social milieu and creating conditions conducive to socialization.

Theory of Natural selection:

Hero worship is the norm of feudal or monarchical societies. In these societies things are pre-destined. Social and cultural hierarchies are well-defined; people are born and die in profession. The Darwin's theory of natural selection is artfully taken to describe the evolution of society. As people are divinely chosen to govern; the governed must be resigned to their fate. Protest for the provisions of basic needs is crime as all things exist for the people those are entitled to have them by the accident of birth. Law is not equal as people are not equal; hence anger simmers beneath the deceptively calm surface and erupts off and on as the dark omen of a civil war in the offing.

Difference in endowments are the difference in status; however to use these differences in establishing well defined hierarchies in which 'the underprivileged in society must not be nurtured or helped to compensate for their shortcomings; while the fate of the poor is determined by their personal inadequacy, wealth and power are reserved for those most qualified' (8) is not well justified as deficiencies and shortcoming may not be absolutely compensated but can be improved with proper education and health facilities adequate to the needs of underprivileged.

Theory of natural selection is right in a sense that best and most powerful ultimately overpowers their competitors; however the people of feudal or monarchical societies tend to credit each ruler of dynasty with sagacity and chivalry associated with its founder; same goes true with spiritual school of thought; it is erroneously believed that spirituality is transmitted to each succeeding generation. Society becomes non-meritorious and non egalitarian because of this exaggerated or irrational interpretation of natural selection theory (as the roles are pre-determined so the question of determining the role in accordance to skills is itself irrelevant). The writing of journalist can explore the consequences of the wrong application of natural selection theory, and can wean people off belief that a child born in spiritual family is not necessarily born with halo or a son of patriarch can be different from his father in characteristics. The writing of journalist armed with rational arguments against irrational fatalism can bring meaningful changes in the definition of the roles of different segments of society and consequently in treatment meted out to them; thus helping society not to be at war with itself.

Victimization theories:

Journalists are exclusively focuses on the offenders; the theories of victimizations can help them understand the part of victims in crime process as someone who shapes and mold the criminal' thus own the 'responsibility in the genesis of crime' (9). These theories can help to understand that victim can be the one who influences the direction of criminal behavior.

Victim precipitation theory:

This theory can help journalist to understand that some but not all crimes would not have occurred unless the 'victims initiated provocatively the confrontation'(10). Sympathies of a journalist then may not rest exclusively with victims; and a victim-precipitated crime will be judged in a balanced way. Journalist can help people against becoming potential victims by cautioning them against the dangers of fighting words or threats.

'If a victim's actions can in any way be construed as consenting to sexual intimacy; or romantic relationship deteriorate into rape, rapists should not be treated with the same

degree of punitiveness as stranger rapes'(11). Understanding the Real Rape helps journalist understand that responsibility should not be always placed squarely on the rapist as victim 'asked for it the way she was dressed'(12) and can promote understanding that the best guarantee against assault is not to 'advertise for sex'.

Life style theory:

'Crime is not a random occurrence, independent of the actions of its targets. Crime and the victim seem to form an association in which the probability of the former is dependent on the activities of the latter.'(13) Crime rate is a function of life style; these are personal characteristics those place victim in jeopardy. The writings of journalist can guide people to reduce the risk of victimization; he points out the danger of 'recreational pursuit of fun that maintains 'greater risk of victimization or of risk location'. (14)

Theories of victimologists help journalist to understand the cause of crime not independent of the cause of victimization. Journalist can understand that crimes do not always explain the onset of criminology; they do explain in many cases the onset of crime. The decision of criminally motivated individual is motivated by the actions and reactions of victims; it is the dependant decision, and underlying reason for crimes.

Choice theory:

To understand the philosophical underpinnings of the view of crime known as choice theory help journalists to understand criminal behaviors that is a matter of reasoned choice. By understanding choice theory as a potent policy making theoretical perspective, journalist can be benefited from the discussion that flows from the theoretical modes that asserts that because crime is a rational choice, punishment should be means to control crime. This theory helps journalist not to classify every criminal as the one who has been criminal because of life situation beyond his control and to understand that one can be criminal not because of crime-producing factors but because of crime-producing traits and committed to evil means despite no longer compelled by circumstances thereof criminal behavior of theirs is matter of reasoned choice that is suppresses by punishment orientated measures rather than those that focuses on rehabilitation and treatment efforts.

Rational choice:

This theory helps journalist to understand crime causation factors. He understands that law-violation is an event that occurs because of offenders believes that 'risk of crime is greater than its potential profits'. (15) Journalist can suggest measures such as improvement in economic benefits and increase in the risk of apprehension that helps forego crime.

The rational choice theory:

This theory can help journalist understand that crime is an event; criminality is a personal trait. Criminals do not commit crime all the time; non-criminals may on occasion violate the law, some high-risk people lacking opportunity may never commit crime; given enough provocation and/or opportunity, a law-abiding person may commit crime'. (16) Journalists therefore can suggest offender specific measure to reduce the pre-requisites for committing crime; and to create perception that legitimate means are better option to achieve personal goals.

Conclusion

Criminology is the scientific view of causes and consequences of crime; it helps in the management and control of crime, thus help society to stop the growth of individual and

social criminal behavior. Various schools of thought committed to different concepts of crime and law emerged from the mid-18th century to the mid-twentieth century. This article discussed the findings of these schools of thoughts to help the students of media studies to understand the paradigms of criminology so to understand crime in a wider social and cultural perspective.

References

- Henry Maudsley. (1981). *Pioneers in Criminology*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Henry Herbert. (1990). *The Kallikak Family: A study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness*. New York: Apple press.
- Jones. (1999). *History of Criminology*. New York: Macmillan
- Emile Durkheim(1970). *Rules of the Sociological Method*. Bostan: Free press.
- Ibid
- James Garofalo(1980). *Improving the use and Effectiveness of Neighborhood*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Ibid
- Peter Finn(1989). *Victims*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press,
- Ibid
- Ibid
- J.A.Yaryura (2000). *Violent Behavior*. New York: Free press
- Ibid
- Ibid
- Otto Kirchheimer (1988). *Punishment and social structure*. New York: Columbia university press
- Ibid
- Ibid

