Doing Research on Crime and Justice: A Political Endeavour?

Introduction

Our starting point for this chapter is that all forms of criminological research are inherently bound up with wider political contexts that, ultimately, shape the research process. Most criminological researchers are willing to acknowledge, sometimes reluctantly, the inevitability that their research can never be free from political influences. For some criminologists, the political nature of crime and justice is their starting point, and their research is a form of politics. In this chapter we begin by exploring the different meanings attached to the term ‘political’. We then move on to offer a brief account of the increasing politicization of research on crime and criminal justice (particularly from 1979 onwards), and alongside this present a chronological account of the politicization of criminological theory (especially in the 1960s and 1970s). Developing our argument that the political context influences the conduct of criminological research in multiple ways, we reflect upon these influences throughout the research process and beyond. Within the chapter we draw upon our own research experiences, as well as the accounts available in which researchers have shared their own views of conducting criminological research in a highly politicized world.
Towards a definition of ‘political’

The term ‘political’ has multiple meanings attached to it in both lay and academic discourse, and this is apparent by exploring dictionary definitions. For example,

1. (a) Of or concerning the State or its government, or public affairs generally. (b) Of, relating to, or engaged in politics. (c) Belonging to or forming part of a civil administration.
2. Having an organized form of society of government.
3. Taking or belonging to a side in politics.
4. Relating to or affecting interests of status or authority in an organization rather than matters of principle (a political decision).

(The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1990; italics in original)

In academic discourse, the term ‘political’ is traditionally compared against the term ‘civil’ (Tonkiss, 1998). The former is conceived as concerned with public affairs and the formal process of government. In contrast, the latter is understood as related to essentially private and freely chosen activity. Together they make up what is commonly understood by sociologists, and other social scientists, as ‘society’. However, this dichotomy can be rendered problematic by exploring the interface between the civil and the political. Some of the most influential voices in this respect have been feminist ones. Summarized in the slogan ‘the personal is political’, feminists have drawn political attention to crimes within the home, encouraging state incursion into the private sphere (see Delamont, 2003 for a more detailed discussion of feminist work). Tonkiss’ definition captures feminist and other debates surrounding the civil/political dualism:

The political realm is that which brings together social relations into focus but specifically in terms of their direction, control, management and adjustment to the demands of the state. The social is rarely, if at all, apolitical but the politics are not always those mediated by state and party. (1998: 259)

Reviewing debates in the methodological literature about competing definitions of ‘political’ (see for example, Hammersley, 1995; Hughes, 2000), it becomes apparent that definitions vary tremendously in terms of how all encompassing they are. Narrow definitions tend to focus on ‘explicit political ideologies and organized coercive institutional power of the modern nation state’ (Hughes, 2000: 235) while others are much broader and note that all human interactions are micro-political processes (Hammersley, 1995). Helpfully, Hammersley identifies two distinct, but closely related, ways in which research may be seen as political. The first acknowledges that research is implicated in power relations. The key questions here are the extent to which researchers are autonomous from the state or other powerful interests in
society, and the extent to which researchers exercise power? The second way relates to the question of whether value judgements are implicated in the research process. We are at risk of devoting the whole chapter to the debate about the meaning of the term ‘political’, and rather than continuing in detail we recommend that interested readers consult Hammersley’s (1995) text. Cognizant of the difficulties of reaching an authoritative definition, we convey our understanding of the term ‘political’ in the box below.

Criminological research is a political endeavour in two senses. Firstly, the political context inevitably shapes, to varying extents, all stages of the research process because criminologists are researching a social problem, which politicians seek to explain and control. Secondly, criminological researchers inevitably become embroiled in micro-political processes because research often seeks to understand the standpoints of different, sometimes opposing, groups.

The politicization of law and order

Through being explicit about the ways in which criminological research can be perceived as a political endeavour, we have already drawn attention to the politicization of the problem of crime. We develop this discussion briefly here, focusing on England and Wales. Surprisingly law and order has only become contested by different political parties since the mid-1960s, gaining dominance in the 1979 election campaign (Downes and Morgan, 2002). Public spending, according to the Conservatives, needed to be reduced. The only exception to this was in the law and order sphere. The approach adopted during the Thatcher (1979–90) and Major (1990–97) governments varied. It began with a highly punitive approach, embodying ‘law and order ideology’ (Cavadino and Dignan, 2002: 5) and during the four years leading up to the 1991 Criminal Justice Act this rhetoric continued to colour policy but a ‘less dogmatic and more pragmatic’ (2002: 6) approach was taken. The 1991 Criminal Justice Act was a radical piece of legislation but some of its central provisions were hastily repealed in ‘the law and order counter-reformation’ (2002: 6). They were replaced by measures which marked the revival of the highly punitive approach. For example, the pledge to reduce the prison population through the use of community sanctions was overridden by a commitment to the use of custodial sentences. The Conservative government portrayed themselves as the party of law and order, leaving the opposition with the task of challenging them.

Following their victory in the 1997 General Election, Labour (now packaged as New Labour) sought to live up to its manifesto promise to be ‘tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime’. This promise was an attempt to assure
voters that they could be successful on law and order issues. These had been successfully portrayed by previous Conservative governments as Labour’s Achilles Heel (Morgan, 2000). Labour passed a deluge of legislation through Parliament, including some measures initially put in place by the Conservatives. Reflecting on the current state of affairs in 2001, Downes and Morgan (2002) suggest that a new and uneasy consensus has been reached by the major political parties, and this has resulted in persistent jostling for political advantage.

**The politicization of criminological theory**

In this section we offer a loose chronological account of the politicization of criminological theory. The term ‘loose’ in this context should not be taken to imply that we will present it in a careless way. Rather we simply wish to draw the reader’s attention to some of the difficulties of following a strictly chronological and linear account. Attempts to periodize the development of criminological theory are superficially attractive. Such simplification is inherent in the abundance of texts that outline the range of criminological perspectives. These texts tend to introduce the dominant perspective at a particular point in time, note how it was subjected to intense criticism by an emerging perspective, report its decline and then move on to discuss the new perspective which they now treat as the dominant one. The pattern continues. The best texts note that adopting this structure is a pedagogic device, and attempt to convey some sense of the complexities that lie beneath the development of criminological theory. For instance, noting that seemingly ‘new’ perspectives often draw upon the influences of earlier ones.

Bottoms (2000: 35) distinguishes between five approaches to criminology: classicism, natural-science positivism, active-subject socially-oriented criminologies, active subject individually-oriented criminologies and political-activist criminologies. Here we will focus on the latter approach. For Bottoms, political-activist criminologies include Marxist-oriented criminologies, feminist criminologies and the theoretical movement known as ‘left-realism’. Gaining dominance within British criminology since 1970, these perspectives have been somewhat openly political. The combination of political activism and theorizing challenges traditional conceptions of the relationship between theory and research. As Bottoms suggests, the legacy of positivism has left criminology suspicious about political engagement for fear that their research may be perceived as unscientific. Political-activist criminology makes explicit that criminological theory and research are inseparable from the political landscape. However, there is a danger that political goals can override the pursuit of knowledge. We provide a necessarily brief, and hopefully not too crude, summary of the main political-activist criminologies below.

Marx himself wrote little about crime but his theoretical framework has been applied by others to the study of it. One of the key elements of Marxism
is that all social phenomena, including crime, can be explained in terms of each society’s economic relations. In capitalist society, the private ownership of the means of production allows the bourgeoisie to exploit the proletariat, and thus crime can be seen as part of the struggle in which the economically powerless proletariat attempt to cope with the exploitation and poverty imposed on them. Bonger (1916) was the first to apply Marxist principles to crime but the Marxist tradition had little impact on criminology until the 1970s. At that time, a growing number of criminologists offered Marxist-inspired analyses of the problem of crime (see for example, Chambliss, 1975). They also went further to suggest that the solution to the crime problem lies in revolution, bringing about major social, economic and political change. Other criminologists were reluctant to adopt a pure form of Marxism, and instead attempted to fuse elements of interactionism with the fundamentals of Marxism. The result was the publication of *The New Criminology* by Taylor et al. (1973). With the benefit of hindsight, this text is widely cited as the genesis of critical criminology. Taylor et al. endeavoured to develop a criminological theoretical framework and to endorse a variety of radical politics through their insistence that a society based on principles of socialist diversity and tolerance would be free of crime.

By the mid-1970s criminology was highly politicized. A growing concern with the process of criminalization provided the backdrop for critical criminologists to explore the ways in which power associated with the capitalist state asserts itself in relation to crime. The influence of Marx was joined by that of Foucault and Gramsci. In simple terms, critical criminology seeks to explore the ways in which the variables of class, ethnicity and gender are played out in relation to crime and criminal justice. The concern of critical criminologists is not only with discriminatory practices but the ways in which structural inequalities are perpetuated. For instance, critical criminologists seek to understand the ways in which state practices seek to marginalize, and consequently criminalize, certain groups. The influence of feminism is apparent in critical criminological work. The second wave of the women’s movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s introduced a new dimension to criminological debates. It began by noting the misrepresentation, or more commonly neglect, of women in criminological theory, and attempted to redress the balance by focusing their attention on women as victims, offenders and criminal justice professionals. An important dimension to their work is the blurring of the boundary between theory and practice. Feminist criminologists have been active in campaigning for law reform, changes to criminal justice policy and providing a range of support services for female victims of crime.

In the mid-1980s, Left realism emerged in the UK as a response to both the utopianism of earlier Marxist-inspired criminologies and the punitive and exclusionary character of right realist policies in the US. Left realism still claimed to be radical in its criminology but combined this with a commitment to offer effective solutions to the crime problem. Rather than seeking to challenge the state, criminologists on the political left now sought to work with
the state as part of an attempt to take crime seriously. We make no attempt to reflect on the current state of criminological theory here or to debate its future. Reviewing the final chapters of the many available texts on criminological theory will provide divergent views on this topic. Suffice to say here that contemporary criminology is characterized by multiple perspectives, and some might describe it as ‘fragmented’ (Ericson and Carriere, 1994). Supporters of these different perspectives vary in terms of how explicitly political their views on crime are. They also differ in the type of research strategies they generate, hence look to different sources of funding. We develop this issue below.

**Pipers and paymasters: shaping criminological research**

The key question which preoccupies us in this section of the chapter is whether he (or she) who pays the piper calls the tune? Before attempting to answer this question we need to consider the available ‘pipers’ or criminological researchers and potential ‘paymasters’.

Researchers working in any of the following organizations may conduct criminological research:

- higher education institutions;
- central government departments, sometimes in dedicated research units;
- criminal justice organizations, particularly large police forces and probation areas;
- private sector research organizations, for example, National Centre for Social Research; and
- voluntary sector organizations, for example National Association for Care and Resettlement of Offenders.

Criminological research may also be carried out by practitioners working in the criminal justice sphere. Reiner (2000a: 220) terms this group ‘inside insiders’. Research may be done as part of a postgraduate degree or as part of a programme of work. Criminal justice professionals are also eligible to apply for a small number of awards including the Cropwood programme of short-term fellowship awards (based at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge) and the Police Research Award Scheme (funded by the Home Office). The growth of practitioner research is not peculiar to criminology, and there is a growing literature on the subject (see for example, Fuller and Petch, 1995; Robson, 2001).

There are multiple sources of funding available to criminological researchers. The organization which employs the researcher will determine the sources of funding they are eligible to compete for, and consequently the type of research that they can undertake. The main types of funders are listed in Table 2.1 below.
It might be helpful for readers to be familiar with the diverse sources of funding we have received to conduct criminological research. We have obtained grants, either together or separately, from the Home Office (see Chapter 9 for more information on a Home Office funded project), Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions the National Assembly for Wales, the Nuffield Foundation, Drugscope, and a drug action team. We have also been employed as researchers on projects funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and a local council. The CVs of many criminologists will also have an eclectic mix of funding sources (see for example, Morgan, 2000). We elaborate on the main types of funding for criminological research below, focusing on their research priorities and the procedures for obtaining research funding.

### Government funding

A major source of government funding for criminological research is the Home Office. The Home Office funds research in different ways. It has a dedicated research unit, the Home Office Research Development and Statistics directorate (HORDS) but also issues contracts to external research organizations. HORDS has appeared in different guises but dates back to 1956. It has always been a major locus of criminological research but has not always enjoyed an easy relationship with politicians. The Conservative governments of 1979–90 were deeply phobic about criminological research. Michael Howard carefully scrutinized research during his term as Home Secretary (1993–97) and his junior minister (David Maclean) went as far as proposing closure of the research section of the Home Office. Even before that date Home Office research was shifting towards an ‘administrative criminology’ agenda. This term, coined by Jock Young in the 1980s, refers to criminological research which abandons the search for the causes of crime and focuses its efforts on strategies and policies to prevent and deter crime. The inclusion of the word ‘planning’ to create the Home Office Research and Planning Unit (HORPU) in 1981...
was more than symbolic. As Maguire (2000) notes, the Home Office moved towards a position where funding decisions were almost exclusively driven by narrow short-term policy concerns, and where the research questions, methods and timescale were ever more tightly established in advance by civil servants. This has the effect of losing sight of the broader academic debates, and runs the risk of neglecting more fruitful and innovative ideas. Increased Home Office control over the research agenda has been described as the inevitable corollary of the party politicization of law and order (Morgan, 2000).

When the Labour government came to power in 1997 they seemed committed to the information economy and were willing to invest substantial sums of money to develop it. In April 1999, the Crime Reduction Programme was launched. It ran for three years, with an overall budget of £250 million (£25 million of this was dedicated to research). The programme comprised a series of diverse initiatives, dealing with a wide range of offences and every aspect of the criminal justice process. The aim of the programme was to establish what works in reducing crime as part of a commitment to evidence-based policy and practice. As a result, funding was made available for independent evaluation, always leading to the collection of quantitative data. Described by Morgan (2000: 61) as 'the largest programme of criminological research ever undertaken in the United Kingdom', criminological researchers were divided in their response to the increased funding. Some sought to avoid involvement, suggesting that the work was theoretically impoverished and too closely allied to the interests of the state. Others welcomed the opportunity to have some degree of involvement with the development of crime policy but were streetwise enough to recognize the political nature of the work. No doubt others were more pragmatic and opportunistic, unable to resist the large sums of money on offer.

Research opportunities under the Crime Reduction Programme were only offered in response to invitation to tender. The majority of Home Office funding is allocated in this way, and concerns about the process have been aired elsewhere (Crace and Plomin, 2001; Morgan, 2000). Sometimes tenders are issued to a shortlist of applicants who have been requested previously to submit an expression of interest. Typically researchers are sent a detailed document which is fairly prescriptive about the work to be undertaken. There are exceptions to this, and one example is described in Chapter 9. A further example is the Innovative Research Challenge Programme. This takes the form of an open competition, and its aims are described in the HORDS business plan 2001–02 as to enhance ‘contact with the wider research community and building on its contribution to Home Office aims, but also to ensure that RDS research retains a long-term focus’ (emphasis in original).

As other criminologists have noted, policy-oriented research can be innovative and intellectually challenging (Maguire, 2000). It is possible to produce both a concise report devoted to answering the research questions asked by the funder, and to use the knowledge required to produce publications for an academic audience. For instance, a research study we were both involved in on
the risk management of sex offenders led to a Home Office report (Maguire, et al., 2001) and the findings also informed a journal article on risk penalty (Kemshall and Maguire, 2000). A colleague once used the metaphor of a ‘Trojan horse’ to describe Home Office contracts, implying that more academically interesting questions can be asked at the same time as conducting government research but researchers often feel they need to be secretive about it.

Research council funding

Criminological research comes largely under the remit of Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The ESRC was established in 1965 by Royal Charter as an independent organization. However, its £92 million budget (for 2003–04) for both research and postgraduate training comes mainly from the Government. In the 1990s, thematic priorities were developed in order to focus research on scientific priorities. There are seven in total, and criminological research can be related to all of them. However, the two most important thematic priorities in relation to criminological research are ‘Governance and Citizenship’ and ‘Social Stability and Exclusion’. They provide a focus for some, but not all, ESRC research activities. These include provision of funds for centres, programmes and grants. Since 1990, two programmes have been directly related to crime (‘Violence’ 1997–2002) and ‘Crime and Social Order’ (1993–97). In addition, funding has been made available for two research networks on pathways into and out of crime (one running from 2001–05 and the other from 2002–07). Although the ESRC is widely regarded by the criminological community as the most prestigious source of funding, its strategies for allocating funds have been contested. The ESRC make explicit their commitment to funding ‘blue-skies’ or curiosity-driven research alongside applied and strategic research. However, the incorporation of users’ needs into various aspects of the research process has caused concern. The oft-perceived shift to only funding applied research and the subsequent loss of rigour are the most common causes of disquiet (Rappert, 1997). Users in this context include industry, charities, universities, local authorities and other public bodies, government departments and independent policy bodies. Users are involved in a wide range of practices including setting thematic priorities for funding, evaluating research and shaping programmes.

Charitable foundations

There are a number of charitable foundations that are willing to fund criminological research, although none of them have crime as their exclusive focus. In the UK, the major players are the Leverhulme Trust (dating back to 1933), the Nuffield Foundation (founded in 1943) and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (which has funded research from 1959). The Leverhulme Trust has an annual budget of £25 million, and places emphasis on allowing applicants to choose the topic
they wish to research. This form of responsive support is open to researchers from all disciplines. In contrast, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation focuses solely on social policy research, and the £7 million budget funds both ongoing and time-limited research programmes. The Nuffield Foundation runs 14 different grant programmes including an ‘open door’ one, and gave out £6.4 million in the form of research grants in 2002. While the programmes run by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Nuffield Foundation do not concentrate solely on aspects of crime and criminal justice, they do offer opportunities for research in areas of interest to criminologists including programmes, for example the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Drug and Alcohol Research Programme and the Nuffield Foundation’s programmes on child protection and access to justice.

*Does who pays the piper call the tune?*

Having described the various sources of funding available to criminological researchers, we will now attempt to answer the question above. Research agendas are created by funders who have their own preferences for both the research topics and research approaches they wish to support. This applies to all three major sources of funding outlined above. The research programmes which emerge are the end product of a series of interactions between groups. For government departments such as the Home Office, the key players are ministers, civil servants and HORSD. For research councils such as the ESRC, research priorities and programmes are developed by Council, which includes representatives from academia, business and the public sector. For charitable bodies, the trustees are influential in determining the research they are able to fund. All these players will have to work within the parameters of their organization’s role, and in the case of charitable trusts the original wishes of the benefactor.

The extent to which funding bodies influence the actual conduct of research varies considerably. Those who enter in a ‘customer-contract’ relationship with the Home Office experience the greatest level of interest. This can take many forms including the submission of regular progress report (linked to payments) and steering group meetings. Critics might interpret them as compromising the independent nature of the research that has been commissioned. A more balanced view is to recognize the need to be cautious when public money is being invested in research, and to appreciate the support that can be offered, even if the level of involvement feels intrusive at times. Other funding bodies may not operate in the same way but do not give researchers a free rein. They may, for instance, require changes to be made to the research design and to be notified if the research differs from that laid out in the proposal. Even those university researchers whose research is unfunded are not free from the political agendas of government. The context in which they work is highly significant. Since 1989 a research assessment exercise has taken place periodically. The stated purpose of this exercise ‘is to enable the higher education funding
bodies to distribute public funds for research selectively on the basis of quality’ (www.hero.ac.uk), and one of the criteria on which decisions are made is the amount of external research funding received.

We return to the debate about the ways in which conducting funded research, especially for the state, impinges upon academic autonomy when we discuss the politics of publication and dissemination.

The politics of postgraduate research: a brief note

The discussion above may seem removed from readers who are postgraduate research students. Postgraduate students, if they have any funding at all, are likely to be in receipt of studentships from their own academic institution or from the ESRC. Postgraduate students still need to work within the broad parameters of ESRC funding but these researchers are likely to enjoy academic freedom to a far greater extent than their supervisors. This may only be appreciated after the event.

One of us (Smith and Wincup, 2000) has explored elsewhere how the political context can still be important for postgraduate researchers. Reflecting on doctoral research on prisons and bail hostels for women at a time of increasingly punitive responses to offenders, we made the following comment.

Although not financially sponsored by the state (both of us were awarded university studentships), our research was inevitably influenced by … [the] political context in various ways. Explicitly, we were dependent upon the state for access to the criminal justice agencies we wanted to research. Implicitly, the political context impacted upon our relationships in ‘the field’. We had to tread carefully. (2000: 355)

In the same chapter we explored the politics of conducting postgraduate research. We drew attention to the relatively powerless position that postgraduates occupy within academic institutions even though they count considerably towards the rating their department receives in the Research Assessment Exercise. Retaining their academic freedom is one of the challenges postgraduates face. This became apparent at a session one of us (Wincup) ran on ‘managing your supervisor’ at the 2002 British Society of Criminology Conference. It was rather dispiriting, although not unexpected, to hear students suggesting that their supervisor had ‘written’ their thesis for them by driving the research in a direction most suited to their theoretical concerns.

The micro-politics of criminological research: taking sides, trying to please everyone and other strategies

In the above discussion we drew attention to the impact on the political context on field relations. As Downes and Morgan (1994) argue, the micro-politics of
law and order are articulated in a wide range of settings in both the public and private sphere through the generation of talk about crime and how best to solve it. This influences research but also provides data for analysis. We focus here on the settings in which criminologists conduct research, and in particular explore whether it is possible to be neutral at the data collection stage.

Howard Becker’s 1967 essay entitled *Whose side are you on?* continues to offer a major contribution to the debate. Described by Delamont (2002: 149) as a ‘manifesto on values and methods’, his starting point is that neutrality is a myth shattered by the reality that personal and political sympathies inform research. This does not mean that the goal of research is the pursuit of political goals, although as we noted earlier in this chapter some researchers might argue that it is. Instead, it challenges the aim of positivists and naturalists to strive as far as possible to limit the influences of values on the research process. Qualitative research has little in common with positivist principles but qualitative researchers have been proponents of naturalism. This perspective attempts to study the social world in its ‘natural state’, undisturbed by the researcher, and offer a detailed description of some aspect of social life (‘to tell it how it is’). This perspective has been subjected to criticism by qualitative researchers (see Chapter 6).

The focus of Becker’s essay was on research with deviant groups, chosen because researchers who focus on this group frequently have to answer to the charge that siding with deviant groups leads to distortion and bias. Becker suggests that a ‘hierarchy of credibility’ (1967: 241) operates in deviancy research (and in other areas such as education), and credibility and the right to be heard are distributed differentially throughout the hierarchy. Researchers interested in deviant groups concentrate on those whose voices are normally unheard, and hence challenge what Becker (1967: 243) terms the ‘established status order’. According to Becker, accusations of bias are levelled only at researchers who focus on deviants rather than those concerned with criminal justice professionals. For Becker, researchers always have to take sides, and their challenge is to ensure that unavoidable sympathies with our research participants do not render our work invalid.

Becker’s essay received criticism shortly after it was published by Gouldner (1975) who insisted that value-neutrality was possible and desirable. Remarkably, over 35 years after its publication, Becker’s essay continues to be revisited by social researchers (see Delamont (2002) and Liebling (2001) for recent examples). In her article on prisons research, Liebling argues that ‘it is possible to take more than one side seriously, to find merit in more than one perspective, and to do this without causing outrage on the side of officials or prisoners (2001: 473; emphasis in original). She does note, however, that this is a precarious business and risks encountering the wrath of criminologists who are sceptical of any attempt to understand officialdom. For Liebling, taking more than one side seriously does not lead to impartiality, and is therefore not a form of closet positivism. Instead, attempts to synthesize different or competing perspectives
within the prison world at the analysis stage help to sharpen our focus, and consequently this is a valuable analytic task.

For many criminological researchers, regardless of whether they adopt Becker’s position, they find themselves in the precarious position of trying to keep everyone happy. This is particularly true for those conducting research within criminal justice agencies who have to strive to avoid alienating opposing groups. For example, Carter’s (1994) study of the occupational socialization of prison officers involved forging positive relationships with staff and prisoners within the organizational hierarchy. The groups have the potential to be mutually antagonistic, leading him to describe the research process as a ‘nerve-racking experience and a difficult road to walk for the researcher’ (1994: 34). For Carter, the researcher has to be seen to be everyone’s friend, attempting to understand their different points of view and appearing not to favour any one group or individual.

The politics of publication and dissemination: confidentiality, censorship and controversy

There are numerous ways in which criminologists can publish their findings. Journal articles, research monographs, book chapters and research reports continue to have the greatest kudos in academic circles. The demands of the Research Assessment Exercise in the UK have placed particular importance on the production of peer-reviewed articles. There are, of course, other opportunities to publish work. Potential outlets include practitioner journals (for example, *Prison Service Journal*), professional magazines (for example, *Police Review*, *The Magistrate*), newspapers (particularly broadsheets), political magazines (for example, *New Statesman and Society*), and journals produced by voluntary sector organizations (for example, *Criminal Justice Matters*). Technological developments have increased opportunities further, and it is now possible to find criminological research reported on websites and in electronic journals. Academic criminologists have yet to experiment with theatrical scripts as a means of conveying their research findings. They have been employed by other qualitative researchers (Mienczakowski, 2001), and this reminds us that dissemination does not have to be confined to the written word.

Submission of a research report of some kind is a requirement of all funders of criminological research. What happens next varies but all require a final report, which may be sent to academics with specialist expertise in the area to review. This happens for Home Office funded research, and the draft is also scrutinized by HORDS researchers and by policy-makers in different areas of the Home Office and in other government departments. Researchers are then asked to respond to the comments, and sometimes this process is repeated. It would be unfair to suggest that this practice is unhelpful. Receiving constructive comments on a draft often leads to a more polished report, even if
the feedback is a little painful to read at first. Similarly, observations from policy-makers can produce a more user-friendly, policy-relevant publication. However, the whole process can also be frustrating, not least because it can lead to immoderate delays. It can also produce contradictory feedback and suggested changes to the research design, which are of little use once the data have been collected. Until the final report has been accepted, researchers working on Home Office projects need to ask permission to publish findings. A ‘publish and be damned’ attitude is unwise if researchers seek to receive future government funding, not least because researchers are expressively forbidden in their legal contracts to make public any findings prior to the publication of the final report without permission.

At the extreme, state funded research may be subjected to censorship. Drawing on his considerable experience as a Home Office researcher (now working in a university), Mair (2000) reveals that he felt his work was never subjected to censorship. Anticipating his critics, he is keen to defend himself against the charge that his work was self-censored through gradual acceptance of repressive practices. However, he does concede that he felt under indirect pressure to produce the ‘right’ results from his study of electronic monitoring. This illustrates that political pressures may not be explicit but form part of the social milieu in which the researcher works. There are, however, some examples of censorship. We present two examples here, which might be described as infamous.

The first is Baldwin and McConville’s Home Office funded study on the outcome of jury trials in Birmingham Crown Court. This was conducted in the mid-1970s. Drawing on the data gathered from over 100 interviews with defendants, they found repeated evidence of plea-bargaining. Since little had been written on the topic in the UK, the researchers hoped to publish a book in the area. The reaction to the findings has been presented in-depth elsewhere (Baldwin, 2000), and we will summarize it here. A confidential draft of the report was leaked to the media. The controversy caused led the Senate of the Bar to contact the Home Secretary urging him to discourage publication. The university put in place an inquiry after being warned by the Home Secretary about possible implications should the book be published. The book was eventually published in 1977. The same year, Cohen and Taylor published an account of their attempts to publish research on long-term imprisonment, going as far as to suggest that their research was ‘sabotaged’ (1977: 68) by the Home Office. The study employed qualitative methodology, an approach for which they receive a great deal of critical comment, and focused on how prisoners talked about their experiences of coping with lengthy custodial sentences. Despite their protests that the study was ‘not particularly radical’ (1977: 85) and constituted an important piece of independent sociological inquiry, they found themselves ‘trapped in a complex web of social and political restrictions’ (1977: 76). They note that official bodies such as the Home Office are able to exercise a
high degree of control of research through five forces which they term as the ‘centralization of power’, ‘legalisation of secrecy’, ‘standardization of research’, ‘mystifying the decision structure’ and ‘appealing to the public interest’ (1977: 77). Ultimately these forces led to the decision to abandon the research rather than collude with the Home Office agenda.

Even if research is not funded by the state, publishing research findings can have political consequences. Whyte (2000) notes that presenting a paper on the findings of his critical criminological research on the oil industry to an industrial audience led to an abrupt end to his access to the Health and Safety Executive Offshore Safety Division. Hoyle (2000) shares her experience of publishing a book based on her PhD on policing domestic violence. She experienced extensive media publicity because of her unwillingness to support right-wing feminist calls for blanket arrest and prosecution policies and custodial sentences for all convicted abusers. For Hoyle, the criticisms (described as politically driven denunciation) stemmed from her failure to support political orthodoxy on domestic violence.

Making use of criminological research: understanding the linkages between criminological research and crime policy

The relationship between research and policy had been subjected to ongoing academic debate by social scientists (see Hammersley, 1995 for an overview), often leading to the establishment of typologies of the different forms the relationship can take. We concern ourselves here specifically with criminological research and crime policy, which leads us to the depressing conclusion that criminological research has little direct, immediate impact on crime control policy or practice. Of course research need not always have a direct recompense in this way. Travers (2001: 13) argues that research might be done ‘entirely for its own sake!’. In contrast, King (2000) implies that it is not sufficient for research to attempt to address challenging intellectual questions. Instead, researchers should aim to have at least some modest impact on society. This may not be immediate. As Hughes (2000) notes, research may have a long-term influence on both the policy and political process. Criminological research over time has the potential to challenge political discourses on law and order through generating debate. One study alone is unlikely to change policy but a coherent and cumulative body of knowledge on a criminological issue might have an impact. This body of knowledge might consist of what has been termed ‘basic’ (concerned with producing theory) and ‘applied’ research (Janowitz, 1972).

Criminologists are understandably impatient. There are plentiful examples of missed opportunities to influence policy, and criminologists must accept some of the blame for this. In a paper on young adult offenders and alcohol, Parker
(1996) argues that British criminologists are ill-equipped to respond to, or moderate the power of, the law and order discourse. For Parker, the dominant law and order discourse is ‘alcohol plus young men equals violent crime’. British criminologists have largely retreated from qualitative, ethnographic community-based studies of subculture and deviant lifestyles (a point developed further in Chapter 6). Hence, there is a lack of authoritative explanations available to challenge the simplistic, blaming style of political discourse. There are also copious instances of developing policies which run counter to research findings. Frequently cited in this respect is the insistence by Michael Howard, when he was Home Secretary in 1993, that ‘prison works’ despite the wealth of research findings which suggested the contrary. This was his rationalization for pursuing a highly punitive approach to offending (Cavadino and Dignan, 2002).

As we write this chapter the debate about the relationship between research and policy has received political attention. The National Audit Office (NAO) published a report in April 2003 suggesting that the gulf between academics and policy-makers means that much of the £1.4 billion the government spends on research each year is wasted. To be clear, the report entitled Getting the Evidence: Using Research in Policy-Making focused on research commissioned by the Department of International Development, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. University academics are the most common recipients of these research contracts. Only a minority of these research budgets are likely to be concerned with areas of criminological interest. Nonetheless, it is worth considering their findings in more detail because the issues raised are likely to resonate with criminological researchers and policy-makers concerned with crime and criminal justice. Indeed similar arguments are advanced by Mair (2000). Some of the difficulties raised are practical ones, and included poor understanding of research results by policy-makers, inadequate communication of the research results by researchers, and too little being done to propagate findings. These can be resolved by developing research training courses for policy-makers, furthering the report writing skills of researchers, and enhanced dissemination activities. The latter requires increased funding, exploration of more imaginative forms of dissemination to reach the widest audience possible, and clarification of whether the researcher or the funder is responsible for disseminating research findings. Bridging the gap between academics and policy-makers is more challenging. The NAO reported that the grasp of policy questions by researchers was inadequate but are careful to avoid blaming researchers. They note that those commissioning the research are not always clear about what their needs are. The solution of NAO is to involve users throughout the research process, a model already adopted by the ESRC.
Concluding comments

In this chapter we hope we have demonstrated the different ways in which criminological research can be perceived as political. The nature and extent of political influences will vary from project to project, and are dependent on a wide range of factors including the subject matter, the theoretical framework adopted, funding arrangements and the timing of the research. How one defines the term ‘political’ is crucial and we have opened up this debate for readers to explore further. We adopted an inclusive and catholic definition. Like Hughes (2000: 235) we argued that ‘criminological research does not take place in a political and moral vacuum but is a deeply political process’ (emphasis in original). We also supported Hughes’ view that criminological research can never be anything but political.

We need to be wary of the talk of the end of politics and the rise of non-political technical fixes for research. Such talk is likely to usher in very restrictive research agendas for criminology. Furthermore, it is impossible to envisage a time when criminological research will not generate ... political controversies. (2000: 247)

We are keen proponents of reflexivity, and therefore feel it is important to be aware of the ways in which the political context shapes our research. While this will add incalculable value to our understanding of the development of knowledge, criminologists often seem reluctant to do this, perhaps fearing that it will detract from the credibility of their findings.

Exercises

1. Select a criminological research topic. This may be an area where you are currently conducting research or plan to do so in the future. Consider the political influences that might shape the data collection process.
2. Extend your thinking to cover the process of disseminating your findings to a wide audience. You should think here about the different ways this can be achieved.
3. Look at a recent example of criminological research which has received funding from the government. You will find plentiful examples of research on England and Wales on the Home Office website (www.homeoffice.gov.uk). What impact do you think the source of funding had on the research?
4. Repeat the above but focus on research which has been funded by either a research council or a charitable body.
There is a growing literature on the politics of social research but Martyn Hammersley’s (1995) text entitled *The Politics of Social Research* still provides the best overview of the debate about whether social research is, or indeed should be, political.

Specifically on the politics of criminological research, the following are recommended.


The former takes the reader through the different stages of the criminological research process, exploring the implications of researching a political world at every stage. The latter muses on the development of the criminological enterprise and the infrastructure of criminological research. Both authors argue that all criminological research is conducted within a political context, which exerts some influence on the research. To understand fully the political context to which they refer, readers are strongly advised to read the series of essays by Downes and Morgan on the politics of law and order from 1945 to 2002.


Useful websites

Home Office  
Youth Justice Board  
Lord Chancellor’s Department  
Economic and Social Research Council  
Joseph Rowntree Foundation  
Nuffield Foundation  
Leverhulme Trust  

www.homeoffice.gov.uk  
www.yjb.gov.uk  
www.lcd.gov.uk  
www.esrc.ac.uk  
www.jrf.org.uk  
www.nuffieldfoundation.org.uk  
www.leverhulme.org.uk