

British Society of Criminology Outstanding Achievement Award 2014

Acceptance Speech

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Colleagues, family, friends, and especially Barry: thank you. It is indeed a great honour to receive this award from the society and from you Barry, a more recent colleague for me, but a highly valued one.

I am particularly astonished to be recognised in this way, if for no other reason that when I got my first academic post, in 1974 ‘down the road’ at the, then, Liverpool Polytechnic, I was informed that there was only space for one criminologist in the department of social studies as it was at that time and I wasn’t to think that it might ever be me. As I look around this room and reflect upon the 400 delegates registered for this event and the 7-800 who now attend the European Society of Criminology conference, I am reminded of how things have changed.

I started my career being interested in social control. I was part of the first cohort of sociologists to graduate from Lancaster University and had the joy of being taught deviance and social control by Max Atkinson. From that point I was hooked! Being fortunate enough to be one of those working class girls to have benefitted from the loosening of the quotas on 11+ passes (something I only learned about much later) and thus went on to grammar school, I was equally fortunate to have parents who resisted the extended family pressure to send me out to work at 16 rather than let me stay on at school. That school had as its motto ‘I serve’ and I suspect those values have become ingrained in me and others who attended it in ways that cannot really be articulated. However having secured a job in 1974, grander career ambitions never crossed my mind. Polytechnics were about teaching, and that’s what I aspired to be, a good teacher. However the demands of HE, even in the polytechnics were changing and by the late 70s early 80s ‘being engaged’ above and beyond teaching was increasingly expected. Consequently my aspirations changed too.

In 1983 George Murphy, a senior probation officer on Merseyside, opened up the world of Victim Support to me, and I was presented with a relatively under-explored and under researched arena, at least in UK terms, from which I have continued to benefit. I worked with and for Victim Support for over a decade: a time I look back on with great fondness not only because of the people I met but the intellectual challenge that they, and their experiences, posed for academic discourse. It was a discourse that was well debated back in the office. During this time I had the privilege to share an office with Joe Sim, and along with Pete Gill, and others we developed one of the first UG criminology/criminal justice programmes in England and Wales, launched in 1988, I think, along with one of the first modules in victimology. The rest, as they say is history.

Making that history is never solely a personal story. A career is never a product of an individual or individualised project. It requires collective engagement and I have been very fortunate to have worked with not only Joe, but Tony Jefferson, Ian Taylor, Pat Carlen, Rob Mawby and my partner Ron Wardale. Now that I am ‘up the road’ rather than ‘down the road’ it has been, and continues to be a great pleasure working with colleagues here in the department of sociology, social policy and criminology. In particular those colleagues with whom I have also worked elsewhere: Susan Pickard and Karen Evans (Salford); Lynn Hancock and Barry Godfrey (Keele); and Dave Whyte, Nicole Vitellone (MMU). Ross McGarry, Gabe Mythen are central to my current work for

whom there are always 'three papers in this'. Gabe and I have been writing together for 10 years now and that has been not only a productive but a special intellectual relationship. Gabe, thank you.

As some of you will know I took up the role of Editor in Chief of the BJC in January of this year. In that capacity, and in being involved in organising this conference, I am struck by the vitality, variety, and increasingly global pre-occupations of the discipline. I am also struck by, what Rock (2013) has recently referred to as, 'the processes of chronocentrism' present in the discipline: the new displacing the old. This in and of itself is no bad thing but what is perturbing in these processes is the 'forgetting' that seems to accompany it. Laub (2004) remarked in his Presidential Address to the ASC in 2004, that 'developments in our field are constantly offered in an environment characterised by a collective amnesia'. Of course around some issues the word amnesia is not appropriate since some things never appear to have been learned at all. As Nicole Rafter was to comment in her Sutherland address in 2009, the extent to which many criminological (and other) colleagues do not understand the difference between sex and gender, and indeed they along with practitioners, politicians and so on, use one term as though one is interchangeable with the other, is quite frankly remarkable. This is more than amnesia.

But to return to the problem of amnesia for a moment, this practice of collective forgetting raises important questions at a time when the discipline in the UK has a greater presence than when I became an academic but simultaneously, and arguably, has much less influence. I example contemporary debates on policing as just one arena in which the generation of sound, provocative, thoughtful, evidenced, robust work was produced on police accountability during the 1980s, the import of which appears to have been lost not only by politicians, and those commissioning research but also by a good proportions of those researching these issues. I can think of other examples in which the phenomenon of 'newness' seems to be prevalent, but given the strong presence of papers on policing in this conference, I suspect that is provocation enough and this is not the place to engage in a deep analysis as to how and why this has happened. I am sure we all have our views on that. Nonetheless this Alzheimic tendency needs some attention since without attending to this problem, the discipline may run the risk of becoming increasingly marginalised from the publics with whom it is concerned. Some of this, is in my view, the result of what Jock Young (2011) has referred to as the rising spectre of the 'bogus of positivism'. However if I may be permitted to put this problem another way, there is a danger of disciplinary 'stuckness'. Pirsig in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* published in 1976, has this to say in talking about 'stuckness':

Traditional scientific method has always been at the very best 20-20 hindsight. It's good for seeing where you've been, but it can't tell you where you ought to go, unless where you ought to go is a continuation of where you were going in the past. Creativity, originality, inventiveness, intuition, imagination - 'unstuckness' in other words - are completely outside of its domain.

We need more 'unstuckness' and one way of facilitating that might be not only to reflect upon Maureen Cain's insightful observations on Occidentalism but also by remembering the past.

By way of an ending, in a congratulatory email to me a few weeks ago, Mike Levi said to me, 'take it as a celebration of unfinished distinctions, not as their terminus'. And that's what I fully intend to do. This outstanding achievement award is a collective one for colleagues, for my children, and for my partner.

Enjoy your conference. Thank you.