



Who is 'the public' when we talk about crime?

Interpreting and framing public voices in criminology

The value and role of the 'public' in criminology and criminal justice have been constructed and reconstructed over the decades, experiencing a number of discursive shifts across different subdisciplines in criminology.

In this forthcoming publication, Anna Matczak argues that narratives about public voices change according to the context in which they are told. Depending on the researcher's vantage point and inclination, it appears that the voice and role of the public in criminology tends to be narrated either as a 'malevolent public', which speaks for an unspecified entity of people who are most of the time misinformed, punitive and in need of expeditious education, or a 'benevolent public', representing a more inclusive, but also romanticised, vision of citizens in the public sphere.

In her chapter, examples of various perspectives on the role and value of lay people in criminology are discussed to demonstrate how these narratives are interpreted and framed to align with the pre-conceived perception of either the 'benevolent' or the 'malevolent' public agenda.

This development, as well as the dominant application of quantitative methodologies to research public attitudes, has silenced the magnitude of different and sometimes elusive communities, whose access to the public sphere and media representation is limited.

Thus, there is a need not only to shift away from the dichotomous division between liberal vs. punitive public views, but also to address the heterogeneity of people's views and roles vertically (individual, collective), horizontally (in different networks/publics/target groups).

Moreover, the publics as we knew them some decades ago, when the most frequently cited attitudinal research was conducted, are now different publics that function in both the online and offline public spheres simultaneously – the impact of which is yet to be captured in criminology.

The chapter will be published by Routledge in a book 'Marginalised Voices in Criminology' (edited by Kelly Stockdale and Michelle Addison) and available from January 2024.

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