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TOWARD A RURAL CRITICAL CRIMINOLOGY*

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ABSTRACT

A review of the extant literature reveals a recent growth in critical criminological analyses of rural crime and societal reactions to it. Nevertheless, rural critical criminology is still in a state of infancy and requires much more development. Thus, heavily influenced by Taylor, Walton, and Young's (1973) path-breaking book *The New Criminology* and by research on woman abuse in rural communities, the main objective of this article, then, is twofold: (1) to describe the key reasons for a more fully developed rural critical criminology and (2) to outline some of its key elements. Also included in this article is a brief history of rural criminology and a discussion of ways that a critical approach to the study of rural crime can be applied to both policy and practice.

As British critical criminologists Paul Walton and Jock Young (1998: vii) remind us in their preface to *The New Criminology Revisited*:

> Radical criminology…has since proliferated, developed and flourished. The various currents that form its past, whether Marxist, radical feminist or anarchist, continue in fierce dispute but have in common the notion that crime and the present day processes of criminalization are rooted in the core structures of society, whether it is class nature, its patriarchal form or its inherent authoritarianism.

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Also called either the new criminology or radical criminology (Platt 1975; Lynch, Michalowski, and Groves 2000; Taylor, Walton, and Young 1973, 1975), critical criminology has existed since the early 1970s (DeKeseredy and Perry 2006). Although various definitions of this term have been proposed,[1] for this article, however, critical criminology is an interdisciplinary perspective that views as major sources of crime the class, ethnic, and patriarchal relations that control our society. Further, critical criminology rejects as total solutions to crime short-term measures such as tougher laws, increased incarceration, coercive counseling therapy, and the like. Rather, critical criminologists regard major structural and cultural changes within society as essential steps to reduce criminality and to promote social justice.[2]

Just because critical criminologists call for major political, economic, social, and cultural transformations does not mean that they disregard criminal justice reform, an issue that is of central concern to conservative scholars. Indeed, every society requires a combination of formal and informal processes of social control (DeKeseredy and Perry 2006). Even so, the types of criminal justice reforms called for by critical criminologists do not include harsher punishment or draconian means of psychological treatment (e.g., shock therapy). For example, British left realists[3] Lea and Young (1984) and Kinsey, Lea, and Young (1986) call for democratic control of policing, "minimal policing,"[4] and "preemptive deterrence."[5]

Beyond proposing criminal justice reforms, critical criminologists call for what Harvard University sociologist William Julius Wilson (1996) refers to as short-term policies that reflect a broader vision. This involves developing strategies that

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[1]See Lynch et al. (2000); Schwartz and Hatty (2003), and Thomas and O'Maolchatha (1989) for various definitions of critical criminology.

[2]This is a modified version of Young's (1988) definition of radical criminology.

[3]Although there are variations in left realist theory, all versions start with the assertion that inner-city violence is a major problem for socially and economically disenfranchised people, regardless of their sex or ethnic/cultural background (DeKeseredy 2003).

[4]The principles of minimal policing are maximum initiation of police actions, minimum necessary coercion by the police, minimal police intervention, and maximum public access to the police.

[5]This involves working in a neighborhood to try to prevent crime from happening, rather than coming in with a massive police presence after the fact.

target the key social, cultural, and economic forces that propel people into crime, such as patriarchal practices and discourses, poverty, and unemployment (DeKeseredy and Perry 2006). For example, guided by solutions advanced by U.S. left realists Currie (1985, 1993), Messerschmidt (1986), Michalowski (1983), and Wilson (1996), DeKeseredy et al. (2003) call for the following strategies to help curb interpersonal violence in Canadian public housing:[6]

- A higher minimum wage.
- Job rationing.
- Meaningful jobs.
- State-sponsored, affordable, and quality daycare.
- Housing subsidy and refurbishment programs.
- Public transportation.

Readers unfamiliar with the extant literature on critical criminology may assume that, like most other theoretical perspectives on crime, this progressive school of thought only focuses on the plight of poor people in urban centers of concentrated disadvantage and the ways in which they are treated by agents of social control. This is definitely not so, given that feminists are a subgroup of critical criminologists who do much to address the plight of battered and sexually assaulted women in a variety of social settings and intimate relationships (DeKeseredy, Ellis, and Alvi 2005). Moreover, in response to middle-class juvenile troubles spawned by the role of modern social Darwinist culture in the U.S., left realist Currie (2004) suggests progressive ways of developing a "culture of support," such as inclusive schools and offering troubled teenagers welcoming places to go when they leave or are thrown out of neglectful or punitive homes. Nevertheless, since its birth in the early 1970s, rural crime and its control has ranked among the least studied social problems in critical criminology (DeKeseredy et al. 2007). Of course, the neglect of rural can just as easily be said about criminology overall throughout the twentieth century (Donnermeyer 2007a, 2007b; Donnermeyer, Jobes, and Barclay 2006).

[6]Of course, critical criminologists are not the only ones who call for such strategies. Certainly, some initiatives informed by the work of strain theorists such as Merton (1938) and Cloward and Ohlin (1960) are also designed to maximize people's educational and job opportunities.

Today, we are witnessing a growth in critical criminological analyses of rural crime and societal reactions to it, such as the work of Hogg and Carrington (2006) in Australia and DeKeseredy et al.'s (2007) rural masculinity crisis/male peer support model of separation/divorce sexual assault in the United States. Judith Grant's (2008) feminist analysis of Appalachian women's pathways from addiction to recovery is another important contribution to the field. Nevertheless, rural critical criminology is still in a state of infancy and requires much more development. Thus, heavily influenced by Taylor et al.'s (1973) path-breaking book *The New Criminology* and by research on "gendered violence and the architecture of rural life" (Hogg and Carrington 2006:171), the main objective of this article, then, is twofold: (1) to describe the key reasons for a more fully developed "new" or critical criminology and (2) to outline some of its key elements. First, however, describing the history of rural criminology briefly is necessary.

SELECTED EVENTS IN THE HISTORY OF RURAL CRIMINOLOGY

The journal, *Rural Sociology*, began in 1936 under the sponsorship of the newly formed Rural Sociological Society. The Society itself came about in part because the founders were not satisfied with the space on the annual program of what was then called the American Sociological Society. By the third issue of the second volume in 1937, the first article on rural crime appeared. Written by Mapheus Smith, an associate professor of Sociology at Kansas State University, this article attempted to understand official rates of delinquency by the proximity of rural counties to places with larger populations. Nearly absent were references to the work of other scholars, except a short set of citations all contained in a footnote on the article's first page. In it, Smith (1937) does cite the *Criminology* textbook of Edwin Sutherland (1934). After a rather thorough analysis of the data, Smith concluded that distance does make a difference, with delinquency rates increasing by proximity to larger places.

Two years later, in the first issue of volume 4 of *Rural Sociology*, Marshall Jones (1939), an Associate Professor of Economics and Sociology at Tusculum College in eastern Tennessee, examined patterns of crime known to the state police in western Massachusetts, which was both rural and "had a very bad reputation for crime" (p. 139). As was the style for so many articles in *Rural Sociology* back then, Marshall Jones use of references was austere, although he does manage to cite the Sorokin and Zimmerman (1929) work on *Principles of Rural-Urban Sociology*. Jones (1939) concluded that most of the crime known to the state police was committed by

transients and outsiders, and by inference giving a reprieve to the long-term residents of western, rural Massachusetts.

In 1942 and again in 1944, the eminent criminologist Marshall Clinard published two articles in the *American Journal of Sociology* on urbanization and criminal behavior. In the first, Clinard (1942) concluded that rural offenders were less likely associated with gangs or other forms of criminal organization and less likely to view their actions as breaking the law, when compared with offenders from the city. In the latter (Clinard 1944), he reinforced his earlier findings, noting that the theory of differential association, given fame by the work of Sutherland and the Chicago School of Sociology, did not apply to rural offenders, especially those from a farm. In both articles is not one reference to work in *Rural Sociology*, although he does cite the comprehensive review of rural research published in 1931 by Sorokin, Zimmerman and Galpin (*Systematic Source Book in Rural Sociology*). Clinard confines himself to interpreting what he found out about offenders in rural localities from the work of scholars he knew and who focused on urban crime, namely, Sutherland, Wirth, Shaw, Thrasher and others associated with the Chicago School. This is quite easy to understand, as both articles were developed from his dissertation, and indeed, he earned his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago.

The reader may be curious why an article that proposes a new and more critical approach to rural criminology would bother to dust off these long-ago studies. It is not without purpose. There are lessons from the past that are necessary to learn if the current explosion of conceptual and empirical work on various dimensions of rural crime is to be taken seriously by scholars in the decades ahead. First, most rural crime research up through the late 1970's was both sporadic and mostly segregated, with rural sociologists on the one side infrequently referring to developments in mainstream criminology and sociology, and scholars on the other side largely ignoring the work of rural sociologists. Other than the first name "Marshall," there was little in common between the sociological sub-fields of rural sociology and criminology, hence there was limited integration and practically no synergy.

Second, most of the early work was descriptive and atheoretical, and when theoretical, was dominated by a functionalist mode of thinking. Early rural crime scholars on both sides of the aisle relied heavily on the Chicago School's fascination with concentric circles and a sociological analogy to Newton's mechanistic model of gravity, hence contextualizing rural crime and its various expressions as a product of the distance of the hinterland to the nearest urban center, and weighted by the size of that city. They mostly ignored structural characteristics of rural

places that engender crime. We suppose these scholars simply forgot that Einstein's well-established general theory of relativity, which posits everything is moving and there is no absolute reference point, had superseded Newton several decades before. They continued to favor an analogy to a centuries old theory in physics that was only approximately correct (i.e., breaking down only in the presence of extreme conditions like strong gravitational fields) but had been replaced by a better way of looking at space and time. As the reader shall see, we propose the same for a new rural critical criminology, that is, crime within rural places must be understood in terms of their own social organization and culture, and is far more complex than proximity of cities of various sizes, population mobility and differential association with gangs and criminal cliques, although all three remain possible and legitimate factors in a larger and more relative milieu of explanatory variables.

Third, sometimes these early works of rural criminology drifted over from the influence of urbanization, which is based on place, to consider the impact of urbanism, which is the consequence of culture and change and derived in part from Ogburn's (1928) theory of lag and Wirth's (1938) influential description of urban life. In this variation, understanding rural crime was simply a matter of knowing something about what had happened at a previous time in America's big cities, or blaming the current criminal woes of a rural place on the newly arrived, transients or anyone else who was not a so-called local. Hence, rural crime was seen as a phenomenon that was similar to but lagged behind urban crime in both the type of offense and its quantity or rate as American society underwent vast cultural, economic and social transformations in the middle decades of the 20th century (Fischer 1980). Although the urbanism perspective was an advancement in thought because it did not shackle rural places to a narrow linearity of distance and geography, it nonetheless assumed a false one-way type of causality. If smaller places exhibited unusually high rates of crime, it must be due to the loss of their ruralness and an increase in their urbanity. Further, if these rural places were urbanizing, there must be a source external to the intrinsic social structural, economic and normative characteristics of rural places. Supporting this notion was a vast array of previous anthropological and sociological literature on such things as folk societies (Redfield 1947), organic and mechanical solidarity (Durkheim 1960) and the still frequently cited and just as frequently misinterpreted *gemeinschaft-gesellschaft* dichotomy (Abbott 1997) of Tönnies (1955).

Near the end of the 1970's, rural criminology suddenly became quite popular, in large part because of the availability of Federal monies from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, which was established through the 1968

Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act. At the time, official rates of crime were rising quite rapidly in city, suburban and rural areas, and the nation had experienced race riots and political unrest over an unjustified and imperialistic war in Vietnam, echoing a similar set of circumstances in America today. From these initiatives emerged what is today known as the National Institute of Justice.

Some of these free flowing federal funds were siphoned into rural crime research, most notably by the formation of the National Rural Crime Prevention Center (NRCPC) at The Ohio State University. Without a doubt, NRCPC was a direct descendant of all that was good and bad about the tiny field of rural criminology from decades past. It was housed in the Rural Sociology Program at OSU, which as of 2008 maintains separate and autonomous M.S. and Ph.D. programs from Sociology, where the mainstream criminologists focus on crime as an urban phenomenon and mostly ignore rural-located crime. Its emphasis was on property crime and most of the work remained atheoretical but with functionalist undertones. Yet, under the leadership of its founder, G. Howard Phillips, rural criminology for the first time moved toward a greater prominence in the sociological sub-fields of both rural sociology and criminology (Carter et al. 1982). It benefited from the support and advice of several criminologists in the Department of Sociology, most notably Simon Dinitz, a former President of the American Society of Criminology. Further, the work of NRCPC inspired scholars at several other universities to focus on issues related to crime in rural places, including a spate of studies on agricultural crime in the late 1980' and early 1990's (Barclay and Donnermeyer 2007; Mears, Scott, and Bhati 2007) and research on social change and its impact on rural communities and crime (Freudenburg and Jones 1991; Krannich, Berry, and Greider 1989; Krannich, Greider, and Little 1985; Wilkinson, 1984a, 1984b; Wilkinson et al. 1984). Most important of all, it laid the basis for the recent and rapid growth in rural criminology that can be traced back to the mid 1990's and continues to this day.

Over the past two decades, rural criminology has been marked by several distinctive characteristics, in part due to the sheer volume of published research in the United States (Donnermeyer et al. 2006; Weisheit and Donnermeyer 2000; Weisheit, Falcone, and Wells 2006) and the diffusion of interest in rural crime to several other advanced capitalist countries where criminological associations are well organized and active, such as Australia (Barclay et al. 2007; Hogg and Carrington 2006), Canada (DeKeseredy and Perry 2006; Wood and Griffiths 1996), and Great Britain (Aust and Simmons 2002; Chakraboti and Garland 2004; Dingwall and Moody 1999). Currently, most published work in rural criminology

comes from scholars in criminology and criminal justice, not rural sociology. For example, although rural crime remains a small share of the papers listed in the program for the annual meeting of the American Society of Criminology, there are typically 20-40 papers with an exclusive rural focus or a rural-urban comparative framework, in contrast to less than a handful of papers at the Rural Sociological Society. Even adjusting for the relative size of the two societies, most of the action is in the ASC. As well, work has spread beyond criminology, especially in relation to substance use among rural populations by scholars in various allied social and behavioral sciences (Donnermeyer et al. 2006; Edwards and Donnermeyer 2002; Robertson et al. 1997).

The past two decades have witnessed a greater attention to the application of theory. Unfortunately, most of this work utilizes social disorganization (Reiss 1986) or the concept of collective efficacy (Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley 2002; Sampson and Raduenbush 1999), both of which are latter day versions of work that goes back to the Chicago School of Sociology before WWII. Many studies have successfully utilized this framework, either explicitly or implicitly, to examine the relationship of rural social structure and crime (Barnett and Menckin 2002; Jobes et al. 2004; Lee, Maume, and Ousey 2003; Osgood and Chambers 2000; Petee and Kowalski 1993; Reisig and Cancino 2004; Rephann 1999; Wells and Weisheit 2004), gaining valuable insights into similarities as well as distinctive aspects of crime in the rural context. Yet, these largely quantitative studies have their limitations. The most serious is that they assume that crime in rural communities is due to a lack of cohesion and solidarity, never suspecting that what they are really describing are different kinds of social and normative structures (Barclay, Donnermeyer, and Jobes 2004; Jobes et al. 2004), and that these variations are as great across rural localities as they are in cities.

Hence, we prefer to borrow Einstein's assumption that there is no absolute reference point, whether it is the concentric circles encompassing Chicago's multiethnic neighborhoods or the so-called quiet lifestyles of rural and farms areas where everyone knows everyone else and "official" or visible crime is supposed to be low. Only social organization varies from place to place, and statistical variations in census data that measure the economic and demographic dimensions of rural (and urban) places are simply proxy variables that operationalize these structural forms for statistical analysis. The fact that they vary with official rates of crime shows the ways that organization, not disorganization, either facilitates or constrains certain types of crime as expressed in locations both rural and urban. Hence, examining rural crime and explicating ways that it informs crime in the city is as valuable as

it is the other way around. Remember that everything is relative! Without it, or rather, by clinging to anachronistic notions of urbanization and urbanism (and rurality as well), a rural critical criminology is not possible. A critical rural criminology would recognize urban influences of various kinds, but only through how they mix with forms of inequality, poverty, patriarchy and other structural factors that help rural scholars understand the context of crime within rural communities.

To approach a newer and more critical rural criminology means taking a different theoretical approach that is not beholden or dependent on an urban derived criminological theory unless it has some heuristic value. It is the utility of a theory, not its historical roots in a well-known school of criminology or the way that it enhances publication in mainstream criminology journals that really counts. Further, rural related work should critique and revise these urban biased frameworks, or if not practical, brush them aside and start over, thereby informing the general field of criminology. As well, an excessive reliance on quantitative research, without benefit of what qualitative data can say, will continue to limit the potential of rural crime scholarship to understand the true dynamics of what is taking place in rural America.

KEY ELEMENTS OF A RURAL CRITICAL CRIMINOLOGY

The key elements of a new or critical rural criminology called for here are similar to some of those recommended by Taylor et al. (1973) close to 40 years ago. However, their path-breaking work was mainly a critique of mainstream theories (e.g., strain and social learning) and liberal perspectives, such as Becker's (1973) labeling theory (Matthews 2003). Further, Taylor et al.'s theoretical position was grounded primarily in a Marxian understanding of the political economy and how it shaped crime and its control. According to them, crime is "a product of inequitable economic relationships in a context of general poverty" (1973:218). While we agree that the capitalist political economic structure warrants careful consideration, we contend that the patriarchal and ethnic relations that control our society must also be taken into account. Although it is painfully obvious to those familiar with the history of critical criminology, it is worth stating again nonetheless: Taylor et al.'s (1973) *New Criminology* privileges economic conditions over gender, race/ethnicity, and culture (Matthews 2003). This is highly problematic because much of rural men's violence depends on an adherence to the ideology of familial patriarchy or their attempt to assert white hegemony, despite their class position (Chakraboti and Garland 2004; DeKeseredy et al. 2006; Perry

2003). Thus, our call for what Taylor et al. (1973:270) call situating a criminal act "in terms of its wider structural origins" is broader in scope, and neither rural nor urban in bias. It becomes a matter applying a critical approach or perspective to place.

The Wider Origins of Rural Crime

In his commentary on Ireland, Thornberry and Loeber's (2003) urban public housing violence research, Lab (2003) presents some arguments that are also used for a social scientific understanding of rural crime. For example, he contends that:

> One of the most important things that criminologists often fail to address is the context in which they (their projects or topics) are operating. This is true whether they are proposing a new theory, testing an existing explanation, investigating an emerging phenomenon, or evaluating an intervention or program (2003:39).

As they progress through the beginning of this new millennium, critical criminologists need to ask, "What is the broader social, political, and economic context in which crime is operating in rural North America and other parts of the world?" For example, it is estimated that as many as 1.5 million Americans may lose their homes because of foreclosures in 2008 and those living in Michigan and other "auto-wreck states" are especially at risk (Ivry 2008). Simultaneously, there is a major decline in the number of family owned farms because many people cannot make a reasonable living from them (DeKeseredy et al. 2007; Jacobs 2005). Moreover, many rural towns, such as Nelsonville, Ohio that had to rely on a few industries for employment have been economically shattered by the closing of sawmills, coalmines, and other major sources of income (Jensen 2006).[7] In addition, the "Wal-Marting" of the rural U.S. is forcing locally owned small businesses to shut down (Stone 1997; Tunnell 2006). Not only will this economic crisis increase involvement in rural drug trafficking, consumption and production (Donnermeyer and Tunnell 2007; Grant 2008; Mangum, Mangum, and Sum 2003; Tunnell 2004; Weisheit and Kernes 2003), but it also exacerbates the problem of male-to-female violence. As socialist feminists assert, class and gender relations are equally

[7]After nearly 70 years of operation, in 2002, the Rocky Shoes and Boots factory closed in Nelsonville, Ohio and moved to Puerto Rico. None of its 67 displaced workers were offered replacement jobs (Price 2002).

important, "inextricably intertwined," and "inseparable," and they interact to determine the social order at any particular time in history (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1996; Jaggar 1983; Messerschmidt 1986).

For example, before the end of the last century, many rural men's income was derived from owning family farms or as employees of extractive industries, such as coal mining (DeKeseredy 2007; Jensen 2006). Further, buttressed by a patriarchal ideology, these men's marriages were typically characterized by a rigid gendered division of labor in which men were the main "bread winners" and women had "an intense and highly privatized relationship with domestic production," such as child rearing and house cleaning (Fassinger and Schwarzweller 1984; Websdale 1998:49). Such gender relations still exist in many rural communities (DeKeseredy et al. 2007). Nevertheless, rural men's power is now fragile because of major challenges to their masculine identity spawned by rural social and economic transitions that have occurred over the past 40 or more years (Sherman 2005). Prime examples of such changes are: the loss of farms and other sources of income described previously; women seeking employment or getting jobs when their husbands are unemployed or when their farms become less profitable (Albrecht, Albrecht, and Albrecht 2000; DeKeseredy 2007; Lobao and Meyer 2001); women's rights to own property and wealth; the increase in the number of women's associations, and the "deligitimation" of some forms of rural masculinity, such as crackdowns on drinking and driving (Hogg and Carrington 2006).

As noted by DeKeseredy et al. (2007), many unemployed men deal with the above and other "masculinity challenges" by spending much time with other men in similar situations. This is one main reason some of their wives leave or try to leave them (DeKeseredy 2007; Sherman 2005). Further, as DeKeseredy et al. (2006) discovered in Ohio, sizeable portions of rural men have patriarchal attitudes and beliefs, and they also have peers who view wife beating, sexual assault, many other types of abuse as legitimate and effective means of repairing "damaged patriarchal masculinity" (Messerschmidt 1993; Raphael 2001). In sum, then, being economically displaced puts many men at high risk for committing both public and private crimes.

Critical criminologists who study male-to-female violence and drug-related problems are not the only ones who view loss of family farms and other rural economic problems as constituting a crisis of masculinity. For example, Ferber and Kimmel (2004:145-146) assert that many rural white men join radical-right militia groups because they "feel under siege and vulnerable, unsure of their manhood.

They are furious and looking for someone to blame." Consequently, they cause much pain and suffering for others "in the name of hate" (Perry 2001).

The Social Psychology of Rural Crime

This "formal requirement" of Taylor et al.'s (1973) new criminology involves explaining the different ways in which the structural transitions identified above "are interpreted, reacted against, or used by men at different levels in the social structure, in such a way that an essentially deviant choice is made" (p. 271). DeKeseredy et al.'s (2007) rural masculinity crisis/male peer support model of separation/divorce sexual assault responds to Taylor et al.'s (1973) concern and is heavily influenced by some subcultural theorists (e.g., Cohen 1955) who assert that socially and economically marginalized males create a collective or group solution to the problem of strain caused by challenges to their masculinity.

Drawing upon the research of DeKeseredy (2007) and DeKeseredy et al. (2006), DeKeseredy et al. (2007) argue that women ending relationships because of their male partners' substance abuse, violent behavior, or other problems generated in part by unemployment is often perceived by rural men as yet another threat to their masculinity. They further assert that male peers influence some rural men to engage in separation/divorce sexual assault to regain control and to avoid losing status among their friends. Consider that about 67% of the 43 rural Ohio women interviewed by DeKeseredy et al. (2006) reported on a variety of ways in which their male partners' male peers encouraged and legitimated separation/divorce sexual assault. This finding and those of DeKeseredy and Joseph (2006) are consistent with rural Kentucky data uncovered by Websdale (1998) showing evidence of a powerful "ol' boys' network that oppresses and brutalizes women. Patriarchal male peer support for woman abuse is but one example of a "social psychological component" of a critical theory that responds to calls by Taylor et al. (1973) and other critical criminologists for addressing "the precipitating causes of crime" (Matthews 2003:5).

A Rural Square of Crime

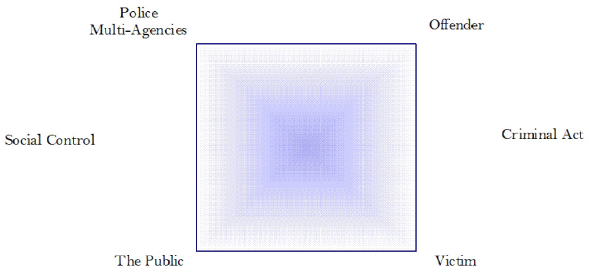
The above two elements of a rural critical criminology exclude the role of the state, which is a central focus of much critical criminological empirical, theoretical, and empirical work, especially that done in the 1970s and 1980s (e.g., Fleming 1985a; Pearce 1976). Following the late Marxist scholar Ralph Miliband (1969:54), the state consists of "the government, the administration, the military, the police, the judicial branch, the subcentral government, and parliamentary assemblies." How

should a rural critical criminology address the role of the state? Perhaps the best answer to this question is found in left realists' square of crime presented in Figure 1. The square consists of four interacting elements: victim, offender, state agencies (e.g., the police), and the public. Young (1992:27) describes the social relationships between each point on the square:

> It is the relationship between the police and the public which determines the efficacy of policing, the relationship between the victim and the offender which determines the impact of crime, the relationship between the state and the offender which is a major factor in recidivism.

The square of crime focuses simultaneously on the criminal behavior or action and on societal, including state, reactions to it (DeKeseredy, Alvi, and Schwartz 2006). Moreover, the square of crime shows that crime rates in many urban and rural communities are outcomes of four interrelated causes: (1) the causes of offending (e.g., unemployment and peer group membership); (2) factors that make victims vulnerable (e.g., lifestyles/routine activities); (3) the social conditions that influence public levels of control and tolerance; and (4) the social forces that propel agents of social control (e.g., police) (Young 1992:30).

FIGURE 1. THE SQUARE OF CRIME.



Some readers might argue that since the square of crime is a dated contribution and that left realism has historically focused almost exclusively on inner-city street crime, it has little, if any relevance, to a critical criminological understanding of current criminal activities and societal reaction in rural communities. Of course, this is an empirical issue that can only be addressed empirically, given that, to the best of our knowledge, no one has yet tested hypotheses derived from the square of

crime in rural areas. It is hoped that someone will soon because it is time for critical criminology to take more frequent "departures from criminological and sociological urbanism" (Hogg and Carrington 2006:1). However, we contend that unlike the earlier Chicago school, the square of crime does not have an intrinsic urban bias, and instead, represents a way to understand the fundamental dimensions of crime at multiple levels.

CONCLUSIONS

Contrary to popular belief, rural communities are not less criminogenic than urban areas. In fact, rural rates may be higher than urban rates at particular types of rural places and for specific kinds of crimes (Jobes et al. 2004). As Donnermeyer (2007b) points out, the official rate of violence for the most rural counties of the US exceeds those for several dozen metropolitan areas, based on the FBI's *Uniform Crime Report*. In Canada, the rate of homicide in rural areas (2.5 per 100,000) is higher than the rate for large urban areas (2.0) and the rate for small urban communities (1.7). Consider, too, that this pattern held constant over the past decade (Statistics Canada 2007). Evidence also suggests that rural women are at greater risk of being sexually assaulted during and after separation/divorce than their urban counterparts (DeKeseredy 2007). As Donnermeyer et al. (2006:205) put it, "Rurality does not imply the sociological equivalent of immunity from crime."

It is time to think critically about rural crime and theoretical work on this topic needs consistently and explicitly to address the unsettling truth that one key determinant of crime is structured social inequality. For instance, research done in rural Appalachia by DeKeseredy et al. (2006), Grant (2008), and Websdale (1998) clearly demonstrate that woman abuse, alcoholism, and drug addiction are strongly associated with poverty, unemployment, and patriarchal practices and discourses. Similarly, societal reactions to these problems are also influenced by a larger set of economic, political, and social factors. As Grant (2008:22) correctly points out, "rural areas are often neglected in the creating of national political agendas or plans for reform and change."

Such neglect is also evident at the local level and often depends on an attempt to maintain inequality and oppression. Consider that DeKeseredy (2007) found that many rural Ohio men who abuse their ex-partners can rely on their male friends and neighbors, including those who are police officers to support a violent patriarchal status quo even while they count on these same people to help prevent public crimes such as vandalism. Furthermore, in rural sections of Ohio and other states such as Kentucky, there is widespread acceptance of woman abuse and

community norms prohibiting victims from publicly revealing their experiences and from seeking social support (DeKeseredy et al. 2007). Rural women with addiction problems encounter similar processes of informal social control and hence spend long periods suffering in silence (Grant 2008).

In his critique of Taylor et al.'s (1973) *The New Criminology*, Ellis (1987:67) contends that this book does not offer a "fully social theory." Rather, he claims that Taylor et al. provide "a rather general statement of things to be taken into account in formulating an explanation of crime and deviance." We, too, can be accused of doing the same thing. Nevertheless, like Taylor et al.'s offering, ours is also a starting point in the development of a new way of understanding social problems and more elements of a new or critical rural criminology need to be fleshed out. It is hoped that more rural sociologists and criminologists will point out the interrelations among broader social, economic, and political forces and crime and societal reactions to it. The failure to carefully consider these wider influences is one major shortcoming of place-based theories and other perspectives (e.g., social learning) on rural crime reviewed by Donnermeyer (2007a).

What is to be done about rural crime and its control? For critical criminologists, despite whether they are feminists, left realists, Marxists, or proponents of other means of thinking critically about crime, one answer to this question is integrating theory with praxis (Grant 2008). Critical criminologists call for major social change, but they also struggle for major structural and cultural transformations. Their efforts are antithetical to those of many, if not most, mainstream criminologists who engage in "hit and run" or "drive by" research. This involves gathering data from people and their community and never offering them anything in return (Fleming 1985b). On the other hand, critical criminologists are heavily guided by what Jock Young (1975:89) 38 years ago:

> Working class organizations have eventually to combat the war of all against all that is the modus vivendi of civil society. Further, is only in the process of struggle for control that the community can evolve out of its frequently disorganized and disintegrated state. The radical criminologist's task is to aid and inform such struggles and projects. His task is not to help the courts to work, not to design better prisons. The problems of social control are problems for those who want to control existing social arrangements.

Today, critical criminologists also work closely with women's groups, civil liberties associations, gay and lesbian groups, and a host of other progressive collectives. Further, they have no problem being labeled *political.* After all, "all writing is political" (Sartre 1964:29), and we hope that our efforts and those of our colleagues will eliminate all forms of inequality that plague rural communities. Moreover, we, like many other contemporary social scientists (e.g., DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz 2007), contend that no scientific method, theory, or policy proposal is value free. Nor are theories, methods, and policies advanced by prominent conservative scholars like James Q. Wilson (1985) and Donald Dutton (2006).

In what is still one of the most widely read and cited sociology articles in the world, Howard Becker (1967) asks us, "Whose side are we on?" Not surprisingly, we are on the side of the rural socially and economically disadvantaged. Unfortunately, we and other critical criminologists are greatly outnumbered by those who support right-wing ways of thinking about crime and its control. In a sense, this is parallel, but not analogous to, the way rural sociologists feel when they attempt to bring human and social dimensions into the debate about agriculture and rural development.

Beyond saying that critical criminologists' theoretical frameworks and policy proposals are flawed because crime, regardless whether it occurs in rural or urban areas, is an individual–not social–problem, supporters of neo-conservative policies (e.g., imprisonment) argue that progressive initiatives are expensive and the money would be better spent lowering nations' deficits. Yet if money has not been too tight to build new prisons and to pay for a war in Iraq, then money can be found to reduce poverty, unemployment, and a host of other social problems strongly related to rural crime if that is what people want. Government spending is always directly related to political priorities, and what we need now is a radical readjustment in thinking about our rural priorities (DeKeseredy 2003; Grant 2008).

Finally, there is a misperception that a critical approach to crime reduces its application to specific actions that can be initiated at the local level by citizens, law enforcement and various criminal justice agencies. Nothing could be further from the truth. The mistake centers on the false assumption that a critical approach only takes a society wide view of crime, and therefore, it can address broad policy issues, but is less relevant for recommendations of direct action within a single community. The authors' own work proves otherwise. For example, one author has taken the leadership with developing solutions for violence against women by considering ways in which norms of tolerance in the localized setting of a single rural community can be changed so that law enforcement, the prosecutor and the courts

are more responsive. One label for this approach is "second generation CPTED" (crime prevention through environmental design) (DeKeseredy, Donnermeyer, and Schwartz forthcoming). First generation CPTED was concerned with lights, locks, alarms and aspects of physical security. Second generation CPTED's focus is on conditions within communities that enable violence, and how to reduce/eliminate the enablers. These same considerations are used in substance abuse prevention and a variety of other crime prevention campaigns that incorporate everything from billboards and other forms of social marketing to talks before church and civic groups, poster fairs, festivals and even demonstrations that create awareness of the problem and encourage local law enforcement and criminal justice agencies to act accordingly, backed up by local elites. It is all a matter of the relative readiness of a community to support particular solutions (Donnermeyer et al. 1997).

The other author is a regular instructor in leadership programs for police executives (i.e., chiefs, deputy chiefs, commanders, captains, lieutenants and sergeants). His focus is on how to improve the communication skills of police executives as they interact with citizens, civic groups and local elites, and how to become better and more effective agents of change. To achieve his educational objectives, he takes a traditional Marxist approach, explaining how vested interests as expressed through social class and other forms of inequality create uneven influence and decision-making in communities, large and small. Instinctively, police executives already know this, as they see first-hand that only a few citizens decide, and not always for the good of the total community. They see the "dark side of gemeinschaft" and the negative aspects of social capital as much if not more than the bright, shiny, idealized sides of either concept, something that a functionalist approach would likely fail to consider (Barclay and Donnermeyer 2007). However, "here's the rub"–Marx is never mentioned by name (certainly Karl, and not even Groucho) in any of these seminars. It is merely enough to explain the concepts in a way that can be used by police officers, not to force-feed grand sociological theory down their throats. They can get plenty of that in their college-level criminology and criminal justice courses! After-all, application is the art of applying good science (in this case, criminology and rural sociology) in ways that everyday people in rural communities can understand and use. It is the theme of the 2008 annual meeting of the Rural Sociological Society (Rural Sociology as Public Sociology), and it is ultimate intent of a critical approach to the study of rural crime.

This article began by explaining that a critical approach is conducive to the development of policy and action. Further, throughout this article, we have explicitly or implicitly described the applied side of a critical approach for the

advancement of rural crime scholarship. For a more thorough discussion of ways in which a critical perspective is as practical as any other criminological theory (if not more), the authors wish to refer readers to DeKeseredy et al. (2006).

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