



Editor's Introduction to the Special Issue, "Centering the Margins: Addressing the Implementation Gap of Critical Criminology"

Rita Shah¹

Published online: 25 February 2021

© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature B.V. part of Springer Nature 2021

As I write this Editor's Introduction, I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the lands on which this piece and the articles in this special issue were written. As we put 2020 behind us, 2021 is beginning with a glimmer of hope. A COVID-19 vaccine is slowly making its way to us all and some countries are returning to a semblance of normal interactions. The scars of 2020, however, will stay with us for decades to come, if not longer. Questions remain as to how the most vulnerable will be able to obtain the vaccine and whether it will reach the countries with the least political clout. All the while, global warming remains an imminent threat.

These issues are just a few in a series of social justice concerns that continue to loom large. The scars of 2020 are layered on top of the wounds of ableism, colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy, and countless other oppressive systems and histories that have never been addressed properly. They may have been bandaged over—perhaps even scabbed over—but they have not been treated, and they have certainly not healed. Black¹ academics, Brown academics, Indigenous academics, queer academics, disabled academics, immigrant and refugee academics, other marginalized academics, and multiply-marginalized academics across the world have been calling for change for decades if not centuries. Yet, no matter how loudly we fight to be heard, it often feels as though we are still barely breaking into the conversation.

On the other hand, there seems to be the beginnings of a shift, at least in the United States (US).² As deaths from COVID-19 exceed 450,000 individuals; as months-long

¹ While there are many explanations for why one would capitalize Black, Brown, Indigenous, and other racial identifiers but not white, my reasoning is best explained by Geneva Sarcedo (<https://twitter.com/evergeneva/status/1278762885322174464>). In her Twitter thread, Sarcedo cites Harris and Patton (2019) and Kapitan (2016) to argue that capitalizing Color is an empowering move that also questions the "'hegemonic grammatical norms' of whiteness" (<https://twitter.com/evergeneva/status/1278762887872315392?s=20>) and highlights the inherent inequalities between groups. Thus, until we are all treated equally, and until those who capitalize white but not Color are also asked to justify their decision, I will continue to capitalize Color and not white (see also Laws 2020).

² In June 2020, NPR's *Code Switch* podcast aired an episode examining why there seemed to be a sudden surge of support for Black Lives Matter and other attempts at confronting systematic racism by white people in particular (<https://www.npr.org/2020/06/16/878963732/why-now-white-people>).

Rita Shah (she/her/hers)

✉ Rita Shah
rshah9@emich.edu

¹ Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI, USA

protests against police brutality continue daily in cities across the country; as the interplay of race and class become highlighted through an increase in evictions, unemployment, and growing health disparities; and as an attempted coup raised serious questions about the strength of anti-democratic and white supremacist sentiments in the country, the need to address injustices and inequalities has remained at the forefront of national conversations. Indeed, the global health pandemic has exposed and underscored a plethora of inequalities not just in the US but worldwide. Every aspect of society has come under scrutiny—and rightfully so.

Many of these issues could—and *would*—have been addressed more easily had centuries of Indigenous knowledge and knowledge from other marginalized groups not been lost or dismissed. For all the challenges 2020 has brought, it has also revealed a fundamental truth: failures to listen to and center marginalized individuals yield deadly consequences for us all. While this special issue cannot bring back all of this knowledge (or the lives lost), it is an attempt to continue to raise and address issues that have been ignored or understudied for too long.

This special issue is the offshoot of a conference held at Eastern Michigan University (EMU)—located on the unceded territory of the Anishinaabeg and Wendat/Wyandot peoples—in April 2019. That conference was the fourth in a series of critical criminology conferences in the US, hosted by the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in 2016, by Old Dominion University in 2017, and by Eastern Kentucky University in 2018. The theme of the EMU conference was “Centering the Margins: Addressing the Implementation Gap in Critical Criminology,” which is now the theme for this special issue.

This theme was chosen in response to several prominent scholars, who have noted that criminologists are “fundamentally obligated” (Richie 2011: 216) to participate in conversations about criminal and social justice issues—an obligation that has been reiterated in recent years by presidents of both the American Society of Criminology (ASC) and Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences. In 2014, then-ASC President Joanne Belknap (2015) delivered a “call to action” to criminologists to take a more activist role in addressing social and legal injustices, while then-ACJS President Lorenzo Boyd (2017: 3) argued, “We need now more than ever before, to have seats at the table, to be part of the conversations. If we, as social scientists, do not champion the cause of social justice then who will take on the cause?” And yet, opportunities to have discussions dedicated to developing strategies for change are rare. As such, the conference—and now this special issue—focuses on marginalized identities often overlooked or undervalued in the field, on inclusivity and equity (not just diversity), and on interrogating how criminological inquiry can better serve social justice.

For both the conference and the special issue, the notion of “centering the margins” is twofold. First, it draws attention to those marginalized by social processes that reveal themselves based on dis/ability, gender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status, among others, and the intersection of these identities. While critical, feminist, and radical criminologies have attempted to address these inequalities and patterns of discrimination and exclusion, the goal of this special issue is a deeper exploration of not just oppression and domination, but also of the benefits of centering marginalized voices in terms of knowledge production and praxis.

Second, we wish to unveil and interrogate forms of marginalization within academia. As Richie (2011) argues, the field of criminology has little incentive to change because the power elites within academia uphold dominant traditions and paradigms, making it difficult for questions related to social justice to be raised and addressed. This may be because of academia’s emphasis on publishing, which can lead to watered down publications or

to publications based on methods that are less-time-consuming than others (Moosa 2018; Rawat and Meena 2014). Studies also find that women publish less than men³ and scholars of Color publish less than white scholars within criminology (Potter, Higgins, and Gabbidon 2011)—likely as a result of disparate acceptance rates to graduate school (Posselt 2016), inherent biases within academia (Posselt 2020), unequal distribution of labor (e.g., Babock et al. 2017; Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012; Niemann et al. 2020), the peculiarities of the publishing process (del Carmen and Bing 2000), and the ways in which familial and emotional labor falls to women during times of crisis, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic (Flaherty 2020a, 2020b; Squazzoni et al. 2020; Vincent-Lamarre et al. 2020; Zimmer 2020). When such scholarship is published, the authors are often accused of “mesearch” or navel gazing, rather than receiving recognition for advancing the field (Bernal and Villalpando 2010). The emphasis on publishing also impacts the ability of scholars to be effective teachers in the classroom (Moosa 2018). In addition, several studies find that non-white, non-male, non-heteronormative scholars are still underrepresented in criminology and academia broadly (Deo 2019; Greene et al. 2017; Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012; Niemann et al. 2020; see also the forthcoming special issue in *Race and Justice*, “BLM in the Academy: Black Scholars’ Personal Accounts”). While critical criminology attempts to address these marginalizations, it, too, often falls short (for a discussion, see, e.g., Ball et al. 2014; Thorneycroft and Asquith 2019; Woods 2014).⁴

In terms of “addressing the gap,” the conference, and now the special issue, seeks to highlight conversations that attend to and challenge how we might better implement critical criminological aims with respect to marginalization. Many critical criminologists have had success contributing to policy, and more critical, feminist, and radical criminologists are being invited to the policy table. Furthermore, there is growing recognition of the importance of scholar-activists, and discussions on *how* to push for critical criminological goals are gaining traction as part of traditional training and in larger discussions in the field (see, for example, Henne and Shah’s recent *Routledge Handbook on Public Criminologies* (2020)). Thus, the goal for this special issue is to continue moving critical criminological discourse beyond theoretical discussion to praxis and to extend conversations started in this journal five years ago (Arrigo 2016).

Hidden in this theme—and lost in larger conversations about addressing inequalities and injustices—is the emotional toll involved in continuing to be marginalized and fighting for space. In so many ways—and for so many reasons—the conference should *not* have been necessary. This special issue should *not* be necessary. It is exhausting to think that, once again, marginalized individuals must raise our voices, take a stand, and fight for what is right. It is exhausting to have to write pieces arguing that our power, our strength, our value, and our inclusion need to be seen not as an “if there is room” or as an “also,” but as an “essential.” But that is precisely what the authors in this special issue have done. This

³ While I did not find studies analyzing publication outputs from scholars who are queer, transgender, or nonbinary, it is safe to assume they also publish less often than cis men and potentially less than cis women.

⁴ Perhaps one of the most glaring examples is a 2020 article in *Feminist Criminology* that perpetuates anti-trans and transphobic arguments. A more subtle example is a previous Editor’s Introduction in this journal that ended by using an appropriated Sanskrit word incorrectly. In addition, members of critically oriented divisions of the American Society of Criminology are raising serious concerns about racism being perpetuated within these divisions and are pushing back against concerns about such racism being dismissed by other members of these divisions.

special issue not only highlights the voices of those marginalized in critical criminology, despite the subdiscipline's lip-service to critiquing hegemony, but also gives power to the authors published here and the topics they address, and it provides support to the countless others who are also tired.⁵ While the collection of articles presented here all tangle with notions of power in some way, they are all also power, in and of themselves. Within each piece is the power of self, the power of love for self and others, and the power of truths that must be spoken.

The authors in this special issue tackle a variety of areas in which to center the margins: (1) in academia; (2) in policy discussions; and (3) in victimization studies.

We begin with Kenneth Sebastián León's article (2021), which argues for a Latino criminology that focuses on decolonizing—or, as he calls it, “unfucking”—criminology. In the second article, Allyn Walker, Jace Valcore, Brodie Evans, and Ash Stephens (2021) contemplate “centering the margins” in academia in a different way—through a discussion of the challenges faced by transgender scholars, which lay bare the emotional and professional risks they have taken. In doing so, these two pieces reveal an inherent contradiction faced by academics whose research is inspired by their own experiences: both make clear that critiques of “mesearch” perpetuate inequalities and should be laid to rest. In order to make this argument, however, both pieces must once again justify why they/their views/their focus is necessary. They then go one-step further and do the emotional labor of modeling how to undertake research inspired by one's own experiences, of supporting their fellow academics, and of providing advice for allies and would-be accomplices.

In terms of policy discussions, Andrew Novak's article (2021), the third in this special issue, addresses why critical criminologists should take seriously HIV-criminalization and why doing so will provide greater insights into numerous criminological concerns. Next, Krystle Shore (2021) draws on penal surveillance and public health surveillance studies to highlight how the use of electronic monitoring with people with cognitive impairments constitutes a form of carceral protectionism. In the fifth article, Smith and Kinzel (2021) expand the concept of “carceral citizenship” and argue for greater involvement of those who have experienced the carceral state in policy discussions. Combined, these articles remind us why it is important to ensure that the voices of marginalized individuals are included in discussions of how criminal justice apparatuses are used. They stand in contrast to Troshynski and Bejinariu's article (2021), which reveals the rhetoric and logics used to question, and potentially undermine, efforts to support transgender students in public schools—thereby reminding us of the need to address such push back and continuously support social policies aimed at centering the margins.

Finally, two articles address centering the margins in victimization studies. Christina DeJong, Karen Holt, Brenna Helm, and Skyler Morgan (2021) analyze media coverage of transgender individuals killed in 2018 and offer suggestions for improving this coverage. In the final article, Emily Lenning, Sara Brightman, and Carrie Buist (2021) theorize the ways in which a trifecta of violent ideologies, policies, and actions can help us understand both anti-Black lynching and violence against transgender women, particularly Black transgender women. Both pieces note that there is much work to be done in not only recognizing and eliminating violence against transgender individuals, but also in taking such violence seriously.

⁵ It is my hope that this journal (and, by extension, criminological organizations that focus on social justice) continues to work toward this goal.

A common theme throughout these pieces is one of safety. All of the articles raise questions as to *who gets to be safe, who gets to define "safety," and how safety can be undermined by a variety of individuals*, ranging from well-meaning individuals with unconscious biases to those purposefully seeking to cause harm. While it is not surprising that half of the articles center transgender individuals, particularly given the emerging field of queer criminology, it is a reminder that more work needs to be done to include queer individuals in all aspects of academia and society.

The topics covered by the authors also highlight the ways in which critical criminology has become comfortable in its whiteness, in its heteronormative patriarchy, and its own version of colonialism. The articles in this special issue ask us to challenge ourselves, what we think, and what we believe. As such, these articles push us to expand the boundaries of critical criminology. This task is particularly important as the historical moment of the global health pandemic is raising a plethora of questions about the kind of world we want to live in and how to better achieve inclusiveness: questions critical criminology should be at the forefront of addressing.

This issue ends with a book review of *Waiting for an Echo: The Madness of American Incarceration* by Christine Montross. In this review, Candice Tudor (2021) highlights how Montross dissects the madness of the criminal justice system and offers possible solutions. As Tudor notes, however, discussing such solutions without taking into account race and other social identities leads us to furthering the very inequalities such solutions seek to address.

In two key ways, however, this issue falls short. First, this issue is limited to contributors from the Global North (Dados and Connell 2012) and to those working and residing in North America, in particular. Admittedly, it is also limited in the marginalized voices present even from the Global North, providing only a snapshot of some of the ways in which we consider centering the margins.

Second, what is still underdeveloped in this issue is a discussion on praxis. While a past special issue of *Critical Criminology: An International Journal* has addressed this (Arrigo 2016) and a search for "praxis" in the journal's database reveals a number of useful articles, the rise in anti-government and anti-science sentiments worldwide and the growing power of fundamentalist and authoritarian governments makes the need for critical criminology to play a role in policy and praxis more urgent. The challenge of discussing praxis, however, is that those who are on the front lines often lack the time to write pieces about their work. And yet, when these pieces are published, they are instrumental in helping others determine how they can best utilize their skills and be effective accomplices. Perhaps one avenue for addressing this issue is for critical criminologists to advocate for hiring, tenure, and promotion decisions to take into account the real-world benefits of praxis as equally important as—or perhaps more than—traditional research outputs.

This special issue would not exist without the numerous people who supported it. The contributors deserve recognition for highlighting what it means to actively consider social justice as scholars, not just with respect to how to incorporate social justice principles and topics into our teaching, research, and service, but also in terms of pushing a field that embraces critical and radical approaches to interrogate their own privileges and examine how they can better tackle their goals. Their contributions were further supported by many whose labor we often fail to recognize in full—an international group of peer reviewers, including some from outside of criminology: Nicole Asquith, B Camminga, April Carrillo, Martin French, James Gacek, Kishonna Gray, David A. Maldonado, Heather Mooney, Aaron Roussel, Sebastian Sclofsky, Deena Isom Scott, Lori Sexton, and Renee Shelby, as well as reviewers who requested to remain anonymous. This special issue would not have

been possible without the production team at Springer, particularly as many of them work in India where COVID-19 is still taking a heavy toll. Finally, thanks to Avi Brisman, Editor-in-Chief of *Critical Criminology: An International Journal*, for recognizing the importance of these issues and lobbying for making these articles free-to-access for an extended time period and for Springer for extending the free-to-access period.

References

- Arrigo, B. A. (2016). Critical criminology as academic activism: On praxis and pedagogy, resistance and revolution. *Critical Criminology: An International Journal*, 24(4), 469-71. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-016-9333-8>.
- Babock, L., Recalde, M. P., Vesterlund, L., & Weingart, L. (2017). Gender differences in accepting and receiving requests for tasks with promotability. *American Economic Review*, 107(3), 714-747.
- Ball, M., Buist, C. L., & Woods, J. B. (2014). Introduction to the special issue on queer/ing criminology: New directions and frameworks. *Critical Criminology: An International Journal*, 22(1), 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-013-9231-2>
- Belknap, J. (2015). The 2014 American Society of Criminology presidential address: Activist criminology: Criminologists' responsibility to advocate for social and legal justice. *Criminology*, 53(1), 1-22.
- Bernal, D. D., & Villalpando, O. (2010). An apartheid of knowledge in academia: The struggle over the "legitimate" knowledge of faculty of color. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 35(2), 169-180.
- Boyd, L. M. (2017). President's message. *ACJS Today*, 42(1), 2-3.
- Dados, N., & Connell, R. (2012). The Global South. *Contexts*, 11(1), 12-13.
- DeJong, C., Holt, K., Helm, B., & Morgan, S. J. (2021). The framing of transgender homicides in the United States. *Critical Criminology: An International Journal*, 29(1).
- Deo, M. E. (2019). *Unequal profession: Race and gender in legal academia*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- del Carmen, A., & Bing, R. (2000). Academic productivity of African Americans in criminology and criminal justice. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 11(2), 237-249.
- Flaherty, C. (2020a). No room of one's own. *Inside Higher Ed*, April 21. Retrieved on February 4, 2021, from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/21/early-journal-submission-data-suggest-covid-19-tanking-womens-research-productivity>.
- Flaherty, C. (2020b). Something's gotta give. *Inside Higher Ed*, August 20. Retrieved on February 4, 2021, from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/08/20/womens-journal-submission-rates-continue-fall>.
- Gutiérrez y Muhs, G. G., Niemann, Y. F., González, C. G., & Harris, A. P. (Eds.). (2012). *Presumed incompetent: The intersections of race and class for women in academia*. Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado
- Greene, H. T., Gabbidon, S. L., & Wilson, S. K. (2017). Included? The status of African American scholars in the discipline of criminology and criminal justice since 2004. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 29(1), 96-115.
- Harris, J. C., & Patton, L. D. (2019). Un/doing intersectionality through higher education research. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 90(3), 347-372.
- Henne, K., and Shah, R. (Eds.). (2020). *Routledge handbook of public criminologies*. New York and Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge.
- Kapitan, A. (2016). Ask a radical copyeditor: Black with a capital "B." *Radical Copyeditor*. Posted on September 21, 2016. Retrieved on February 4, 2021, from <https://radicalcopyeditor.com/2016/09/21/black-with-a-capital-b/>
- Laws, M. (2020). Why we capitalize 'Black' (and not 'white'). *Columbia Journalism Review*. Posted on June 16, 2020. Retrieved on February 4, 2021, from <https://www.cjr.org/analysis/capital-b-black-style-guide.php?fbclid=IwAR38XEA3S2GUXGkOlguxPvUN4wuc1I8jAWT5Vhn5hzkFceZDsVQsIvK3uvs>
- Leon, K. S. (2021). Latino criminology: Unfucking colonial frameworks in "Latinos and crime" scholarship. *Critical Criminology: An International Journal*, 29(1). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-020-09544-y>.

- Lenning, E., Brightman, S., & Buist, C. (2021). The trifecta of violence: A socio-historical comparison of lynching and violence against transgender women. *Critical Criminology: An International Journal*, 29(1). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-020-09539-9>.
- Moosa, I. A. (2018). *Publish or perish: Perceived benefits versus unintended consequences*. Northhampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Niemann, Y. F., y Muhs, G. G., & González, C. G. (Eds.). (2020). *Presumed incompetent II: Race, class, power, and resistance of women in academia*. Louisville, CO: University Press of Colorado.
- Novak, A. (2021). Toward a criminology of HIV/AIDS. *Critical Criminology: An International Journal*, 29(1).
- Posselt, J. R. (2016). *Inside graduate admissions: Merit, diversity, and faculty gatekeeping*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Posselt, J. R. (2020). *Equity in science: Representation, culture, and the dynamics of change in graduate education*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Potter, H., Higgins, G. E., and Gabbidon, S. (2011). The influence of gender, race/ethnicity, and faculty perceptions on scholarly productivity in criminology/criminal justice. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 22(1), 84-101.
- Rawat, S., & Meena, S. (2014). Publish or perish: Where are we heading? *Journal of Research in Medical Sciences*, 19(2), 87-89.
- Richie, B. E. (2011). Criminology and social justice: Expanding the intellectual commitment. In M. Bosworth and C. Hoyle (Eds.), *What is criminology?* (pp. 211-222). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shore, K. (2021). Targeting vulnerability with electronic location monitoring: Paternalistic surveillance as a model of carceral expansion. *Critical Criminology: An International Journal*, 29(1).
- Smith, J. M., & Kinzel, A. (2021). Restorative reform: Including formerly incarcerated voices in criminal justice reform. *Critical Criminology: An International Journal*, 29(1). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-020-09538-w>
- Squazzoni, F., Bravo, G., Grimaldo, F., Garcia-Costa, D., Farjam, M., & Mehmani, B. (2020). No tickets for women in the COVID-19 race? A study on manuscript submissions and reviews in 2347 Elsevier journals during the pandemic. Posted on October 19, 2020; revised on January 25, 2021. Retrieved on February 19, 2021, from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3712813.
- Thorncroft, R., and Asquith, N. L. (2019). Crippling criminology. *Theoretical Criminology*. Advance online publication. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480619877697>.
- Troshynski, E. I., & Bejinariu, A. (2021). Exploring the rhetoric: How state gender diversity laws address rights for gender diverse students. *Critical Criminology: An International Journal*, 29(1).
- Tudor, C. (2021). Christine Montross: Waiting for an Echo: The Madness of American Incarceration. *Critical Criminology: An International Journal*, 29(1). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-021-09553-5>.
- Vincent-Lamarre, P., Sugimoto, C. R., & Larivière, V. (2020). The decline of women's production during the coronavirus pandemic. *Nature Index*, May 19. Retrieved on February 4, 2021, from <https://www.natureindex.com/news-blog/decline-women-scientist-research-publishing-production-coronavirus-pandemic>.
- Walker, A., Valcore, J., Evans, B., & Stephens, A. (2021). Talking while trans: The experiences of transgender scholars in criminology and criminal justice. *Critical Criminology: An International Journal*, 29(1).
- Woods, J. B. (2014). Queer contestations and the future of a critical "queer" criminology. *Critical Criminology: An International Journal*, 22(5), 5-19. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-013-9222-3>.
- Zimmer, K. (2020). Gender gap in research output widens during pandemic. *TheScientist*, June 25. Retrieved on February 4, 2021, from <https://www.the-scientist.com/news-opinion/gender-gap-in-research-output-widens-during-pandemic-67665>.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.