



Reshaping a Discipline: the rise of behavioural genetics in the study of crime

Dr Brian B. Boutwell

Assoc. Prof. of Criminology, and Criminal Justice, and of Epidemiology,
College for Public Health and Social Justice, Saint Louis University

Institute of Criminology Public Seminar Series

Thursday 14th May 2015, 5.30pm

Seminar Room B3, Institute of Criminology,
Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge, CB3 9DA

A drinks reception in the basement foyer will follow this seminar for attendees

Scientific progress often proceeds at a slow pace. Ideas are generated, tested, and ultimately refined or discarded. Owing in part to its sociological ancestry, the field of criminology and criminal justice has been hesitant to embrace biosocial techniques broadly defined, and behavioural genetic methods in particular. This seminar is intended to provide some background in to the origin and evolution of behaviour genetic methods. Along the way, we'll discuss the logic behind behaviour genetic research designs, the methodological assumptions of the techniques used by behaviour geneticists, and the progress made by biosocial criminologists using these techniques over the last decade. Progress is rarely continuous, though, and can stall at various junctures for a variety of reasons. One avenue for jumpstarting progress involves rigorous debate. Recently, a paper was published in *Criminology* arguing that behavioural genetic methods are deeply flawed and forcefully calling for the censorship of all future studies that employ behavioural genetic designs. These were bold claims and unprecedented recommendations. The key question becomes, however, is there quantitative evidence to support such a position (and to legitimately ban behaviour genetic research)? Part of the goal is to demonstrate, both through discussion of the existing literature and mathematical simulations, why the central tenants of this critique, though seductive, are completely vacuous, concluding with a roadmap forward. Rapidly advancing techniques (such as molecular genetics and the use of genome wide association studies) are poised to rocket the discipline in to a new stratosphere of scientific insight. The upcoming decades promise to be some of the most exciting ever for criminologists and criminal justices.

Dr. Brian Boutwell is an associate professor of criminology and criminal justice and is jointly appointed as associate professor in the Department of Epidemiology at Saint Louis University. Dr. Boutwell completed his doctoral training in 2010 at Florida State University and specializes in studying the biosocial underpinnings of violent, aggressive, and antisocial behaviours.

Additionally, his interests include various aspects of evolutionary psychology and biology. Dr. Boutwell has published in the areas of life history theory and human mating, while also publishing research addressing aspects of reproductive outcomes in non-human animal subjects.

This seminar is free, and is open to all interested in attending, with no ticket required.
If you wish to be added to the seminar mailing list, please contact: Joanne Garner, on: jf225@cam.ac.uk
For full listing of IoC Seminars: <http://www.crim.cam.ac.uk/> For directions: <http://map.cam.ac.uk/>