

“Johnny Come Lately” – An Essay on Latter-Day Myths about Rural Crime and Justice Studies

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Abstract

“Johnny Come Lately” is a colloquialism with roots back to nineteenth century British maritime days. It is used here to illustrate the recent emergence of new myths about rural crime and justice studies. As rural crime and justice studies have emerged and grown over the previous 50-plus years, a number of scholars have discussed and debunked myths about crime and rurality, but unfortunately, new falsehoods have been purposively created of late. In this paper, each latter-day myth is described, debunked and then transformed into positive directives about the future of rural crime and justice studies, following the example set by Ceccato and Abraham (2022). These positives include: (1) there must be a sustained effort to make the location for rural crime studies and the scholars who do the research and theorizing ever more diverse; (2) rural crime studies, both old and new, must be made more easily accessible to this generation and future generations of scholars, practitioners and policy-makers alike; (3) rural crime studies must continue to improve theoretical sophistication through application, critique, and revision, and through theoretical interpretation of previously published empirical work; and (4) a thorough synthesis of the rural crime and justice studies literature is imperative to its future development.

Keywords: disciplinary mobbing; latter-day myths; criminological theory; critical theory; “Johnny Come Lately”; rural crime and justice studies; rural criminology; rural diversity

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Introduction

“ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge” – Charles Darwin¹

“Johnny Come Lately” is a phrase that emerged in the nineteenth century, according to the website *The Grammarist* (Osmond, n.d.). It’s etymological roots go back to an earlier British naval colloquialism, “Johnny Newcome,” to refer to someone who recently joined the crew of a sailing ship. The “Johnny Come Lately” idiom has evolved such that today it can refer to people who boast they know better about something than everyone else, and do not mind telling others they are the expert on issues they actually know less about than those with more experience. They might even act and claim as if they were the creators of ideas or things for which others deserve the real credit. This, of course, is a form of plagiarism, frequently seasoned with a bullish-like approach for guiltlessly manufacturing exaggerated and frequently false proclamations.

The “Johnny Come Lately” idiom varies in its meaning from region to region of the world. For example, in Caribbean cultures, the term “Johnny Come Lately” is used in a derogatory manner to refer to people who are new to an industry, community and/or organization as well as to those who are newly joined, but who give the impression that they are the repository of all knowledge.

The purpose of this essay is to address four “Johnny Come Lately” myths about rural crime and justice studies which seem to have appeared quite suddenly in this third decade of the twenty-first century. It is best to address them proactively so that the next generation of rural scholars do not naïvely fall prey to these falsehoods. These misconceptions may be clearly considered delusions created by the author(s) who constructed the myths by a present-day cadre of rural scholars who know far better than to believe them, but the future is more unpredictable if the record is not set straight now. There is much to explore in rural criminology studies and, in the interest of progressing as opposed to regressing the field, it is better not to invest time (perhaps beyond this essay) to disprove what is already well-established, just to appease a bothersome myth-making bully.

With the rise of rural crime and justice studies as a sub-field within criminology, several notable publications addressing myths about crime and rurality are available. For example, Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy (2014, pp. 6-26) discussed four. First, the unproductive use of dichotomies to distinguish what is rural from what is urban, recognizing that binaries (i.e., rural versus urban, *gemeinschaft* vs. *gesellschaft*, etc.) disguise the diversity of both rural and urban places and the people who live there. Second, findings that emerge from rural crime studies can challenge the illogic of many criminological theories, such as questioning the mythological idea that socially disorganized rural communities and those

¹ The quote can be found on page 3 of Darwin’s *Descent of Man*, published in 1871 by the London publishing company, John Murray. The quote comes from an article found in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* by Justin Kruger and David Dunning in 1999.

with weakened forms of collective efficacy are likely to display higher incidents of crime, when, in fact, a great deal of crime is embedded in the strength of networks (i.e., collective efficacy) found among people who live in rural localities. Third, rural crime was historically low and it is only in recent times, through modernization and urbanization, that it has increased, whereas the fact is that there are many historical accounts of crime in the countryside before the industrial revolution. Fourth, diametrically opposed images, but equally stereotypical of rural localities, as either places of horror and deviance versus idyllic portraits of harmonious and crime free rural communities, serve to hide to the same extent the diversity and variability of crime that can be found, based on empirical studies conducted at various kinds of localities with smaller populations and densities (Jobes et al., 2004; Wells & Weisheit, 2012).

These myths were reprised by Donnermeyer (2016) in his introductory chapter in the *Routledge International Handbook of Rural Criminology*, and greatly expanded by Ceccato (2016) in her book on *Rural Crime and Community Safety*. Yet, Ceccato was not finished. Along with a colleague, Ceccato and Abraham (2022) recently published the ground-breaking *Crime and Safety in the Rural: Lessons from Research*. Here, they improve upon the previous discussions of myths (Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014; Donnermeyer, 2016) by converting myth statements into positive interpretations about reasons why crime and safety in rural areas is important, and hence why a rural criminology is needed today more than ever. For example, one myth is that rural places all look alike – simple, homogenous, and forgotten through much of the history of criminological studies. Following from this naïve assumption is the fallacious logic that since all rural places look alike, what is rural in one country is equally rural in another country, when in fact, rural is relative to both geographic size and population distribution within an area, and in many countries, what might be rural in one region is semi-urban in another region.

Ceccato and Abraham (2022, p. 10) call for more sophisticated views of rural: “Taking distance from simplistic views of the rural, we call for the need to untangle possible facets of rural areas as both safe and criminogenic...”. As they also note, crime is “influenced by the very nature of rural areas”, and rural areas themselves are under “constant transformation” (Ceccato & Abraham, 2022, p. 10). There are another seventeen reasons cited by Ceccato and Abraham (2022) for why rural crime studies matter, a list well worth reading, and then reading over again, by all rural scholars to help guide their theorizing and research.²

Johnny Come Lately Myth #1: There is Little Diversity Amongst Rural Criminologists

This essay addresses four “Johnny Come Lately” myths and prevaricated claims promulgated purposively in present-day times. The first myth is that rural criminology is largely an endeavor without much diversity, neither by the location of contributors to the

² Ceccato also contributed a chapter in the Harkness and Bowden (2022) book *Rural Transformations and Rural Crime: International Critical Perspectives in Rural Criminology* titled “Fifteen Reasons to Care about Rural Crime and Safety”. This edited book is the first in the Bristol University Press *Research in Rural Crime* series.

field, nor by sex, race and age.³ Phrases and words like “small-group”, “clique”, and “tight-knit” may appear in public print, but in more private communications that supposedly allow a “Johnny Come Lately” to cravenly hide behind a veil of anonymity, such as the review of a book proposal, the accusations become worse for their misogynistic, racist and ageist overtones. To bust this myth, let us consider the soon to be released edited collection titled *Rural Criminology in Global Perspective: State of the Art on the World's Continents* (Bowden & Meško, 2022). This book is part of the Bristol University Press “Research in Rural Crime” series. Including the editors and the contributors for that book, there are ten scholars who are male from seven countries, and six women from another four countries. Five contributors are not white. What these scholars from diverse locations and backgrounds have in common is that they are individuals whose focus is on rural crime and justice studies.

Now, let us consider the *Encyclopedia of Rural Crime* (Harkness et al, 2023). There are eighty-five entries, covering topics from classical theory in criminology to LGBTIQ+ issues in a rural context. Of the eighty-two contributors, thirty-seven are male and forty-five are female. Furthermore, contributors from seventeen countries are represented.

Finally, let us dispel the myth with a third example. Presently under preparation for the “Routledge Studies in Rural Criminology” series is an edited book with the title *Crime, Peoples and Places: Perspectives on Rural Safety and Justice*, edited by Vania Ceccato and Alistair Harkness. This is clearly an internationally focused book, with chapters dealing with issues of rural crime and justice from 21 different countries. The list is remarkable for its diversity: Argentina; Australia; Brazil; Chile; England; Germany; India; Ireland; Japan; Kenya; Nigeria; New Zealand; Poland; Portugal; Slovenia; South Africa; Spain; Sweden; the United States; and Wales. Further, female authors are 22 in number, with an equal number of contributors who are male.

The future speaks to an ever-growing diversity within rural crime and justice studies. For example, Wendell Wallace is currently editing a book for the Bristol University Press “Research in Rural Crime” series on *Rural Policing in Global Contexts*. Authors and topics are from Australia, England, Iceland, Nigeria, Pakistan, Poland, Scotland, South Africa, and Trinidad and Tobago. The editor himself is a rural crime and justice studies scholar at the University of West Indies in Trinidad and Tobago. In addition, this same series will publish a monograph, likely in 2026, about crime in rural China, by Qingli Meng, currently at the Niagara University in Buffalo, New York.

In all these examples, the distributions are not perfectly perfect, to be perfectly redundant about it, but not bad! Besides, what is the ideal distribution? Perhaps from a more comparative perspective, one would find that rural criminology, such as the Division of Rural Criminology, is more diverse by both country of origin and demographic characteristics than

³ An earlier allusion to this myth can be found in “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: An Irreverent Taxonomic Review of Reviewers and Reviews” by Joseph F. Donnermeyer (2023) in Volume 4, Issue 2 of *Rurality, Crime and Society*, pages 34-40. See especially “the bully” on pages 38 and 39.

all of the other divisions in the American Society of Criminology (ASC), except perhaps the Division of International Criminology.

To tabulate male and female contributors, I simply counted up the countries where they currently hold academic positions, not where they are originally from. The real world of academics is far more complex than this. Most of us travel a great deal throughout our careers, either for employment and/or for research and writing. For example, one prominent rural scholar grew up in Brazil but holds an appointment at a university in Stockholm. Another one began writing about rural crime while living in Kenya, but now resides in Australia. A third and fourth are located at universities in the United States, but grew up in Canada and China, respectively. Many other individuals with different countries of origin and cultural identities, different from their current location, can easily be cited. These authors, often but not always, focus their scholarship on their country of origin, not the country of their employ, thereby bringing a wide range of experiences and perspectives to the field.

I remember that my goal when developing the *Routledge International Handbook of Rural Criminology* (Donnermeyer, 2016) was to make it as diverse as possible, both in terms of authors and the rural localities they wrote about. I wanted more than the “big four” (Australia, Canada, Great Britain, and the United States), where so much criminology scholarship historically is from, because there are so many millions of rural places and so great a diversity of rural peoples around the world. Further, despite being controversially positioned as the ‘Global South’ in many Southern Criminology studies, Australia is not the sidelines locale that some falsely claim it is.

I succeeded only partially, with 21 of the 73 contributors located in countries outside the “big four”. Further, of the 42 chapters, 14 were focused on the rural context of crime beyond the boundaries of the “big four”. I gave myself a grade of B-minus, for try as I might, I simply could not find scholars at that time with a rural focus in several regions of the world, especially Central America, the Middle East and South Asia. Yet, I congratulated myself because it helped move rural criminology toward an international focus, a growing diversity which continues to this day as evidenced by the five examples above. Further, the increase in the number and diversity of scholars is not incremental, but exponential.

Since the handbook was published, there is now an International Society for the Study of Rural Crime (ISSRC), a Working Group on Rural Criminology in the European Society of Criminology (ESC), along with the Division of Rural Criminology in ASC. In 2023, the biennial conference of Criminal Justice and Security in Central and Eastern Europe, held in Ljubljana, Slovenia, focused on rural and urban safety and security perspectives, based on the 17 United Nations Sustainability Goals. The 66th Commission on the Status of Women had, in 2023, as its review theme, the empowerment of rural women and girls, with rural criminologists speaking at the parallel non-government organization event. In conclusion, myth #1 is tremendously inaccurate, and seems to be motivated by nothing else than a desire to be negative about the success of rural criminology.

Following the role model provided by Ceccato and Abraham (2022), this first “Johnny Come Lately” myth can be converted into a positive statement about the reason why rural crime and justice studies matter. It is this: despite the growing mix of scholars and scholarship, there must be a sustained effort to engage, support and facilitate the inclusion and foregrounding of geographically, culturally and linguistically varied studies and scholars. This pursuit is important too, given the systemic and technological bias, such as language bias, in ranking the algorithmic of scholarly databases and repositories (like Google Scholar). It will be perennially important to make rural studies even more diverse, by country of origins of authors, and countries and regions within which rural scholarship is focused. For example, in criminology generally and rural criminology specifically, much more needs to be done to include scholars from Indigenous communities and those who do research of Indigenous peoples.

Many rural scholars work at institutions of higher learning where they may be the only criminologists interested in the rural dimensions of crime and justice. Resources may be scarce for them, restricting travel to various conferences, such as the annual meeting of ESC, and thus the opportunity to chat face-to-face at the conference bar about theory and research with like-minded colleagues. The solution to their intellectual isolation, however, is obvious. Links and meetings can now be electronic, such as the various roundtables sponsored in years past by the ISSRC, among other opportunities to collaborate. Further, rural criminology must be inclusive by scholars from the various disciplines that can potentially contribute about crime, deviance and criminal justice in a rural context. The electronic platforms can be quite helpful in building this cohesion. However, they are not enough if rural criminologists of all kinds do not maintain a mindset of inclusiveness; that is, a world-wide welcome mat for all who want to join and contribute positively to rural criminology.

“Johnny Come Lately” Myth #2: The Origins of Rural Criminology

Another equally false myth is that rural criminology, especially from a critical criminology point of view, emerged only from work in Australia and the United Kingdom. This flagrant lie purposively excludes the other two countries (Canada and the United States) among the “big four” as I call them. Additionally, once early studies from a variety of other countries are considered, the exaggerated kudos proclaimed in this myth, with all the credit given only to the countries of Australia and the United Kingdom, is even less true. But, what makes this to be truly silly is that it is such a frivolous, zany and unnecessary claim.

Myth #2 is a purposive attempt to create a form of academic amnesia; that is, intentionally endeavoring to create and then spread a fake fact about the history and heritage of rural crime and justice studies. As Young (1979) long ago pointed out, criminology is a field of science characterized by a great deal of amnesia, selectively forgetting about the intellectual contributions of some scholars that somehow do not fit in to a socially constructed but false narrative. As Goyes and South (2017) later pointed out, there was much green criminology before green criminology was coined. This work, a lot of it written in other than the English language, deserves to be acknowledged and the field of green

criminology is richer if this literature is not forgotten but rather is made accessible to all scholars.

To claim supremacy of Australia and the United Kingdom for the emergence of rural crime and justice studies, however, is more than mere academic chauvinism. It is not only an attempt to hide away the international character of rural crime and justice studies as they emerged over the past half century, but to steal that heritage and claim it for one's own! As well, tossing in kudos for the United Kingdom would appear to legitimize Australia, a type of "back door Johnny" syndrome of waiting for the stage star by the back door in order to make oneself look good, but having never really performed on the stage in a way to earn one's own star on the rural criminology walk of fame. If this myth were to diffuse among a great number of rural scholars, not just a disgruntled myth-makers who does not feel guilty about claims that amount to intellectual plagiarism, it would morph into a type of disciplinary mobbing (Westhues, 2005). Disciplinary mobbing is when the mainstream of a field of study seeks to actively ignore the diversity of contributions that previously built up this very same body of scholarship. If not corrected, it becomes plagiarism on a collective scale.

Consider, for example, the proclamation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century of the renowned physicist, Ernest Mach, who declared during a lecture in Vienna that atoms do not exist. Thankfully, Einstein's first article on Brownian motion and the existence of atoms was not swept under the rug, was published, and the theories we know today as relativity and quantum mechanics began to emerge. Imagine if Einstein's brilliance had been squashed by a form of positivism embraced by Mach who unbudgingly reasoned that because atoms cannot really be seen, they do not exist (Rovelli, 2014). Imagine the same diminishment of rural crime and justice studies if this second myth was believed by too many scholars from this and future generations.

A history of the development of rural crime and justice studies can be found in Donnermeyer (2016, p. 4), with updates in Donnermeyer (2019, p. 6), and Harkness et al (2023, pp. 3-4). In Donnermeyer (2016; 2019), the emergence of rural criminology and its increasingly international character are illustrated by an inverse cone that starts at the top of the page as quite skinny, but has grown fatter and fatter going down the page with each passing year because books, journals articles, and conferences with rural-focused scholarship have increasingly expanded the body of knowledge and theoretical points of view. At the top of the illustration are the words "early work – scattered, theory-less, with little synergy", and at the bottom are the words "21st century work – more theoretically diverse, more critical, more international, and more self-aware" (Donnermeyer, 2019, p. 6). Harkness et al (2023) provide updates for the decades to the 2020s. Further, at the 2024 annual meeting of the ESC in Florence, Italy, the Working Group on Rural Criminology sponsored three sessions. In each, the audience filled the room and in one session, attendees were sitting on the steps and even a couple standing outside, watching through the door and listening intently.

In countries like Australia, a good share of the early scholarship came from scholars whose backgrounds were from somewhere else. For example, the ground-breaking book,

Crime in a Rural Community (O'Connor & Gray, 1989) includes an author who hails from Ireland. Another book important for the advancement of rural criminology in Australia, edited by Barclay et al. (2007), included an American (me!). Some of the prominent early work on farm crime in Australia was conducted on behalf of the Australian Institute of Criminology by a scholar, Carlos Carcach, with roots in Latin America (Carcach, 2002), and then there is an ex-patriot American's leadership associated with research on cohesion and crime in rural communities of New South Wales, Pat Jobes (Jobes et al., 2004).

The point of all this is that one's academic training may occur at one place, employment at another, and research at a third locality. It is actually impossible to claim any one country (or nationality) was a leader in the development of rural crime and justice studies. Consider my own experiences. While driving back with a valued colleague in an open-range area of northern New South Wales, Australia (not quite the outback, in my opinion), and chatting about the two interviews completed that day, it occurred to me that there is a serious flaw in social disorganization theory. That is, there is only social organization and there can be multiple expressions of social organization associated with either more crime or less crime, intersecting with each other through multiple networks of actors that exist in even the smallest of rural places (Donnermeyer, 2015). So, what country gets the credit? Australia? What about my college courses, heavy on theory, from Thomas More College near Cincinnati, Ohio (undergraduate) and the University of Kentucky in Lexington (graduate)? Does this mean the United States is awarded the honor? Or, consider the work of Kaylen and Pridemore (2013), both scholars from the United States who used the British Crime Survey to test the systemic version of social disorganization theory, focusing on respondents from rural places in the British Isles. Their article was published in the *British Journal of Criminology*. Again, what country is assigned the kudos? The correct answer should be: who cares! The exchange of ideas amongst scholars who themselves display varied intellectual experiences and backgrounds, especially over the span of a career, dispels this "Johnny Comes Lately" myth as a very laughable form of braggadocio. What are the real origins of rural crime and justice studies? The only valid answer is: THE WORLD!

Once again, following the role model provided by Ceccato and Abraham (2022), busting this lie is not enough. It must be converted into an important reason for why rural crime and justice studies matter. There is likely a great amount of literature about crime in a rural context that is not available to early career scholars today because it is not accessible via electronic search engines such as Google, on social media platforms such as LinkedIn, or in library repositories at universities around the world. This older body of literature does not have DOI's and often cannot even be found in PDF form. For example, in a box of hard copy rural crime materials in my basement, I have a mimeograph of a research paper (no date and no author) on "praedial larceny in Brazil" (a type of agricultural crime) that likely was written in the 1950s or 1960s.

One endeavor for the remainder of this third decade of the twenty-first century should be to curate as much rural crime literature as possible and make it available through the ISSRC, the Centre for Rural Criminology at the University of New England (Armidale,

NSW) and other places where it can potentially inform scholars, both new and old. This is why an joint archivist role has been created for rural criminology via ISSRC, ESC's Working Group on Rural Criminology, and ASC's Division of Rural Criminology. A lot of the literature will have connections to the "big four", but much will be from other countries as well. This essay can then be read by a next generation of scholars who will know full well not to believe the silly claim of this "Johnny Come Lately" lie.

"Johnny Come Lately" Myth #3: Rural Criminology is Not Critical

Critical criminology is often mis-defined, mis-interpreted, mis-applied, and mis-appropriated. All four conditions are the case with the recent "Johnny Come Lately" myth that rural criminology lacks a critical approach to its subject matter. Let's begin by defining what critical criminology is, using my favorite definition (a definition I created and then managed to squeeze the whole kit and kaboodle into a single, elongated, grammar-defying sentence) (Donnermeyer, 2012, p. 289):

... all approaches to critical criminology argue for a structural explanation... of crime, that is, crime is rooted in economic, social, and political inequalities and social class, racism, hate, and other forms of segmented social organization, reinforced and rationalized by culturally derived relativistic definitions of conforming, deviant, and criminal actions, which separate, segregate, and otherwise cause governments at all levels and peoples everywhere to differentially and discriminately enforce laws and punish offenders.

Some criminologists mistake rhetoric as a form of critical analysis, using words like "periphery", "metropole", "reflexivity", "privileging" and a host of other multi-syllabic words that project a false patina of theoretical sophistication. As well, merely making negative comments about rural criminological scholarship is not a critical criminology, but a simple negativity. Since there are many distinctive versions of critical criminology (DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2012), it is incumbent on criminology scholars to identify which one(s) they are using. In the case of this "Johnny Come Lately" myth, the word "critical" is used in such a footloose manner as to render it meaningless.

Another attempt to define a critical rural criminology comes from a special issue of what was then a journal called *Southern Rural Sociology* (the name is now the *Journal of Rural Social Sciences*). Titled "Toward a Rural Critical Criminology" (Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2008), the authors applied the left realist concept of the "square of crime" (Young, 1992) to interpret such criminological issues as violence against rural women, with the square of crime subsequently applied to a more fully developed and internationally focused examination of woman abuse within a monograph in the Routledge Studies in Rural Criminology series by DeKeseredy (2021). The square of crime consists of four interacting elements, including the police and agencies of the state, the public, the offender, and the victim. Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy (2014) also applied the square of crime to discuss critical approaches to the study of rural community characteristics and crime, substance

misuse, and agricultural crime. Further, the third myth is busted when considering that as far back as 1964, the American criminologist, William Chambliss, who would be president of the American Society of Criminology in 1988, wrote an article on vagrancy laws in England that had both a decided rural focus and a definite critical perspective.

Again, following Ceccato and Abraham's (2022) example, allow me to briefly discuss why a critical rural criminology matters, and more generally why engaging with criminological theory matters for the development of rural crime and justice studies. If a rural crime and justice scholar understands various versions of critical theory (or other theories not explicitly critical), then application can be made to analyze a wide variety of specific topics, hence developing rural-based middle-range critical theories (Merton, 1949) that can create conceptual models for framing research and advancing theory on specific issues of safety and security in rural settings (Donnermeyer, 2019).

As rural crime and justice studies emerged in the latter decades of the twentieth century and into these early decades of the twenty-first century, it was okay to feel critical by complaining about an urban bias in criminology, and it remains appropriate for rural scholars to remind their readers that a great deal of urban prejudice still exists. The continued maturity of rural criminology, however, is to now move forward with theories that help advance scholarship, or in the words of Ceccato and Abraham (2022, p. 10): "crime is influenced by the very nature of rural areas". Such is the example of DeKeseredy's (2022) male peer support model of violence against rural women. It addresses the way rural transformations (Ceccato & Abraham, 2022; Bowden & Harkness, 2022) affect the development and sustainability of patriarchal rural cultures that provide male abusers with rationalizations for their behaviors. Hence, it combines a view of the relationship of broad social structural change (unemployment and high rates of poverty) to the behaviors of men at the local or community level who are enmeshed in highly patriarchal cultures (Donnermeyer, 2012). When theory goes local in its focus or directs its attention to specific issues, it becomes far more rigorous than global-focused rhetoric of metropolises and outbacks that ignore the diversity of rural places but somehow believes the equator has become a magical dividing line for making one feel like a critical criminologist.

Also, it must be kept in mind that a great deal of the rural crime and justice studies literature (and criminological literature, more generally) is neither theory-oriented nor critical. Yet, this should not be seen as a shortcoming, but as an opportunity for rural crime and justice scholars in this and future generations to re-interpret past scholarship in a theoretically critical, or at least meaningful, manner. Lambasting might satisfy a storyteller who composes blustery phrases of negativity about rural criminological subject matter and the scholarly output of others, but has little value for advancing the subdiscipline. It needs to be recognized, too, that scholars – including those recognized as leading rural scholars – have lamented the decline in theoretical work that is plaguing criminology more broadly. While appreciating the value of and need for theory, it is important to note that a scholar who adopts a more empirical approach to researching crime problems so as to advance knowledge which leads to meaningful reform (which is the intent of left realism) is not somehow less of an

academic than the theorist, and much, much more so than the person who writes turgid drivel under the guise of being a “critical” criminologist. Such myth-makers, particularly those in publicly funded institutions, should struggle to look in the mirror to justify to themselves how they are doing anything of value for either the taxpayer or the profession.

“Johnny Come Lately” Myth #4: There is Nothing New in Recently Published Articles and Books about Rural Crime and Justice Studies

The fourth and final “Johnny Come Lately” myth that forms the focus of this essay may be the most dangerous threat to the future of rural crime and justice studies. It is the mendacity of claiming that contemporarily published rural-focused articles found in various peer-reviewed journals and chapter contributions published in edited books are simply repeating findings that are already known, based either on previous rural scholarship or because the same topic is covered by the general field of criminology. This claim demonstrates a great ignorance about how science works in all fields of study, from the natural sciences to the social sciences. It is easy to exclaim about current rural criminology work that none of it is new and already can be found in any textbook on criminology.

The refutation of this myth requires only one word – REPLICATION! In the health and medical fields, replication is essential to the identification of diseases and confirmation of their cures. One peer-reviewed publication is not enough. In political science, periodic surveys of citizens’ opinions about governmental leaders and issues of concern to the welfare of the state are central to their scholarship. One study is not enough. In criminology, there are literally hundreds of studies that measure citizens’ self-perceptions about their safety and security in places around the world. Would a single study of safety and security in Barrow, Alaska be sufficient to assess perceptions in Maribor, Slovenia? Would a study of safety and security in Mexico City be sufficient to understand crime and security in the village of Kulang, Malaysia? And would what makes sense in terms of crime prevention for Chicago, Illinois be worthy of implementing in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago without significant cultural adjustments? Of course not!

It is impossible to replicate precisely from one criminological study to another, including even those few pieces of research with tight experimental designs. The word “replication” as used in this essay is simply a reminder that one published study alone is insufficient to bring closure of knowledge in a particular subject matter. There are dozens of studies of rural community characteristics and crime, using various criminological theories of crime and place, bringing depth to an understanding of community context and criminality (Lilly et al, 2015). And, recalling the words of Ceccato and Abraham (2022), which is also echoed in the title of the recently edited collection by Bowden and Harkness (2022), rural areas are continuously transforming.

One or even a few studies alone will never do. It is the accumulation of knowledge that makes a scientific field a science. Also, it is comparative scholarship based on theory that will advance rural crime and justice studies, and perhaps suggest ways to revise various

criminological theories or even to create new ones. Consider the following chapter in the recently published book, edited by Bowden and Harkness (2022), that was about rural policing (Stenbacka, 2022). Stenbacka is a scholar from Sweden who focuses on the consolidation of police services, often with deleterious effects on the safety perceptions of people who live in rural communities. Her chapter relies upon formerly published scholarship of dozens of studies about rural policing, especially in a European context. Or, consider a book on policing in rural Niger (Göpfert, 2020). It takes on greater significance when combined and compared with scholarship from Australia, Canada, France, Slovenia, Scotland, South Africa and dozens of other localities, and itself adds to the significance of the literature from those countries.

With apologies to the various Star Wars movies, let us turn from the dark side of “Johnny Come Lately” myth-making to the good side of the “force”, that is, of the reasons why rural crime and justice studies matter (Ceccato & Abraham, 2022). What rural criminology needs more and more now is synthesis. The remarkable growth of rural crime and justice studies, especially in the twenty-first century, necessitates even more books like Bowden and Harkness’ (2022) *Rural Transformations and Rural Crime*, where a diversity of scholars have a chance to summarize the literature on particular topics, from their particular geographic focus and from their particular point of view. Keep in mind that it was the three editions of the Weisheit, Falcone and Wells’ (1996, 1999, 2006) monograph, which is essentially a literature review, that propelled rural crime and justice studies from a scattered state of affairs to a more cohesive body of scholarship (Donnermeyer, 2019). Despite the fact that their monograph was focused almost completely on the United States, these academic equivalents of Jedi Knights made a big and positive difference to rural criminology.

A Short Conclusion

Even though the “Johnny Come Lately” myths reviewed in this essay display a negative mentality not conducive to the growth of rural crime and justice studies, the upside is that these myths provide to an ever-growing and diverse network of scholars various opportunities to advance rural crime studies by considering why the falsehoods are just that. An unfortunate aspect of manufacturing malicious myths about rural crime and justice studies is that there are many of the barriers faced in the past by rural criminology scholars that remain. For example, reviewers of manuscripts submitted to journal or for research proposals may view rural as relatively insignificant and therefore not worthy of publication or funding. Yet, those kinds of barriers are breaking down. Why repair them?

Ultimately, this is why transforming the myths into positive statements is very important. Here are the four reasons for why rural crime studies matter, expressed (hopefully) in the same style as the 20 reasons why crime and safety in rural areas matter that was composed by Ceccato and Abraham (2022).

- (1) there must be a sustained effort to make rural crime studies and the scholars who do the research and theorizing ever more diverse and to create space for and prioritize marginalized voices, particularly when systemic, collective bias overlooks them;
- (2) rural crime studies, both old and new, must be made more accessible to scholars, practitioners and policy-makers alike – praxis must be pursued;
- (3) rural crime studies must continue to improve theoretical sophistication through application, critique and revision, and through theoretical re-interpretation of previously published empirical work; and
- (4) synthesis of the rural crime literature and the comparative analysis of crime studies from diverse rural localities is imperative to rural criminology's future development.

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