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KAREN FOLEY: Hi, and welcome back to Student Connections. Well, we've just been having a very interesting discussion about digital literacy and passwords, without giving our passwords away, and all our ideas around that, and this whole concept that I guess security may not be quite as secure as we always think it is. Which I guess leads us slightly to the area of criminology, because I'm joined now by Vickie Cooper, and we're going to talk about the study of criminology. And Vickie sort of outlined in her title for this that sometimes what we think criminology is isn't always how we choose to study it. So Vickie, welcome to Student Connections.

VICKIE COOPER: Thank you.

KAREN FOLEY: And I know this session has a lot of questions and a lot of students are interested in criminology. So in the chat, as we're going through, let us know your questions. Let us know your feedback. And we'll feed that and ask Vickie those questions.

So can I ask, then, what is criminology?

VICKIE COOPER: Well, very broadly, criminology is about the study of crime and criminality. And this can involve anything from the study of perpetrators, study of victims of crime, study of social harms caused by criminal events. It can also involve the study of those groups in society that are caught up in the criminal justice system as a result of their status, such as immigrants, homeless people, and substance misusers, et cetera, things like that.

And criminology is also about the study of those institutions that manage groups in society who are in the criminal justice system-- so criminal justice agencies, courts, police, and also regulators of financial crime, et cetera. And our department's really broad, and between us, all the staff in the department, we look at things like corporate crime, homelessness, immigration, austerity, domestic violence. And the kind of common denominator that brings all those topics together is the processes of criminalisation and non-criminalisation.

KAREN FOLEY: Because the department's really growing. And like you say, you've got now so many different areas of expertise. And I guess a lot of the modules that we're producing and the way that we're developing qualifications is also growing accordingly.

And this is something that's so interesting to students. Why are students interested in studying

all these grimy areas, all these sorts of things that aren't quite as common, I guess? Why is it such an interesting area for students?

VICKIE COOPER: It's a very interesting area for students because it encompasses a whole lot of areas, as I've discussed, a whole number of areas. It encompasses areas such as criminal profiling, and a lot of students are interested in criminal profiling, criminology and psychology. But it also encompasses a lot of areas to do with inequality, social problems in society, and then there's also grander crimes, like crimes of the powerful, et cetera. So all of these broad areas have a really, really huge impact on students when they first begin their degree.

KAREN FOLEY: You mentioned, then, the idea of inequality. And I'm just sort of mindful of this idea of definitions and how we define things. Because some things that might be criminal in one society may not be in another.

VICKIE COOPER: Yes.

KAREN FOLEY: So can you tell us a bit about what criminalisation means and how we're sort of defining that in this academic area?

VICKIE COOPER: Yeah. Criminalisation is about the way in which the criminal justice system and other agencies target key groups, which then leads to them becoming-- or more likely to become caught up in the criminal justice system, caught up in court, and to be prosecuted. But equally, there are processes of non-criminalization-- so where key members in society commit unlawful crimes, unlawful acts, and nothing happens. They're not prosecuted. So like Volkswagen, for example, the whole Volkswagen--

KAREN FOLEY: Very topical.

VICKIE COOPER: The topical situation at the minute. And so state societies are just talking about fines in those areas, rather than criminal activity, whereas there are groups in society are caught up in the criminal justice system, sort of more typical criminals.

KAREN FOLEY: And I guess where is the parameter, in terms of what's more common, popular, interesting? You know, so many different spheres, I guess, that you're looking at, in terms of both the actions and the implications of those. Where's this all at, at the minute?

VICKIE COOPER: In what sense? Sorry.

KAREN FOLEY: I guess-- I'm just saying what's interesting, you know? What sorts of things are the department looking at, that you-- you've mentioned so many different areas of criminal activities and how some of those, whilst they may be criminal actions, like corporate crime, they may not have necessarily the same sorts of ramifications as they might do if you go out and murder somebody, for example. So I guess what I'm saying is what's trending? What's hot in the world of criminology, in terms of the things that people are looking at right now? Or maybe something that you're doing? Because I know you're sort of one part of this department that's got a lot on.

VICKIE COOPER: Yeah. Well, I mean, my own area is homelessness. I look at homeless groups caught up in the criminal justice system. I look at homeless in prison, the over-representation of homeless people in prison. And students tend to like that subject a lot, because it encompasses a whole lot of other areas, such as homelessness and mental health, homelessness, substance misuse, et cetera, and then looking at those within the criminal justice system.

There's a number of students who are interested in prisons, as well, and the institution-- what happens inside prisons and how and which prisons are sites of punishment. And we have a number of students also interested in corporate crimes and crimes of the powerful, as well. That's really topical.

And then also, there's domestic violence. Domestic violence-- both the victims of domestic violence, perpetrators of domestic violence, students are really interested in that, as well. So those are all really key topics. In my experience, anyway, those are key topics that students have been interested in.

KAREN FOLEY: We've got a lot of students in the chat talking about how they're starting their journeys in DD103, where you're thrown up with lots of different ideas, and like you've mentioned, all these various sorts of aspects to do with things. What advice would you give students who think, oh, that's so interesting. I'd love to do some more about that. But they're at DD103 level, where they've got to cover a huge range of things, but actually, something may be really interesting and neat. What sorts of advice would you give those students about nurturing that side, as well as keeping on studying?

VICKIE COOPER: I would advise students to focus on their interests. Certainly when I was an undergraduate student, I started working in a soup run for homeless people. And just my interest in that area has continued to where I am now.

So I would encourage students always to keep on top of your studies, as much as possible. And you can fit in your interests into your area of study, as long as you work extremely hard and read a lot.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. Absolutely. And I guess, you know, it's all about keeping up with what's interesting and making it relate to the world. And like you mentioned, the VW-- and I know that's generated a lot of chat, as well. And I'd like to go to the social media desk to see what people are saying. Because again, you sort of mentioned corporate crime and how criminal acts can have different ideas. Rachel and HJ, what's everyone saying?

RACHEL: Well, under the banner of corporate crime or corporate harm-- whatever you want to call it-- we have Gareth, that has been asking the question about crimes of the powerful. And he wonders whether VW, Volkswagen, will be prosecuted for their actions. But it also kind of blurs the line between individual responsibility for criminal action and corporate responsibility. So it's kind of just learning where that goes. What do we think about that?

VICKIE COOPER: This is interesting. I was just reading this morning that within the company itself, they're looking at prosecuting individuals-- individual technicians, individual engineers-- who installed the software in the cars, rather than looking at the entire corporation, prosecuting the entire corporation. And there's a whole lot of literature that talks about the problems and the split and the individualisation of that crime, compared to the responsibility of the entire corporation of those crimes. And Volkswagen is a good case study to think about.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. People have just been saying what a good case study this is going to be when it transpires. And I'm getting the sense that it could be something that's going to benchmark how these things are dealt with, in terms of corporation and individual responsibility.

And also, if you look at the Resources section, I know we've got the blog there as well, and Steve Tombs does a lot on corporate harm. But I wanted to sort of return to this idea again about these processes of criminalisation-- individuals and corporations. Inequality, as well, is one of the sorts of key things that comes up, irrespective of whether we're looking at the individual or a bigger conglomerate.

So how does that, then, relate? How do these unequal parameters or these different power relations then impact on what criminal activity can be and how we treat that?

VICKIE COOPER: Well, the power relationships are massively important to how we define crime, how we

represent-- how crime is represented, for example, in the media, and then how crime is represented in courts and in the criminal justice agencies. And inequality's really interesting to think about-- crime and those individuals that are criminalised, compared to those who aren't.

So for example, in 2008, there were 1,800 prosecutions under the Vagrancy Act, which is a two-century-old legislation that has historically been about criminalising the poor and activities associated with homelessness-- begging, idleness, et cetera, and public disorder. Compare that with crimes of the powerful. Each year, on average, there's about 20 people prosecuted by the Serious Fraud Office, that looks at fraud within companies. So there's a huge disparity, in terms of wealth and inequality, and how members who are part of wealthy societies are not criminalised, and members who are part of unequal societies and come from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to be more criminalised.

KAREN FOLEY: We've had a very international audience. And one of the things we've been talking about, as well, is how we can have certain very Western-contextualized ways of treating things that may not be the same elsewhere, and different cultural differences and things like that. And also just drawing on that VW thing, about how these ideas are shifting, do you think with corporate crime and the sort of distinction between individuals, that might change in terms of that power balance? That we might start saying, actually, whilst yes, we can criminalise, we can compartmentalise people who are doing what we would say are deviant acts-- shoplifting, et cetera-- actually, the concept of crime might be changing a bit, like with this VW case study, where maybe we're actually saying, well, yes, we've got corporations. Yes, we've got individuals. Might that then prove to be a bigger area once we start researching it and recategorising what we then see as criminal acts and who that responsibility lies? Have you got any thoughts around that?

VICKIE COOPER: Yeah. I think the entire period of austerity has helped to highlight the way in which society's shifting, in terms of how it conceptualises crime, deviance, and notions of criminal activity. And those realities are shifting now. I think there is a greater focus upon, for example, financial crimes and corporate crimes, such as Volkswagen.

But it takes a long time, these shifts. You know, these aren't shifts that will happen overnight. But there are certainly, from where I'm sitting, there are certainly shifts in how those are represented.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. So we've talked a bit about these corporate crimes, and I just want to get back to

the sort of base root level, I guess. We were talking about criminal activities, the homeless. They will often end up being prosecuted. Criminal system-- that's, I guess, the more clear-cut of the lot. And then we, of course, imply a penalty-- often prison, that sort of thing.

And very interested in this idea, then, about what sort of things that achieves, and then how that label then affects somebody when they leave prison. You know, how being criminalised and being part of that process may impact on the individual, to exacerbate or alleviate or rehabilitate people. What are your thoughts on that side of things, in terms of the process?

VICKIE COOPER: Well, it's interesting. Part of criminology, a large part of criminology, is about looking at rehabilitation, both within prison and also when people leave prison. And myself, I've done studies and I am interested in where people return to when they leave prison, what communities they go back to, particularly if they've come from disadvantaged communities or they've come from backgrounds of violence. You know, do they go back to the same community? Do they go back to different communities?

And so that is part of probation, if you like, as a key criminal justice agency. Probation plays a large part in the study of criminology, and how probation manages these rehabilitation programmes, and how people are processed from prison through probation and the return and integration into the community. So yeah, criminology definitely addresses those areas. It's interesting.

KAREN FOLEY: I'm very interested in the idea-- because a lot of people are starting their studies and very excited about all of that. And as well as talking about some of the content that's really interesting, we've been talking about how people might do some of these things, like what it's like to study. And I wanted to ask you, when students are looking at all these interesting areas, how do we study these? Like how is it possible to then sort of say, OK, we're social scientists. We're going to look at the world. You know, we like all of our methods, and we like all of our sort of cause-and-effect type things.

In criminology, then, how do we study-- how do we study some of this? And what might students expect? Especially if they're starting at the sort of Level 1 modules, how would they be looking at studying criminology?

VICKIE COOPER: Well, I mean criminology literature, topics, they're so broad. And a number of areas, such as sociology, history, politics, psychology-- all of those areas are possible for students to focus upon criminology and be able to access books and key literature within those areas alone. And

again, as I said before, they would just need to focus in an area that they're interested in and apply that to the subject that they're currently studying, like sociology, history, politics, psychology.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. And your research-- because you mentioned you were doing a lot with homeless people and things. How are you studying that world? What sorts of methods? What sorts of-- how are you collecting data and publishing around all of that? Can you tell us a bit about that process?

VICKIE COOPER: Yeah. The process, it starts with an idea. It starts with an idea. And then it's about exploring whether that's possible. And you have to look at the ethics. You have to consider, well, what is ethical? You know, you can't just go up to a homeless person on the street and say, I want to question you. I want to ask you some questions. So you have to consider what's possible, through what agencies you're going to be meeting and speaking with the groups that you want to interview.

And you have a research design. So you think, well, OK, what do I want to find out? Here's my questions, and this is how I'm going to gather the data, and this is my time frame.

And then from that data, you have your own analysis, and that analysis is largely fed through your data but also fed through what you're reading and what theories are out there, what criminology ideas and sociology ideas are out there. And that helps to form your overall analysis.

KAREN FOLEY: So for the things-- I know there's a lot of chat about what's going on in the news and all these interesting things. I guess what we're saying, really, is that there is a sort of method in the social sciences that will sort of take a look at those things, I guess, in a more considered way, and using different methods with different areas of interest that are often quite specific.

And I think, like you were saying before, there's so much interdisciplinarity with so many of these things. Sometimes it must be quite a challenge to actually say, OK, we've got all this politics, this psychology, all of these sorts of aspects coming into play here. How do we then research something quite specific? And I guess that's the skill for new students, isn't it?

VICKIE COOPER: Yes, absolutely.

KAREN FOLEY: And I wanted to ask, just to sort of end up the session, about what sorts of things, once people are studying criminology-- we can see it would be very valuable, in terms of the skills. You

must get a lot of different skills as you progress in your studies. What sorts of careers or jobs do people go on to do? I mean, do they end up working in prison settings, or what do people do once they've done a criminology degree?

Again, it's a really broad field. And this is also why criminology's quite a popular topic. A number of students, in my experience in meeting students after they finish their degree, they go on to work in youth work, social work, domestic violence agencies, victim support agencies. They go on to work in probation sector, as well. And there's a number of third-sector agencies now that are involved within the criminal justice system, such as Nacro and Shelter. And a number of students do go on to work in the third sector, also.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent, so lots of potential there.

VICKIE COOPER: And of course prisons, as well, if that's an area they're interested in.

KAREN FOLEY: Ah. Well, thank you so much, Vickie.

VICKIE COOPER: Thank you very much.

KAREN FOLEY: That's been incredibly useful. And I know criminology's one of those areas that is always generating a lot of discussion. I know we've also got loads of new people who've come onto the chat, and so I'd like to go to the social media desk and say hello to everyone, and see if people have sent in some of their selfies as requested, and to see what's going on out there as well. HJ and Rachel?

HJ: Yeah, we've got loads of selfies coming in. And the mailman's on his way, I've heard. But loads of people really loved this discussion. And criminology's not my area, but I've been really intrigued about how again, with social sciences, it just feeds into everything. Gareth said a good point about how criminal justice these days is constrained a lot like budgets, and courts may be not prosecuting these days because of that. And it comes onto the integrity of our criminal justice system.

And Karen and Katrina are starting on new modules, and they're really excited to go on to criminology modules. And Andrea, Charlie and all of us have come up with some great points on the chat, as well. So yeah, it's been going really well for this session. Absolutely fantastic.

RACHEL: And we also have Sharon, who aims to start a master's degree in criminology in October 2017. So we've got a good mix of students here, and a lot of students are studying their first level

three module, DD301. It's a fantastic module. We actually do have the books somewhere here in the studio, so enjoy them when they're delivered.

But yeah, there's been a huge amount of interest in criminology here. And it's the questions that people have about the criminology element, about how most media reports have a criminology or criminal element to them. So it's fantastic.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Excellent. Well, welcome everybody who hasn't been before, and it's great to see you chatting. And if you are choosing the live-only option, you can pop on to the website and see all of this chat. You can go to connections.kmi@open.ac.uk and choose the Live and Interactive button. And from there, you can engage with the chat. You can see the widgets, as well. And do keep letting us know how you're feeling and which level you're studying with, so that we know whether there are lots of new people here or a mix.

And of course, a mix is great, because we're coming onto a postgraduate session next, where we're going to be talking about the various taught masters and post-graduate options. I know that that's had a lot of questions.

So any questions, the panel have promised that they'll answer them. So throw those in to HJ and Rachel on the chat, or email us. We'd love to see selfies, as well, of where you're engaging with the conference. So email us, connections@open.ac.uk, or you can send us a tweet, #SCC15.

But before we go to that, a lot of people may be studying a module and think, ah, yeah, this criminology looks really interesting. And MOOCs, which is something we're going to be talking about a little bit later, are a very popular option for people who want to try things. And I'm going to show you a very short video now about a forensic psychology MOOC. So hopefully that will be interesting to you.

And also, it's a great way to get those husbands, wives, et cetera, and friends who say, oh, yes, that Open University, that sounds very interesting. You can say, well, why don't you give it a go? So this is a good option, one of the most popular MOOCs around. So have a look at this short video, and then we'll be back in about five minutes.

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