



The fascination with crime

The notion of crime

Roger Bolton:

People seem to have a strong notion of what is meant by crime, in fact many members of the public are afraid of crime and the effect that it can have on them, their families, and their community. Yet crime novels, murder mysteries, crime and police dramas and amateur detectives fill our bookshelves and TV screens. Why is crime such a fascinating subject for us? Today I've been joined by Doctor Louise Westmarland, lecturer in criminology at the Open University. Louise how did you get interested in crime, as a child, committing it?

Dr Louise Westmarland:

Well my actual research interests are policing and crime, so, in that very specific area the reason that I got interested in it was because I could, I could see that there were things going on behind the scenes in policing that maybe, we weren't being told about. So my sort of nosy interest was really to sort of uncover some of the police practices that may or may not have been just. So my take on criminology and crime and so on is what the police do about it. Since then I've become generally more interested in crime and criminal justice from the point of view of ethics and integrity and how the criminal justice system might enact justice. In other words, how it provides justice for society, but also about some of the injustices that happen in society. So I'm interested in the way that various criminal justice agencies interact, and the things that they do.

Roger Bolton:

It sounds as if you began your involvement, because you thought in some way that the law was unfair, or that the police were corrupt, or from that perspective, you were more concerned about the victims of the police, than perhaps the victims of crime.

Dr Louise Westmarland:

Yeah, I think that's true because, I'd certainly met police officers who would tell me that the fascination that people have with crime is partly due to the image that the police have. In other words, the police have certain knowledges and secrets that they think that people want to know about.

So yeah, I became interested in the way that secrets and knowledge might have an effect on justice and injustice, and yes, I was interested in how the police operated and what effect that would have on justice.

Roger Bolton:

As a result of working in this field, do you think you've changed your view about the police, seeing them perhaps as victims as much as, in some ways, those who are convicted are, in the sense that they are having to deal with problems, which have been created by society not by them.

Dr Louise Westmarland:

Well I've certainly changed my view of the police, as a result of the research that I've done, and I agree with you that one of the things I have discovered is that they're doing a very difficult job. The police are expected to solve all sorts of problems which are really beyond their power to solve. But at the same time, the police have a tremendous amount of power, and if it wasn't for people in universities, criminologists and researchers, in a way keeping an eye on them, which is perhaps a common parlance way of saying it, we would be worrying as a society I think, about what they would be doing.