PUBLIC CRIMINOLOGY AND THE 2011 VANCOUVER RIOT: PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF CRIME AND JUSTICE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Facilitating public dialogue is at the core of doing public criminology. Advancements in technology, in the form of social media platforms, briefly outlined below, allow criminologists to survey the broad landscape of public opinions, particularly those related to matters of crime. Empirically investigating how online users respond to criminal events like riots (in the form of user-generated posts) can provide some insight into how criminologists might respond to crime. This process, I suggest, can directly inform the public criminologist about public debates over such matters even as they occur in real time.

The need for public criminologists to pay more attention to public debates in conjunction with the role of public shaming related to crime and punishment, as it now unfolds online, is becoming an important area of scholarly investigation. This paper explores this process. The paper draws from, and builds upon, previous research (Altheide and Schneider 2013;Schneider and Trottier 2012; Schnei-

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der and Trottier 2013; Schneider 2015) related to the 2011 Vancouver riot. Other research related to the 2011 Vancouver riot has examined restorative justice issues (Arvanitidis 2013) and collective apology narratives (Lavoie, Eaton, Sanders, and Smith 2014). I use Qualitative Media Analysis as a methodological approach to deal with materials gathered from social media as a guide for other criminologists to engage in similar forms of public criminology. The questions that guide the direction of this paper include: (1) what can the online response to the 2011 Vancouver riot tell us about the public perception of crime and crime control?; (2): how might these responses shape subsequent online perceptions of the riot? And, (3): how then might public criminologists best serve publics, including the growth of online publics that respond to riots and other criminal events? The first two questions help to provide a more informed sense of the public debate about the riot, a process that elucidates an approach to the third question in the manner that online media serve as a point of entrée for the public criminologist.

I first provide a brief overview of the 2011 Vancouver riot and the role of social media in drawing increased awareness to the riot. I then outline how to deal methodologically with materials gathered from social media. Next, I develop some basic user-generated themes relating to crime. Lastly, I conclude with a discussion for how this might contribute to a public criminology, and offer some suggestions for how one might generate public debate.

THE 2011 VANCOUVER RIOT AND SOCIAL MEDIA

There was a riot on the streets of downtown Vancouver, British Columbia on the evening of June 15, 2011. Riots are complex social events that involve people and violence. These disturbances can emerge from within a

framework of social contexts such as underlying economic, political, or cultural factors. Examples might include race riots (Bergeson and Herman 1998), sports riots (Rosenfeld 1997), or the 2008 riots in Greece. The catalyst of the latter riots was attributed to the police shooting of an unarmed teenager (similarly, the 2011 riots in England followed the shooting of an unarmed black man). However, to deny the influence of any number of diverse "political and economic epiphenomena" factors that contributed to the 2008 riots in Greece (Karamichas 2009), or even other similar disturbances (e.g. 1992 Los Angeles riots), would indeed be a serious oversimplification.

A common thread between these disturbances is the labeling of these events as "riots" by state agents (most usually police) and the conceptual treatment in response to the label by government officials, media journalists, and citizens. A recent development includes this process as it can now develop online on social media, as explored in this paper. Despite the various underlying factors that may contribute to the classification of an event as a riot, the contextual process, and conceptual treatment, nevertheless, is usually attributed to the legal classification of a riot as a criminal disturbance (i.e., a riot as a crime).

A disturbance of this sort can refer to a great deal of matters even while no universally agreed upon definition of what exactly constitutes a criminal disturbance exists. Riots share two characteristics: (1) the naming of the event as a riot and (2) the presence and involvement of police and other state agents. Thus, to label a social gathering a "riot" remains a political designation. To avoid confusion, the term riot will be used herein in reference to the unrest on the streets of downtown Vancouver in 2011 and 1994.

A similar riot occurred in Vancouver seventeen years earlier on June 14, 1994. Each riot in Vancouver (i.e.,

1994 and 2011) followed a decisive Game 7 of the National Hockey League (NHL) Stanley Cup Finals. British Columbia's only NHL team, the Vancouver Canucks, lost each contest. Following both losses in 1994 and 2011, some of those who had gathered downtown overturned cars, smashed windows, set fires, and looted retail establishments. In both instances, police swooped in to disperse the crowds and, in the process, arrested suspected rioters. In 1994, police requested (and later confiscated) materials from local news media, that included, raw television footage, film and negatives seized from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), and from the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Province* newspapers, among other news media.

Following the 1994 Vancouver riot, police presented the public with edited news media footage to help identify suspected rioters (Doyle 2003). Media materials used to identify these suspects were collected (seized), and organized (edited), by police, and *then* presented to citizens to aid with identification. In 2011, we see the inverse occur, where the collection and organization of media materials (i.e. evidence for the identification of suspected rioters) were almost entirely conducted by those *not* affiliated with law enforcement (Schneider and Trottier2012).

While Canada has seen other "Stanley Cup riots"—in Montreal in 1993 and in Vancouver 1994—the 2011 riot was the first of these events where social media played an active and prominent role in documenting the event, and also shaping the outcome, i.e., how the riot was interpreted and defined in news media and by police and public users online (Altheide and Schneider 2013; Schneider and Trottier 2012; Schneider and Trottier 2013; Schneider 2015). Social media are a hybrid of media and interaction (Altheide and Schneider 2013). The phrase "social media" is quite often used interchangeably with "social network-

ing,[2]" yet the two are distinct. Social media are the dissemination platform (like television) and social networking usually refers to the interactive component, where online users can access and publish information. To avoid confusion, "social media" is used in reference to both.

The 2011 Vancouver riot is one of the most documented riots in human history. What makes this criminal event especially unique is that *members of the public generated almost all of this documentation*, much of it also provided to police. The proliferation of smart phones, and other communication and information devices equipped with recording technologies, along with social media, contributed to the wellspring of citizen-recorded-distributed data. These materials, believed by many users as evidence of criminal activity (e.g. pictures or videos of the riot in progress), were then submitted to the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) (who also solicited the public to provide this information). The VPD received documentation of the riot from the public even as the riot was in progress. As the riot was contained, documentation provided to police increased with dramatic frequency. According to police, there were so many people that "forwarded information to the VPD for their investigation within hours of the riot [that] the VPD's website crashed for several hours" (VPD Stanley Cup Riot Review 2011, 14). In just four days following the riot more than one million photographs were reportedly sent to police (CBC News 2011a).

On July 20, 2011, the VPD reported that they "had received 4,300 e-mail tips, 1,500 hours of video, and 15,000 images *as a result of the public's assistance*" (VPD Stanley Cup Riot Review 2011, 75, *my emphasis*). In less than five months following the riot, the VPD claimed to have

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[2] See boyd and Ellison (2007) for a definition and history of social networking.

processed the "equivalent to 7,500 DVDs or 45,000 CDs" worth of data. These data included "over 5,000 hours of video" documenting more than "15,000 criminal acts." The sheer volume of data provided to police is astounding considering that "the riot was controlled in approximately three hours" (VPD Stanley Cup Riot Review 2011, 7). Some of this public documentation was also circulated on-line, along with vast amounts of public commentary. Much of these data are then readily available for collection and analysis.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Media Analysis (QMA) is a suitable methodology for collecting and examining meanings in media documents, like user posts made to social media sites in response to the 2011 Vancouver riot. The 2011 Vancouver riot provides a useful case study to collect and examine public opinions pertaining to the riot. There were a handful of social media sites dedicated to the 2011 Vancouver riot, however, according to news media reports, the "Vancouver Riot Pics: Post Your Photos" Facebook group page[3] was the "largest Facebook group… dedicated solely to posting pictures of rioters" (CBC 2011b). More than 70,000 people "liked" (i.e. endorsed) the page in less than 24 hours after it was created. In total, 12,587 posts were made to the main wall of the Facebook group page in just two-weeks following the riot. During this time the page was "liked" 102,784 times. After this two-week period, for reasons unknown, interest and user activity on the page declined. For instance, over the next four weeks (June 29-August 28, 2011) there were only 350 posts made to the main wall (a decrease of 97.22%), and the page was "un-liked" by 1,967 users. These observations indicate the

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3 https://www.facebook.com/VancouverUp.datesandnews?fref=ts

two-week time frame following the riot as best suited for data collection and analysis (Altheide and Schneider 2013).

In total, 12,587 posts were collected between June 15, 2011 (the evening of the riot) until June 29, 2011 from the "Vancouver Riot Pics: Post Your Photos" Facebook group page. These data were captured and stored in chronological order[4] using Adobe Acrobat Pro. The dataset consists of one 2,118-page PDF document. Saturation sampling was utilized. Selected search terms that were initially entered into the dataset included: crime, law, and punishment. The three terms combined appeared a total of 636 times across the 12,587 user posts and netted 45 pages of aggregated data. These data were then reviewed for recurring terms that helped to locate additional search terms, including "police," "justice," "jail[5]" and related terms, "criminal justice," "justice system," and "legal," to list a few. These terms and phrases produced additional searches of the original data. This procedure was repeated until no new posts surfaced. These data were then reviewed for basic user-generated themes posted by users in response to the 2011 Vancouver riot in British Columbia. The *production of evidence* and *punishment* emerged as two basic themes. These are discussed in further detail below.

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[4] A much more thorough discussion of this process can be found in Qualitative Media Analysis (Altheide and Schneider 2013, pp. 103-114).

[5] "Jail" (which appeared 309 times) was the preferred term among Facebook users in reference to some form of "incarceration" (which appeared 2 times) for offenders. Other terms like "prison" (which appeared 64 times) or "correctional facility" (which only appeared 1 time) were much less frequent. For this reason "jail" will be used herein in reference to all forms of correctional service.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In the sections that follow, I present two basic themes that emerged from user posts featured on the "Vancouver Riot Pics: Post Your Photos" Facebook page. The first theme pertains to the production of evidence and the second theme to punishment. The two thematic findings below indicate that many online users of the examined data were much in favour of immediate sanctions against the accused in response to the user-production of evidence (theme #1) where public shaming emerges as a dominant alternative punishment to jail (theme #2). Online "punishment" spared taxpayers the financial costs associated with the incarceration of offenders and amended the perceived inadequacy and unhurried speed of the justice system. A basic argument then is that the real time format of social media (i.e., the immediate circulation of evidence of crimes in progress) further promotes the desire among users for the immediacy of punishment while simultaneously exacerbating the perceived weakness of the justice system. This paper serves as a reminder for the importance of due process in a time when immediacy seems to undermine this very basic principle of justice.

THEME #1: USER-PRODUCTION OF EVIDENCE

The initial stated purpose of the "Vancouver Riot Pics: Post Your Photos" Facebook group page was to identify riot suspects, or in the words of the page creator, to "put a label on those losers that made this city look so bad" (June 15, 10:19pm). Following this first post made as the riot was still in progress, a commonly shared sentiment that quickly emerged across user posts was some derivation of the old adage "do the crime, do the time." Many insisted

that they were providing aid to authorities[6] by providing what was believed to be evidence in the form of documentation (e.g., pictures and videos) in order to identify accused rioters to bring them to justice, as noted by one user: "LET'S ALL ASSIST and HELP BRING EACH and EVERY FRICKEN IDIOT TO JUSTICE on HERE! IF YOU DO THE CRIME...YOU PAY WITH TIME!" (June 15, 11:40pm). Time was in reference to jail, as expressed by many other users, and for some, this even meant life behind bars.

For instance, a user post made the morning following the riot read: "Rioting Can carry a Life Sentence, Under Sections 67-68 of the Criminal Code of Canada... Put them All Away for Life for Destroying Our City!!!" (June 16, 7:22am). A handful of posts that followed this one included citations and various excerpts from the *Criminal Code of Canada* in support of calls for life imprisonment. Whereas other posts were intended to remind users of the "crime" that brought them together on the Facebook page in the first place (when discussions might have moved off topic).

> Focus people.. opinions and editoials [sic] are for blogs this page is for IDing the criminals .. and in case you forgot here's the crime commited.. [sic] from section 64 of the criminal code: An "unlawful assembly" occurs when 3 or more persons with intent to carry out any common purpose assemble in such a manner... (June 17, 10:21am).

In many circumstances, but especially in response to the user circulation of evidence of what was *believed* to be documentation of crime (e.g., photographs and videos),

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6 Elsewhere we refer to this as "'crowd-sourced policing' to refer to the utilization by social media users of narratives consistent with criminal justice discourse" (Schneider and Trottier 2012, 62).

the presumed guilt of those accused was taken for granted, outside of the principles of fundamental justice (i.e., due process). Evidence was a dominant theme of the examined data. On the "Vancouver Riot Pics: Post Your Photos" Facebook group page much of the discussion (i.e., posts) concerned circulating "real evidence" in reference to "pictures that you think will actually help the cops" (June 16, 2:01am).

The user-generated production (and circulation) of evidence on sites like Facebook also served as a basic source for news media. As the riot unfolded, various social media sites (e.g., Facebook) quickly became a basic part of the news media riot narrative that directed increased attention to dedicated social media riot sites. To help illustrate the point, let us briefly consider an exceptional, but iconic example drawn from social media. A variety of iconic images emerged from the riot, some to the great amusement of the public, such as the "kissing couple" photograph taken by Richard Lam. The photograph was named "Photo of the Year 2011" by *Esquire Magazine* and dubbed "the kiss" in the December 26, 2011 issue of *Sports Illustrated Magazine* which called the picture "the most compelling sports image of the year."[7]

If the iconic *positive*, as it were, was the kissing photo, then the iconic *negative* was a Facebook post made by a person called "Brock Anton." A screen shot (see caption below) of the post quickly went viral and generated immediate and universal condemnation.

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[7] Due to the aggressive copyright lawyers at GETTY, we cannot reprint this photo (despite having the photographer's permission!) If you would like to check it out on-line, see: http://bfy.tw/1RjI

News Feed   Top News · **Status Updates** ⌄

Share: 📝 Status 🖼 Photo 🔗 Link 📹 Video ❓ Question

> What's on your mind?

Brock Anton   ✕
Maced in the face, hit with a Batton, tear gassed twice, 6 broken fingers, blood everywhere, punched a fucken pig in head with riot gear on knocked him to the ground, through the jersey on a burning cop car flipped some cars, burnt some smart cars, burnt some cop cars, I'm on the news..... One word .....
History :) :) :))

🔲 about a minute ago via iPhone · Like · Comment

👍 Brock Anton and Tyrone Gallant like this.

> **Ashley Pehota** brockkkk! take this down!!! its evidence!
> 2 seconds ago · Like · 👍 1 person

> Write a comment...

▲ Image: Brock Anton Facebook Post

Excerpts of the post made national headlines and ignited an online firestorm that included the "Brock Anton Sucks Dick" Facebook page, the tagline of which read: "Title = Prediction of Brock's future activities with his new cellmate." More than 3,000 people "liked" the page. Immediate calls for his capture and swift punishment were made on the "Vancouver Riot Pics: Post Your Photos" Facebook page. One user referred to Brock Anton as "everyone's favorite RIOT Coverboy" (June 17, 1:39pm).

Few if any users questioned his implied guilt because he "admitted on his facebook [sic] that he partook in the riot" (June 16, 12:22am). Another user wrote: "WOW posting what you did on FB was an awesome idea Brock Anton, Hope you think jail is just as fun" (June 16, 8:57am). Demands to "get this loser behind bars" (June 16, 9:31am), and questions of the status of his impending arrest followed: "So, 12 hours later, is BROCK ANTON in custody yet or what??????????" (June 16, 11:58am).

More than fifteen months later, a *Globe and Mail* report absolved Brock Anton of any wrongdoing in connection with the post. The headline of the report read: "Riot 'lightning rod' goes uncharged; Number of accused now 156, police say, but believe man who boasted on Facebook actually not as involved as he claimed." In reference to Brock Anton's post a VPD spokesperson, Constable Brian Montague, noted:

> [We] have investigated him extensively and if we found him doing the things he said he did, there's no doubt in my mind that we would be requesting charges on him[8]. You kind of have to read between the lines there. He was obviously down there that night. But he's not doing the things he says he is (Dhillon 2012).

Brock Anton might have been an exception, but the example illustrates the fervor of the public response to the riot, on the one hand, and raises questions about taken for granted notions of guilt, on the other hand, even while not all users outright accepted the guilt of those accused online. The point to highlight is that users had to make sense of what the evidence meant, i.e. what constituted a depiction of what was thought to be a crime (stupidity, for instance, while not a recognized criminal offence, was another central theme of user posts, see Schneider and Trottier 2012).

Often "real evidence" was understood as recorded documentation of a disruption of the norm. A garbage can on fire, for instance, is not necessarily out of the ordinary in some urban spaces, whereas, this is certainly always the case with burning police cars. Pictures of people standing (or posing) in front of burning police cars, an image irri-

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[8] In the province of British Columbia police recommend charges and Crown Counsel makes the decision whether or not to lay charges based on the likelihood of conviction.

tating to many, was not believed to constitute a criminal act for many users.

> I'd like to point out something EXTREMELY obvious. For everyone posting pictures of people just standing around, or posing for pictures in front of a fire, give it a rest. Unless you have some other evidence proving these people committed a felony[9], stop flooding the photo's section and leave room for the real criminals (June 17, 1:02pm).

I now turn my attention to the second theme, user discussions of punishment on the "Vancouver Riot Pics: Post Your Photos" Facebook page. It is worth repeating here that this paper is a reminder for the necessity of the principles of fundamental justice for the accused. This is becoming increasingly important in order to counter public assumptions of guilty until proven innocent, a perspective no doubt driven by the immediacy that social media offers. The danger here is that immediacy can be understood to threaten some of the basic principles of justice, including punishment without process.

THEME #2: PUNISHMENT OF THE ACCUSED

What remained consistent across user posts was the expressed *need* to punish those guilty of participating in the riot. How to punish these offenders and what exact "punishment fit the crime" was hotly contested. A small handful of users were in support of draconian measures of punishment even before any charges had been laid (e.g., flagellation, public lashings, life imprisonment, forced labour, and in a few circumstances, even the death penalty).

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[9] Felony is a United States legal term and is not a recognized legal term in Canada. The user is very likely referring to an indictable offence (see Schneider 2012 for a discussion about the influence of American crime media in Canada).

While others called for restraint, public shaming online was viewed by many as an acceptable and just response. Public shaming was understood as both a form of punishment as well as a suitable deterrent mechanism. The riot was a large-scale social event in which many people were believed to have actively participated in the chaos (one user put this figure at "10,000 people"[10]). Because of the sheer magnitude of the riot (and damages) it was widely understood by users that it was not possible to "put everyone in jail" (June 20, 2:18pm). "So many idiots… so few jail cells!" another noted (June 17, 1:20pm). All users did not universally share this belief. Statements such as "ALL the guys in this video[11] need to go to jail" (June 18, 7:52am) appeared. Consider the following:

> Jail time should be on the table for all involved… However, our liberal brain-dead judges will most likely give them a slap on the wrist and tell them not to do it again (June 18, 8:02am).

The need to shame those involved emerged in response to the limited capacity of jail, but was more directly attributed to the belief that the "candy-ass justice system" will just let rioters "off the hook with a slap and a tickle" (June 16, 3:04pm). In this regard, many users expressed deep frustrations with the correctional institution.

Indeed, it was widely believed that "social shaming may be the only justice that these clowns see" (June 20, 1:58pm). According to another user: "If we can't send them to jail then lets [sic] shame them and publicly hold

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[10] As of February 2013 police have recommended charges against 315 suspected rioters.

[11] Users seemed to collectively agree that video constituted the best form of evidence. See Schneider (2015) for further discussion of this matter.

them accountable instead!" (June 17, 5:20pm). Yet another post read: "public shaming is social justice" (June 18, 7:09am). Few users recognized the realizable harm of this process (only two posts observed the possibility of stigmatization). A few others noted that public shaming would lead to an increased burden on society, and subsequently, the justice system, and would therefore be a counterintuitive form of punishment.

> The consequence of public shaming on the internet is lifelong. However, not giving these people a chance to reintegrate into society will only make them a continued burden to society. At an extreme: No job →welfare →theft → life long crime →lifelong commitment of tax dollars. That is not something I want to continue paying for...(June 18, 9:34am).

Funding was a major point of contention. Punishment in all its forms (under the correctional apparatus) is funded by tax money, and users were very much aware of this fact. On the "Vancouver Riot Pics: Post Your Photos" Facebook group page, punishment was framed in terms of cost-benefit analysis. As such, discussions of cost effective alternatives were debated, posts such as: "ALOT of community service" (June 17, 1:12am), and restitution, like garnishing wages "to help pay back the costs" (June 16, 8:48pm) were frequent. Those costs included riot related expenses incurred by the city of Vancouver, the VPD, and local stores and businesses that were looted and vandalized. The accompanying belief of forthcoming insurance rate increases and, above all, the cost for the cleanup of the city were the most pressing concerns for those users. Consistent throughout these posts was the belief that the rioters were to *pay* financially for their crimes. This issue, however, was complicated by the assumed class status of those that participated in the rioting.

Many of the accused were assumed to be members of lower class, such as those on welfare, *and without jobs*, and therefore, for instance, unable to participate in wage restitution as an alternative form of punishment. One user post read: "no job? well they can take half your welfare cheque" (June 16, 6:46pm). The irony here of course is that taxpayer funds (i.e., welfare) in such a scenario would still be used to pay for riot related damages. The imagined status of the rioters was twofold: either users were too poor to afford to pay for the damages they caused because they were unemployed, or they were young (i.e., teenagers, one user noted that "75%" of the rioters "seem to be kids"), or both. Young riot participants, however, were assumed as "spoiled kids," and not necessarily of a lower class, but, nevertheless, still unable to pay for the damages.

> OK everyone stop calling these idiots people ! i [sic] watched it all night and they were all KIDS...who have no respect, do not pay taxes and still live at home with parents they had nothing better to do it is disgusting but to them its something to do and just plain fun...a rush a thrill excitement [sic] THEY WERE ALL DUMB KIDS, PEOPLE pls separate [sic] the words from PEO-PLE to KIDS (June 16, 9:42am).

Perhaps not surprisingly, many blamed parents and urged them to turn in their kids[12]. Consistent with cost-benefit analysis others suggested that parents pay for damages caused by their children. One post read: "Is there legal precedent for charging parents for damage caused by their asshat kids downtown? Hope so." (June 15, 11:56pm). Such measures were believed to reduce costs associated with the riot. Reducing the cost burden on citizens re-

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[12] Evidence suggests this actually occurred, e.g., consider the headline of one CBC news report that read "Alleged Vancouver looter turned in by parents" (June 17, 2011).

mained a consistent theme across posts that discussed punishment.

Incarceration was understood as a prohibitively expensive burden to place upon the public. One user noted that rioters should "build houses for the homeless" to "save us some tax dollars… don't just send them to jail" (June 19, 9:35am). Jail was viewed as too expensive. According to another: "*if they just go to jail*, we the tax payers will have to pick up the tab" (June 17, 8:25pm, *my emphasis*), to pay for "their lax jail time" (June 16, 10:42am). In fact, jail, for many users, was getting off too easy, a "soft punishment" that is "handed out" (June 16, 9:27am). For these users, jail was recognized as a place for "feeding and housing" rioters (June 20, 8:40pm), a place to "party" with others (June 16, 9:50pm) or "watch TV" (June 17, 11:46pm), and in some circumstances, a resort: "I don't know if I believe jail time is good for these goofs, (I reckon it's a free pass to play golf, not pay rent and get pizza delivery [to] *mission prison[13]*)" (June 18, 7:47am). Another remarked: "I don't want these people going to jail. I think there is no point in *providing them with shelter and food* on the tax payer's dollar" and suggested that "severe fines" and "community service" serve as punishment options (June 17, 12:55am, *my emphasis*). Other suggestions, such as serving in the military unpaid for a year were also offered. Above all, the most popular punishment option remained public shaming, which was believed would do real justice:

> I think pointing out their [i.e., rioters] lack of moral character, and exposing them, and the shame they brought on the people of Vancouver is more justice

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[13] Mission Institution is a medium-security facility for male offenders located in the central Fraser Valley, British Columbia.

than any law enforcement [sic] could ever bring (June 17, 10:14am).

The above data reveal that as users produce evidence of crime (i.e., riot) a growing dissatisfaction with the correctional institution seems to coincide with this process specifically in dealing promptly with accused rioters. Alternatives to standard forms of punishment (i.e. incarceration) are offered. This occurs because the production of documentation (i.e., evidence—pictures and videos) validates user beliefs that the accused do not deserve the "soft punishment" of jail. The evidence is also believed to reveal that the majority of the accused because of their perceived relative age would not be able to pay back the costs associated with the cleanup. This process furthers tensions to punish immediately and in a cost effective manner and public shaming online meets these criteria. A basic argument of this paper is that the immediate circulation of evidence of crime promotes an increasing desire among online users for swift punishment while advancing beliefs of the perceived weakness of the justice system. This paper serves as a reminder for the necessity of due process in an era when immediacy threatens one of the most basic principles of justice.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Let us now briefly return to the first question posed at the outset of this paper. What can these online responses to the riot tell us about the public perception of crime and crime control? Riots are multi-faceted events that now unfold online (e.g., recent riots across the Middle East and the August 2011 riots that rocked England). These social relations create new conditions for how crime now comes to be known, and is then interpreted by publics. In these spaces, publics can offer immediate responses to crime, such as punishment sanctions in the form of public sham-

ing. This form of punishment emerged as a suitable alternative for various reasons, including, the perception that offenders were either of a particular socio-economic status, young, or both, but above all, unable to pay for the nature of their crimes.

The perception of the 2011 Vancouver riot was also believed by users to be much larger than was actually the case. This was evident in the discussions about the believed number of rioters, versus the number of those recommended for charges. More importantly, however, this belief (i.e., magnitude of the riot), in part, was also a justification for sparing rioters jail sentences. This was not because it was viewed as a more humane way of treating offenders, but rather, these alternatives to jail were suggested to spare the tax paying public the unnecessary financial burden of paying for the mess. While community service was viewed as a possible alternative, it was also believed that additional punishment, in the form of public shaming and humiliation, should accompany community service.

Let us now briefly turn to the second question posed earlier. How might these responses shape subsequent online perceptions of the riot? The Brock Anton post and responses to this post serve as an illustrative example. This post made news headlines across Canada and drew national ire. The post elicited strong responses from online users condemning the perceived flagrant and callous disregard for law and order. The public understanding, as expressed in the examined Facebook data, in response to Brock Anton (and other suspected rioters), was for immediate and swift sanctions in the form of arrests, charges, and punishment, and in the case of Brock Anton, even without due process. On the one hand, the disregard for law and order (expressed in his post) was immediate; on the other hand, the consequences (i.e., punishment) were not. This disjuncture further promoted the expressed need to punish, and exacerbated the belief among users of the weakness of

the justice system (i.e. slow to respond, softened or short sentences, etc.).

The basic task of public criminology is to encourage public debate on the topic of crime. This can include a great many issues, debates concerning crime control and reduction, the likelihood of recidivism, certain policies and laws, and, making the topic of harm central to these matters by spotlighting the possible ills that might emerge for victims of crime, offenders, and publics (e.g., public safety). Public debates, as the above data indicate, can now emerge even during the commission of a criminal event. Posts on the examined Facebook page began to appear while the riot was in progress. In this case, the frame of the debates that followed were set by the parameters of the Facebook page, which outlines what can, and will, be discussed, up to, and including, user-generated commentary, and the circulation of the names of suspected rioters, pictures, and videos. This can lead to the unnecessary harm and stigmatization of persons with little or no involvement, but also, against accused suspects, as was the case with Ms. Camille Cacnio.

Ms. Cacnio was identified online as a rioter and later charged. Because of the online notoriety of her actions that emerged from just a few seconds of video, coupled with her online public apology[14], it was reported that she dropped out of university and was terminated from three different jobs (CBC 2012c). In his ruling of her case, sentencing judge, British Columbia Provincial court Judge Joseph Galati noted: "Ms. Cacnio, to some degree, has been unjustly persecuted by the would-be pundits of the social media" (CBC 2012c). The above user-generated empirical data indicates public shaming as a popular and acceptable contemporary measure of justice and judicial consideration of public shaming on social media illustrates

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[14] http://therealcamille.wordpress.com/2011/06/20/dear-vancouver-i-am-sorry/

the increasing significance of this type of public reaction. The need then for public criminologists to pay more attention to public debates in conjunction with the explicit role of public shaming (i.e., harm) related to crime and punishment, as it unfolds online, is becoming an increasingly important area of scholarly investigation.

Because of the immediacy of social media, the public criminologist might be notably absent from such debates, as was the case in the above data (not one post appeared to be made directly by a criminologist or criminal justice professional). What then is the role of the public criminologist under such circumstances? How should we best serve publics relating to such crime debates online? I suggest that it first makes sense to understand the debate, including, what issues are under debate, which leads us to ask other questions, including the *why* and *how* of the issues. Examining online data in the form of user-authored posts allows for a more reflexive approach when understanding the matters important to the very publics that we serve.

Let us now finally return to our third question posed at the beginning of this paper. How then might public criminologists best serve publics, including the growth of online publics that respond to riots and other criminal events? One approach might be to actively situate oneself in the debates that emerge online in direct response to criminal events. In such spaces, the public criminologist could get sense of the topic at hand (i.e., survey posts), and publish (i.e., post) responses through interaction with various online publics. I refer to this form of public engagement elsewhere as *e-public sociology* (Schneider2014a), or what we might call here *e-public criminology*. *E-public criminology* consists of a third distinguishable category situated between Burawoy's (2005) *traditional* and *organic* forms of public sociology. The traditional form consists of publications written with a public

audience in mind whereas the organic form involves directly interacting with publics. Social media platforms enable scholars interested in public engagement to now do both simultaneously. Such engagement permits the injection of our "criminological products" directly into real time public debates. Given that police agencies now use social media for similar purposes (Schneider 2014b) it seems that public criminologists should do the same. The hope is that this will help contribute to both increased public understandings, but also, in the words of Loader and Sparks (2011), a "better politics of crime."

Empirically investigating public opinions offered online in response to crime can better contribute to a more informed sense of various public understandings about crime. Online materials like Facebook posts can help criminologists to better situate themselves in debates that emerge in response to crime and provide evidence informed commentary because doing criminology produces scientific explanations for crime, *and also* its potential consequences (e.g. shaming). By understanding where public perceptions come from, and by directly contributing our scientific explanations to online public debates, criminologists can now provide insights to publics in direct ways not possible in the recent past. These "interventions" in public life may then contribute to harm reduction among the very publics that we serve. Future work in public criminology might develop strategies for entering public debates online, and perhaps test the effectiveness of such approaches.

Acknowledgments

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