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Convict criminology from here to there: a content analysis of scholarship in a growing subfield

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ABSTRACT

The academic field of Convict Criminology (CC) started in the mid-1990s. In general, CC argues that the insights and experiences of currently and formerly incarcerated men and women are typically ignored in scholarly research and policy making circles. Since its founding a considerable amount of scholarly activity connected to this school, movement, and network occurred. Although CC scholars have reviewed the CC literature and activities, none have performed a rigorous content analysis of the scholarship in this field. This approach is important to understand who has written this work, their background, the venues where this academic writing has been published, the content of this work, and the impact of this literature. More importantly this type of analysis may provide a better sense of what kinds of future research on CC, or using the CC approach, should be conducted. Specifically, this study presents the results of a content analysis of 79 pieces of scholarship on CC published between 2001 and August 2022. The conclusion points out areas where continued scholarship using the Convict Criminology framework may be conducted.

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KEYWORDS

Convict criminology; critical criminology; corrections; prisons; prisoner experience

Introduction

In any scholarly field it is important to periodically take stock of what has been published to determine where contributions have been made and what areas need more attention. The lion's share of these overviews are done through the process of systematic reviews, including scoping reviews, narrative reviews, or state of the art reviews (Grant & Booth, 2009). Such reviews are commonly conducted within criminology to provide updates on specific theories or crime related topics (Turanovic & Pratt, 2021). These reviews are important for established fields and well-defined substantive areas so the large body of research can be more easily understood. For smaller subareas different types of reviews are important to better understand their trajectories, where they fit in the wider field, and if they are accomplishing their intended aims. In such cases, content analyses addressing these issues are especially valuable.

The production of content analyses in criminology and criminal justice has been predictably idiosyncratic. Some of the content analyses have examined the treatment of

subject matter and types of research methodologies (e.g. Copes, Beaton, Ayeni, Dabney, & Dabney, 2020; Copes, Brown, & Tewksbury, 2011; Tunnell, 1993; Woodward, Webb, Griffin, & Copes, 2016), others have analyzed conference presentations (e.g. Barbaret, 2007), and still some looked at specific types of publications (e.g. Ross, Tewksbury, Samuelsen, & Caneff, 2021). Many of the content analyses solely examine the representation of specific types of people (in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, etc.) (e.g. Dorworth & Henry, 2006; Eigenberg & Park, 2016; Taylor Greene & Gabbidon, 2003). Other content analyses focus on establishing the most cited works and scholars with the hope of making inferences about the state of the discipline (Copes, Cardwell, & Sloan, 2012; DeJong & St George, 2018; Moeller, 2019; Walters, 2015).

Engaging in these kinds of content analyses are especially important for specific subareas within larger fields. As subareas mature it is important to know where they have been and where they are going. As such, we elaborate on the subfield of Convict Criminology. Convict Criminology (CC) rests on the premise that the convict voice is much needed in criminology/criminal justice but is typically ignored in scholarly and public policy research (e.g. Ross & Richards, 2003; Ross & Vianello, 2021). Moreover, presently there are a number of people who have been directly impacted by the carceral system and who have earned a doctorate in the fields of Criminology, Criminal Justice, or cognate fields. Thus, these scholars can presumably speak with a degree of personal authority that other scholars may lack. Now that CC has been around for over two decades, it appropriate to assess who is engaging in this type of research, how they are doing this research, and what topics they prioritize. Our larger aim is to critically assess the state of the field of CC. By content analyzing research that is directly informed by or builds on CC we determine who is publishing it, the broad content of what is being published, and whether they are advancing the broad aims of CC. This information will ground our critical evaluation of the subfield and inform suggestions for future research.

Convict criminology overview

Convict Criminology formed in the 1990s when a handful of excon professors, graduate students, and other scholars interested in prison reform came together at an American Society of Criminology (ASC) panel in Los Angeles. Shortly thereafter, under the direction of Stephen C. Richards and Jeffrey Ian Ross, they crafted an organization that focused on producing relevant scholarship, mentoring people who were incarcerated or recently released, and engaging in activism related to reforming corrections. As news spread, more people became curious with this nascent group, and some joined in its mission. CC scholars promoted a progressive approach to corrections, which includes ideas supportive of left leaning public policies such as decarceration, prison abolition, and decreasing mass incarceration. This activist approach placed CC under the theoretical umbrella of Critical Criminology and within ASC's Division of Critical Criminology and Social Justice. Over time, new members from countries other than the United States and Canada joined in the mission of the group and participated in panels and joint scholarship efforts. Although heavily connected to critical criminology, CC scholars eventually created their own division within ASC in 2020. The Division of Convict Criminology was created 'to provide an intellectual home for all scholars/scientists who are interested in the study of

Convict Criminology' (Division of Convict Criminology mission statement). According to the Division Chair, in 2022, there were 80 members of the Division.

The first article that detailed the core ideas of CC was published by Richards and Ross (2001). This article set the broad agenda of the field. Since this initial publication, CC scholars have expanded the aims and the reach of CC (Ross, Darke, Aresti, Newbold, & Earle, 2014), including showing how CC is relevant in Italy (Vianello, 2021), Latin America (Vegh Weis, 2021), and the United Kingdom (Aresti, 2012; Earle, 2018). Although CC has diverse aims, three major tenets of CC developed: scholarship, mentorship, and activism (Jones, Ross, Richards, & Murphy, 2009). The first principle of CC is encouraging the production of scholarship related to understanding and reforming corrections. CC scholars promote the value of lived experiences, of the scholars and the participants, in guiding this research. The second tenet is promoting the mentorship of those directly impacted by incarceration. This takes the form of mentoring people in prison and those who were formerly incarcerated to help them manage reentry, in particular assisting them to navigate their graduate school experience and academic careers. The final aim is to develop and apply effective policy and promote activism to reform the current correctional and criminal justice system. For convict criminologists, activism includes activist scholarship, mentorship as activism, and direct activism (Ross & Tietjen, 2023).

Now that CC has been around for over two decades, it is a good time to assess the state of scholarship in this area and to determine if it adheres to the broad tenets of the field laid out in earlier work. Accordingly, this study analyzes publications that directly use a CC framework to provide better understandings about the people who conduct this scholarship, their approach to scholarship, and the particular subject matter on which they focus. We move beyond review and annotation, to focus on what such scholarship offers as a body of knowledge. These insights will provide the foundation to critically analyze this body of work to determine if they are meeting their aims and to suggest paths forward to invigorate future work in the area.

Methods

To better understand the current state of CC scholarship, we performed a content analysis following basic principles articulated by Krippendorff (1980/2018). To locate work that was directly informed by or advanced CC, we performed a search in Google Scholar with the keyword 'Convict Criminology' for the period 1 January 2001, to 1 August 2022.¹ In addition, we included chapters in two edited books devoted to CC (i.e. Ross & Richards, 2003; Ross & Vianello, 2021). We then scoured the references of these publications for CC scholarship that we may have missed. To further delimit the scholarship, and make the research task more manageable, only English language publications were included.

For a piece of scholarship to be entered into the sample it was not sufficient to simply use the words Convict Criminology or to make passing reference to the concept. Also, it was not enough to simply discuss prisons or the convict experience to be included. The authors had to actively engage with a CC framework by refining the core ideas of it or placing the review or findings in the context of it. Thus, excluded from this initial list were a handful of chapters that were published in edited collections such as *Convict Criminology* (Ross & Richards, 2003) and *Convict Criminology for the Future* (Ross & Vianello, 2021), that were relevant to CC, but did not directly engage with scholarship

on this theme. We were more lenient with chapters in *Convict Criminology* because CC was embryonic at this stage and many of the parameters of the field had yet to be decided. We included introductions to special issues and edited collections if they expanded on issues relating to CC and were not simply statements of what was included in the edited collection.²

We excluded encyclopedia entries, handbook chapters, forewords to edited books, prefaces to special issues, chapters in conference proceedings, and biographies (e.g. Frank Tannenbaum and John Irwin). If any articles or chapters were reprinted, we only chose one of them for inclusion (favoring those in journals over edited collections). We also omitted scholarship written by people associated with the Convict Criminology network if they were not directly engaging with CC. Thus, research that is informed by the prison insider experience, including prisoner auto-ethnography, but does not specifically mention CC was not included in the final analysis. After this culling of the initial list, we included 79 publications that met the inclusion criteria.

We recognize that over the past two-and-a-half decades (since the appearance of the first panel of convict criminology at the ASC Meetings) a considerable amount of scholarship has been conducted and published using participatory action research in prisons, where the researchers have partnered with current or formerly incarcerated people to do scholarship (e.g. Fine et al., 2003; Haverkate, Meyers, Telep, & Wright, 2020). In many respects this activity appears, almost word for word as if it is CC, but the researchers do not use or reference the expression Convict Criminology, nor do they cite relevant CC literature. Even the peer-reviewed *Journal of Prisoners on Prison*, a publication that specializes in giving voice to incarcerated inmates, contains articles that would be considered participatory action or auto-ethnographic research, but do not cite CC scholarship. We omit this research in the content analysis.

We developed and revised our coding sheet as additional variables and response sets were considered. When deciding what variables to include in the coding, we asked ourselves, 'What would we want to know (as researchers, instructors, or students) after having read this scholarship?' Much of this was based on the lead author identifying as a convict criminologist. We collaboratively coded each publication. Throughout this process, we communicated with each other to address nuances and ensure consistent interpretation of coding criteria. In this way, coding discrepancies were identified as we coded. This allowed us to discuss each difference to determine if differences were due to missing the data in our initial read of the source or due to interpretation of coding criteria between us.

Coding was divided into four main categories: lead author information, general manuscript information, three tenets of convict criminology, and manuscript impact. The first broad category we coded for was information about the lead authors. Although CC does not exclude the voices of non-convicts, it prioritizes the experiences of those who have been incarcerated (Ross & Richards, 2003). Accordingly, we sought to determine the backgrounds of those who write in the area. For this part of coding, the unit of analysis was the lead authors of the publications rather than the publications themselves. We coded only for lead author because it is typical for the lead author to be the person who is driving the research or who has contributed the most to it. We coded each lead author for convict status (i.e. currently or previously incarcerated or not), nationality, gender, race, and academic rank at time of publication. We used authors' current affiliation to

determine nationality. We recognize that scholars move for employment but use this measure as we believe it still reflects how nationality may shape thoughts on CC. For gender and race we relied on our personal knowledge of the authors. Otherwise, for those we did not know personally we reviewed read bios in the published papers or on official (typically university-related) websites for pronouns. Doing so means that we may have mis-gendered or mis-racialized some. We also calculated the total number of unique authors (as lead and as co-author) to provide a sense of how big the area is and the prevalence of co-authoring.

The second broad category was general information about the publication. This included data about when it was published, whether it included 'Convict Criminology' in the title, and where it was published. We include CC in the title as it is a clear indication that the authors intend to place the writing in this context. For where published, we determined whether they appeared in academic journals or edited collections. We also coded for the specific journals and edited collections in which they appeared.

The third broad category of codes related to the three tenets of Convict Criminology. Previous discussions of CC have detailed that the field is based on: scholarship, mentorship, and policy/activism (Jones et al., 2009). Accordingly, we created variables to assess each of these categories. For scholarship, we coded the approach authors took for each manuscript. These were coded as 1 = empirical, 2 = normative/conceptual, 3 = review, and 4 = mixed approach. We classified those articles/chapters as empirical approaches if the piece used systematic data collection. We considered normative approaches as those that focused on developing or elaborating on the state of CC. Reviews were those publications that simply reviewed and summarized the current state of research on CC. There were some publications that combined two or more of these approaches and we coded these as mixed.

If the manuscript was empirical, then we coded as to whether it relied on quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods. Also, we coded each article to determine if the author relied on formal autoethnographical approaches or if it was driven by personal, first-hand experiences related to incarceration or time in the field by the authors. We included this category because lived experiences relating to incarceration is promoted among convict criminologists (Ross & Richards, 2003). Autoethnography is 'an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experiences (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)' (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 273). We made distinctions between formal autoethnographies and those that included first person accounts but that did not include systematic analyses.

For mentorship, we coded whether each manuscript promoted or actively discussed mentoring either for those impacted by the criminal justice system or other convict criminologists working as academics. We included a variable for co-authorship as a proxy measure of mentorship. We did so because coauthoring often can entail some form of mentorship. For policy and activism, we coded each item to determine if they actively engaged or critiqued current criminal justice policy or if they directly discussed and encouraged activism. When coding for policy, it was not enough to simply criticize existing policy. The authors had to have made specific recommendations relating to criminal justice or corrections policy.

Additionally, we coded publications to determine the specific subject matter they addressed. The categories included, prison experience, re-entry experience, convict

identity, education (e.g. promoting prison education), methods, corrections, criminal justice, or review or critique of scholarship on convict criminology.

Finally, the fourth broad category related to the impact of the manuscripts. To measure the impact of each manuscript we relied on citations from Google Scholar. We searched each title and recorded the number of citations at that time. All Google citations were recorded on 30 May 2022.³ Additionally, we calculated the average number of citations per year. We calculated the *h*-index, and *i*10-index for the entire sample. The *h*-index is the number of papers coauthored by a researcher with at least *h* citations each (Hirsch, 2005). This measure was designed to determine the output of specific researchers and has been applied in criminology and criminal justice (Copes et al., 2012; Khey, Jennings, Higgins, Schoepfer, & Langton, 2011). We adapted this measure to determine the output of a group of researchers, in this case convict criminologists. Similarly, we adapted the *i*10 index, which is a measure of the number of articles published with at least 10 citations.

Findings

Richards and Ross (2001) published the first article that formally advanced the CC idea. Two years later, these same authors published an edited collection devoted to CC. After these early works, there was not another CC publication until 2008, which suggests that it took some time for the idea to take off in the field. The highest number of journal articles published in a single year was 10, in 2012. In 2021 another edited collection was released (Ross & Vianello, 2021).

Lead author characteristics

Understanding who the authors of the manuscripts are can provide insights into the direction of the field. There were 67 unique people listed as authors on one or more CC articles and chapters. Forty-four people were lead authors, eight authored five or more CC manuscripts. As shown in Table 1, of the 44 lead authors, more than half ($n = 24$) were formerly or currently incarcerated and 20 were not. The lead authors of CC manuscripts were largely White men. The racial backgrounds of the lead authors were: 39 White, 2 Hispanic, 2 Black, and 1 Native American. Thirty-six were men and 8 were women. Of the men, 32 were White, 2 were Black, 1 was Hispanic, and 1 was Native American. Of the women, 7 were White and 1 was Hispanic. Most of the lead authors were working in the United States ($n = 28$). The others were working in the UK ($n = 6$), Italy ($n = 5$), Canada ($n = 2$), Argentina ($n = 1$), Australia ($n = 1$), and New Zealand ($n = 1$).

We were also interested in the ranks of those who published CC research. Whereas the previous discussion of authors was based on the 44 people who were lead authors, here we provide descriptive data for all the lead authors of the 79 publications included in the sample. Keeping in mind that the ranks of authors changed over time as these authors were most likely promoted, the majority of lead authors were in tenure track positions at the time of the publication: 21 were full professors, 24 were associate professors, and 16 were assistant professors. In addition, 8 were students, 6 were independent scholars, 2 were instructors, 1 was a post-doc, and 1 we were unable to determine their official rank.

Table 1. Characteristics of lead authors.

	(N = 44)
Convict Status	
Convict	24 (54.5)
Never Convict	20 (45.5%)
Gender	
Men	36 (81.8%)
Women	8 (18.2%)
Race	
White	39 (88.6%)
Hispanic	2 (4.5%)
Black	2 (4.5%)
Native American	1 (2.3%)
Nationality	
United States	28 (63.6%)
United Kingdom	6 (13.6%)
Italy	5 (11.4%)
Canada	2 (4.5%)
Argentina	1 (2.3%)
Australia	1 (2.3%)
New Zealand	1 (2.3%)
Rank	
Full Professor	21 (47.7%)
Associate Professor	24 (54.5%)
Assistant Professor	16 (36.4%)
Instructor	2 (4.5%)
Post Doc.	1 (2.3%)
Student	8 (18.2%)
Independent Scholar	6 (13.6%)

Table 2. General characteristics of convict criminology publications.

	Publication Outlet		Overall Sample (N = 79)
	Journal (N = 42)	Edited Collection (N = 37)	
Convict Criminology in Title	28 (66.6%)	18 (48.6%)	46 (58.2%)
Subject Matter			
Convict Crim.	14 (33.3%)	14 (37.8%)	28 (35.4%)
Prison Exp.	2 (4.8%)	18 (48.6%)	20 (25.3%)
Prisons	5 (11.9%)	6 (16.2%)	11 (13.9%)
Education	7 (16.7%)	4 (10.8%)	11 (13.9%)
Scholarship	5 (11.9%)	1 (2.7%)	6 (7.6%)
Re-Entry Exp.	2 (4.8%)	3 (8.1%)	5 (6.3)
Approach			
Normative	22 (52.4%)	15 (40.5%)	37 (46.8%)
Review	7 (16.7%)	9 (24.3%)	16 (20.3%)
Mixed	6 (14.3%)	10 (27.0%)	16 (20.3%)
Empirical	7 (16.7%)	3 (8.1%)	10 (12.7%)
Empirical Method	n = 9	n = 6	n = 15
Qualitative	5 (55.5%)	6 (100%)	11 (73.3%)
Mixed	3 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (20.0%)
Content Analysis	1 (11.1%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (6.6%)
Personal Experience	17 (40.0%)	20 (54.0%)	37 (46.8%)

Table 3. Mentorship, policy, and activism in convict criminology publications.

	Publication Outlet		Overall Sample (N = 79)
	Journal (N = 42)	Edited Collection (N = 37)	
	Mentor Convicts	10 (27.0%)	
Mentor Academics	6 (14.3%)	4 (10.8%)	10 (12.7%)
Promote Policy	4 (9.5%)	14 (37.8%)	18 (22.8%)
Promote Activism	7 (16.6%)	4 (10.8%)	11 (13.9%)
Specialized Groups	1 (2.4%)	5 (13.5%)	6 (7.6%)

Table 4. Citation measures for convict criminology publications.

	Publication Outlet		Overall Sample (N = 79)
	Journal (N = 42)	Edited Collection (N = 37)	
	Mean Citations	22.05	
Mean Cites per Year	2.84	0.66	1.82
h-Index	21	12	22
i-10 index	20	13	34

Characteristics of CC publications

We now turn to our analysis of the CC publications. Here the unit of analysis is the published article/chapter, rather than the authors of the papers. In the final analysis we included 79 publications. Of these, 42 (53.2%) were in journals and 37 (46.8%) were in edited collections. All publications actively engaged with a CC perspective, as part of the selection criteria; however, only 46 (58%) included 'Convict Criminology' in the title. Twenty-eight (66.6%) of the articles used Convict Criminology in title and 18 (48.6%) of the chapters did (see [Table 2](#)).

We also coded for the primary and secondary subject matter of the articles and chapters. In total we coded for 25 broad subjects. Most of these only had one or two publications that addressed these subjects (e.g. health issues, journalism, and employment). The six most common subjects discussed in CC articles/chapters were convict criminology ($n = 28$), prison experiences ($n = 20$), prisons/corrections ($n = 11$), education ($n = 11$), scholarship ($n = 6$), and re-entry experiences ($n = 5$). The 28 publications we classified as 'convict criminology' provided reviews of the area, sought to expand on the boundaries of CC, or encouraged examining CC to areas outside of the United States. These were the most common subjects regardless of where the scholarly work was published.

Approach and methods

Research can be classified by the type of approach the authors take. These can be empirical, normative, review, or mixed. The frequency of these approaches were normative approach ($n = 37$, 46.8%), review ($n = 16$, 20.3%), mixed ($n = 16$, 20.3%), and empirical ($n = 10$, 12.7%). Normative was the most common regardless if published in journals or edited collections. The mixed papers included 5 that used empirical methods. Empirical papers were more likely to be published in scholarly journals ($n = 9$) than in edited

collections (n = 6). For the publications that were based on empirical methods, they most often relied on qualitative methods (n = 11, 73.3%), followed by mixed methods (N = 3, 20%), and quantitative content analysis (n = 1, 6.7%).

One of the original cornerstones of CC was the desire for the scholarship to include auto-ethnographies (Ross & Richards, 2003). Despite this intention, we discovered that only one publication conformed to commonly accepted definitions of autoethnographies. However, it was common for the papers to be based on the personal experiences of the authors. These experiences were more often derived from being incarcerated, but they also include experiences working in prisons or as being family members of those who were incarcerated. We found that 37 (46.8%) of the publications drew directly from prison experiences in some way. Publications in edited collections were more likely to draw from personal experiences (n = 20, 54%), than were those in journals (n = 17, 40%).

Mentorship

The second of the three pillars of CC is the promotion of mentorship for those who are incarcerated and those who have been released from correctional confinement. Consequently, we coded for whether the authors actively promoted mentorship of those in prison and of those who are now in academia. As shown in Table 3, a minority of papers discussed mentorship of those in prison (n = 17, 21.5%) or of those who were previously incarcerated and who are now in academia (n = 10, 12.7%). Mentorship was more likely promoted in journal articles than chapters in edited collections.

Another way to measure mentorship is to determine the number of coauthors for a publication. The assumption is that coauthors work together, often in a mentor-mentee relationship (Ross, Zaldivar, & Tewksbury, 2015). Overall, 38 (48.1%) of the publications were co-authored and 41 (51.9%) were sole-authored. Of the co-authored articles, 22 (57.9%) were led by formerly incarcerated scholars and 16 (42.1%) by non-incarcerated scholars. For the solo-authored publications, 26 (63.4%) were authored by incarcerated scholars and 15 (36.6%) were written by non-incarcerated scholars. Chapters were more likely authored by single authors than were journal articles.

Policy/activism

The third stated tenet of CC is promoting policy and activism relating to corrections and the broader criminal justice system. Although it was common for authors to critique prison and criminal justice policy, only 18 (22.8%) of the publications actively promoted or recommended specific policies. Even fewer actively promoted activism (n = 11, 13.9%). Chapters published in edited collections were more likely to recommend policy (n = 14, 37.8% of the chapters) than were articles in journals (n = 4, 9.5% of the articles). Journal articles were slightly more likely to promote activism (n = 7, 16.6%) than were chapters in edited collections (n = 4, 10.8%).

We also coded for whether the authors focused on specialized populations. We found that only 6 publications emphasized specialized populations. These populations included Native Americans, those sentenced for sex offenses, those with disabilities, and women. Five of these 6 were in chapters.

Citation impact

The mean citations per article was 15.54 and mean cites per year was 1.82 (see [Table 4](#)). The *h*-index for these articles was 22, which means that 22 manuscripts were cited at least 22 times. The *i*10 index was 34, which means 34 had been cited 10 or more times. When comparing where the works were published, those in academic articles were cited more than those in book chapters. The mean citations for articles was 22.05, with a mean of 2.84 cites per year. The mean citation score for chapters was 8.16, with mean cites per year .66. The *h*-index for articles was 21 and for chapters was 12. The *i*10 for articles was 20 and for chapters was 13. The articles tended to be published in specialty criminology journals, rather than general ones (e.g. *Criminology*, *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, and *Justice Quarterly*). The journals where these articles most frequently appeared were the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* (*n* = 14) and *Critical Criminology* (*n* = 6).

Discussion and conclusion

Convict Criminology started with the mission of promoting the voices of those scholars who had served time in prison (Richards & Ross, 2001). Although there is not a unified approach to CC, scholarship in the area tends to support three primary tenets: scholarship, mentoring, and policy/activism (Jones et al., 2009). Our content analysis of CC scholarship was designed to assess this body of work to determine if they are meeting their aims and to suggest paths forward to invigorate future work in the area. Overall, our findings lead us to conclude that in many ways CC scholars have more work to do to achieve these aims.

Scholarship that deals with the same themes as CC but does not cite CC research

There is a large body of research on correctional facilities that covers the same content and methodological approach as convict criminology, but does not outright mention this field. There are numerous reasons for why this may occur. On the one hand, scholars, reviewers and editors may not legitimately know about Convict Criminology. Alternatively, this group of experts may be misinformed about CC. Indeed, the original description of CC was not concise. Regardless it is not clear why these scholars failed to cite CC in these situations. Finally, we are also aware that some formerly incarcerated scholars, despite doing insider research (Newbold, Ian Ross, Jones, Richards, & Lenza, 2014) do not want to be known as Convict Criminologists. They prefer to remain being undercover 'members' of CC. Their motives for not wanting to be a part of CC is beyond the scope of our current research effort.

Author backgrounds

Our analysis of the background characteristics of those who write in the area suggests that there is room to be more inclusive. Our findings suggests that CC has been historically a largely White, male enterprise. A criticism discussed by Belknap (2015). Convict criminologists are aware of this and have been working diligently to address this gender and race/ethnicity issue (Ross, Jones, Lenza, & Richards, 2016). Evidence of

this is that nearly half of the women who are lead authors published within the past two years. Women represented 6 of the 22 (27%) lead authors in 2021 and 2022. Additionally, current leadership in the Division of Convict Criminology is gender and racially diverse, to formerly address previous criticisms of the network (e.g. Belknap, 2015). Specifically, in 2022, six of the eight officers are women and four them are women of color. It appears that progress is being made in diversifying CC, but more work needs to be done.

Our data prohibit us from explaining why this gender and race gap exists in CC. Regardless of why it exists, we think that CC scholars should be proactive in recruiting members from minoritized groups. Targeting scholars from the Global South, Latin America, and Asia could help expand the range of thought, methods and theory in CC. Finding ways to mentor, recruit, and retain faculty is also important. Being proactive in addressing these issues is consistent with the overall ethic of CC and promotion of under-represented voices.

Convict criminology content

Our findings also suggest that CC scholars devote a significant amount of time reviewing and discussing the boundaries of the field. Indeed, over a third of the published work focuses on overviews. Such work is certainly important, especially in the early stages of a field. CC has been formerly defined for over two decades; thus, we think it is time to move past these types of reviews. There is much to write about within a CC framework. Applying CC concepts to a broader range of topics would be healthy for the field and would allow CC to be relevant throughout literature on crime and criminal justice. Applying CC to those indirectly impacted by incarceration (family, friends, and victims of those in prison) would show the reach of harm from excessive incarceration. Including more research on those in community corrections, including the harms and benefits of such programs, would reach bigger populations. In short, CC scholars should limit the amount of reviews and increase applications of the framework to other areas within the justice system.

One of the tenets of CC is advancing scholarship using an insider's perspective. Our findings suggest that CC scholarship underutilizes empirical methods. CC scholars tend to use other approaches in their work, primarily reviews or normative approaches where they discuss personal experiences. Normative approaches are valuable, and our previous suggestion of applying the CC framework to other substantive areas is consistent with this. That said, using empirical methods is also important. The broader acceptance of evidence-based practices in criminal justice supports this claim. Many in positions to implement policy look to empirical research to shape policies and programs.

Mentorship

The second key tenet of CC is the promotion of mentorship of those who are incarcerated and especially those convict criminologists who are now in academia. Our findings suggest that there is limited emphases in mentoring of any type. We did find evidence of indirect mentorship through the practice of co-authoring. The prevalence of co-authoring, especially when senior faculty work with early career scholars suggests that

this type of mentoring is taking place. Despite this, it was rare for CC scholarship to detail specifics about mentoring programs or suggestions for effective mentoring.

Policy and activism

One of the larger aims of CC scholarship is to promote sound and meaningful policy and to encourage activism to bring about this change. These are certainly important goals. However, our findings suggest that it is rare for CC scholarship to articulate clear policy recommendations. Less than a quarter of all publications recommended policy changes. It is common for CC scholars to critique existing policy, often from personal experiences. What is missing is the advancement and articulation of actual policy suggestions. The same is true for the promotion of activism, where less than 15% advanced political activism. Detailing specific policies and programs and directing activism in clear ways can increase the reach of CC.

Impact of CC scholarship

It is difficult to assess the impact of an area within the broader discipline. One way this can be done is by looking at how frequently scholarship is being cited and where it is being published. The mean citation of over 15 and *h*-index of 22 suggest CC is getting attention. That said, our analyses prevent us from determining where these citations are coming from. We cannot say if these citations are simply other CC scholars citing one another or themselves. We can say that the outlets of CC work seem to be in non-generalist journals or edited collections. Also the journals where CC related articles have been disproportionately included the *Journal of Prisoners on Prison*, and *Critical Criminology: An International Journal*. Indeed, nearly half of all CC articles were published in these two journals. This singing to the choir approach may have been appropriate during the early formation of CC, where getting out the word was important, but the field is now close to 25 years old and those interested in the CC perspective should invest more time engaging with empirical research. This means that CC scholars should also target general Criminology/Criminal Justice journals and those with high prestige. There are certainly difficulties in measuring prestige of journals, but those with good reputations and high citations include *Criminology*, *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, and *Justice Quarterly* (DeJong & St George, 2018; Roche, Fenimore, & Jennings, 2019). Doing so will allow CC to reach a wider audience and help ensure that it is not seen simply as a fringe area.

We encourage CC scholars to publish in more mainstream, general criminology/criminal justice journals. To do this, convict criminologists will need to move beyond reviews or further elaborations of CC. Such reviews and elaborations are important but this type of work represents a large portion of published work on CC. Perhaps, too much. Engaging with empirical, data driven research will help CC scholars to publish in general, highly cited journals. More importantly, empirical research will allow them to make stronger policy recommendations and to inform effective activism.

Additionally, despite the objective of creating a branch of the academic fields of criminology/criminal justice that was built on rigorous auto-ethnographies, it was uncommon for scholars to use this approach. Although the majority of the research used firsthand accounts, they were not auto-ethnographies in the truest sense of the term.

There is value in detailing personal experiences, but it is important to have clearly defined and rigorous methods. Retrospective accounts are limited in their ability to convincingly direct policy as they can be discounted as merely anecdotes. As one of the major tenets of CC is to promote policy having more sophisticated methods will aid in bringing this to fruition.

Currently, the bulk of empirical research from CC highlights those who are currently incarcerated. Of course this is important, but it is also limiting. CC is well suited to also understand the experiences of those who are indirectly affected by carceral systems. People whose relatives or friends are incarcerated are also impacted by the system. These stories are just as important as those sentenced to prison. These people, especially children, face hardships and courtesy stigma due to being the loved ones of people who are incarcerated (DeShay, Vieraitis, Copes, Powell, & Medrano, 2021). Additionally, insights from those who work in prisons can be used to inform CC and to offer policy recommendations.

Further iterations of this research effort

Our content analysis of scholarship devoted to CC has allowed us to suggest ways of strengthening the field. Although we believe the insights from the analysis are important, the study is not without limitations. First, we limited our sample to English language publications. As CC has grown, scholars writing in varied languages have begun to produce important CC work. Accordingly, further iterations of this research should include foreign language articles written on CC. We are aware of scholarship written in French, (e.g. Salle, 2007), Italian (e.g. Degenhardt & Vianello, 2010), and Portuguese (e.g. Biondi & Madeira, 2021). But there are certainly much more than this.

Additionally, we focused our analysis on assessing how closely CC adhered to the three tenets (Jones et al., 2009). These tenets are a core part of CC, but it is also likely that as the field has grown so too has its scope and aims. Accordingly, others may find value in examining other aspects of CC. Indeed, including additional research methodologies or broad subject matter may allow us to better understand different components of convict criminology. Finally, as previously mentioned, a content analysis, in the manner that this one was conducted, is advantageous for assessing the state of the field. We also think it is important to engage in qualitative analysis of the field. Consistent with the one of the larger tenets of CC, gaining the perspectives and insights of those who practice CC could provide a rich discussion of the state of the field. Follow-up research might endeavor to ask the authors of this scholarship about the experience of writing in this field, including questions surrounding their motivation and the effect it had on their lives and careers.

Notes

1. Although one of the first scholarly articles that mentions Convict Criminology is Arrigo (2000), it is primarily a passing reference to the forthcoming book *Convict Criminology* (Ross & Richards, 2003). Also, to be included in the content analysis, the article or chapter needed to be at a minimum listed in Google Scholar (e.g. publicly available), but not necessarily assigned to a specific issue.

2. All books that were not edited collections were excluded. Thus Earle (2016) was not subject to content analysis.
3. We located a single article published after this cutoff. We use the citation score after this 30 May 2022, date only for it.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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