



Acting out Justice: Harnessing Role-Playing for Criminological Education and Research

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Abstract

The integration of arts-based, particularly theater-based, education and research within the realm of criminology is increasingly imperative, primarily due to the current limitations in its application. Despite the traditional dominance of quantitative methods in criminological research and training, theater-based methodologies may provide nuanced dimensions to the complexities of criminological phenomena that may remain obscured by more conventional approaches.

"Art is a lie that makes us realize truth"

(Picasso Speaks, 1923)

Introduction

Criminology is the systematic study of crime, criminals, criminal law, criminal justice, and criminalization [1]. Arts-based research encompasses a range of approaches and strategies that utilize one or more of the arts in investigation [2]. Within the arts-based methods, theatre-based methodologies, particularly role-play dynamics, have profound implications [3] for real-world contexts [4], encompassing the complexities of organizational behavior, social psychology, and ethics [5].

While contemporary discourse increasingly acknowledges the importance of utilizing creative, imaginative, and artistic methodologies in criminological investigation, there remains a notable absence of role-playing in the education of criminologists to deepen their understanding of crime and criminal intent. The integration of artistic sensibilities through role-playing is crucial; without it, the essence of criminology risks dissipating, leaving behind a mere bore, devoid of richness and complexity [6]. Such integration will serve to fill the metaphorical borehole, restoring depth and vitality to the discipline. We aim to explore what traditional methods cannot capture [7] through the application and utilization of the arts-based methods in criminological inquiries. Therefore, the purpose of this literature review is to illuminate instances where the incorporation of arts and especially performing arts in criminology might significantly enrich criminological investigations due to its lack of experimental research [8].

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Arts-Based Methodologies in Criminology Education and Research

Acknowledgments are due to the contemporary pioneers of criminology, whose contributions have facilitated the widespread utilization of visual and performative arts [9], benefiting both perpetrators and victims within correction centers and prisons [10].

Drawing on symbolic, radical, critical, and cultural interactionism as theoretical frameworks, a research conducted by Natali & Costa in 2010 at *Brera Fine Arts Academy* in Milan showcases a diverse array of creative methodologies, including 'poetically informed' research and the 'film-live' method, to expand criminological perspectives. The study explores the encounter between the imaginary and the real [11].

As an art historian and lawyer, Amy Herman et al., [12]; in her book, *Visual Intelligence: Sharpen Your Perception, Change Your Life*, defines arts-based learning methods to develop the perception of the participants how to assess, analyze, and articulate what they see in the visual appearances like photographs, paintings, or real-life crime scenes and business cases. She gives professional development courses entitled *The Art of Perception* to business people, police officers, and agents like FBI, CIA to increase their perception through practices with visual art pieces. While arts-based training for executives represents a relatively recent development, its efficacy in shaping learners' perspectives is noteworthy. By fostering creativity and imagination, learners can enhance their capacity for prediction and invention, ultimately enabling them to function more effectively [13]. In her empirical research, Erturk Kilic et al., [14]; conducted an arts-based creative communication training program clearly illustrates that participants exposed to arts training experience had significant impacts on creativity, healing effects, and enhancements in communication skills and social sensitivity [14].

The arts-based approach, grounded in experiential learning and embodied cognition, provides immersive artistic experiences that foster creativity, empathy, and collaborative problem-solving. Criminology training already benefits from performative [15], visual [12-17]. Sensory and affective techniques [16], utilizing such approaches to cultivate nuanced understandings of criminal behavior, victim experiences, and societal responses to crime.

While the incorporation of arts-based approaches has garnered widespread utilization in numerous correctional facilities and prisons

globally [18], its application in the realm of crime detection and prevention remains relatively underexplored within the field of criminology. We posit that the potential of arts extends beyond its conventional roles, encompassing not only therapeutic benefits but also implications for mental well-being, self-esteem, and cognitive development of the criminologist and with a better understanding of the psychology behind the crime [19].

In 'The Psychology of Art' Vygotsky states "Art is the antithesis of everyday life and the opposite of morality" [20], and continues "art enables us to experience things that we would never otherwise experience": "Art is the organisation of our future behaviour" (p. 253).

In consideration of the theoretical framework concerning morality and art's influence on the anticipation of future behavior, it is posited that a criminologist who adheres strictly to the routine of daily life, fulfilling roles as a citizen, worker, and familial figure, may inadvertently constrain their exposure to diverse lifestyles. Consequently, such limited exposure may impede their capacity to fully comprehend the multifaceted motivations underlying criminal behavior. "Thinking like a violent criminal" entails recognizing the interconnectedness of social processes over individual isolation [21]. By embracing imaginative exploration and subjecting their emotional faculties to the rigors of artistic integration through role-playing within their professional practice, criminologists can potentially navigate the intricacies of criminal motivation with greater efficacy. Drawing parallels with the pedagogical efficacy of incorporating arts into childhood education, it is reasoned that similar principles may be applicable to the cultivation of criminological insight. Thus, the assertion is made that broadening the methodological toolkit of criminologists to include artistic engagement holds promise for enhancing their investigative acumen and fostering a more nuanced understanding of criminal motives.

As quoted by Cooke, Peirce et al. [22,23], in his essay A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God, introduces the term 'musement'. This term underscores the importance of acknowledging unconventional and unexpected phenomena that may otherwise go unnoticed. It has been observed that the absurdities and amusing nonsense found in nursery rhymes, through the subversion of ordinary events, significantly contribute to child art. Criminologists, in particular, encounter certain absurdities—some not so amusing but unmistakably nonsensical—in their work on individual cases. Thus, possessing a tool like Musement is invaluable for them, as it helps in navigating through unexpected situations and identifying crucial elements in their studies [22].

Integrating Role-playing as an Arts-Based Method into Criminology Education: A Justifiable Approach

"Thus play I in one person many people"
Richard II, Shakespeare

In contemplating the integration of role-playing into criminology education, a spectrum of perspectives regarding theater emerges, all converging towards a shared objective: the enactment of a rehearsal, the construction of a fabricated reality, and the cultivation of dual consciousness.

For director Anne Bogart "[theatre] is a gym for the soul [it] is a place where personal investment is required and the return is real" while Aristotelian definition of theatre is structured around six essential components: Plot, Character, Thought, Diction, Spectacle, and Song [24]. However, starting in the mid-1980s and continuing thereafter, the theatrical events were viewed as a Whiteheadian junction consisting of six integrated "loci"—the text, the director, the cast, the crew, the audience, and the actuality created by the actors' dual consciousness of self and character [25].

This duality of consciousness of the actors [26], if applied by criminologists could offer a unique avenue for criminologists to critically examine crime in a creative and impartial manner.

Quick and Rushton et al. [27], elicited Baudrillard's mourning for the loss of theatre via it being absorbed into the quotidian in their article 'Theatricality', and quoting from him indicated that humans "are all actors and spectators; there is no more stage; the stage is everywhere; no more rules: everyone plays out his own drama, improvising his own fantasies" [27,28]. Through Baudrillard's words, [27], claimed:

...rather than fleeing the environs of the stage in a vain attempt to encounter a reality in those encounters where risk, liveness, endurance and authenticity are privileged, we might discover something extraordinary, something real, in the artificiality of theatricality itself. (p. 3)

Freidman et al. [29], quotes Fred Newman, the playwright and progressive political leader, who describes theatre as "a playground of the social imagination" (part 2, para. 9) at its best. Rose et al. [30], in his article *Varieties of Sociological Imagination* mentions diverse representations of self:

There are many ways of representing the individual as he reveals himself in his behavior and his words...George H. Mead used the analogies of play and the game to develop a representation of interactive human behavior; Erving Goffman used the analogy of the stage drama to develop the same representation... (p. 625)

In the sphere of artistic expression, theater especially role-playing uniquely provides pathways to uncover and engage with genuine reality within artificially crafted environments which could serve criminologists as both a secure space and a laboratory to explore the myriad dangers of the real world that the human psyche can manifest. The staged world can offer profound insights and truths that transcend the boundaries of conventional reality.

In the realm of acting, while definitions may vary, a central tenet revolves around the art of storytelling and the actor's body as their unique instrument for conveying narratives [31]. Regardless of the diverse methods (the system of Stanislavski, Method acting, Adler technique, Meisner technique, Uta Hagen, M.Chekhov, Grotowski are among the most practiced techniques) and interpretations, the essence remains consistent: actors are storytellers, utilizing their physical presence to bring stories to life for audiences.

While crafting theatrical characters, actors transcend simplistic inquiries such as *What would I do if I were the character?*, instead they delve into questions such as *Under what circumstances would I behave as the character does?*, this approach enhances character analysis by taking into account contextual influences and the character's individual worldview [11]. This understanding prompts actors to pose a fundamental question during rehearsals, providing their consciousness with a different perspective than their own.

Acting ideally progresses through a series of steps, including mimesis, a foundational cognitive-semiotic capacity as an educational tool [32-34]. The establishment of objectives and super objectives, researching the given circumstances, and ultimately embodying the character [35-37]. This process often necessitates extensive literature and historical research to authentically embody the character within the context of the plot and directorial guidance. Role-playing is the actor's profession for conveying the character they have created. Beyond mere portrayal, actors' transition from embodying the character to presenting their performance, which may include monologues, dialogues, or soliloquies. The authors of *A Critical Role for Role-Playing Pedagogy*, Shapiro and Leopold et al., explore various strategies for implementing role-playing pedagogy in different educational settings and disciplines.



Boal et al., [38], however explores the use of role-playing and improvisation techniques as a means of social and political activism in theater. Criminology theorist Lonnie Athens et al., [39], draws parallels between psychological introspection and the theatrical device of soliloquy. In his article *Self as a Soliloquy* Athens et al., [39], explores how soliloquies reflect shifts in human experience across thirteen distinct steps, and also, suggests that if a person deliberately changes their inner soliloquy, they will be able to unlearn the steps that led them to the criminal act, as discussed in his other article *Dramatic Self Change* [40].

In their study, Turhal and Natali et al.[11], employed acting techniques to delve into the intricacies of the criminal psyche by embodying characters created through a 'Create your criminal' map, which included a questionnaire and visual and auditory aids. Drawing from Athens' concept of the 'phantom community' at [39], participants were encouraged to create and articulate their inner monologues, providing insights into their thoughts and intentions before, during, and after the commission of a crime. This innovative approach, tailored for students of criminology, offers a creative avenue to comprehend the cognitive and behavioral aspects underlying criminal behavior, surpassing traditional literature-based methods.

Shakespeare and Criminology

A significant body of scholarly literature exists on the intertextual relationship between Shakespearean works and criminology [41]. Meron et al., [42]; in his article Crimes and Accountability in Shakespeare examines how Shakespeare addresses leader-driven crimes, power dynamics, and advisor accountability in his works.

Similarly, Victoria M. Time et al., [43], suggests that Shakespeare was a criminological theorist. Through Shakespearean characters, the study advocates exploring diverse sources of knowledge, including the plays of Shakespeare, to enrich criminology, highlighting that Shakespeare instructs us that we may not know ourselves as well as we think we do et al., [43]. Wilson et al., [44], proposes that Shakespeare's plays provide an early form of criminology and serve as a valuable resource for both theoretical exploration and pedagogical purposes. It suggests that Shakespeare offers new avenues for theoretical consideration in criminology, as the criminal events depicted in his plays engage with complex philosophical debates about crime and justice, laying the foundation for theoretical interpretations and adds:

...in Shakespeare's drama, as in life, neither the meaning of an event nor the identity of an individual is ever as singular and stable as it initially appears to be. To understand the importance of perspective is to understand that the meaning of an event changes depending upon the angle from which one looks at it. [44], pp. (101-102).

These studies among others [45-51], explain that there exists a wealth of insights that can be gleaned from arts-based trainings in crime scenes of Shakespeare.

Conclusion

In this study, through reviewing the literature, the arts-based methodology is presented as an effective means of education and research in criminological education. In their common application, arts-based methods are valuable in understanding complexity in meaningful and experiential learning experiences [52]. Many practitioners and authors emphasize the importance of arts involvement to realize the complexity and to develop the perspective to see what is not seen [5,-12].

Through an inductive perspective, after glancing at the general scene in literature, we narrowed down the arts-based methods with a focus on the application of role-playing in criminological education. The authors

of this study, as being involved in arts-based methods in both theoretical and practical terms, intentionally placed emphasis on role-playing as an effective and commonly applied method in this area. This echoes the sentiment expressed by Boal, who famously stated in an interview with the New York Times in May 2009: "Anyone can do theatre. Even actors. And theatre can be done everywhere. Even in a theatre".

As quoted from Guo et al. [53], the duality of consciousness of acting is valuable to create a mechanism to compare, criticize, reflect, and rehearse any situation in a safe area. This function of role-playing is practical to understand the complexity and realize different sides of the phenomenon in criminological studies. Also, as the most specific part of the inductive perspective in this study, one of the most common and effective applications of arts-based methods in criminological education, authors take Shakespeare and his works into the attention through different examples [41-44].

As a conclusion, this study presents how arts integration into education and research in criminology is useful and effective through a literature review of the related studies and introduces arts-based methods as an innovative perspective to criminological education.

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