

# Beyond Positive Convictions?

## The emergence of ex-prisoners as criminologists in the UK

A prison sentence and an academic career are usually mutually exclusive. The first tends to lock you down and out of society, the other secures an elevated position in its upper ranks. It can be a long uphill journey from a prison cell to a university office. It is a journey few people make but recently, as criminology in the UK has expanded, something remarkable has happened. Some ex-prisoners are making that journey into criminology and getting jobs as criminologists. They are sometimes referred to as convict criminologists.

- What do they know about crime and punishment?
- Can they teach students anything new?
- Do they research prison and prisoners differently?

These were the kinds of questions Dr Rod Earle asked in 'Beyond Positive Convictions?'. Biographical interviews were conducted with nearly all those people in the UK who meet the established definition of a convict criminologist: a scholar who has graduated from a prison sentence and either completed, or is close to completing, a PhD in criminology or a related subject.



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*“By combining personal life experience with academic training and criminological theory, convict criminology offers fresh insights into important aspects of crime, punishment and social order.”*

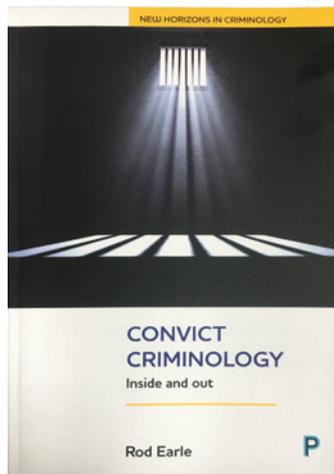
**Dr Rod Earle**

# What is convict criminology?

Convict criminology was developed in the United States in the late 1990s. It is based on the idea that first-hand experience of imprisonment may have the potential to contribute valuable insights into the study of crime and punishment. Until recently it has been associated with the US prison system but that is changing as the approach becomes viable in the UK. In 2016, the first book-length treatment by a single author of the convict criminology phenomenon was published in the UK.

***Convict criminology: Inside and out*** by Dr Rod Earle emerged from the unavoidable connections he discovered between conducting research in prison and his own experiences of imprisonment as a young man. Using an auto-ethnographic approach that links his prison experiences to the development of his interest in criminology, it provides a detailed and engaging introduction to the study of crime and punishment. It offers an original account of the pre-history of convict criminology in the work of the US sociologist Frank Tannenbaum and the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin. In addition to providing a detailed account of US convict criminology, it considers how the approach is developing in Europe, and what it may contribute to critical studies of crime, punishment and social order. Personally revealing and intellectually adventurous, it offers a platform for the development of further work in convict criminology, such as that emerging from the ISRF Beyond Positive Convictions study. It is available from bookshops, or can be ordered from Policy Press: [policypress.co.uk/convict-criminology](http://policypress.co.uk/convict-criminology) and online retailers such as:

[amazon.co.uk/Convict-Criminology-Inside-Out-Horizons/dp/1447323645](http://amazon.co.uk/Convict-Criminology-Inside-Out-Horizons/dp/1447323645) and [waterstones.com/book/convict-criminology/rod-earle/9781447323648](http://waterstones.com/book/convict-criminology/rod-earle/9781447323648)



As part of the research a small symposium of convict criminologists was held in London, including two women ex-prisoners who provided perspectives on women's incarceration and their routes into criminology. This group now meets twice a year as British Convict Criminology. It offers mutual support and encouragement to people with experience of imprisonment who want to develop their interest in criminology. For more information about this study, convict criminology in general and the British Convict Criminology group, contact Dr Rod Earle at The Open University: email: [rod.earle@open.ac.uk](mailto:rod.earle@open.ac.uk) [wels.open.ac.uk/people/re876](http://wels.open.ac.uk/people/re876) or visit the group's website: [britishconvictcriminology.org.uk](http://britishconvictcriminology.org.uk)