



## A CRIMINOLOGY OF HOPE

Laura Finley, Ph.D

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The discipline of criminology is often criticized for being too negative. Indeed, although the subject matter is important, it can definitely be dark and even depressing. But with care, educators in this area, and others like it, can take a critical yet positive approach, which not only informs but inspires students. In asserting the need to go beyond critical pedagogy, Giroux (2017) explains, “Without a simultaneous discourse of hope, it can lead to an immobilizing despair or, even worse, a pernicious cynicism. Reason, justice and change cannot blossom without hope. Hope speaks to imagining a life beyond capitalism, and combines a realistic sense of limits with a lofty vision of demanding the impossible.”

My work has been influenced by peacemaking criminology, first developed by Hal Pepinsky and Richard Quinney (1991), which attempts to offer a more hopeful stance toward crime and justice. It seeks to move beyond legalistic understandings of crime to assess harms done, and advocates for nonviolent solutions that affirm the dignity of all. Peacemaking criminologists believe that the current system of justice is itself violent, and that violence cannot be an effective response to crime. To build a different system will take a community of people committed to a better way.

One of the projects I am most proud of in my career is the College Brides Walk. This is a campus-community collaborative effort to raise awareness about dating and domestic violence and to inspire young people to take action to prevent abuse and disrupt it when they see it occurring. The title comes from the case of Gladys Ricart, who was murdered by her abusive ex-boyfriend just minutes before she

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Laura Finley is Associate Professor of Sociology & Criminology at Barry University. She dedicates this piece to all the activists and advocates who work tirelessly to end dating and domestic violence.

was to go to the chapel to wed her new partner. One part of the initiative involves a walk through busy streets, with participants encouraged to wear bridal gowns or white clothing and to carry signs that pay tribute to Gladys and the estimated 1,400 people who die annually from domestic violence in the U.S. The idea is to use the spectacle that is a sea of walkers in wedding gowns to prompt conversation about a topic that is still shrouded in silence.

Yet the College Brides Walk is so much more than just a walk. It includes outreach presentations to area schools and groups, educational workshops, speakers, multimedia presentations, artistic representations, and passive components like signs and banners. And, while the subjects of dating and domestic violence can definitely be emotionally challenging, we also include opportunities for survivors to share their stories of resilience, for activists to discuss their work, and, importantly, for attendees to take action immediately. Participating in the walk brings a sense of solidarity, and participants are also offered the opportunity to sign petitions about legal proposals, create public service announcements, and sign up to volunteer with local service agencies or activist campaigns.

In sum, the College Brides Walk is an innovative way to address the crimes of dating and domestic violence, but it is far from the only example of how criminologists are involved in challenging injustices and advocating for more just and peaceful alternatives to crime prevention and crime control. Events like this can provide not only important education but also that sense of hope and agency that drives social change.

#### WORKS CITED

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