

#50 (GLORIA LAYCOCK)

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Jerry Ratcliffe:

Reducing Crime podcast features conversations with influential thinkers in the police service and leading crime and policing researchers.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Gloria Laycock headed the Home Office Police Research Group and was Founding Director of University College London's Jill Dando Institute of Security and Crime Science, the first such institute in the world. We discussed 50 years of policing and crime prevention, repeat victimization and working with policy makers.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Welcome to Reducing Crime. I'm Jerry Ratcliffe.

So a bit of a milestone. Episode 50. Go on, put your hands up if you've listened to every episode. Okay. Just my mum then. Eh, who am I kidding? She has no idea about this podcast. Actually she's 91 and isn't even really sure what a podcast is.

What did you think of the theme tune? For the first four years the main theme for this podcast was the outro that played over the closing credits for classic 1970s British cop show *The Sweeney*. Starting with the previous episode, I flipped to the far more exciting intro theme for the same show. Too exciting, though? I'm on the fence, to be honest. So feel free to share your thoughts on Twitter @Jerry_Ratcliffe.

For this 50th episode, nobody better to chat with than a British crime prevention legend who's been involved in criminal justice in the highest levels of government criminal justice policy for 50 years. Gloria Laycock OBE worked as a psychologist in the UK prison service for 10 years before moving into the policy realm of the British government. She established and headed the Home Office Police Research Group and was Founding Director of University College London, UCL's Jill Dando Institute. More on that in the episode.

At UCL, she was director of research supporting the What Works Center for Crime Reduction until 2016. Gloria was awarded her Bachelor of Science in psychology at UCL in 1968 and a PhD from the same department in 1975. So it's

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fitting that more than 50 years since she started at that institution, she is Professor Emeritus of Crime Science at UCL. She was awarded an OBE in the Queen's birthday honors in 2008 for services to crime policy.

We cover a lot in this episode. It's like a masterclass on the history of crime prevention. You'll learn about the successes and failures of working in crime prevention policy, the importance of tackling repeat victimization as a way to reduce crime and, I'm not joking here, what crime prevention success story was objected to by a British government minister because it was too many syllables. Yeah.

Gloria and I caught up at the Environmental Criminology and Crime Analysis Conference at the Crown Hotel in the English town of Harrogate up in Yorkshire. The Crown Hotel is one of the oldest in the town and the visitor's book includes luminaries such as Lord Byron. It's a delightful place. It was late afternoon, so we settled into the hotel's lounge, skipped the afternoon tea and went straight for the gin.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, and also they're just playing this elevator lift music in the background and I feel like I've got gin and tonic in the scene. I actually could nod off nicely here.

Gloria Laycock:

Exactly. Yeah. You'd swim in that gin and tonic.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's the idea.

Gloria Laycock:

Is that a marmalade one?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It is. Who'd have thought there's such a thing as marmalade gin, but it's bloody marvelous. Yeah.

Gloria Laycock:

You like it? We had one the other night.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm embarrassed to say it's really quite nice. Yeah.

Gloria Laycock:

Okay.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You were the very first director of the Jill Dando Institute for Crime Science. Did you ever think you would get into this because you started as a prison psychologist, didn't you?

Gloria Laycock:

Yes, I did. I mean, I started with an interest in the law when I was at school, told, no way could I ever be a QC because I had a Liverpudlian accent. So, I thought about psychology because I didn't like the idea that somebody might know something about me that I didn't know. So, I thought, "Well, that's it. I'm going to find out about psychology." Did 10 years in Wormwood Scrubs. It's always fun to say that because it's a big prison.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Did you get any time off for good behavior?

Gloria Laycock:

Yeah. Well, only actually.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Actually it was one of the biggest prisons in the country at the time, wasn't it?

Gloria Laycock:

It certainly was. And it took a lot of the life sentence prisoners. So I did what was actually longer than the average life sentence in Wormwood Scrubs at the time. It was nine years and I did 10.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Can you imagine people from America listening? They hear a life sentence and in America that means life, when we're going, 10 years is longer than the average life sentence.

Gloria Laycock:

I mean, averages are a bit deceptive, as you know Jerry, but the maximum is life. But in those days there were people who'd murdered their dying wives and confessed to murder and then they're stuck with a life sentence whether they like it or not. So it was a fascinating place to be, but I stayed there too long, basically. 10 years was too long.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. That was from 1968 to 1978?

Gloria Laycock:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It feels like another country back then, doesn't it?

Gloria Laycock:

It did. Well, I was saying to John Eck on the bus earlier today that when I started all the prisoners were white ... 90 ... You'd go there and they'd all look white. And I went back five/10 years ago and they were predominantly Black. So something massive has happened over that period. I mean, it's not my area, I don't get into it, but it has to be a worry.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

There's been increasing diversity, but not to that level.

Gloria Laycock:

No, not to that kind of level. Though, it is disproportionately focused in London.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Gloria Laycock:

And I miss London. The diversity's great.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What is it Samuel Johnson said in the 1700s? "When a person's tired of London, they're tired of life."

Gloria Laycock:

Oh, yes, that's right. I haven't got to that point yet. Now, I'm a northerner having retired last year.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Instead of ending up for 10 years in Wormwood Scrubs to become a QC, wouldn't it have just been easier to try and lose your Scouse accent?

Gloria Laycock:

No. The other thing the headmistress said was, "You needed to know lots of solicitors to get the work."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, my goodness.

Gloria Laycock:

And I was a woman in the ... Or a young girl, a 21 year old when I left university, went straight into the prison system. I looked about 12. All the prison officers hated me. It was stressful, to be honest.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What was that like?

Gloria Laycock:

Well, I was a psychologist and the prison staff didn't like psychologists and I was a woman and they didn't like women, and I was terribly young looking, so they didn't like that either. The prisoners themselves were usually very polite, respectful, if you like, -

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Gloria Laycock:

... more so than some of the staff, to be honest. But when I left, I left and went to the Home Office research unit in Central London because Ron Clarke suggested it and I suddenly realized how much happier I felt. It was like a weight had come off from the stress of just surviving in that prison for so long. It left me thinking nobody should work as a prison officer for the whole of their career because it's a damaging experience. And I feel a little bit like that about the police sometimes that-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Just burn out?

Gloria Laycock:

... they're worn down, I think. And that's why I'm quite interested in trying to make the policing job as interesting, intellectual as much as anything, so that it's not just tramping the streets and going on patrol. That they can actually start to think creatively about crime control and what they can do to prevent it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's a bit like demographic researchers, they get broken down by age and sex.

Gloria Laycock:

Honestly. There are worse things to be broken down by this. So, yeah, quite.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I remember talking to Sir Denis O'Connor and the job was very different back in the '60s when he joined it. There was a lot more clarity about what the job involved and it was a lot more simple. You could do 30 years and it would be a long career. Now, these frontline jobs in the criminal justice system are incredibly draining.

Gloria Laycock:

Yeah. I mean, when I started working in the crime prevention unit in the Home Office, again, at Ron Clarke's suggestion, I was interested in what the crime prevention office actually did. And their training involved about a week in a Chubb lock factory looking at how five lever mortise locks were made.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Bloody hell.

Gloria Laycock:

And they do nonstop security surveys of houses and chemist shop and what have you. And that was what they did. Colossal waste of time. There was no evidence whatsoever that it was anywhere useful.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Did anybody care then about evidence? I mean, you're talking then-

Gloria Laycock:

Oh, no.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... about when? The late '70s?

Gloria Laycock:

Absolutely. No, they didn't. And they had all this data they were sitting on and they never ever looked at any of it. We set about trying to demonstrate to the crime prevention officers that they could do something with the data, that they could do crime analysis that would lead to something. And we banged on about it for, literally, years. And then, of course, discovered people like Herman Goldstein and Ron Clarke and situational crime prevention and so on and realized that policing could be incredibly rich. That's how Herman Goldstein would describe it. It's so exciting and rich and you can do so much and you can prevent crime.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Was there a lot of transnational, transatlantic cooperation between people like yourself and Ron Clarke and Herman Goldstein across in the United States?

Gloria Laycock:

I think the big change in relationship, that was when Ron actually immigrated to the United States.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Ron Clarke moved across to the US?

Gloria Laycock:

Ron Clarke moved across, yeah. He left the Home Office. At that time I'd been seconded by Ron into a policy division to head the crime prevention unit but instead of being in a little cloister of researchers, I was in a policy division and that meant I could speak on a daily basis to the policy people about what we were finding from the research we were doing. And it was really exciting because you thought you stood this fighting chance of getting somebody to listen to these research results.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What's the secret? How the hell do you get people to listen to stuff and actually make changes based on research and science?

Gloria Laycock:

I think you need to understand what motivates them, what they're looking for. I mean, what ministers were looking for were sound bites.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, God. Really?

Gloria Laycock:

Sadly. I mean they wanted results. They didn't really want to wait for the outcome of a pilot study. They just wanted to announce things. And you have to understand that's the reality. I was saying the other day, we were very, very keen on repeat victimization. All the work on repeat victimization was done from the crime prevention unit, mainly by Ken Pease. And I said to one of the ministers, "This is really exciting work, minister. Great if you could promote it and put it in your speeches and things." And he said, "Repeat victimization, Gloria, it's got too many syllables."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You're joking. Oh, my goodness.

Gloria Laycock:

No, I mean, he's, "Can't you can't you make it fewer syllables?" And I'm, "Well, not really, no." He said, "Can't we call it repeat offending?" I said, "No, it's not repeat offending. It's repeat victimization. 4% of victims suffer 44% of crime in the UK. That's how powerful it is. And if you can protect them, you can reduce crime. That's what this research is showing." "Oh, well, yeah. Carry on doing it. I'm not trying to stop you, but I'm not really interested."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, my goodness.

Gloria Laycock:

There was no secret in how to engage with them. I failed, basically.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

For the 20 plus years, more than that probably, I think I've known you, I've been ever so slightly terrified of you. What was it Shakespeare said? "You may be small, but you are a vixen." I'm surprised any policy maker would have the temerity to turn you down.

Gloria Laycock:

No, well, what we did, we did all this research, we tried to persuade the policy people to promote it to the police and they didn't do anything. And I was getting crosser and crosser. So I went to my boss, who was the head of the police department and said, "Look, I gave them all this policy to develop with the police and they've done nothing. Will you please give it me back and I'll do it."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So the Home Office had the department that looked after policing?

Gloria Laycock:

Yeah. The Home Office had a big department that was responsible for policing with lots of divisions in it. One of those divisions was responsible for crime prevention, but they weren't taking repeat victimization as a concept and really pushing it to the police. And the police were saying, "We haven't got any of that." And I'd say to a couple of chief constables, "But you've got no domestic violence?" "Oh, yeah, we've got that." "You've got no commercial burglary?" "Oh, yeah, we've got that." "Well, then you've got repeat victimization. I mean, domestic violence is the quintessential example of it."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So there is an advantage here in the UK where you have a national government and if you can influence the policing people at the national government, they can actually start to distribute it. Did you have more success?

Gloria Laycock:

Yes we did. We did several things: One of the things I managed to persuade them to do was to set a performance indicator related to repeat victimization. The police hated being compared with each other. So instead of that, we said, "Look, you've got a year. In that year you've got to be able to count it." Because it's quite difficult, as you know, Jerry, because you've provided guidance on how to do it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's quite a good idea. I mean, there's no point trying to move forward on a metric until you've got some confidence the metric is reliable.

Gloria Laycock:

Exactly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And just set a simple goal,-

Gloria Laycock:

Exactly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... "Can you measure this reliably?"

Gloria Laycock:

Yeah. "So after a year, can you measure it?" "Yeah, we can measure it." The second year they had to pick anything, whatever offense you like, that's repeat victimization and make it go down. "We're not trying to compare you with each other. You can all pick different offenses, but you've got to do it." And then I left, and the whole thing collapsed because I think the audit commission took over responsibility for performance indicators and performance measures and they were all as interested in comparing forces because they thought that competitive edge would-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Gloria Laycock:

... motivate them. To be honest, I've always been a bit disappointed that the police don't focus on reducing the probability of a victim being hit again because whichever offense we looked at, it was really important they were being repeatedly victimized.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And over time they start to just not bother reporting the victimization?

Gloria Laycock:

Well, indeed. Absolutely. And, "Why didn't you report it?" "Well, I told the police I was burgled last time and now I've been burgled again. What's the point?"

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Gloria Laycock:

And then that did cause a problem for the police because when they went to a victim and said, "Have you been burgled before?" And they said, "Yeah, three times this year," the police were a little bit reluctant to record it because their figures would go all pear shaped and no one was going thank us for that.

Gloria Laycock:

But I think the principle is really to say, "Analyze your crime data and bear in mind you're trying to prevent it. So you're trying to look for opportunities that enable those crimes, hotspots." I mean, heavens, talking to you about hotspots and you know all about hotspots.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I've heard of them. Yeah. They sound like they're a good idea. We should do something about that.

Gloria Laycock:

Absolutely. I mean, "There's a staring you in the face hotspot. What are you going to do?" And, "What kind of hotspot is it? What's it a hotspot of? And why is it a hotspot?"

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And if it's a hotspot of repeat victimization or a hot point almost, "Can your crime analysis tell where the next crime's going to happen?" "Well, with repeat victimization, we can."

Gloria Laycock:

Yeah. I mean the work that Shane Johnson and Kate Bowers have been doing at UCL in the Jill Dando Institute was looking at near repeats.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

UCLA being University College London.

Gloria Laycock:

University College London. Well, Jill Dando's just the background to that. She was a really famous TV personality and she and Nick Ross, amongst other things, did Crime Watch in the UK.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That was a very popular program.

Gloria Laycock:

Incredibly popular. She was beautiful. She was successful-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

She was smart.

Gloria Laycock:

... and she was shot in the back of the head by somebody. No motive that anyone could work out. And the whole country was horrified. I think that was in 1999. And her friends and colleagues, Nick Ross and her fiance, Alan Farthing, and Sir John Stevens, who was the Commissioner in the Met, they all decided they wanted to do something to remember her by. And Nick Ross, her co-presenter on Crime Watch, had a bee in his bonnet about criminology, if I'm honest. He thought it was a total waste of space.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, he still does.

Gloria Laycock:

I know. It's embarrassing. I mean, actually some of my best friends are criminologists, as they say. I mean, I wish Nick wouldn't be quite so vocal about it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, we all have that one friend, that one criminologist.

Gloria Laycock:

Yeah, that's right. Anyway, he decided that he wanted to raise some money with everybody else's help to set up an Institute of Crime Science, basically, to get far more scientific thinking into crime control.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But before this, you set up the Police Research Group, didn't you?

Gloria Laycock:

Well, interestingly, when I was in the crime prevention unit, we were working with the police, and I thought, "You know what? This is all right, but there's all sorts of other things the police do. Most of it's not crime prevention." And there was no central research resource for the police. So I persuaded the head of the police department to set the Police Research Group up.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This is less than 30 years ago. This is the biggest part of the criminal justice system at the time and there is no research taking place in a national level.

Gloria Laycock:

I mean, there was, but it was all driven by the ministers or the policy people's agendas. The police weren't customers for it. And so I persuaded the head of police department that the Police Research Group should have the police's customers for it in the sense that we would take note of what their needs were along with the ministers and the policy people. So, basically, we had three customers and that-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's a bit radical, isn't it? Actually asking the police what they would like policing research to be on.

Gloria Laycock:

To be honest ... And we never really did that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, God.

Gloria Laycock:

The great thing about having three customers is you can go and tell the other two that the third one wants something. So you can control the agenda yourself but it was independent of the Home Office research unit. I worked directly to the head of police department-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Gloria Laycock:

... so I was very independent. And the good thing about that was he was very busy and couldn't be bothered. So long as nothing went wrong I was left alone and they gave me a million pounds in external research budget,-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Which, 30 years ago was a chunk of money.

Gloria Laycock:

... which was a lot of money. And they took it off the police technology research budget. Gordon Wasserman, who was then ... And some American colleagues will remember Gordon, he worked in New York for a while, he gave a million of his seven million budget to do social science research. So I announced that we were going to have a police operations against crime program because I thought if we can get the police working with academics all in partnership, we can get them to reduce volume crime.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It was the early '90s-

Gloria Laycock:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... and that was the crime peak-

Gloria Laycock:

Total peak-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... right then.

Gloria Laycock:

Total peak.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Never been as bad.

Gloria Laycock:

Yeah. And if we can get them to reduce that, that will free up so much time for the police to do serious stuff. But I told the academics they all had to bid with a police partner.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That was a first wasn't it?

Gloria Laycock:

Yeah, it was for the UK. So they put these bids in and there were six bids to evaluate neighborhood watch and,-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's a bit lame.

Gloria Laycock:

... to be honest, I was really disappointed because there was nothing radical, there was nothing new. There was nothing, what we would now call action research where they got together and said, "We're going to solve this problem. Or we're going to work together and develop something from scratch." It was all, "Let's evaluate what's kicking around."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But isn't that part of the struggle when you're so in the weeds all you can see is the weeds that are around you? I think I see it in academia, as well. People say, "Oh, by getting grants and other bits and pieces?" The real currency of academia is ideas.

Gloria Laycock:

Absolutely. And I was quite disappointed at the unimaginative nature of some of the bids that came in. We did spend the money and we set up a little crime prevention unit paper series. I fondly imagine the color of these booklets was claret, but Ken Pease used to call them the brownies.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, on the plus side, if you did that in America, people would think you were sending them cookies. You say, "Come to this meeting. We have brownies."

Gloria Laycock:

Brownies. Exactly. Yeah. Bring your brownies. We were able to publish them really frequently and we sent them everywhere. We sent them to New Zealand, we sent them to Australia.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Was it easy to find academics to work with the police?

Gloria Laycock:

Yes, it was. Well, the biggest problem I found with the academics was I wanted them to do the research and then tell me, "What did you find and what are the implications for action?"

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, that's not exactly an unreasonable request.

Gloria Laycock:

Well, it is if you're an academic because they never want to do that last bit that, "So what? You've done all this work-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

"And don't tell me we need more research."

Gloria Laycock:

... and don't tell me we need more research on the last page. I'm not interested. I want to know what are you telling the police?" And so they'd write the little booklets on what they'd done and they were to be short. And then they'd write a one page summary of the research and bullet points for action. And they moaned and they groaned, but most of them actually did it. It was reflective of the academics' real reluctance to take a risk and say what they thought. Not what they'd found hardcore, "I can defend this in court" conclusion.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And then you get academics endlessly moaning that people in the policy world don't pay any attention to them.

Gloria Laycock:

Exactly. No, I had no problem with saying, "We've done all this work. I'm going to stick my neck out here. Here's what I think the implications are." That would've been perfectly fine. I mean, at one point a couple of police officers said to me, "I'm sick to death of these brownie booklet things. Every time one comes, my chief tells me to summarize the implications for our force and you keep sending them. Will you stop?" And I thought, "No, I won't stop. Read it and then do something."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Now, you took a career break because I remember you spent some time across in the US. I remember being very envious. And then we met in Australia.

Gloria Laycock:

Yeah, that's right.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You came around to dinner at my place. This is 20 years ago on the warmest night in Australian history and I didn't have any air conditioning. You were a trooper.

Gloria Laycock:

Oh, no. I loved Australia. I mean, I had an amazing just over a year in the United States, as well when Jeremy Travis was head of NIJ. Sally Hillsman was there. It gave me time to think. And I wrote probably my favorite paper I've ever written, which is called Hypothesis-Based Research: The Repeat Victimization Story. We had 15 years of funding on repeat victimization. The first project was on burglary. Then we showed it was relevant to racial attacks and we showed it was relevant to bullying. Then we showed you what you could do about it. And we had this program of work to bring it to the attention of the police and it went on years. But that time in the US was an opportunity for me to write it up,-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Gloria Laycock:

... which I wouldn't have done otherwise.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

To be ... You had the moment to be reflective in time-

Gloria Laycock:

Yeah, exactly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... to put it all in place.

Gloria Laycock:

Exactly. And then I went to Australia for four months to the AIC and-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I don't think many people are aware of the Australian Institute of Criminology, the AIC, but it's a fantastic place.

Gloria Laycock:

It's a super place. And at that time they had one of the best criminological libraries-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They did, yes.

Gloria Laycock:

... on the planet. It was-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Do you remember when we used to go to libraries instead of just visiting them electronically?

Gloria Laycock:

Absolutely. Happy days.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They had a wonderful librarian staff.

Gloria Laycock:

Oh, you could find anything. What had happened was I persuaded the Home Office to let me stay in Australia for another year. But Ron Clarke said, "Oh, apply for this job for Jill Dando Institute."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's right. Because this was just after the ... All the money had been raised from the public after Jill Dando had been murdered.

Gloria Laycock:

That's right. They raised a million pounds.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

She was murdered in '99. So this would've been what? 2000 or so?

Gloria Laycock:

Yeah, 2001, they were advertising for a director and I was going to stay in Australia. Ron said, "Oh, apply for it." He said, "The time to decide when you want a job is when you offered it." And I thought, "Oh, that makes sense." So I applied for it and I went home after the interview and the provost at UCL phoned me and said, "We'd like to offer you the job." And I said, "That's fantastic. Thank you." And then I thought, Oh, my God, I was supposed to think about it?" Flattered, whatever, I was so excited. "Oh, yes, yes, definitely". And so I turned up UCL with a million quid in their bank and a part-time secretary.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So why crime science? I mean, you're setting up at University College London, the world's first center for crime science, how was that different from all the criminal justice places in the US and all the criminology places in the UK?

Gloria Laycock:

There were several issues: First of all, it was outcome focused. Everything we did was really about ... I'm not going to just say preventing crime or reducing crime, but controlling it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So you weren't about creating some obscure theory that would end up sitting on the shelves for the next 50 years?

Gloria Laycock:

We very much were. And we weren't particularly interested in the court system or whether probation worked. What we were interested in was making crime go down. And we actually inherited a huge amount of really useful work from Herman Goldstein on problem solving, from Ron Clarke on situational crime prevention, from environmental criminology, generally. We just pinched it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Which, I should say, is not about oil spills in Alaska, but-

Gloria Laycock:

Absolutely. Yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... environmental criminology is about the criminology, the built environment and the world in which we live in.

Gloria Laycock:

Yeah, much bigger than the built environment. It's understanding that situations and opportunities cause crime. And in that sense it's the huge environment. It's systems, it's management processes, it's the way the world's organized. If you go around, there are opportunities for crime everywhere. And if you can't control them, then you can't control crime. So it's very much focused on an outcome. And that takes you automatically really to policing and how the police operate.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Or at least what they also see and experience. I always like going to frontline police because they're the people who actually are on the ground. They actually see the opportunities on the ground.

Gloria Laycock:

Absolutely. And very often can't do anything about them. I mean, just going back to the crime prevention unit, one of the things I did there, I went to Hendon, the police college in London and said to the police, "They ought to do something about what? Who are they and what's what." And they said, "The banks ought to do something about credit cards." And this was in 1986 or something. Credit card fraud was going through the roof.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So let me come back to that. That's a really good way to frame it. Go to people and say, they ought to do something about what, and then just have the people that you're talking to say who the they are-

Gloria Laycock:

Exactly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... and what the what is. That's a great idea.

Gloria Laycock:

Well, when I was in the Police Research Group in the Home Office, car manufacturers ought to do something about car crime and they wouldn't. The Home Secretary called all the manufacturers into the Home Office and said, "You've got to do something about car crime." And they all said, "It's terribly difficult. We can't do it. It's because our cars are so popular." Ford said, "The Ford Escort's so popular, that's why it gets stolen." So we paid Loughborough University to do some research in the engineering department to demonstrate that you could develop a lock that was a deadlock on cars. Of course, they knew that. It's exactly what-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They just didn't want to spend the money.

Gloria Laycock:

Yeah, exactly. We went naively saying to them, "Hey, look, you can because Loughborough University had just done this." And they said, "Yeah, well, we don't want to." So what we did was, in the Police Research Group, we published the car theft index, which ranked the manufacturers by make against the cars that were stolen and we called-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Something like a bit of shaming.

Gloria Laycock:

Absolutely. We called them back into the Home Office and the Home Secretary said, "Next time we publish this, we're naming the manufacturers at the top of the list and we're going to tell everybody." And I remember the man from BMW said, "We're not going to be at the top of that list." And they all went away and they all voluntarily put deadlocks and immobilizers on all vehicles at the point of manufacture without any legislation. The legislation came later.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean, you say "Voluntarily," but-

Gloria Laycock:

Well, yeah, okay. They weren't exactly falling over themselves to do it until it was pointed out to them that nobody wanted to be at the top of this list.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They were coerced by Gloria Laycock.

Gloria Laycock:

Well, they were coerced a little bit. But actually sometimes people say, "What are you most proud of?" And I think the thing I'm most proud of in my 50 year career is coercing those manufacturers. And we were watching car crime tumble from 1993 onwards and it just carried on going down.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That must have left you inspired to the idea that you really could use crime science to engineer out crime.

Gloria Laycock:

That's exactly what happened. When we first set up the Jill Dando Institute, we were in the School of Public Policy at UCL, and for some reason best known to UCL itself, but then provost decided to move us and they put us in the engineering faculty.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Now, can you imagine criminologists,-

Gloria Laycock:

Exactly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... criminal justice people, saying, "We're moving you to engineering?"

Gloria Laycock:

Absolutely. I mean, it was inspired and I loved it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean, it sounds like it should be insane, but it was inspired.

Gloria Laycock:

Well, I think it was inspired because it meant I didn't have to justify science. I mean, what engineers do is solve problems. That's what they do. Scientists think about theories and grand schemes and the meaning of life and God knows what out of universe. It's fascinating stuff. Engineers design the world around us and they base that design on their experience, on their knowledge, on mathematics, on their knowledge about material sciences. In other words, they use all the sciences and they use a huge body of knowledge and they build things. And if they don't work, they think, "Oh my goodness, it didn't work. Why didn't it work?" They don't think, "Let's sack the engineer who built it." They think, "Let's fix it."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And they don't seem wedded to particular theoretical constructs or-

Gloria Laycock:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... political positions.

Gloria Laycock:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

If the bridge falls down, build a better bridge.

Gloria Laycock:

Well, why did it fall down? A great example actually. I mean, they do make mistakes. In London, there's a bridge, I think it's the Albert Bridge, and at one time it was called the wobbly bridge-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The wobbly bridge, yeah.

Gloria Laycock:

... because it wobbled if people walked over it. And they realized that that happened because people walking in step, as it's a suspension bridge, it amplified the swing. So this particular bridge then had a notice on it that said, "If you're in the army, please break your step as you walk over this bridge." So when they built the Millennium Bridge, they forgot about the wobbly bridge and the moment it was opened it wobbled something dreadfully because they'd forgotten what they'd learned from the wobbly bridge.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That sounds very criminal justice to forget what you've learned from before.

Gloria Laycock:

Exactly. But they now understand what went wrong and they fixed it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Gloria Laycock:

That's why I think crime science in a way has ... Well, it's embraced engineering, partly because we're in the engineering faculty, but also because it's the right thing to do: Solve problems.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But now you're also ... And I've known your department for 20 years ... Also has computer scientists and you also have people from a whole range of other disciplines. It seems very multidisciplinary, atheoretical.

Gloria Laycock:

It is very multidisciplinary.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean you have some theories that you're-

Gloria Laycock:

Well, the theories [crosstalk 00:30:51].

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Environmental criminology theories.

Gloria Laycock:

Exactly. That's right. The theories, as far as we're talking about crime, the theories come from environmental criminology from the absolute conviction that situations need to be controlled if you want to control crime. And the way to control situations is to engage with engineers and planners and designers.

Gloria Laycock:

So one of the things we've done, for example, and relatively recently and it set up the Dawes Center for Future Crime, Shane Johnson is the director of it, and we did that because we're very conscious of all the wonderful technologies being developed with nobody giving an iota of thought to what the consequences for crime are going to be. And those new technologies are opening up huge opportunities. The biggest crime growth area in the UK, I suspect everywhere, is cyber crime. And nobody even thought about what they were going to do about crime.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What's also interesting about cyber crime is, because so little is known about the offenders, there's very little work being done in the long term root causes of crime.

Gloria Laycock:

Well, that's what's so fascinating, isn't it? The only way to control cyber crime is situationally really.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It comes back to the old discussion about when people are jumping the turn styles. What are your options? Do you want to reduce property to reduce the incentive to jump the turn style? Or just design a better turn style?

Gloria Laycock:

Yes, exactly. Exactly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But with crime science, especially being very pragmatic, let's just have less crime. What's been the reception from the more traditional sociological criminology crowd that are more about root causes of people engaging in crime?

Gloria Laycock:

I mean, to be honest, it's not only the criminology crowd that think root causes and think poverty and parenting and all those things. And they're correlates of crime, but they're not causal. There are loads of rich people who commit dreadful crimes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because they have the opportunity.

Gloria Laycock:

Exactly. It's about the opportunity.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Why is this not seen as a massive growth of crime science? The traditional approach is does criminology still have-

Gloria Laycock:

That's a really interesting question actually, Jerry. I'll tell you why. The social psychologists will tell you about something called the fundamental attribution era. And the fundamental attribution era says, "If I see you breaking the law or doing something you shouldn't do, I will say you're a dreadful person, you need to be arrested and I will attribute it to a characteristic of you. It's your personality." If I do something that breaks the law, I will interpret it in terms of the situation within which I found myself. It wasn't my fault. I've got no money. The kids were driving me mad.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The classic example I use is there have been times when I've had to drive pretty fast down the motorway,-

Gloria Laycock:

Exactly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... down the freeway. But when somebody goes blasting past me, I always go, "Asshole."

Gloria Laycock:

Exactly. That's exactly right. And it's a fundamental characteristic of human nature to do this and it permeates everybody's criminal justice system. So our starting point is if we see somebody doing something bad, they're bad people.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But criminologists are often far to the left in terms of being more understanding of offenders.

Gloria Laycock:

Right. Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean, you know the old joke about a woman lying in the road after being assaulted and the criminologist runs over to her and says, "Oh, I do hope the person that did this is okay."

Gloria Laycock:

Yes, exactly. I mean, it's not just about being a bad person needing to be arrested. Some people, and I have a lot of sympathy with this, to be absolutely honest, would say, "Well, they're poor, they've got no money, they're desperate." And the worry is that the state the world's in at the moment, there's a real danger that crime's going to start creeping up again because people are going to be so desperate. I definitely worry about that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The changes worldwide and inequality is starting to become an issue.

Gloria Laycock:

Whether those changes are going to be so horrendous that people are sufficiently desperate, they'll overcome all these security measures. But the other criticism of situational crime prevention is it turns everywhere into Fort Knox and nobody wants to live in Fort Knox. It's just oppressive.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And it also excludes people.

Gloria Laycock:

It's exclusive, it's not nice. Though, we've riddled around on this in the crime science area. What we would say is that crime science is about reducing crime ethically, aesthetically, with due care. To being decent about it. So those riders come with it. So when we're saying we're multidisciplinary, we are. And criminology is very much one of the disciplines we're interested in, as is ethics.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The inclusion of ethics is an underappreciated part.

Gloria Laycock:

My feeling is that crime science has to depend on data. And if you want good data, it's going to have to come from the public. And the public are not going to provide good data to the police or good intelligence or good information if they don't trust them. So police legitimacy has to be a fundamental element to successful crime science.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because without it, we're not going to get the data and be able to solve problems.

Gloria Laycock:

Absolutely right. We won't know what the problems are and you can't solve a problem if you don't know what it is.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Gloria Laycock:

Getting the problem right is so important. I mean, I think it was Einstein who said, "If you tell me to solve a problem, I'll spend 55 minutes working out what the problem is and five minutes solving it." And he was really right.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So you retired last year, but for somebody who's notionally retired, here you are at a conference contributing to it. So, so much for that retirement.

Gloria Laycock:

Yeah. I don't think people do retire these days. I'm trying to write a book, actually on crime science and particularly for the police. It's focusing on undergraduate police officers who are starting policing degrees. And I want to try and make it accessible. One of the things John Eck said in his book, and I absolutely agree with him ... He's read some of these academic journal articles and he didn't understand them and thought he was an idiot. And I've read them and I haven't understood them and I've thought I'm an idiot. And actually they're badly written.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No, I've read them. And I didn't understand them and I know I'm an idiot.

Gloria Laycock:

Well, exactly what you get. I certainly don't get everything, but they're so impenetrable somehow. I mean, it's not necessary.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And the academics don't make any effort-

Gloria Laycock:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... to reach out and then they complain that nobody listens to them.

Gloria Laycock:

Some academics put themselves out to write in convoluted sentences and polysyllabic lab words and it's just-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

There are whole areas I could talk about that seem that way, but I'll get canceled if I talk.

Gloria Laycock:

Well, exactly. I mean, we both agree that it's hard work to write with clarity.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I can't remember his name. I think it's Pascal in the 1500s wrote to his friend and said, "I would've written a shorter letter, but I didn't have the time."

Gloria Laycock:

Exactly. Yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So in the big picture, what are the key things in terms of crime science that you've learned?

Gloria Laycock:

There's a couple of big points I'd want to get across to the police in this book: One, is that science is exciting because it's about discovery and nothing's more exciting than getting a data set and pimpling around and finding some little gem. I mean, repeat victimization is a good example of a little gem. Or if you've done a little experiment to see if something works and it actually did, I mean, that's fantastic.

Gloria Laycock:

But what I really want the police to do is to think and I want them to think like an engineer, things to be able to find and articulate the problems and then be determined to solve them. The thing about the solution is it is not necessarily arrest. It is not necessarily patrol. It is not necessarily for that traditional toolkit of policing methods.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, I think it's a good message that would come out right now because nobody has the resources to do that.

Gloria Laycock:

Absolutely. They don't have the resources, and as technologies are developing all the time, those old methods aren't going to work.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No.

Gloria Laycock:

You can't patrol your way out of cyber crime or organized crime. Solve the problem. And if you don't solve it first time, tweak it a bit and try again. But don't be scared to make mistakes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's one of the challenges, I think, the fear of failure prevents people trying things at all.

Gloria Laycock:

Absolutely. And it's very easy for me to say to the police, "Make a few mistakes. It'll be fine. Learn from your mistakes."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Make career shoulder the risk. Yes. That's right.

Gloria Laycock:

I mean the best mistakes to learn from is somebody else's, basically.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Gloria Laycock:

But if you can't do that-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's the whole reason my life is here.

Gloria Laycock:

Well, exactly. Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Everybody else can learn from mine.

Gloria Laycock:

I sent my friend a birthday card recently and it says, "I've learned so much from my mistakes. I'm going to make a few more." The police are in a difficult position because if they make mistakes, the media jump on them. It's easy to say, this is what ... It would be nice if they could do ... Actually doing it is incredibly difficult. And I think we need to get the media off their back, we need to get politicians off their back, and we need to get people to accept that the police are human too. They will make mistakes. If it's a genuine mistake, they need support. If it's corrupt or inappropriate, they need slamming hard. And that's a different problem.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. The realization that so much of this is human beings interacting with other human beings is going to result in mistakes.

Gloria Laycock:

Absolutely. It absolutely is. I mean, stuff happens. And if you take risks, you will make mistakes and then it would be great if the police could be encouraged to do that.

Gloria Laycock:

There's a really interesting little piece of work from Australia actually in Queensland and Victoria where they try to do problem-oriented policing and problem solving. And they asked the police were they encouraged to make mistakes? And they said, "Absolutely no way are we allowed to make mistakes?"

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Gloria Laycock:

And that was in two police agencies that purport to encourage problem solving.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, I worry now in the post George Floyd world-

Gloria Laycock:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Sarah Everard and, oh, you know?

Gloria Laycock:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You just identify all these cases in different countries in five, in 10 years' time, we're just going to see a whole generation of police leaders who are so risk averse it's going to see a contraction of policing to just doing the basics that we know won't get criticized. And that's a failing to the public.

Gloria Laycock:

It really is a failing to the public. But I think that's why the legitimacy agenda is so important, and the police know what the ground rules are. The danger is that there's a culture of covering up error. And I understand why they do that-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because-

Gloria Laycock:

... but they need to be able to say, "We shouldn't have done this. It was a mistake."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But we as a community need to give them the space to be able to do that.

Gloria Laycock:

Absolutely do. And it's about acknowledging that we're all human, we will make mistakes, but we'll learn from them, basically. And I'm very excited about the future-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Good.

Gloria Laycock:

... because I think it's just got to be right what we're doing. And we've got so many examples of where it's worked. And when you look at what's happened to volume crime, and we can tell you why it happened, we understand why it went down.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So you're not really going to retire anytime soon, are you?

Gloria Laycock:

Well, I mean, it depends on what you mean by retire. I think what retire means is I'm carrying on working but not being paid for it, which probably is a mistake. I should have stayed where I was.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, I appreciate you sticking around with us.

Gloria Laycock:

Thanks, Jerry.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Thanks for taking some time, Gloria.

Gloria Laycock:

I enjoyed it, hugely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That was episode 50 of Reducing Crime, recorded in Harrogate, England in June, 2022. Drop by reducingcrime.com/podcast where you can find transcripts of this and every episode. New episodes are announced on Twitter @_reducing crime or my personal handle @Jerry_Ratcliffe. Instructors feel free to DM me there for support materials.

Be safe and best of luck.