REVIEW: Criminology

A textbook for the next-generation of criminologists

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Case, S., Johnson, P., Manlow, D., Smith, R., Williams, K. (2017) *Criminology*, **OUP, Oxford. pp. 952 pages.**

This new introductory Criminology textbook is a very welcome core text for both undergraduate students and educational practitioners, in terms of the scope and breadth of coverage of relevant material and the inclusion of significant innovative features. The express aim of the book is to foster active criminologists and create students as producers actively engaged in research, reflective practice and applied agendas. The text offers useful advice and guidance that covers every facet of the student experience, from pre-graduate to induction, to providing the essential study skills and attributes for undergraduate study, research, and employability in the labour market. The exploration of key themes and perspectives in criminology is supported by contemporary illustrations and applications, with selected further readings, activities and weblinks to encourage extended reading, research and scholarly activity. As might be expected for a project of such scope and magnitude, there are some areas of Criminology that are relatively 'underrepresented' or underdeveloped, but the text goes a long way to being all-encompassing. On a critical note, the reviewer was struck by the seemingly uncritical incorporation of the employability agenda, an agenda and discourse which has ostensibly become 'naturalised' (Fairclough, 2014) and largely unquestioned and unchallenged in today's neo-liberal UK HE Institutions. The uncritical use

of employability appears incongruous with a Criminology text that is otherwise explicitly concerned with developing criticality.

Chapter One, of Part One ('Journeying into Criminology') of the new introductory undergraduate textbook 'Criminology' by Case et al (2017), is concerned with the process of 'Becoming a Student' and provides valuable insight into the variety of teaching and learning methods and different modes of assessment that the undergraduate student is likely to encounter. This chapter provides an excellent account of essential study skills, and the authors have effectively produced a HE toolkit that anticipates and captures the minutiae of the undergraduate experience. Not only does this chapter provide a technical manual and support guide for study, but it also acts as a useful and empowering navigational aid, charting and mapping the institutional terrain and the social and cultural processes of becoming a successful student and beyond. Crucially, and this is a key feature of the text throughout, there is a great emphasis on the development and application of critical analysis to relevant material. Students can sometimes lack an understanding of how to treat relevant material analytically, and the book is able to provide guidance on how to hone and practice these vital skills.

Part Two of the text ably introduces the key principles and central dynamics of criminology as an undergraduate subject. This includes an excellent chapter (6) that provides a useful and accessible introduction to the potentially challenging area of research methods in criminology, including a detailed and critical discussion of the subjectivity-objectivity debate, epistemological, practical and ethical considerations, and the strengths and limitations of different research methodologies. This part of the text focuses on how criminological knowledge is constructed and contested, how we know what we know about the world and how we define what is 'researchable', with an acknowledgment that knowledge-making is, in part, reliant on questioning normative assumptions and critiquing the status quo.

This is followed by a discussion of significant substantive topics, including crime and the media, hate crime and victimology, youth offending and youth justice, race-ethnicity and crime and criminal justice, gender and feminist criminology. Throughout, key concepts are clearly explained and complex ideas made accessible and understandable. Arguably, the inclusion of cybercrime under the topic of crime and the media could have been more

developed, perhaps deserving of a separate chapter. As the authors acknowledge, the criminological investigation of cybercrime is in itself now a vast area of criminological research and perhaps more space could have been dedicated to the understanding of cybercrime and the difficulties in policing the net. However, to its credit, the text does offer a useful introduction and gateway to the topic, which signposts some key debates and authors in the field.

The section on gender and feminist criminology gives a very good account of the emergence of feminist criminology, its socio-political context, and its contributions to academic criminology and impact on criminal justice policy. The authors recognise how feminist criminology has subsequently evolved to include examinations of the relationships between crime and ideas of masculinity. This subsection could have benefited from a more developed discussion of sexualities and queer theory and gender identities that do not conform to narrow heterosexual norms. It would have been useful to bring together the diffuse, cross-disciplinary literature that examines a range of research questions around the law, crime and LGBTQ sexualities. These concerns could have been consolidated and located in a subsection that reflected a more fully theorised, self-consciously 'queer' criminology. However, the authors do explore elsewhere the criminological research that explicitly considers and includes the criminalisation and decriminalisation of sexualities constructed as 'deviant', the differential enforcement of the law when applied to members of sexual minorities, the policing of queer sexualities and queer spaces, and the classification of homophobic violence as a hate crime. Overall, the chapter offers an excellent account of the development of feminist scholarship in critical criminology and the large and varied body of theoretical and empirical research that it embodies. The book is also very impressive when examining contemporary strands of critical criminology, including green criminology, crimes of the powerful, convict and cultural criminology. Particularly impressive here is the material on cultural criminology, which neatly captures its interdisciplinary approach and demonstrates how it creates possibilities for thinking about crime from new perspectives by examining different forms of 'crime media', different ways of conceiving crime, and by examining the way crime is 'represented' in popular culture.

The book, in keeping with its critical approach to material, could have usefully provided a critique of employability, with its normative expectation that the individual can no longer

expect secure and stable employment for life, and that individuals, as 'entrepreneurs of the self' (McGuigan, 2014), must be prepared and mobilised for an itinerant career developing ongoing portfolios with a variety of employers. A critical pedagogical approach might view this focus on employability as being an integral feature of 'The New Spirit of Capitalism' (Boltanksi and Chiapello, 2007), practicing a subtle and effective means of governance, social control and exploitation, as increasingly students/ employees are responsibilised and their identities disciplined. The employability agenda was debated and criticised at its inception, by both academics and politicians, being viewed by some as an "unworkable theory" (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005), yet since that time it has become increasingly dominant, driven perhaps by the recent economic crisis, deteriorating conditions in the labour market and neo-liberal projections regarding the future of work. Employability has rapidly become an integral component of the new university agenda, to the point where courses that do not sufficiently embed employability at their core are deemed endangered. As employability gains in legitimacy and becomes increasingly 'naturalised common sense' (Fairclough, 2014), it is perhaps easy to lose sight that it is a neoliberal project that devolves responsibility for economic successes and failures in the labour market, making people believe that it is due to their individual deficiencies that they can't gain employment and 'optimise themselves' (Earle, 2011), rather than the structural failings of the capitalist labour market. Critical criminologists can seek to challenge these developments and develop counter-hegemonic pedagogical strategies and narratives.

A 'positive' interpretation of employability would view the exact calculability and predictability in the social environment, that formal rationalization brings about, as potentially empowering students by helping them understand and navigate through the complex web of institutions in order to realize the ends of their own choice, thereby giving them structure, identity, meaning and recognition. Chapter 30, 'Journeying into employability and careers', can be seen as increasing student's ability to calculate, predict and determine the outcomes of their actions, and therefore have more control and autonomy over their learning and their lives. However, freedom, autonomy and agency can be seen as being curtailed when the micro-processes of the student experience and institutional life are so closely administered and calculable. The increasing vocationalisation of the curriculum and

instrumentalisation of knowledge and learning threatens to stifle individual initiative, subjective values, substantive rationality, serendipity and critical autonomy, in a universe where things can only be done through standardised procedures.

This core introductory text is a very welcome addition to the format, for both students and teachers. There are identifiable areas that could have been further developed, and the reviewer has argued that a more critical approach could have been taken towards employability. However, the book on the whole offers a lively, lucid, insightful, accessible, understandable, engaging, rigorous and relevant introduction to criminology. Links are consistently made throughout between criminological theory, research, criminal justice policy and practice, and wider historical, cultural, social, political and geographical contexts. Concepts, ideas, arguments, theories and perspectives are creatively synthesised throughout. The book itself serves as a model for thinking criminologically and represents a significant and very welcome contribution to the field which will serve to broaden and develop the criminological imagination.

References

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