Book Review

An Introduction to Life-Course Criminology

By Christoffer Carlsson and Jerzy Sarnecki
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An Introduction to Life-Course Criminology is, first and foremost, a reference text which provides detailed explanations for this specific area of criminology. Christoffer Carlsson and Jerzy Sarnecki provide a vast history of the sub-field including the interrelation to, and input from, biology, psychology, sociology and economics and, of course, its deviation from 'traditional' criminology.

Carlsson and Sarnecki open with a comprehensive introduction which promises an in-depth insight. The authors begin with an explanation of Life-Course Criminology (LCC) which assumes little prior knowledge and yet remains stimulating and informative. They are clear to stipulate the distinction between LCC and other areas of criminology, namely that it is interested in the developmental aspects of crime and deviance. The introduction continues to present LCC's attempts to acknowledge the fluidity of criminal careers.

As truly effective social scientists ought to, Carlsson and Sarnecki highlight the involuntary inclusion of their own life-experiences in their work and understand that 'one's biography' can affect and be affected by their ties to 'the social structure of society' (p. 4). With this, the confidence of the reader is established and an effective and capacitating belief of sincerity from the authors help the reader to absorb their detailed explanations.

What may, most obviously, set Carlsson and Sarnecki's text apart from many others is their express concern with the moral constitution of their field. At a very early stage of their book, they make clear their understanding of the responsibilities to the subjects criminologists study and therefore, at least to some extent, represent. They explicitly say that there is a requirement to move away from 'highly abstract concepts that have little or nothing to do with the people and their situation' (p. 4). Although specific lexica will be required in almost all distinct areas of academia, it is worth appreciating the elitist effects of socially commentating on people in a way that, either unintentionally or otherwise, disqualifies those being studied from understanding the interpretations of the researcher. Considering the researcher is likely to require further participation from sub-cultures in longitudinal or subsequent research efforts, the respect shown to those being studied enables subjects to trust such analyses. There is a real sense of remaining loyal to the humanistic responsibilities of 'the social scientist.' Coming from a position of abstract topics to studying the most intimate parts of a 'subject's' sense of self, requires sensitivity and this is quite obviously reflected in Carlsson and Sarnecki's construction.

As a relatively inexperienced theoretical criminologist, it has been possible to alleviate gaps in constitutive knowledge of the field, through reading *An Introduction to Life-Course Criminology*. The authors, for example, have been able to explain the difference between specific study focuses and the use of the term 'General' when applied to theories in an accessible way. One criticism, however, can be made in the earliest, theoretical explanation contained in their text. Where Carlsson and Sarnecki iterate complex topics such as Gottfredson and Hirschi's *General Theory of Crime* (cited p. 32) with as much detail and ability as they use for Moffitt's review on the taxonomy of life-course persistent offenders (cited p. 41), there is an overt dissimilarity between how the two are portrayed. At particular stages throughout their presenting of opposing methodologies, or the distinguishing of specific schools of thought, there is a highly noticeable weight to the side of longitudinal, fluid and rule based theories—as opposed to those which are 'general'. For example, 'what has been called 'The Big Debate' in criminology' (p. 12) is explained as resting on the Age/Crime curve interpretations for which most criminologists (LCC or otherwise) will be familiar with, however Carlsson and Sarnecki go on to refute that theorists *such* as Hirschi and Gottfredson disagreed, at all, with the dynamic characteristics of theories posited by Moffitt and Sampson and Laub, for instance. This aspect of the review can be regarded as hypercritical, especially when the thought into the construction of their book is so evident. One would hope that the research in which the authors so blatantly knows so much about, would be presented with passion for particular areas which they find fascinating.

An Introduction to Life-Course Criminology is a comprehensive manual for those striving to understand such a complex and human field. What is more, Carlsson and Sarnecki explain these intricate topics in a critically engaging way. The inclusion of disputed questions are balanced and unequivocally detailed, such as the contested claims of genetic risk factors in criminal propensity. They state that Benson's claim that '50 per cent of the variation in antisocial behaviour' being attributable to genetics is 'tentative' and, again, balance the argument with acknowledgement of 'gene-environment interactions' (p.79). Carlsson and Sarnecki continue to

explain some of the biological theory that seems to support such claims, with reference to biochemical and neurotransmitter relationships, which allows the reader to critically engage in their explanations rather than in a didactic manner.

For this reviewer, the ability to inform the reader of the subject—for which they obviously have expertise in—in a way that encourages solid social science criticism and responsibility on the part of the audience makes this work a stimulating and exceptional reference book. It is useful in both the bare facts and presentation of conflicting arguments; but, it is more valuable because of the example it sets in applying abstract theories to people. The authors respect the people they, and others, study. One hopes that the need to understand such groups stems from the need to improve the quality of life for society as a whole, and this should be at the heart of every budding social scientist.

Gareth Evans *is an independent member of the* Prison Service Journal *Editorial Board.*

Book Review

Convict Criminology: Inside and Out

By Rod Earle
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Price: £48.00

Convict criminology in the UK is a relatively new phenomenon. At the 2011 British Society of Criminology annual conference a small number of academics discussed the viability of setting up a Convict Criminology Group. In the last five years this group has gone from strength to strength and has been largely responsible for introducing convict criminology into the UK. As the name suggests convict criminology is 'the study of criminology by those who have first-hand experience of imprisonment' (book cover). It is 'founded on the idea that people who have been through a prison sentence can themselves fashion distinctive contributions to criminology' (p.115). The book under review is the first sole-authored book on the subject and is written by Rod Earle, a Senior Lecturer in Youth Justice at The Open University. In 1982 he served a three-month prison sentence in HMP Norwich.

The book is sectioned into eight chapters, each of which start with interesting narratives which detail either the authors prison experience or the consequences of him having a criminal conviction. For example Earle explains the difficulties of attending an academic conference in the USA; how unlike his colleagues he had to apply for a visa, be interviewed at the US embassy in London and then was detained and interviewed at Atlanta airport. All went well, although the following year, despite applying for the visa in good time, his passport was returned with the visa, one month *after* the conference. Other vignettes describe prison overcrowding and prison work; relationships with other prisoners; how the author recognised one of the prisoners when years later he was researching in HMP Norwich; interaction with the police; and, the aging prison population. The final narrative in the concluding chapter details the facts relating to Earle's conviction.

The book is arguably divided into two parts. The first chronicles the early introduction and later development of convict criminology in the USA and then the origins and experiences of convict criminology in Europe. The work and experiences of US convict criminologist such as Frank Tannenbaum, Saul Alinsky, John Irwin, George Jackson and Alan Mobley are documented. In Europe Earle traces the influence on convict criminology by academics such as Peter Kropotkin, Louk Hulsman, Michael Davitt, Terence McSweeney, Antonio Gramsci, Victor Serge and Mike Fitzgerald; although the latter never spent any time in prison. These three chapters are interesting and comment on the introduction and rise of convict criminology well.

The second part of the book then covers a number of topics, which although not directly related to the development of convict criminology, are interesting nevertheless. Chapter Five for example looks at the problems and stigma of having criminal convictions and details how the 'spent conviction' provisions in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 have largely been eroded by the Criminal Records Bureau. As Earle argues, 'a criminal record is for life' (p.86). Chapter Six looks at race, class and gender and Chapter Seven focuses on methodologies, epistemologies and ontologies. This latter chapter is important as it documents how convict criminologists with their unique experiences can 'establish a richer dialogue with broader criminological scholarship' (p. 116).

As more 'Learning Together' programmes are taking place in England and Wales, the number of convict criminologists in the UK could soon rise. Such academics are uniquely placed to contribute to criminology in ways which us 'normal' scholars are simply unable to and this book will help with the development of this important field.

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