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Reviews

Victims, crime and society: An introduction (2nd edition)
By Pamela Davies, Peter Francis and Chris Greer
Publisher: Sage (2017)
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This impressive book provides a comprehensive introduction and overview of the academic analysis of victims and crime.

In the introduction, the three editors and highly regarded criminologists, Pamela Davies, Peter Francis and Chris Greer, describe:

'This is a book about victims of crime, survivors of abuse, the consequences of social harm, the nature of victimhood and the extent and impact of victimisation. It is a book concerned with the study of victims and victimisation, and is written from a critical perspective that seeks to: challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about the study of victimology; question key concepts and approaches to thinking about victims and survivors; critique ways of understanding the nature and extent of victimisation; and provide an alternative reading of many conventional approaches to responding to victims' needs and experiences'

The book sets about achieving its aims through thirteen chapters, written by leading lights in the field. These chapters start by introducing the fundamental challenges of quantifying and defining victims and victimisation. Crime peaked in 1995, a year in which 40 per cent of adults were the victims of crime, falling to 16 per cent in 2016. Nevertheless, not all victims report the crimes that are inflicted upon them, some crimes have more profound effects upon those who experience them, and some groups suffer greater victimisation than others. It is this social context that is drawn out throughout the course of this book.

The social construction of victimhood is addressed in chapters exploring historical perspectives and theoretical issues, as well as the problems of media representation of victims and victimisation. These chapters show how the way that victims are understood has shifted in public policy, academia and the media. The contributors draw out the provocative and critical notion of a 'hierarchy of victims'. Through the lens of this analysis, those at the lower end of the hierarchy are perceived to have exposed themselves to crime or even be deserving of this, such as the homeless, drug addicts and sex workers. In contrast, idealised middle class citizens are seen as the model of deserving victims. These chapters chillingly expose how these hierarchies are manifested in media representations and public discourse. The results of this are profound for individuals, who can find their concerns dismissed and be subjected to secondary victimisation through the criminal justice system. Together, these chapters show how victimhood is deeply entangled with wider structures of power and inequality.

Further chapters offer international comparisons, which show the expansion of victims' rights and expectations, enshrined in national and international law. While the greater attention being given to supporting and helping the victims of crime are to be welcomed, these are sometimes conditional, targeted at the ideal, deserving victim. An unintended consequence of the greater visibility of victimhood is discussed, in particular how this can intensify public feelings of fear and insecurity.

What stands out about the scope of this book is that it dedicates almost half of its content drawing attention to victimisation amongst vulnerable and marginalised groups, including chapters on gender, older people, socio-economic inequality, race and religion and sexuality. Further, as well as showing how victimisation falls disproportionately upon the relatively powerless, the book concludes with a chapter that exposes the victimisation created by the crimes of the powerful, such as serious corporate frauds, safety crimes, crimes against consumers, environmental crime and state violence.

In a world where victims and victimhood carries a political payload, this book is a calm and rational contribution. That is not to say that it is politically neutral or without passion. The editors and various contributors all clearly share a perspective that crime and victimhood reflect and are entangled in social power and inequality. They also all share a commitment to promoting social justice through empirical research.

There is much to learn from this book. For students, academics and practitioners, it is a comprehensive overview and introduction to its subject. Equally importantly, there is much to admire in the commitment to informing compassionate public policy and social justice.

Dr. Jamie Bennett, Deputy Director, HMPPS

Demystifying the Big House: Exploring Prison experience and media representation
Ed by Katherine A. Foss
Publisher: Southern Illinois University Press (2018)
ISBN: 978-0809336579 (paperback)
Price: £28.00 (paperback)

Given the centrality of media to modern life, it is unsurprising that increasing academic attention has been given to the ways in which what we see on our screens shapes our identity, attitudes and behaviours. This edited collection, compiled by Katherine Foss, an associate professor in the school of journalism at Middle Tennessee University, attempts to explore the relationship between the lived experience of prison and media representation, so bridging the divide between prison ethnography and media studies. Throughout the book, Foss and her collaborators, highlight the misrepresentation of prisons in the media, as well as drawing attention to groups that are absent from popular culture. This is a publication that will primarily appeal to scholars interested in the intersections of crime, media and culture. For practitioners and casual readers, this is not an introductory text, although they will find much of interest.

The book is divided into three sections. The first, 'Media representations of prison' offers a series of readings of films and television. This section is distinguished by the particular attention given to the representations of women in prison. The chapters include L. Clare Bratten's historical account of the changing nature of the women in prison genre, from the reforming and critical accounts of 1930s and 1940s, to the subservient view of women in the 1950s led astray or redeemed by their relationships with men, through to the voyeuristic, exploitation films of the 1960s and 1970s. Bratten argues that more recent productions, such as *Orange is the New Black* have been influenced by feminism and have returned to the reforming roots of the genre. In particular, she argues that there are more rounded characters, including a diversity of race and sexual orientation, and credible back stories that contextualise the experience of women in prison, and critique the prison-industrial complex. Bratten's work echoes previous accounts of the history of prison films, which have predominantly focussed on men[1], revealing the connection between the political culture and media representation.

The chapters in this section reveal how the media can reinforce dominant ideas about crime and punishment, an argument that has been made many times previously[2]. This is, nevertheless, given some novelty in Alina Schneeweis's chapter, which exposes how the television series *Oz*, through its dramatic stylisation, served to reinforce dominant ideas about race, masculinity and sexualisation. Media does have the potential to challenge and resist dominant accounts, again an argument that has been made previously[3]. Here, Rebecca Kern argues that *Orange is the New Black* '…appears to challenge historical representations of female sexuality by incorporating new constructions of female sexual identity in prison' (p.49), in particular, by showing uncomfortable scenes of sexual violence and power, which confront viewers with the lived realities of people in prison, and the social norms and structures that shape their lives. Kern argues that this can be productive and politically enlightening: 'The power of the gaze is more than what happens while watching; it is what viewers choose to do with the information after they finish' (p. 62). In a further chapter, S. Lenise Wallace analyses the documentary series *Prison Wives,* which focussed on first-hand accounts of a group that are often invisible to the general public. The documentary series reveals the challenges of financial hardship, sexual intimacy and loneliness, their involvement in legal advocacy, and their attempts to maintain hope. Wallace describes the series as offering the women an opportunity to present their story.

The first section adopts a conventional approach by reading texts, situating them within historical social contexts and positioning them within a contested moral environment. What distinguishes the work is that it focusses not on the majority of films and shows about men's prisons, but prioritises women. For practitioners, these chapters will encourage reflection upon engagement with the media and how to frame or reframe stories so as to engage with particular values and perspectives[4].

1. Cheatwood, D. (1998) *Films About Adult, Male, Civilian Prisons: 1929-1995* in Bailey, F.Y. & Hale, D.C. (eds) *Popular Culture, Crime, and Justice* Belmont: West/Wadsworth (p.209-31); Wilson, D. and O'Sullivan, S. (2004) *Images of Incarceration: Representations of Prison in Film and Television Drama* Winchester: Waterside Press
2. E.g. Ericson, R., Baranek, P., and Chan, J. (1991) *Representing order: Crime, law and justice in the news media* Milton Keynes: Open University Press; Surette, R. (1997) *Media, Crime, and Criminal Justice* Second edition Belmont: West/Wadsworth; Brown, M. (2009) *The culture of punishment: Prison, society and spectacle*. New York: New York University Press
3. Rafter, N. (2000) *Shots in the mirror: Crime films and society.* Oxford: Oxford University Press; Wilson and O'Sullivan (2004) see n.1
4. For a useful guide to engaging with the media and public, see Transform Justice (2017) *Reframing crime and justice – a handy guide* available at http://www.transformjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Reframing-crime-and-Justice-a-handy-guide_Transform-Justice.pdf accessed on 24 September 2019

The second part of the book, 'Connecting media to experience', takes varying perspectives on the relationship between reality and representation, using a mixture of qualitative research and reflective accounts. Emily Plec opens this section by comparing the experiences of death row prisoners represented in the liberal reforming series *Death Row Stories*, with the reality of a case known to the author. A particularly interesting chapter is offered by Karen Churcher, who describes the production of an inmate magazine and television channel in Angola prison, in Louisiana. Churcher captures the ways in which those involved resist the dominant culture within the prison and reconstruct more pro social forms of masculinity. This joins a small but valuable body of work on media production in prisons, including film and radio[5]. This chapter will be of interest to people working in prisons, particularly those supporting arts initiatives with prisoners. Kathryn Whiteley contributes a chapter in which women prisoners reflect upon their representation in the media and how they would want this to be different. In this important chapter, the women call for the complexities of life to be shown and that they are seen as 'more than a crime', but instead a situated and rounded human character (p.222). Again, this is a fascinating chapter that positions people in prison as a specific audience who draw upon their own lived experience and expertise to be sophisticated consumers who can use media to explore and critique the real world they inhabit. This is an innovative contribution, although a recent UK study has been conducted screening contemporary British prison films to an audience serving sentences in a British prison[6].

The final section turns the spotlight on 'Forgotten voices in the media'. This section is concerned with the omissions of the media, including those individuals and experiences that are overlooked, marginalised or ignored. The chapters address issues including breastfeeding mothers in prison, transgender prisoners and formerly incarcerated Black men. These chapters are largely taken from ethnographic research, which seeks to sensitively represent the lived experiences of particular groups and individuals.

Demystifying the Big House is a fascinating and diverse collection that attempts to push the study of prisons and the media in new directions. In the final chapter, Foss highlights the critical conclusion, that:

'…media paint a limited picture of Prison, by blaming individuals for their crimes, emphasising punishment over rehabilitation, and overall by misrepresenting the experience, while ignoring contextual factors that contribute to incarceration' (p. 330)

This assessment clearly situates media representation in a wider context of social power and inequality. In itself, such a conclusion is not novel, but in several respects, this book takes a path that is less well travelled. In particular, it highlights that what is omitted and hidden is as important as what is revealed in media representation. The book also starts to bridge the gap between representation and the lived experience of prisoners, not only in terms of the accuracy of films or televisions, but also in the way that films and television are consumed by people in prison and what effects this has upon them. Finally, it also gives attention to prisons as a site of media production by prisoners. By taking an unconventional and disparate approach, Foss has taken some risks. That courage has paid off in this fascinating collection.

Dr. Jamie Bennett, Deputy Director, HMPPS

5. O'Neill, D. (2017) Film as a Radical Pedagogic Tool Abingdon: Routledge; Bedford, C. (2018) *Making waves behind bars: The prison radio association* Bristol: Bristol University Press
6. This study was conducted by Jamie Bennett and Victoria Knight, and the first publications are expected in 2020.