



Article

Community and the Problem of Crime

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Kirby, Stuart ORCID: 0000-0002-3049-1248 (2016) Community and the Problem of Crime. Safer Communities, 15 (2). pp. 121-123. ISSN 1757-8043

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/SC-12-2015-0041>

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Book Review: Community and the problem of crime.

Journal:	<i>Safer Communities</i>
Manuscript ID	SC-12-2015-0041
Manuscript Type:	Book Review

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Manuscripts

Book Review

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3 Karen Evans: Community and the problem of crime (2016)

4 Routledge: Abingdon

5 ISBN 978-0-415-74855-1(hbk)

6 ISBN 978-1-315-79654-3 (ebk)

7 193 pages

8 £90

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11 This was a book I eagerly awaited. It relates to the ubiquitous subject of community
12 and crime - an area that has lacked thorough analysis in the academic literature. As
13 such, the book has no immediate rival and will be of interest to a wide range of
14 academics, students, policy makers and practitioners. The book has an extremely
15 credible author in Karen Evans who, prior to becoming a full time academic, gained
16 experience as a Community Safety Co-ordinator during the mid 90's. The book also
17 benefits from a long gestation period as it has emerged from a University module
18 she designed in 2003 and continues to teach today.
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22 Overall the book lives up to expectation. It is extremely well researched, well
23 written, and will undoubtedly be a critical first choice text for those interested in the
24 subject. However, prior to spending £90 (rrp), it is important the reader understands
25 the perspective from which it is written. The author, in her introduction, clearly
26 explains it provides a more nuanced critical perspective, being "...less about what
27 community is or is not and more about how the state uses the term 'community' to
28 confer rights upon some groups and to exclude others from exercising those rights".
29 She goes on to say, "This is not a book about crime prevention either.....It is a book,
30 however, which questions the ways in which the concept of community has been
31 utilised within agendas of crime control and how perspectives forged in the West
32 have gone global". Once this distinction is recognised the reader can settle down to
33 an excellent book that is constantly instructive and insightful.
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37 As well as the wealth of content contained within the book I found it an enjoyable
38 read. From the outset the author presents an overview as to what the ensuing
39 chapters will bring. This immediately starts to tease out some of the overarching
40 issues, including: the lack of consensus surrounding a definition of community;
41 misapplication of the label; and the positive and negative impact 'community' can
42 bring. I found the earlier chapters particularly interesting and informative.
43 Highlighting human life as fundamentally gregarious the first chapter explores the
44 evolution and perception of communal living. Using a collection of commentators
45 that range from Durkheim and Weber to the Chicago School the author illustrates
46 how analysts have described the changes to urban life, highlighting the political and
47 social fragmentation that can precipitate stigmatisation and exclusion. The reader is
48 transported through time, exploring the onset of urbanisation and late modernity
49 where community bonds at geographic level weakened, and individualisation
50 emerged. Here the author introduces the importance of virtual communities that
51 transcend physical space.
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56 The second chapter recognises the complex relationships that lead to our
57 understanding of crime, notably the state (CJS), offenders, victims, and the
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3 community. An overview is then provided as to the role of the community, within
4 crime control strategies, since the 18th Century. It is from here that the balance in
5 favour of a critical criminological perspective starts to emerge more strongly. For
6 example whilst just over half a page is dedicated to an explanation of situational
7 crime prevention (which misses some central principles, such as reducing
8 provocation and removing excuses), there are three pages devoted to its criticisms.
9 It concludes by arguing the techniques may simply increase our sense of fear and
10 foreboding, rather than improving our security. Whilst an interesting and thorough
11 analysis, commentators from a positivist criminological perspective would
12 undoubtedly argue there is significant evidence to show SCP techniques have
13 reduced recorded crime - car crime being a good example¹.
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17 The next few chapters are crammed further with interesting research (from inside
18 and outside the field of criminology), and thought-provoking analysis. Chapter 3
19 explores 'disorderly communities', investigating the concepts of underclass, social
20 disorganisation, fear of crime and broken windows theory. Chapter 4 logically
21 continues in relation to how those problem communities can potentially be re-
22 constructed into socially ordered places. This shows how historic and political
23 commentary has influenced policy, describing ideas such as: garden cities, urban
24 planning, de-industrialization, renewal, regeneration and gentrification. Social
25 implications are discussed, as are the unintended consequences of these policies,
26 across a range of countries. Chapter 5 continues by examining the differences
27 between, and within, place-based communities. It explains how cities fragment as a
28 result of many different factors (labour, class, race), leading to complex social
29 relationships, on which inclusion / exclusion as well as individuals prospects are
30 often predicated.
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35 Chapter 6 looks at 'suspect communities', specifically minority groups, across time
36 and place. This exploration extends our understanding of global inequality, with the
37 author examining specific groups from a number of perspectives. This includes how
38 minority groups can be stigmatised, creating tensions at local and national level,
39 leading to a variety of ramifications, including urban disorder. Similar to the previous
40 sections the text is continually producing fascinating insights – for instance here we
41 are told the concept of ghetto was originally formed in history to separate Jewish
42 communities from other parts of the city. Chapter 7 continues by discussing how
43 communities are policed. This is a useful and logical chapter, although some who
44 specialise in the area of community policing may be disappointed to find some
45 recent developments haven't been covered. For example, no mention is made of the
46 Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy, which hastened a joint UK Home Office / police
47 project on 'Reassurance Policing'². This attempted to put residents at the heart of
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52 ¹ Van Dijk, J.(2012) Closing the doors (Stockholm symposium prize winners lecture),
53 downloaded 28/12/15 at [http://www.criminologysymposium.com/download/
54 18.4dfe0028139b9a0cf4080001575/TUE13,+van+Dijk+Jan.pdf](http://www.criminologysymposium.com/download/18.4dfe0028139b9a0cf4080001575/TUE13,+van+Dijk+Jan.pdf)
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57 ² Innes, M. (2006), 'Reassurance and the new community policing', *Policing &
58 Society*, 16 (2):95-98.
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3 crime control, which (following academic evaluation) advanced the national roll out
4 of Neighbourhood Policing. Further the section on Problem Oriented Policing is
5 limited and does not fully capture its principles, unfortunately also misidentifying its
6 originator (Herman Goldstein)³. The book concludes with chapter 8, which
7 summarises the key issues. It explores the limitations of 'community' as an
8 organising concept and points out both the positive aspects and exclusionary effects
9 that 'community' can generate. The author concludes neatly, providing the reader
10 with five lessons that have emerged from the text.
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14 Of course every critic is influenced by his or her academic bias, but from my
15 perspective this book has been very simple to review. Just in case there is any doubt,
16 let me be clear – this review is overwhelmingly positive. As previously mentioned I
17 feel it is important to point out that prospective purchasers should be aware that the
18 author approaches the subject from a critical criminology perspective. Further, that
19 in my opinion, there are some minor gaps and inaccuracies. Having mentioned these
20 matters my conscience is clear to fill my summary with superlatives. This is a really
21 important book that fills a gap in the market in relation to a pervasive subject. The
22 author has provided an original, compelling, and well-researched academic text,
23 which is presented in a very engaging format.
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56 ³ Goldstein, H. (1979) 'Improving Policing: A Problem Oriented Approach', *Crime and*
57 *delinquency*, 25: 236-258
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