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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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38 As well as the wealth of content contained within the book I found it an enjoyable  
39 read. From the outset the author presents an overview as to what the ensuing  
40 chapters will bring. This immediately starts to tease out some of the overarching  
41 issues, including: the lack of consensus surrounding a definition of community;  
42 misapplication of the label; and the positive and negative impact 'community' can  
43 bring. I found the earlier chapters particularly interesting and informative.  
44 Highlighting human life as fundamentally gregarious the first chapter explores the  
45 evolution and perception of communal living. Using a collection of commentators  
46 that range from Durkheim and Weber to the Chicago School the author illustrates  
47 how analysts have described the changes to urban life, highlighting the political and  
48 social fragmentation that can precipitate stigmatisation and exclusion. The reader is  
49 transported through time, exploring the onset of urbanisation and late modernity  
50 where community bonds at geographic level weakened, and individualisation  
51 emerged. Here the author introduces the importance of virtual communities that  
52 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 example<sup>1</sup>.  
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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'<sup>2</sup>. This attempted to put residents at the heart of  
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52 <sup>1</sup> 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 <sup>2</sup> 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)<sup>3</sup>. 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 <sup>3</sup> Goldstein, H. (1979) 'Improving Policing: A Problem Oriented Approach', *Crime and*  
57 *delinquency*, 25: 236-258  
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