

# Book Reviews

## Chris Cunneen and Rob White, *Juvenile Justice: an Australian Perspective*

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Cunneen and White have produced a concise text which will be of use to a wide range of people. It certainly will be of use, for example, in criminology courses, and social work and youth worker training. Its strengths lie in its clarity, the coverage and the differing perspectives presented. Its shortcomings relate to the sections which are more theoretically or intervention focused.

The first section is historical and theoretical. The chapter on the development of juvenile justice and institutional changes takes us on a brief tour of countries where legislation, policies and responses to young people perceived as requiring control influenced the Australian scene. The following three chapters are more theoretical in nature and cover traditional criminological theory, mainstream perspectives, and challenges to criminological orthodoxies. While providing an easy to read, concise description and critique of what can be a dry and complex array of positions, there is little in the way of links between what is outlined and the Australian context. There are some connections made toward the end of Chapter 3, but virtually none in Chapters 2 and 4. It may have been useful to provide Australian examples of policy and practice which appear to have been informed by one or more of the theoretical positions presented.

An important theme, clearly stated, is that much of what we know provides us with associations between variables or potential influences, and that these associations are not necessarily causal. What is not emphasised is that much of what we believe we know comes from over-researching incarcerated, or 'heavy end' young offenders. It is erroneous to assume that explanations or theories which arise from such studies can explain youthful offending across its spectrum; from experimental, infrequent and petty crime to serious, entrenched offending.

We also know little about the explanations for offending provided by young people themselves, particularly offenders. Such research is not canvassed in this book, possibly because there is so little of it, and what exists is questionable in its usefulness. This issue will be returned to later.

Additionally, there is little emphasis on adolescence as a time and stage of development. While not wishing the text to take on a developmental psychology flavour, ignoring the impact of adolescence itself leads to a less than complete picture of influences on the behaviour of young people, including crime. Cognitive and physiological changes which occur during this stage of development need some recognition.

The chapters on indigenous young people and young women are thoughtful and provocative. They raise issues of concern which require attention and offer alternative perspectives to many myths which have arisen. It is pleasing to see a section on gender relations and masculinity, with an emphasis on highlighting the variety of masculinities and how this variety is shaped and constructed. How 'delinquency' can be manufactured,

and how young people are being constructed as dangerous objects to be feared and controlled in most so-called western democracies, including Australia, is also well covered.

Challenging the current emphasis on a putative relationship between use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs is not a feature of this book. The only mentions of alcohol and other drugs appear in the chapter on gender. Much 'treatment intervention', whether provided while in custody or the community has a focus on eliminating or controlling the use of these substances, in the belief that use of them is an integral component in offending. Such assumptions warrant discussion and critique.

Part three covers the state, punishment and crime prevention. The institutions of juvenile justice are outlined, as is policing the young, the courts and sentencing processes, and diversion, community programs and informalism. While it was probably not the intention of the authors to write a book on interventions, the later chapters do not go far enough to ensure a wider audience. There is virtually no attention, for example, to recent research on what appears 'to work', or be associated with more positive outcomes. A brief mention of this literature could have been useful.

There is a very informative critique of detention centres/youth custody, community policing, diversion and a current 'fad' — family conferencing. The contrasts between the style and focus of the New Zealand and various Australian trials is informative. It might have gone further to highlight the differences in family size and structure between Maori and Islander families in New Zealand where the scheme appears to have its strength, and that of Indigenous Australian and Anglo-Celt families in Australia. Additionally, there was no mention of the implication that families require a certain level of communication, planning and conflict resolution skills for effective family conferencing. This point has been raised by some practitioners in New Zealand, where they have spent much time teaching these skills before a resolution to the focus of the conference, a crime, has been able to be developed. The issues raised by the current authors about judicial therapists and what has occurred in various children's and community aid panels are similar.

The conclusions are sound, and point to areas warranting more work, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, gender, young people from other than English-speaking backgrounds, and more qualitative research. Again, the authors may not have gone far enough.

There is an urgent role for the increased involvement of young people in the identification of areas for research, the shaping of research questions, the collection and analysis of data, and in the interpretation of results and the development of theory. The authors state that: 'Rather than simply being objects of study ... young people should be active participants in and contributors to the discussions on juvenile justice and other meaningful aspects of their lives' (p266).

While appearing to recognise these issues, the authors have produced a book wherein the voices of young people, especially those who have experienced conflict with the law and various systems of juvenile justice, are silent or muffled. This may be more a reflection of the dearth of writing which has allowed young people to be expert participants in research, theorising and the development of practice than a deliberate omission. However, what is being suggested about participation goes beyond discussions, 'interviewing young people' and 'talking to them about issues they feel are important, and observing their activities as far as this is possible without being intrusive' (p266). It is about recognising their right to be full parties to what significantly shapes state and non-state interventions into their lives.

Despite the above criticisms, Cunneen and White have produced a useful text which should be part of undergraduate and other courses, and should be read by policy makers and practitioners.

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