Risk, Resilience and Beyond

Introduction

The majority of papers in this volume emerged from a one day symposium titled *Risk, Resilience and Beyond* hosted by The Australian Sociological Association's (TASA's) Crime and Governance Thematic Group (CAGTG). When we, the editors of this issue, established the CAGTG, we argued that the need for such a forum was obvious in a socio-political climate where fear, anxiety and social exclusion often find their expression in increasingly punitive policy and legislation, and increasingly sophisticated social control measures. We also suggested that there was a need for sociology to engage with these processes in an era when individuation often creates individual pathology out of what sociologists would recognise as socially constituted issues and problems.

The purpose of the Thematic Group, then, was to bring together TASA members with interests in processes of criminalisation, the sociology of deviance, criminology, governance and social control. In an effort to realise this purpose, we applied for and received funding from TASA to host a symposium in 2009. Symposium papers were circulated before the event and the format of the program allowed for lengthy discussions about each paper; the type of discussions which are not usually possible in a standard conference panel format. The papers in this issue are a result of that symposium.

Since the early 1990s, risk has become an increasingly important concept for criminologists, sociologists and criminal justice professionals. Ulrich Beck's (1992) *The Risk Society* may have been the defining text sociologically, however Feeley and Simon's (1992, 1994) analysis of actuarial justice provoked ongoing debates about the role of risk assessment and mitigation in the realm of criminal justice. Individuals were, they suggested, no longer the subject of criminal justice interventions. Rather, risk category groups or 'dividuals' became the focus of a system in which economic efficiencies attempted to keep pace with an increasingly criminalised population. Subsequent work by Pat O'Malley (1992, 1996, 2010), David Garland (1997, 2001), and Ericson and Haggerty (1997) among many others has interrogated various aspects of the governance of risk in criminal justice contexts. As Richard Ericson put it:

> …[t]he urge to criminalise is rooted in neo-liberal political cultures that are obsessed with uncertainty. We live in uncertain times, with issues of national security (threats of terrorism), social security (benefits system integrity), corporate security (liabilities for harm), and domestic security (crime and disorder) at the top of the political agenda. This politics of uncertainty leads to enormous expenditures on risk assessment and management that ironically reveal the limits of risk-based reasoning and intensify uncertainty. Catastrophic imaginations are fuelled, precautionary logics become pervasive, and extreme security measures are invoked in frantic efforts to pre-empt imagined sources of harm (Ericson 2007:1).

Indeed, some theorists have noted a shift in the ways in which we manage or plan for catastrophic events. In the post 9/11 world, prediction and attempting to control uncertainty have become key governmental concerns. Pat O'Malley (in this issue) takes us through a range of predictive and precautionary strategies that seek to govern imagined future risks, all of which use a negative logic. However, he suggests that the concept of resilience that has more recently entered the governmental lexicon is different in nature to previous strategies.

> The aim is to produce subjects—whether in business, the military or everyday life—who are capable of dealing with all situations of high uncertainty. In strong contrast to virtually all the other strategies, resiliency thus specifically rejects…the 'neurotic subject'…integral to the subjectivity of the risk society.

The resilient subject is not robbed of its freedoms by uncertainty. Indeed, uncertainty produces new freedoms and the ability to bounce back from or withstand catastrophe should it occur. O'Malley's article is both groundbreaking and scene setting. It usefully outlines the concepts explored and expanded upon in many of the other papers. Papers in this volume explore a range of issues both utilising and critiquing the concepts of risk and resilience. The subject matter is broad as are the conceptual frameworks used to explore them.

With a focus on the concept of resilience, Mariastella Pulvirenti and Gail Mason consider whether the concept is useful in understanding the experiences of refugee women. In particular they identify the importance of seeing resilience as a process rather than a trait.

Taking a more empirical and normative approach to the investigation of risk, Christine Bond and Samantha Jeffries provide a test of the focal concerns perspective via an examination of judicial assessments of both risk and blameworthiness on sentencing outcomes.

John Scott rejects notions that prostitution has been banished from society and instead considers the way in which it has been constructed as a socio-political problem and a risk to be governed through legislation and regulation as a public health issue.

Changes to the regulations regarding the sale and distribution of alcohol in Victoria and the risk rationales that have been used to justify and drive change are the focus of Grazyna Zadjow's article. She considers the ways in which changes to political ideology over time have led to specific forms of the development and governance of the night-time economy.

Matthew Ball's article looks at attempts to cultivate resilience in law students and criminal justice professionals. Producing such resilient personas often involved alignment with psychological and biomedical discourses. Ball explores the emergence of these discourses of resiliency and their implications for the professionals involved.

Finally, David McCallum explores failures of the promise of risk management techniques in the contexts of the governance of children in child protection in Victoria.

As many of these articles suggest, the promise of risk is 'uncertain' (O'Malley 2010). Together, these papers provide a rich resource for those interested in exploring a range of perspectives in relation to both risk and resilience. We trust that readers of Current Issues in Criminal Justice will find this collection fascinating and stimulating.

Acknowledgements

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