

## Book Reviews

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Bernasco, W. 2010. *Offenders on offending: learning about crime from criminals*. Cullompton: Willan. ISBN 978-1-84392-776-1. pp. 322, pbk.

Qualitative data collection has been central to criminological inquiry since the early days of the American Chicago school. Work in the 1920s and 1930s laid a foundation for much research through the middle of the century. Since the 1970s, qualitative criminology has flowered providing major theoretical and empirical advances in our understanding of crime and criminal offenders. This renaissance has not been limited to the USA; criminologists in the UK, Europe, and Oceania have added significantly to this body of work. In October of 2008, the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement brought together the leading scholars in the field for a three-day workshop on the current state of qualitative methods in the study of crime and criminals. The edited volume reviewed here is the product of that workshop.

This volume contains 16 substantive chapters loosely organized into five substantive sections. Each contribution addresses specific methodological problems, providing examination and illustration through reference to the author(s) own work. This valuable approach provides concrete examples of problems of data gathering and the solutions which arise, allowing the work to proceed. The first section, titled "Setting the Stage," includes three essays. The first two provide a broad overview of major problems and pitfalls inherent to qualitative research. Bernasco provides a thorough background on the past and present of offender-based research. Elffers is the first of many pieces in this volume to discuss issues of validity by reviewing validity problems and offering suggestions for addressing them. The last offering in the section sees Jacques and Wright outline a falsifiable theory of research methodology grounded in Black's Pure Sociology.

The second section, "Prison Settings," offers three essays focusing on interviewing incarcerated offenders. Copes and Hochstetler provide a spirited and convincing defense of the use of incarcerated populations to provide data on offending and offenders. Morselli and Tremblay explore how they addressed validity issues in their survey of Quebec inmates; Brookman provides a similar discussion of these issues arising in her work with inmates in the UK. The third section, "Field Settings," examines issues which emerge during in situ data collection. Lindegaard and Van Gemert's pieces focus on various approaches to triangulation. Curtis examines time-tested techniques for gaining access to

hidden populations, especially through innovations in sampling techniques that increase representativeness of cases selected, specifically applying geographically based multistage probability sampling techniques and Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS) techniques (which are also mentioned by other essays in the volume).

The fourth section, "Social Categories of Offenders and Researchers," offers essays that begin with the fundamental premises that the process of research itself is a social event. Researchers bring with them conscious, unconscious, and social positions to the process, all of which can influence the data collected. Miller examines how the gender, racial/ethnic, and class positions held by interviewers influence the richness of data collected in a study of juveniles. Zhang explores how his ethnic heritage facilitated his research among Chinese Snakeheads. Shover and Hunter provide an insightful discussion of how class, both that of the researchers and the interviewers, affects the nature of the data obtained on street and white collar crimes.

The final section, "Learning About the Act," provides specific meditations on improving the accuracy of criminal event accounts obtained during interviews. Nee examines how to assist in offender recall of events. Summers et al. discuss how they used geographic maps to assist in offender recall, while Polisenka examines the use of cognitive maps during interviews. Finally, Zetinigg and Gaderer examine how they used prison files as well as a survey of victimized banks to validate the accounts of bank robbers they interviewed in Austria.

While each essay in this book is valuable as an individual contribution to the literature, the true value of Bernasco's volume is the direct and indirect dialogue generated by the contributions on the core methodological debates in the field. To some degree, all of the essays here relate to the broad issue of validity: how accurate is the information being collected. Each one, however, addresses widely different aspects of this centrally important question. Specifically, three on-going validity debates are highlighted and brought into dialogue here: using active vs. incarcerated offenders, techniques of verifying the factual truthfulness of accounts and the very nature of the social space of the interview.

One of the first problems of qualitative research design is sample generation and where one will find these hard to reach populations: on the streets or in prison. The Jacques and Wright piece lays out a theoretical model explaining sociologically why data obtained from apprehended offenders is of lower quality than that collected from incarcerated offenders. Other pieces here also support the idea that data gathered in the field is more compelling than data collected in a prison setting (i.e., Curtis, van Gemert, and Zhang). Yet, the majority of the essays here were built out of work on incarcerated populations. Most of these pieces side step the broader active vs. incarcerated debate and instead focus on concrete techniques for enhancing the accuracy of the data obtained in prison-based interview. Copes and Hochstetler, however, assail the basic assumption that active offender research is inherently superior to prison-based studies. By systematically raising, acknowledging, and refuting criticisms of

offender-based studies, their chapter reopens this debate in a useful way. Ultimately, of course, this question is an empirical one which can only be answered through the direct comparison of interviews collected by the same team on the same sets of questions that draws upon both confined and free offenders. To date, this remains undone.

Many of the essays here highlight a second validity issue—the truthfulness and accuracy of the descriptions collected. While, as I will discuss below, this may ultimately be the wrong question to ask, it is a central concern of all social research. The bulk of the essays here address how to reduce intentional or unintentional misinformation or incomplete information provided by interviewees. Excellent discussions of sampling, triangulation, and complementation abound here, providing field-tested techniques for seasoned researchers and students alike.

As mentioned, the fourth section of the book expressly examines the nature of qualitative data collection as a series of social interactions. All three pieces here provide valuable insights into how social positions held by the interviewers and interviewees shape the data that is ultimately produced. The meta-narrative of this section reminds us that when we are interviewing offenders about their offenses what we are getting are accounts. Accounts are reflexively modified presentations of self influenced by the audience eliciting and hearing them. While the methodological techniques discussed throughout the volume that allow researchers to attempt to ascertain the truthfulness or falsity of what is said are important, ultimately what we are left with to analyze are offender presentations of self. These images can, if examined in the right light, tell us more about offending and offenders than explorations of strictly factual accounts of criminal events. Through understanding the cognitive frames that people use to structure, present, and make sense of their own criminal actions (and the actions of others), we garner crucial insight into how offenders see their worlds, the place within the world, and the role their crimes play within it. We also gain rich descriptions of the many social scenes and locations offenders live in and move through. Such research not only shapes criminological theory specific, but social theory as a whole.

This volume collects pieces by many of the central researchers in qualitative criminology today, which in and of itself makes it a valuable addition to the literature. Further, this book is highly valuable in that it provides a comparative context for the exploration of the issues at hand. Work done in seven different nations on four continents is examined, allowing readers to directly and indirectly explore how specifically national contexts are similar and different. Too little work in the field allows for such cross-national comparison or discussion.

I strongly recommend this book to qualitative researchers and those interested in the methodological issues surrounding qualitative inquiry in the social sciences. This book is a valuable addition to our collective methodological knowledge. This book would also serve perfectly in graduate level methods courses as well as advanced undergraduate and graduate courses in qualitative methodologies. Researchers will find it a useful statement of the current state

of the field. Students will find it a rich introduction to the issues that surround this type of research as well as a concrete set of cases (of both problems and solutions) that will guide them as they frame and carry out their own projects.

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Cromwell, P. 2010. *In their own words: criminals on crime*, 5th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-538319-5. pp. 419, pbk.

One of the most difficult tasks of a criminology professor is to try to elucidate the multifaceted, calculated, and oft times distorted thought process of criminal offenders. Bombarding students with decades of theoretical constructs, hypotheses, and proposed etiologies of crime can only bring students to the brink of understanding the “whys” behind a criminal’s actions. In fact, many undergraduate and graduate criminology, criminal justice, and sociology students are rarely given the opportunity to qualitatively interact with known criminal offenders. This experience goes beyond the rudimentary quantitative surveys conducted by criminology professors who introduce their undergraduate cohorts to basic research methodologies by having students query their fellow classmates regarding such items as student perceptions of crime, fear of crime, and if permitted, their own delinquent pasts.

Due to various concerns, most notably, student safety, time constraints, and money for travel, many college students are never afforded the unique opportunity to speak with known offenders. Thus, in order to convey this experience and its relative importance for understanding criminal behavior, criminologists often look for practical pieces of criminological work that provide an in-depth examination into the worldviews of criminals, especially the “how” and “why” behind one’s actions. Very few criminological texts offer even a mere glimpse into the actual accounts provided by criminals who willingly share their stories. However, one text truly emerges as the benchmark of these empirically valuable qualitative accounts of “real” criminals—Paul Cromwell’s *In Their Own Words: Criminals on Crime*.

In the fifth edition of *In Their Own Words: Criminals on Crime*, Cromwell delivers once again a decisive and powerful compendium of quality ethnographic research centered on the ultimate criminological resource—offenders’ own account of their actions. In this updated anthology, Cromwell successfully expands upon his prior editions by combining earlier notable works found in previous editions along with new research pieces that further supply a fresh look into the motives, choices, and psychological thought processes behind criminal acts of individual offenders. Each contributing author provides direct insight into the mind of criminal offenders by creatively framing their individual pieces in theoretical terms, offering the reader a direct yet understandable first-hand account of the “whys” and “hows” of various types of criminal acts.

In particular, each author carefully extracts powerful excerpts of commentary that were shared by the offenders to them during their interviews. These important testimonies provide the reader with a decisive and influential glance into the world and thoughts of known offenders; a truly valuable instrument for those teaching courses in criminology and/or research methods.

The offender accounts, gathered by these distinguished scholars, offer a realistic and detailed look into the mind of various types of offenders who were willing to openly share their motives, thoughts, rationalizations, and techniques of commission. Moreover, at the conclusion of each work, the author(s) take the time to present an insightful analysis and summary of their individual pieces so that the reader can better ascertain the intended purpose behind ethnographic research, which is to let the offender tell their own story. By utilizing first-hand accounts of the offenders, each of the authors provides the reader with an untainted and authentic glimpse into the worlds of the shoplifters, rapists, white-collar offenders, prostitutes, killers, drug smugglers, gang members, burglars, pimps, and robbers.

In this edition, Cromwell strategically places 25 distinguished works into eight topical categories. These topical categories can be broadly classified into theoretical foundations (Section 1), crime types (Sections 2-7), and criminal desistance (Section 8). The book begins with three articles that explore how criminal lifestyle facilitates and encourages criminal offending. The strength of this section is that it provides a theoretical framework for many of the remaining chapters. The next six sections each address a specific crime category, including property crimes, violent crimes, occupational crime, illegal occupations, gangs, and drugs. The book concludes with a single chapter on how criminal decisions change with age. The organization of the book makes it well-suited for introduction to criminology and crime types courses. While this organization is good for presenting offender-based research on types of crime, the final section seems to hang. With only one chapter, it is not developed enough to warrant an entire section.

It should be noted that 12 of these research offerings dispersed throughout the text are exclusive to this new edition and provide excellent insight into current crime topics that both undergraduate and graduate students alike are inundated with daily both in and out of the classroom. These topic areas include drug smuggling, terrorism, computer hacking, and that nation's fastest growing crime—identity theft. It can also be easily determined that Cromwell took the time to purposely select particular scholars in the field who have an established record of quality ethnographic contributions to the field of criminology, especially in the variety of crime types covered in this text. Each of the 25 chapters is masterfully written and provides useful and often powerful personal accounts of the "how" and "why" people commit different types of criminal acts. For example, some of the new chapters to this edition offer readers a direct look into the thoughts of the master burglar, auto thief, identity thief, domestic batterer, and drug smuggler. By going straight to the source—the criminal(s)—the authors of these chapters are able to assemble and interpret the various

reasons, values, motivations, and thoughts behind these distinctive criminal behaviors—an empirical process which opens the proverbial door of understanding regarding some of the most elusive illicit acts of today.

Cromwell along with the contributing authors to his latest edition should be commended on their empirical efforts. This text continues to be an important anthology for professors who want to enhance the quality of their lectures by including the valuable lessons that most criminological textbooks fail to provide—accounts from the “real” offenders. Since many students will never be granted the distinct and memorable opportunity to interview a master car thief, burglar, or computer hacker it is important to provide a literary venue for the student to listen to the words of criminal offenders so that they can better grasp the true and often disturbing reality of the criminal underworld. In general, this book could be used either as a primary text or secondary reader for undergraduate or graduate students who are studying criminology or as a supplemental text for a course in ethnographic research methods. In summary, Cromwell’s text continues to be a useful and practical learning tool that can positively augment a professor’s repertoire when attempting to explain both the complex nature of crime and deviance and the overall intrinsic value of using qualitative research methods to discover possible etiologies behind criminal actions.

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