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**Review: Offenders on Offending: Learning About Crime from Criminals : W. Bernasco (ed.) Willan Publishing; 2010; pp 322; £25, pbk ISBN 978 —1— 84392—776—1**

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## Offenders on Offending: Learning About Crime from Criminals

W. Bernasco (ed.)

Willan Publishing; 2010; pp 322; £25, pbk  
ISBN 978-1-84392-776-1

Bernasco and the various contributors to this collection of essays draw on their own experiences of undertaking offender-based research with various types of offender populations in various settings to address methodological concerns surrounding the process of conducting qualitative research with offenders. The central theme uniting this collection of essays is the focus on how to maximize the validity of offenders' accounts of their offending behaviour. In so doing, the essays variously review the strengths and weaknesses of different methods used to elicit information on offending from offenders and discuss strategies to obtain the collaboration of offenders and to maximize the validity and reliability of the data.

As Bernasco summarizes in the introductory first chapter, *Offenders on Offending* is organized into five distinct parts that broadly correspond to the various settings in which offender based research is undertaken, with the first part oriented to 'setting the stage' more generally. In the second chapter, Hank Elffers discusses particular issues that can threaten the validity of the offender interview, notably 'misinformation' (in that the respondent him/herself does not have access to the source of information), 'misunderstanding' (referring to different interpretations of questions and answers between researcher and researched) and 'misleading' (where people actively or passively mislead the interviewer). In the third chapter, Jacques and Wright extend the theory of offender based research that they developed in earlier work and in which they discussed the hypothesized effects of relational distance between researched and researcher on the amount of required remuneration, and the quantity and quality of information provided. The authors use Donald Black's pure sociology approach to examine how law and normative status affect offender

based research, concluding with advice as to how researchers might maximize data while minimizing the costs associated with recruitment and remuneration.

In Part Two, Copes and Hochstetler, Morselli and Tremblay, and Brookman consider the extent to which the prison environment influences various aspects of offender based research. Copes and Hochstetler's chapter offers interesting counter-arguments to Jacque and Wrights hypothesis that institutionalized offenders provide lower quantity and quality of information than their non-institutionalised counterparts by providing an argument which emphasizes the advantages of conducting offender-based research in prisons. Building on this theme, Morselli and Tremblay present their face-to-face survey based research on criminal achievement, notably in relation to criminal earnings, among 287 offenders in Canadian penitentiaries in Chapter 5. The emphasis on the validity of and the inherent challenges associated with offender-based research in prison settings is continued by Brookman, whose focus is on the various techniques for triangulating and supplementing the data obtained, drawing on examples from her own research with incarcerated violent offenders.

In Part 3, Chapters 7–9 are authored by anthropologists who have conducted ethnographic research, which, Bernasco observes, lends itself to the validation of findings by utilizing multiple sources of information and/or methods to obtain, verify or analyze the rich data this approach yields. Marie Rosenkrantz Lindegaard, in discussing her research conducted in South Africa, advocates the use of multi-modal approaches to obtaining data, combined with multiple triangulations (notably triangulation of methods, actor triangulation and triangulation of context). Not dissimilarly van Gemert, in reference to his research on Moroccan boys in Rotterdam, promotes the use of repeated measurement of a single phenomena, triangulation and reflection as a means of enhancing validity and reliability. In Chapter 9, Curtis addresses challenges inherent in the process of conducting research with 'hard to reach' populations. In particular, he discusses methods of verification of data that requires the reconstruction of the social networks of respondents, as a means of contrasting accounts of the same phenomena.

Part 4 looks at issues surrounding the social and cultural backgrounds, notably class, ethnicity and gender of researchers and offenders engaged in offender based research. Miller discusses the role of gender in the generation and analysis of data yielded through interviews, and how social positions of race, class and age shape this gendered process. She argues that these dynamics need to be recognized if we are to understand the subjectively experienced worlds of those we research. How the relative social positions of researcher and researched impact the recruitment process is taken up by Zhang who illustrates how his own ethnicity, cultural heritage and social networks facilitated his access to Chinese human smuggling groups in the United States and in China, which further provided a means of validating the data gathered from multiple sources. In the final chapter of Part 4, Neal Shover and Ben Hunter illustrate how class-based cultural capital affects the way convicted white collar offenders construe their criminal acts, their experience of criminal justice processes and their participation in research through a thematic analysis of 52 autobiographies of white collar criminals or former criminals. The chapter concludes with a review of the implications of middle class cultural capital for the conduct of

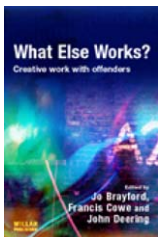
ethnographic research and with suggestions for enhancing the quality and utility of the data provide by white collar offenders.

The general theme of the concluding section, Part 5, is the focus on the act of offending itself. Claire Nee combines conceptually interesting methodological insights with technologically innovative approaches to data generation that seek to enhance autobiographical memory and thus produce more reliable data in the study of burglary. Continuing with a focus on burglars, Summers, Johnson and Rengert, in Chapter 14, and Polisenska in Chapter 15, discuss the use of 'sketch mapping tasks'. Where Summers, Johnson and Rengert highlight the limitations of this methodological device in favour of the use of cartographic maps and computer assisted technological devices in eliciting and analysing information about offender's spatial cognition and decision making, Polisenska's focus on 'mental maps' differentiates between a burglar's detailed local sketch maps and schematic travel maps in the perpetration of crime in the Czech Republic. In the concluding chapter of this epic book, Zetnigg and Gaderer describe their research among incarcerated bank robbers, and their creative approach to the triangulation of the data yielded from participants' own accounts using official prison files, media reports, site visits, discussions with witnesses and photography to capture the physical characteristics of the crime scenes.

This whistle-stop review merely skims the surfaces of this comprehensive review of the challenges and potential solutions to issues of validity in offender-based research which will be of most interest and most inspiring for experienced academicians and researchers as well as research students in the area of offender based research.

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### **What Else Works? Creative Work with Offenders**

*J. Brayford, F. Cowe and J. Deering (eds)*  
Willan Publishing; 2010; pp.290; £22.99, pbk

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In 1974, Robert Martinson published the paper '“What Works?”: Questions and Answers about Prison Reform' in which he reviewed findings from 231 studies of offender rehabilitation programmes that had been evaluated during the prior 30 years. Based on his analysis of what was the most extensive offender treatment database that existed at that time, he concluded that 'with few and isolated exceptions, the rehabilitative efforts that have been reported so far have had no appreciable effect on recidivism' (Martinson, 1974: 25). This spearheaded the now infamous 'nothing works' epoch, characterized by a period of uncertainty and disillusionment amongst practitioners. Since then, rehabilitative interventions have picked themselves up, dusted themselves off