

2
Edition

ABOUT CRIMINALS

A View of the Offenders' World



EDITED BY
MARK R. POGREBIN



2nd
Edition

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MARK R. POGREBIN
University of Colorado at Denver

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FOR INFORMATION:

SAGE Publications, Inc.
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E-mail: order@sagepub.com

SAGE Publications Ltd.
1 Oliver's Yard
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London EC1Y 1SP
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SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
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2^{Edition}

ABOUT
CRIMINALS

*I am very pleased to dedicate this book to Letty Cotton
Pogrebin, the most talented writer in our family. With love and respect.*

PREFACE

The purpose of this book is to present students with recent and important research on criminal behavior. The methodological approach taken is termed naturalistic, one that allows criminals to discuss their offenses and lifestyles from their perspective. Having offenders' voices heard along with the researchers' analyses offers students a real-life view of what, how, and why various criminals behave the way they do. In short, the field studies conducted by the authors for all the articles in this anthology should provide the reader with a realistic portrayal of just what actual offenders say about crime and their participation in it.

In this anthology, I have chosen a collection of readings that highlight criminological concepts that are extremely relevant to the study of crime and criminals. The articles explore a wide array of specific types of criminal behavior, covering the majority of topics on criminal types found in almost every standard criminological text. This book is unique because each type of crime is arranged under a particular subject, with different perspectives discussed for similar types of criminal behavior.

In this second edition of *About Criminals*, I have kept the organization of the subject topics the same while adding a new section on "support systems and crime," an important subject that has been neglected by many anthologies on crime and criminals. Although I have shortened the actual number of articles from four to three per section, I have expanded the readings to reflect the issues and changes that have occurred in the world of criminals. The study of crime and those who participate in its various offender activities is not static, but rather fluid and ever-changing, which accounts for the majority of the new articles in the second edition. Some of the articles included in this new edition were published some years ago because of their classic nature. However, most of the selections are more recent and offer some new perspective on offense types considered new research, conducted by social scientists of a more recent era. Many new

criminology researchers are using a qualitative approach to relate the offenders' perspective as the major focus of their studies.

The readings feature field study research on property crimes, violent crimes, sex crimes, white-collar crimes, gangs and crime, drugs and crime, gender and crime, support systems, and a final section on desistance from crime. Along with the articles, I introduce each category of crime and describe each article's contents. These introductions are meant to help students understand the method that each researcher used to conduct the study as well as to provide an overall description of the study's general contents.

It is my belief that the naturalistic approach using field studies will assist students in gaining a more in-depth understanding of how criminological theories of crime causation actually relate to real-world examples of criminal behavior. I have found from years in the college classroom that the real-world accounts of offenders for their criminality facilitate active learning and tend to motivate student participation in a more meaningful way by connecting abstract theoretical concepts to the real-life experiences of criminals.

About Criminals: A View of the Offender's World can be used in courses as a supplemental anthology in criminology courses and as a separate text for those courses taught from a criminal behavior systems approach. Either way this book is used, it should aid students in providing an analytical perspective on the various motivations and explanations for types of criminal behavior. Perhaps being introduced to the different types of criminal offenses and offenders throughout this book may dispel many of the myths or stereotypes we tend to believe about criminals based on images we receive from movies, media outlets, and television. We may then develop a more realistic understanding of why and how offenders commit particular crimes and how they account for their involvement in such a deviant lifestyle.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank the authors who wrote the articles that make up this anthology. Some written in past years, and others more recently, are representative of high-caliber research on crime and criminals.

Jerry Westby, criminal justice editor at SAGE, deserves my gratitude for his belief in this project and his encouragement to produce this second edition. Jerry's suggestions for ways to improve the book were most helpful. My thanks to Erim Sarbuland, editorial assistant, for help with all of the important logistics that were necessary to get this book produced and published. A very special thanks to my student assistant Alexander Dahl, for all of his help throughout these past months with every aspect of the book's production, not to mention his patience and positive attitude. A very special thank-you to copy editor Amy Rosenstein for finding numerous errors in the manuscript that needed correction. I would like to thank the following reviewers for their feedback on the first edition from which I and the book benefited: Lawrence Bench, University of Utah; Peter English, California State University, Fresno; Robert Lombardo, Loyola University, Chicago; Gina Respass, Old Dominion University; Gerald R. Venor, Colorado State University; and Volkan Topalli;

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Last, but not least, a special thanks to Howard Eiden, close friend, retired probation officer who was forced to listen to my numerous discussions about my ideas for this book for too many months.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Mark R. Pogrebin is a professor of criminal justice in the school of public affairs at the University of Colorado at Denver. He has conducted numerous field studies in the areas of police undercover work, police and tragic events, African-American policewomen, emotion management, women jailers, psychotherapists' deviant behavior with clients, women in prison

and on parole, the strategic uses of humor among police, ex-prisoners' reentry problems, and elite high school students' academic dishonesty. He has published six books, the most recent being a coauthored monograph *Guns, Violence and Criminal Behavior*, and numerous journal articles and has had more than 30 of his publications reprinted in anthologies.

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INTRODUCTION

The vast majority of criminology textbooks break particular types of crimes into groupings or classifications, such as white-collar or property offenses and so on, for the purposes of describing and analyzing multiple variations of criminal behavior. Grouping or typifying certain categories of offenses and offenders may serve to highlight types of criminal behavior and allow for systematic study. This anthology attempts to do just that. Its purpose is to provide students with a more in-depth understanding of the types of criminality by using studies that not only break down particular crimes into specific categories, but that also include the offenders' self-explanations or accounts for their criminal activities and lifestyles.

Some years ago, Clinard and Quinney (1973) attempted to define or distinguish types of criminality because they believed that putting particular crimes into categories allowed for a level of commonality for comparative and systematic analysis. Scarpitti and Nielson (1999, p. 318) note, "It has been shown that criminal typologies are helpful in allowing us to understand the nature of criminal offenses." According to Meier (1989), behavior system typologies can be used for organizing data about offenders and are used by researchers to break crimes into smaller, more meaningful categories.

The historical argument for the limitations of approaching the study of crime by looking at separate types of criminal offenses is understood. There is an awareness that most offenders do not generally specialize in a particular type of criminal activity, but rather participate in a variety of offenses. In short, criminals are versatile, not specialized, because the majority of their crimes are not planned, but rather are opportunistic in nature. However, adult criminals are more likely to specialize in a particular type of crime than are juveniles (Kempf, 1987), especially if they are actively participating in ongoing criminal activities.

I am cognizant of the debate, pros and cons, strengths and weaknesses, for studying crime typologies. What I am attempting to accomplish with the production of this anthology is to offer criminology students the opportunity to gain insight into crime and criminals by offering them research on actual offenders who, throughout the majority of the pages in this book, actually discuss and provide details of offending behavior and reasons for their participation in crime. That is, their motivations, descriptions of how they operate, their thoughts about victims, and a whole host of "thick" descriptive analysis about their unlawful lifestyles are discussed. The objective is to provide students with the opportunity to draw their own conclusions about crime and criminals based on the interviews and observations of offenders portrayed in the 26 selected studies published in this book.

The ultimate value for the naturalistic use of field studies with criminals is best said by Miethe and McCorkle (2001, p. 17) in their discussion of the importance of letting offenders relate their personal experiences and rationale for their behavior:

One of the most important but often neglected sources of data about crime is offenders' own accounts. Perpetrators of crimes are in the unique position of being able to describe, in their own words, the motivations and causes of crime, the level and nature of crime calculus, and the perceived effectiveness of crime control activities in detecting crime. Narrative accounts by offenders also provide the rich details about the situational dynamics of crime and target selection process.

The articles selected in this book of readings offer a naturalistic method for the study of various types of crimes and offenses. Every article used a fieldwork perspective, which stresses interpretive, ethnographic methods that attempt to provide

insightful knowledge at a close range (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988) and, further, expose parts of the criminal's social world that often remain hidden by more traditional methodological techniques (Caulfield & Wonders, 1994). The selected studies attempt to have offenders explain how they make sense of the world in which they live (Spradley, 1980).

Any book of readings attempts to offer a comprehensive view of the subject matter's contents. However, it would be prohibitive to select articles that cover every type of crime. Therefore, as author, I purposely based my selection of writings on two major criteria; the first being the perceived interests to students, coupled with my subjective thoughts on the quality and relevance for each study chosen, and the second, the availability of naturalistic, qualitative type articles for particular categories of crime. To my surprise, there remains a genuine void of naturalistic materials for some criminal types, and as a result, there is a bit of overlap between a few categories. It is my belief that this publication will bring to life the world of crime

and criminals for students who are striving for a connection between theory and reality.

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PART I

PROPERTY CRIMES

Property crimes are the most frequent type of offenses committed in the United States. As distinguished from violent offenses, property crimes most often do not have a confrontational interaction between offenders and victims. According to the Uniform Crime Reports list of property index crimes, burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson are considered the most serious property offenses. However, vandalism, receiving stolen property, shoplifting, and destructive acts against property are included under the definition of property offenses.

From the following section of readings, readers can see that property crimes are committed by males and females, adults and adolescents. Decision-making and motivations for committing these crimes are explored. I have attempted to provide an introspective view of various property crimes. Although far from being comprehensive of every type of crime that comes under this offense category, the readings will offer some insight into those law violators who commit these crimes as well as the rationale they provide for their offenses.

The first chapter, by Vera Lopez, uses symbolic interactionist and cultural perspectives to explain male adolescent property offenders' involvement in committing property crimes. Lopez sought to understand what youthful persons were thinking and feeling during the unlawful event, and what their motivations were at that time. Lopez further studied how the adolescent offenders would interpret and formulate meaning in relation to the delinquent act.

The issue of participation in streetlife as it relates to auto theft was explored by Heith Copes. Here, the author examined the offenders' perceived rewards within the street-life subculture for committing this particular property crime. Copes focuses on criminal decision-making and the extensive values street-life culture imposes on those auto thieves who perceive themselves to be active participants in this type of lifestyle.

Christopher W. Mullins and Richard Wright explored and analyzed how gender structures the crime of residential burglary and, further, how it affects criminal opportunities and perceptions of meanings for both male and female participants. The comparisons between man and woman property offenders are examined together with how these gender-based social networks, which play such an important role in the street-life subculture, affect and influence the actual commission of burglary for both participating sexes.

UNDERSTANDING ADOLESCENT PROPERTY CRIME USING A DELINQUENT EVENTS PERSPECTIVE

VERA LOPEZ

The perceptions of adolescent offenders' involvement in property crimes are the focus of this paper. These youthful teenagers provided information regarding the various situations in which they committed their criminal activity, and their thoughts and emotions during the property offense itself. Multiple motives and interactions that were related to the youthful offenders' interpretive meaning for their involvement in property crimes was explored.

INTRODUCTION

Property crimes committed by adolescents represent a significant economic and societal problem in the United States. Indeed, although Property Crime Index arrest rates, which include burglary, larceny-theft, auto theft, vandalism, shoplifting, and arson, have been declining in recent years (Snyder 2004), adolescents still continue to commit property crimes more often than any other types of crimes (Klaus 2006). To the extent that adolescent offenders choose to engage

in property crime, it becomes important to examine the events and conditions leading up to the decision to commit crime as well as the subjective (offenders' perceptions) and objective (e.g., presence of peers, drug/alcohol use) characteristics associated with the offending situation, otherwise known as the "immediate setting" in which criminal behavior takes place (Birkbeck and LaFree 1993:115). Ultimately, such offender-based and offense-specific explanations can play a significant role in the development of crime theory and prevention.

APPROACHES FOR STUDYING CRIME FROM A SITUATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Criminal or Delinquent Events Perspective

Researchers have, in recent years, begun to adopt a more integrated approach for the study of crime situations resulting in the development of the criminal events perspective (CEP) (Meier et al. 2001; Sacco and Kennedy 2002). The CEP challenges the offender-based focus of most criminological theories in favor of an integrated perspective, which includes simultaneously examining the offenders' perceptions and characteristics, the victim, and the situational correlates and context of specific offenses associated with the criminal event, or what I refer to as the "delinquent event" in the current study.

Criminal and delinquent events, unlike criminal acts, involve a beginning, middle, and an end (Kazemian and LeBlanc 2004; Sacco and Kennedy 2002), and have been alternatively referred to as the precursor, transaction, and aftermath phases (Sherley 2004). The beginning or precursor phase involves what was going on prior to the commission of the crime and includes an examination of the preexisting offender—victim relationship, interactions with peers, and emotional and cognitive states. The transaction phase, in turn, involves examining what occurred during the commission of the crime. Understanding the interactions as how these interactions are influenced by contextual and situational dynamics is crucial at this stage. Finally, the aftermath phase involves what happened after the crime, including what the offender did afterward as well as any resulting short-term and long-term legal or social consequences.

STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of the present study was to expand on the situational crime literature by using the criminal events perspective (Meier et al. 2001; Sacco and Kennedy 2002) to guide an examination of male adolescents' subjective interpretations of delinquent events characterized by the commission of property crimes. Symbolic interactionism in conjunction with a cultural studies approach (Dotter 2004) provided the theoretical backdrop for the study. Although the major focus of this study was to explore how male adolescents define, interpret, and justify their actions within criminal offending situations and how cognitions and emotions influence decisions to commit property crimes, it was also recognized that their narratives represented

idealized accounts, which in turn were shaped and influenced by larger cultural idealizations centered on youth, offenders, gender, and in some cases, race and ethnicity. Finally, it should be noted that my interpretation of the adolescents' narratives were also influenced and shaped by larger cultural idealizations and discourses pertaining to offenders, youth, gender, and race/ethnicity. In particular, social science research, most notably dominant criminological theories steeped in modernist traditions, influenced my own thinking about the adolescents' narratives. Thus, when appropriate, I refer to, and ultimately critique these theoretical approaches when discussing the narratives.

METHODS

Study Participants and Recruitment

Twenty-four male adolescent offenders, ages 14–20, participated in this study. All youths were under the supervision of the state juvenile correction agency. Eleven of the youths were Mexican American; five were white; and eight were African American. Eighty-five percent came from midsize or larger cities, and 15 reported a previous gang affiliation.

In an attempt to maximize the number of accounts and variation in responses, youths were recruited from two settings: a residential treatment home and a halfway home. Youths across the two settings differed with regard to length of stay. Residential treatment youths had completed half their stay whereas the halfway home youths were in the process of being transitioned into the community. Despite this, youths across both settings were similar in terms of age, race/ethnicity, inner-city background, and gang affiliation.

Data Collection

A semistructured interview was used to obtain information about each adolescent's perceptions of his delinquent acts. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed in a private setting; therefore, only the participant and I were present during the interview.

Although information was obtained on other types of crimes, this study specifically focused on delinquent events characterized by the commission of property crimes. To accomplish this, I asked each adolescent to discuss all crimes that he could remember committing in his lifetime. I then asked each adolescent to:

Think back to a time when you committed a crime. Can you remember that time? Okay, now I'd like you to