



## Book Review

# Dana Peterson and Vanessa R Panfil (Eds.) (2014) *Handbook of LGBT Communities, Crime, and Justice.* Springer

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I recently defended my doctoral thesis on the ways in which the gender and sexuality of dissident bodies are managed within male prisons in Brazil. I analysed the findings from my empirical research through the lenses of abolitionism and critical criminology, as well as more recent developments in queer criminology.

When I started the research in 2016, there were few studies on gender and sexually-non-conforming bodies. The *Handbook of LGBT Communities, Crime, and Justice* (2014), edited by Dana Peterson and Vanessa R. Panfil, was an exception. It served as a guide for me, facilitating my understanding of the discourses and practices observed in prison environments. Ten years later, the book remains an excellent resource for academics who work on processes of criminalisation, victimisation and prison conditions for LGBTQIA+ people.

In the *Handbook of LGBT Communities, Crime, and Justice*, Peterson and Panfil bring together a collection of writings on the most varied interactions of LGBTQIA+ people with the criminal justice system. The volume reveals the high rates of violence and crimes of prejudice against individuals based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. The individual chapters also reflect on LGBTQIA+ people's capacity for agency in the face of daily challenges.

Using multiple methodologies and research methods, the contributors to the *Handbook of LGBT Communities, Crime, and Justice* address a range of issues involving law enforcement, including conflict with police and prison officers. In so doing, the contributors denounce the fact that, for a long time, critical criminology neglected and ignored certain social groups, while, on the other hand, mainstream criminology labelled those groups (and individuals within them) as deviant. In addition, the authors of the chapters in the *Handbook of LGBT Communities, Crime, and Justice* integrate legal, public health and human rights perspectives into their respective analyses, taking intersectional and transdisciplinary approaches.

The *Handbook of LGBT Communities, Crime, and Justice* is comprised of 25 chapters organised into six sections. Unfortunately, space constraints preclude mention of each chapter in each section, but hopefully the ones that I have highlighted provide a taste of what each offer.

The first section, *Introduction and Overview of LGBT Communities, Crime, and Justice*, decries the scarcity of research in queer criminology, providing an overview of the issues discussed throughout the volume. Peterson and Panfil argue that criminologists should challenge heteronormativity in their studies, while Jordan Blair Woods' chapter contends that legal and



criminological discourses generate powerful effects by constituting subjects of sexualities within a common normative repertoire. As a result, criminological thinking is structured based on the creation of deviant classes and individuals.

In the second section, *LGBT Communities, Crime, and Victimization*, scholars present research on the experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community—including both those who have been victimised and those involved or associated with crime. For example, Panfil's chapter draws our attention to the fact that LGBTQIA+ individuals can not only be perpetrators of crimes, but also affiliated with violent gangs.

The third section, *LGBT Communities and Juvenile and Criminal Justice Systems*, provides a broad overview of the experiences of gender and/or sexually-dissident people with justice systems (and their agents), such as the police, courts and corrections. Angela Dwyer's chapter, for instance, reveals how the police function as a discriminatory institution through which control mechanisms are administered.

The chapters in the fourth section, *LGBT Communities, Law, and Justice*, depict the struggle of movements for human rights and justice in light of the various existing (and oppressive) legal-political situations that affect LGBTQIA+ people around the world. These chapters offer a nice segue to the contributions in the fifth section, *LGBT Communities, Crime, and Public Health*, which take health as a basic human right and explore the intersection of public health, criminal justice, and criminology.

One of the key takeaways from the studies in the *Handbook of LGBT Communities, Crime, and Justice* is that people whose sexual orientation is perceived as “non-normative” are more likely to be victims of violence, especially when they are involved in sex work. My own research has revealed a lot about the domination and power exercised over bodies that do not conform to the norms: the further people stray from the ideal model of masculinity and heterosexuality, the more likely they are to be assaulted, harassed, and raped (Doering et al., 2018, 2021). What patriarchal, heteronormative society does not realise is that no body is subject to or totally resists the norms. In order to maintain their hold on power, agents of this patriarchal, heteronormative society police the appearance of LGBTQIA+ people and allow them to constitute themselves only within a common repertoire.

There is little to criticise in the *Handbook of LGBT Communities, Crime, and Justice*, but one shortcoming is that much of the discussion is based on theories and experiences from the Global North, especially those from the United States. Therefore, although it is important for queer criminology to remain committed to the political and theoretical aspirations of the Global North, it is also imperative to consider a queer criminology produced from the realities of the Global South. One of the goals of my research, for example, has been to try to identify the ways in which a queer criminology of the Global South differs from that of the Global North. Thus, while the *Handbook of LGBT Communities, Crime, and Justice* was immensely valuable as a guide for me, I found it necessary to develop approaches, concepts and ideas that were more specific to the injustices experienced by dissident sexual and/or gender subjects in Brazil and Latin America. I would hazard to guess that the same would be true in other countries in the Global South.

Despite this concern, the *Handbook of LGBT Communities, Crime, and Justice* is an unparalleled resource, for it not only includes subjects that have long been neglected in criminology, but it incorporates concepts and theories about sexual orientation and gender identity from other disciplines. The fact is that people who “deviate” from gender and sexuality norms have always been mistreated (or worse) by “justice” systems around the world, in large part because the heteronormative gaze of these systems have ignored (and continue to ignore) their experiences.

Overall, the *Handbook of LGBT Communities, Crime, and Justice* is successful because it relies on the collaboration of academic researchers working on issues of sexuality and gender, especially those at the interface of criminology and criminal justice. The editors—and the individual contributors—are pioneers in creating a program to include and deepen the understanding of LGBTQIA+ concepts and theories, recognising forgotten social groups as criminological subjects. They have pointed out the blind spots in theoretical analysis, with the aim of correcting existing deficiencies in the field of research, as well as stimulating positive changes in areas of justice, education, theory, research, and practical application.

Together, these scholars have advanced a queer criminology—one whose main objective is to contribute in theoretical and practical terms to research and scholarship that challenges and deconstructs the violent and oppressive functioning of the criminal legal system, especially against groups of people who do not conform to heteronormative standards. At the same time, the editors and authors in the *Handbook of LGBT Communities, Crime, and Justice* have illuminated some possibilities for people to try to resist violence. That being said, it is not always possible to resist. The experiences of the individuals in the Global South expose how gender configures hierarchical and asymmetrical types of relationships; within this, though, possibilities for agency emerge.

In the *Handbook of LGBT Communities, Crime, and Justice*, “queer” appears as a disruptive movement that problematises the knowledge created and constituted by criminology, reshaping the conventional ways of conducting research and, consequently, of thinking about individuals and their interactions with justice systems. Thus, when queer criminology provides adequate guidance on sexual orientation and gender identity, it makes it possible to understand the experiences of LGBTQIA+ people with the criminal justice system.

In a reality in which sexuality outside the heteronormative framework has been signified by hegemonic knowledge as abnormal (‘deviant’ and often *criminal*), people can be brutalized and killed without major constraints. Peterson and Panfil (and their contributors) provide us not only with examples and explanations, but with visions and hopes for new criminological directions, renewing our spirits and encouraging us to continue our research—and emerging scholars to begin their paths.

In conclusion, the *Handbook of LGBT Communities, Crime, and Justice* is an important boost for queer criminology. The volume is significant for the academic world, as it brings discussions that transcend theoretical abstraction, full of practical problems and empirical meanings. The editors and authors have revealed the possibilities for a queer criminology in ways that provide a vision of the future appropriate to the dynamics experienced by LGBTQIA+ people. Ten years after its publication, the *Handbook of LGBT Communities, Crime, and Justice* still has much to offer.

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