



## International Journal for Crime and Justice

## Book Review

**Renzetti, Claire M, Miller, Susan L, and Gover, Angela R (eds) (2013) *Routledge International Handbook of Crime and Gender Studies*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.**

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As I sit down to write this review, Oscar Pistorius has appeared in court accused of the premeditated murder of his girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp, an event that appears to have hit the newspaper headlines across the global stage. A few months ago, similar widespread coverage was given to the gang rape of a young Indian woman who subsequently died from her injuries. In the United Kingdom the questionable behaviour of a now deceased television celebrity (Jimmy Savile) towards young women in a variety of contexts is subject to ongoing investigation. At the same time the jury is out over the defence claim of 'marital coercion' being made in court by Vicky Pryce, the ex-wife of the now disgraced former British Member of Parliament and cabinet minister, Chris Huhne. For those of us who have been working in and around these kinds of issues for a number of years, these stories appear all too familiar and their patterning by gender all too common a feature. This book takes a close look at the efficacy of gender as an explanatory tool, not only for the kinds of familiar events listed above but also for a wide range of crimes and criminal victimisations in which the salience of gender may not look quite so obvious.

This book comprises a collection of original contributions designed to offer a review of the vast literature that is now available under the general heading of 'gender and crime' as well as to provide a flavour of new insights that a gendered perspective might offer. It is organised into five themes theory and methodology; gender and victimisation; gender and offending; gendered work in the criminal justice system; and future directions for gendered research. Whilst these themes might appear to reflect a rather standard approach for a handbook of this kind, their coverage is interspersed with box features. On the one hand, these features draw the reader's attention to the potential of new and/or controversial issues for research and, on the other, offer a reflective commentary from leading researchers in this area that focus on what it was that got them interested in this particular field of inquiry. Students and teachers alike will find both of these features excellent sources for classroom discussion since both make the material presented in the book 'live' in a way that is often difficult to capture in a standard format. These features give this book a distinctive flavour but what does this handbook actually cover?

It is difficult to give a taste of a book that is so ambitious in its coverage and scope. Suffice it to say, however, that the topics covered include those that you might expect (the fear of crime, human trafficking, white-collar crime, policing, and so on) as well as those that you might not expect (militarism and violence against women, computer hacking, and terrorism). All are usefully informed by an appreciation of the dilemmas posed by intersectionality, by an understanding of the pathways into crime/criminal victimisation, and by questions of methodology. In so doing, it seems to me that there are two common features to each of the contributions. First, there is a commitment to an integrative approach to empirical work: an embrace of what can be learned from both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. This stance tells us much about the way in which feminist-informed work has progressed in its application and pursuit of work 'by women, with women, for women'. Second, there is a commitment to understanding and appreciating the difference between sex and gender and the power that each has as analytical tools. Consequently sight is never lost of a critical appreciation of the nature and expression of masculinity(ies). The terms 'sex' and 'gender' seem to have become increasingly conflated in both the policy and academic worlds, so the desire to unpack the relative importance these terms found in many of the contributions is refreshing. Not all contributions adhere to these features consistently but, for the reader, such unevenness becomes in and of itself a useful source of analysis. Thus what is presented here is a feel for not only the wide-ranging nature of gendered research and the potential such an approach has for continuing to drive the criminological agenda to a better appreciation of crime (in the widest sense of the term) and its consequences, but also a feel for the international reach of such work and the potential engagement it can generate. The reported demonstrations that followed on from the gang rape in India are a good illustration how the changing cultural expectations surrounding gendered social relationships can be expressed in many different ways and in many different contexts. This collection makes the case for how a nuanced but gendered analysis to such events might be developed. Consequently the re-assertion of gender as a powerful analytical tool that this handbook affords is both important for criminology and timely on a world stage in which gendered social relationships routinely leave their mark, as the examples with which this review began, illustrate.

Without wishing to privilege any of the contributors to this volume, I was particularly struck by the comment made by Julie Stubbs (2013: 119). She says:

... in many settings the current political context is one in which feminist knowledge constantly faces challenges and needs to be re-asserted, and where nuance and complexity are lost in sloganeering and criminal justice policy that is too often shaped by political expediency.

From the part of the world in which I sit, I cannot help but agree with this comment. It is to be hoped that handbooks like this one, and the thoughtful focus for existing and future gender informed work it provides, will provide a platform from which such sloganeering and expediency can be challenged by those who read it. This is an ambitious project but in neither downgrading the complexity that a gendered analysis affords nor under-estimating what remains to be done, this handbook will achieve much in pushing the criminological boundaries on the question of gender to their limit and beyond.

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