

BOOK REVIEW

Offending Identities: Sex Offenders' Perspectives on their Treatment and Management

Kirsty Hudson

Willan Publications, 2005

204pp

ISBN 1-84392-115-4

Crime Prevention and Community Safety (2006) 8, 67–68.

doi:10.1057/palgrave.cpcs.8150016

Historically, the literature on sex-offenders has generally focussed on why the offender commits the sexual act, the nature and extent of sexual-offending and what the most effective responses are to treating sex-offenders within the criminal justice system. Normally, these research findings have been informed by examining the perspective of the professionals who work with sex-offenders or by evaluating reconviction rates.

In *Offending Identities*, the author undertakes the unique task of moving beyond this viewpoint and approaches the impact and understanding of treatment programmes through the narrative of sex-offender(s). As Hudson expresses in her opening chapter “one perspective notable by its virtual absence has been that of the offenders themselves” (pp. 2). In posing such questions as this, the author pushes her text forward, while simultaneously contextualizing her material within the relevant sex-offender policies/theories and perceived images.

The book begins with a comprehensive exploration of past and current legislative responses to sex-offenders. Here, the author provides a concise and yet reflective overview of the law and policy relating to sex-offenders in England and Wales. The subsequent chapter puts forward a convincing argument for the need for policy makers to refocus on rehabilitation instead of the “supposed” risk that sex-offenders may pose to society.

Parts two and three shift the focus from an historic and legislative account to an empirical explanation of the participants' perceptions on how they were treated and managed on sex-offender programmes. Indeed, one of the most poignant aspects of this book is the contribution that the offenders make themselves. Throughout the book, Hudson demonstrates her ability to nurture and bring out the candid thoughts of the participants. Parts two and three are littered with quotes, which adequately balance and support the author's argument.

In these sections, Hudson details the difficulty that sex-offenders often have from separating their criminal identity from their overall sense of self.



The author does this by drawing on the work Goffman and Becker, exploring issues surrounding “extended social identity” and the concept of “master status” within the context of multiple identities. The subsequent chapter follows with this theme and examines the different impetuses and influences that lead to participation on programmes. The remaining chapters focus primarily on the participants’ views regarding their respective treatment programmes. It is in these chapters that the author presents her most thought-provoking analysis. Here, the author powerfully illustrates (utilizing quotes from the participants) that the identity perceived by the sex-offender is crucial to the understanding and implementation of sex-offender treatment programmes. Hudson notes that not all sex-offenders conform to the stereotypical media image and that sex offenders are a “heterogeneous group” of people who do not always pose a risk to society. Without a doubt, the common thread that links all these chapters together is the image of the sex-offender. Hudson’s main argument, which is successfully traced throughout the book, is that of the inaccurate portrayal of the image of this offender type. The author uses this premise to form a very convincing argument for the need to change society’s perception of the sex-offender and move towards more realistic representations. Ultimately Hudson concludes by asserting that the creation of the sex-offender as a sexual predator is unrealistic and can have an adverse effect on the rehabilitation of sex-offenders. If we are to successfully rehabilitate sex-offenders then we need to look beyond the conventional wisdom and common imagery and focus on conveying a more realistic representation of the complexity of sex-offender identities; this can only be done if we, as researchers and policy-makers, are prepared to listen to and take account of the lived narratives of the sex-offender.

The principal strength of this book is the emotive and enlightening narrative of the sex-offender; there is no doubt that Hudson’s innovative findings should influence policy and policy makers. As such, the book would be an essential read for policy makers and practitioners working within the field. The book is a welcome and much needed addition to the literature. It is difficult to offer too much criticism of this book. However, Hudson’s argument may have benefited from a more theoretically rich analysis; as it stands there is a paucity of theoretical contextualization of many of the insights generated by the analysis. Nevertheless, *Offending Identities* is a much needed addition to the literature.

Julie Eve Gardner
School of Geography, Politics and Sociology,
Claremount Bridge, University of Newcastle, UK