Book Review

Crime and everyday life

Marcus Felson and Mary Eckert

Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, 5th edn, 2014, 217pp., £35.99 (paperback), £34.49 (Kindle edition), ISBN: 978-1483384689

Security Journal (2016) **29**, e11–e12. doi:10.1057/sj.2015.25; published online 7 December 2015

The late, great criminologist Don Gottfredson had children who were themselves distinguished criminologists, at least one of whom married a criminologist. Don once remarked that his ambition was to publish a paper titled ‘On the Dangers of Nepotism in Criminology’ authored by Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Gottfredson and Gottfredson. Like Don, Marcus Felson is making crime a family business. He was the sole author of the first edition of the book here reviewed, the fifth edition of which is coauthored with his sociologist wife Mary Eckert. Marcus and Mary cite the work of two other Felson relatives. The book’s touching dedication is to Marcus’ mother Virginia Raphaelson Felson ‘who turned 100 years old on October 12, 2014. Stubborn. Independent. Humorous. Fast on her feet. College graduate, Ahead of her times’. One warms to the writers and to the woman about whom they write, while worrying about a Felson takeover of criminology.

The core message of the book is supplied concisely on its last page:

In all ages, the offender must complete a set of tasks. Society sometimes makes these tasks easy and at other times difficult Students of crime analysis should stop wasting their efforts looking deep into social structure or the human soul or treating crime as melodramatic. Crime is ordinary behaviour reflecting basic human selfishness, everyday symptoms and environmental cues. The key to crime reduction is hidden in plain sight. (p. 185)

To adhere to this commandment, the student must recognise and reject eight fallacies about crime: that

1. crime is typically dramatic rather than mundane;
2. cops and courts are central to understanding crime;
3. you are pure relative to other people;
4. being young means being innocent;
5. offenders are generally competent;
6. organised crime mimics formal organisations;
7. gangs are generally city-wide outfits;
8. moral agencies and similar organisations have the answers.

Fallacies eschewed, the authors describe the chemistry of crime; the cues, locations and circumstances that facilitate lawbreaking. The text is in effect the practical working out of Felson's Routine Activity Theory.

Throughout its five editions, *Crime and Everyday Life* has been an excellent introductory text in criminology, a brilliant corrective to the many evidence-light and theory-heavy texts. The book's language is simple and uncompromising. The authors do not pander to the sensibilities of those about whom they write. The likely offender is 'a young male with a big mouth who does poorly in school' (p. 31). 'Many of the people who write about violence are so upset that they cannot calm themselves down enough to analyse it well' (p. 58).

Were your reviewer now teaching an introductory criminology course, *Crime and Everyday Life* would be its set book. That said, one would wish to supplement its contents in the following ways.

1. Situational measures are relevant to cybercrime. However, Felson and Eckert are perhaps too sanguine about their ready deployment in cyberspace. Much ingenuity is needed to be applied in understanding what cyber situations are and how to shape them benignly. The Internet of Things means that vulnerabilities to hacking have proliferated to the point where the safety-critical systems of public utilities are threatened. Bitcoin and its block chain underpinning threaten the traceability of criminal transactions. The Dark Web hosts a new criminal underworld. One too many online communications allow fraud victims to self-select.
2. In a liberal democracy, the Felson and Eckert approach is probably enough. But how does a citizen of a corrupt regime behave to be true to the message of the book?

That said, the perfect is the enemy of the excellent, and the book reviewed is excellent; lucid, provocative and full of good and relevant stories. And there will be a sixth edition, whose dedication, one fervently hopes, will be to Marcus' mother on her 103rd birthday.

Ken Pease

Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science, University College London, London, UK