

BOOK REVIEWS

Edited by Dave Phillips, Sheffield Hallam University

BAR WARS: CONTESTING THE NIGHT SCENE IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH CITIES

Hadfield P (2006).

Oxford: Oxford University Press. 282pp ISBN 0-19-929786-X

(pbk) 0-19- 929785-1 (hbk)

This book is based on previous research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council Violence Research Programme. The author is examining the context of 'night' from several angles focusing more specifically on those who live or work in areas affected by the Licensing Act 2003. This does make the book topical, particularly as the Act itself did not become fully operational until November 2005.

The author himself clearly has much experience of working within the night time economy, due to the fact that he was a disc jockey, and spent over 1000 nights in pubs and clubs as part of that employment. Indeed, the book is quite clearly, in parts, an ethnographic account of night workers, where the author used participant observation. Hadfield does suggest that this is a particularly British study and he followed the Chicago School in order to immerse himself in the subject matter whilst using symbolic interactionism to explore how discourse may vary, citing Downes & Rock 23003, Lindner 1996.

The book has three major sections. Part 1 is an in depth examination of the social aspects of night, how this became an area that was contested and how attempts have been made to control what goes on. It also looks historically at the changes that have taken place on a social and political level within Britain particularly the rapid changes in the 1990's which saw the rise of conglomerates focusing on ensuring their brand was the most popular and their share of the market increased and more directly at how this has impacted on the night time economy, leading up to the implementation of the Licensing Act 2003. The author himself states that his aim is to 'explore night-time hours as a period of release, control, resistance, economic opportunity and struggle.'

The second section is the ethnographic fieldwork, looking at how the high street is regulated both formally and informally. This examines the work of the security staff, and other staff members who have to work together to maintain informal control as well a look at how the police attempt to deal with the situation. Finally the chapter examines the impact on those who may live locally and how the state have attempted to deal with any negative publicity that arose as a result of the proposals.

The third section looks more specifically at how the licensing laws work, who is involved and how arguments are used within this specific social and economic context. The author suggests that because of his 'hands on' experience of the system and his involvement with licensing boards, he can provide details about what happens behind the scenes. This is summed up by an argument for improving democracy within the regulatory field by using inquisitorial rather than adversarial hearings.

This is a very detailed and at times complicated book which would no doubt appeal to anyone interested in how arguments are devised for and against the need for licensed premises and the effect this has on all involved in the process. Certainly the major focus of the book is the actual hearings process, and how this is far less transparent than one would assume, with far more issues at the core than one would realise.

Each chapter ends with a clear summary of the arguments and concludes the main points of interest. The final chapter is particularly interesting for anyone involved in ethnographic research. The author reflects on the use of this particular methodology and highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the methods chosen for this piece of research.

Tanya Miles-Berry, Sheffield Hallam Universtiy

SOLUTION-FOCUSED TREATMENT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OFFENDERS

Lee, M.Y., Sebold, J. and Uken,A:, Oxford:
Oxford University Press (2003).
ISBN 0-19-514677 (HBK)
ISBN 0-19-514678 (PBK)

At a time when domestic violence work with offenders has become dominated by approaches that blend gender analysis and cognitive behaviourism this book presents an alternative to those dominant ideas. The work of Lee, Uken and Sebold challenges the current orthodoxy through the use of Solution Focused approaches within a groupwork model, where the offender is encouraged to take responsibility for solving to his or her use of domestic violence. The writers remain faithful to this approach and their book sets out their journey in setting up a Solution Focused groupwork project in Plumas County, California. This treatment programme has been running since 1991 with "Court-mandated" participants. The book is structured in a useful way, explaining clearly the methodology of Solution Focused Treatment and how this might be applied to domestic violence offenders.

The authors detail their methodology from the initial contact, through assessment and treatment to the completion of the group and post programme evaluation with participants. There are informative discussions relating to the debates about the nature of the treatment of this particular group and this is enhanced by case examples throughout the book. One chapter presents the comprehensive and rigorous research conducted by Sebold which substantiates the notion that a Solution Focus approach offers the potential for improved results without the need to incorporate a more punitive stance when confronted with challenging and abusive individuals. For example traditional approaches such as the Duluth programme typically have a drop out rate of 50% whereas research carried out with this Solution Focused approach had completion rates in excess of 90%. As we already know from research concerning accredited programmes within the UK dropping out of such a programme can raise the risk of reconviction.

The principles of good practices within this model include the approach that participants are accountable for their solution, it is future orientated rather than problem orientated, avoids negative labels, the participants are themselves active assessors in the treatment process, it is strength and exception based and participants are treated as the expert.

“participants take ownership of their problem not by talking about or reaffirming the problem but by defining goals of therapy and constructing solutions”
(p9)

It is clear from the statistics gathered concerning participants that those attending have similar profiles to those attending UK groups. The research records that of those attending 61% had a substance misuse problem, 18% a psychiatric diagnosis 25% a personality disorder and 4% a brain injury. The issue of cultural diversity is also given careful consideration as this was a real issue within the group participants; again this is seen as a strength on which to build the foundations of change.

The evaluation of the Plumas Project was expanded to include interpersonal relationship skills as well as the cessation of violence within intimate relationships and was based on 14 groups completing between October 1996 and January 2002. The project research included both male and female groups and the assessment of further domestic abuse was based not only on reconviction but also post programme interviews with partners. Although this evaluation only covered the period of six months after participants completed they found that reconviction and re-offending reported by partners to be only 16.7%. In addition the research reported increasing self-esteem amongst the participants and of those that did re-offend a reduction in the frequency and seriousness of violence. Typically reconviction (which may not equate to re-offending which is likely to be higher) rates amongst Duluth programmes are around 40% over a two-year period.

Interestingly project programme consisted of only eight groupwork sessions of one hour over a three-month period. This was broken down into four distinct phases, the first relating to introducing group rules and establishing a collaborative relationship, the second phase focusing on assisting participants to establish “well formed goals” for themselves. Phase 3 reviewing positive changes and assisting participants to expand and amplify solution behaviour and the final phase focusing on the consolidation of changes and celebrating participant’s successes.

This book represents an interesting and demonstrably effective departure from the dominant methodology of working with this group and with offenders in general. It is an approach that has always interested me and one which I have often recommended to my Trainees. This book is a useful guide to using this approach and also provides the research base for a broader implementation within the Criminal Justice System. The authors usefully raise the question whether the current dominant treatment methodology of confrontation, blame and a focus on deficits recreates a similar non-helpful dynamic which is at the core of the abusive relationship which it seeks to treat. Although not explicitly considered within this book this necessarily asks the reader to consider the epistemological basis of our work with offenders.

Paul Kirk, Practice Development Assessor, North Yorkshire Probation Area

CHANGING LIVES – AN ORAL HISTORY OF PROBATION NAPO (2007) ISBN 0-901617-22-9

This short book of just under a hundred pages sets out to “celebrate the work and achievements of the Probation Service over its first century” at a time when the future of the service is very much under threat from the emergent National Offender Management Service. Perhaps inevitably therefore the tone of many of the contributions combines affectionate nostalgia with a disquiet, suspicion and antagonism to recent initiatives that have impacted on the modernisation of the service and the managerial tendency of the last 20 years. This reader is left with an overwhelming sense that, on the basis of the accounts within this book, the past compares favourably with the present and that modern developments have generally been for the worse rather than the better.

The narrative starts with a section titled “The evolution of Probation” which provides a very engaging timeline from 1820 to 2006, highlighting many of the most significant events within the history of the service. This is well supported by some well chosen images including a photograph of the inaugural meeting of Napo in 1912 which confirms that if the service had maintained similar standards of sartorial elegance today, there would surely be little talk of its likely demise (page 8). The focus is weighted toward the history of Napo rather than the service generally and as a result significant milestones are missing, but this does not pretend to be an exhaustive or comprehensive account.

There then follows Part One of the Oral Histories which consist of extracts of interviews undertaken with a broad range of retired probation service employees ranging from ex chief officers through to clerical and administrative staff. This includes contributors who began their probation careers from the 1930s through to the 1970s and their accounts are generally full of insight and succeed in capturing both anecdotes that throw light on changing probation practice and reflections on policy and practice that provide some contextual understanding. These contributions do not tend to focus on momentous events within probation history but instead provide highly personal accounts of what it felt like to be part of the service, what are perceived as the contributions made by individuals and some sense of how this compares to the here and now.

It would have been useful to include contributions from practitioners and managers who started careers in the 1980s, 1990s and during this century. Their perspectives would have embraced 25% of the hundred year history and would perhaps have challenged or re-enforced the general sense of a service in decline, from a better informed position. I would like to have seen the negative references to the current training arrangements, which more than one contributor makes, opened up to a bit of scrutiny and debate.

Sandwiched between the two oral history sections is a brief history of probation in film and television provided by Mike Nellis. Some excellent stills accompany the text which is perhaps over succinct, no doubt constrained by the requirements of the publication.

However for this reader, being reminded of the Hard Cases series in the 1980s, brought with it uncomfortable memories of explaining to friends and family that a probation career was not synonymous with the type of risk, danger and extreme behaviours more normally associated with a Bond movie.

The book finishes with brief histories of LAGIP, ABPO, the Edridge Fund and finally concludes with a number of centenary congratulations from the great and the good including Tony and Hilary Benn, Douglas Hurd, David Faulkner and others. My favourite quote comes from David Ramsbottom and includes the following lines:

“I have two hopes for the Probation Service in its centenary year. First that the public will learn to appreciate the size and scope of the debt that it owes to the men and women of the Service. Second that the government will realise that, if its stated aims are to be satisfied, it must enable those who have to do the various required tasks to do them effectively. It is worth the investment.”

Hear hear!

Simon Feasey, Principal Lecturer in Criminal Justice, Sheffield Hallam University

THE HISTORY OF PROBATION: POLITICS, POWER AND CULTURAL CHANGE 1876-2005

Whitehead, P and Statham, R (2006),
Kent: Shaw and Sons.

The year 2007 marks the centenary of the legislation that permitted the appointment of salaried probation officers by the local courts. This book is the first of several to be published to mark the significance of this centenary year and may be seen as part of a much wider and overdue consideration of the work of this organisation.

The contributors to the book have together many years of experience in working in and around the probation service and as participant observers they have written the 'biography of a public sector organisation that we know something about' (xi). Their hinterland contains a wealth of experience. They also acknowledge the contributions of other practitioners from a number of backgrounds in the criminal justice system and explain that the book has 'not evolved from within the academic community' (xi). The authors pose two main questions that need to be addressed. What has happened to the service between its creation (1907) and the advent of NOMS (2004) and why have these changes happened? In the foreword, Mike Hough, whilst keeping an open mind about these changes acknowledges the importance of an ethical value base that has always motivated individuals working in this sector of the criminal justice system. He emphasises that 'it is essential that its core values are preserved and not squandered' (ix).

The book is divided into three sections. The first considers the chronological period from the beginnings of the police court missionaries in 1876 up to 1979. This is dealt with in less than a hundred pages and provides a broad contextual background. The second part concentrates on developments since 1979, with the advent of a radical Conservative government and the appearance of the Statement of National Objectives and Priorities (SNOP, 1984). As the authors assert this is a period that needs to be 'excavated'. The final section looks at what the authors designate the 'Decline and future of Probation'.

Within the broad framework the authors identify six phases of development ranging from the saving of souls (1876-1930s), casework (1930-1970s) through to the collapse of the rehabilitative ideal (1970s). This was succeeded by ideas that centred on probation as an alternative to custody (1980s) when considerations around 'law and order' and 'efficiency' drove the agenda. This was broadly followed by 'the difficult years' (1992 to 1997) when punishment in the community and in custody resulted in a 'punishment frenzy of escalating imprisonment' that 'shows no sign of abating as we complete the book in 2005' (168). Finally however, in addition to punishment, is the growth of evidence based practice and the 'renaissance of rehabilitation' (5) (1997-date).

This is a useful typography that signals, to the reader, the prevailing ideologies that impacted on the developments of policy and practice. Structurally the book provides

summaries and details of the changes that the service has undergone. There are useful sectional headings that provide for easy reference. The broad narrative sweep, together with detail, provides a useful source of reference for the general reader and practitioners within the service. There are useful appendices and references that help the reader to make sense of these developments.

Each of the developmental stages is considered in detail in the context of the interaction of ideas, legislation, policy and political initiatives. What does become clear is the way in which law and order gradually moved to the centre of the political agenda. There was never a 'golden age' for the Probation service (279) but there has been a loss of discretion and judgement in favour of prescriptive systems, rules and procedures (279). This has perhaps been a consequence of this shift of law and order to the centre of the political arena with the consequent flood of legislation. This can be bewildering. The book helps to make this coherent.

That there is a history that 'excavates' the evolution of the work of the service is essential for politicians and practitioners. 'Those who cannot remember the past are designed to repeat it'. (Santayana, 1905). In the probation context this would be the production of the 'seamless sentence' as though it is completely new, like a rabbit out of a hat. The authors also deplore the lack of focus on basic skills and techniques. Practitioners, for example, may not have acquired these basic skills, that they could pass on to other staff, before being promoted to management roles. Additionally it is argued that a consideration of actual probation practice and developments around face to face contact has been neglected. This is unfortunate since it can act as a foil to the dangers of bureaucracy and 'routineisation' both of which are the enemies of effective practice.

The final section of the book reflects on the growth of accountability to 'whimsical ministers' and how 'the loss of freedom to exercise local leadership dulled enthusiasm for the proposed changes' (207). However the authors conclude on a note of optimism 'as we think about our future responses we are limited only by our imaginations' (283).

David Phillips, Sheffield Hallam University