

Book Review

Brisman, Avi. *Geometries of Crime: How Young People Perceive Crime and Justice*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 249 pp. \$74.99 (eBook). ISBN 978-1-137-54620-3; \$95.00 (hbk) ISBN 978-1-137-54619-7.

Avi Brisman's *Geometries of Crime: How Young People Perceive Crime* challenges the theoretical analyses of criminologists who define crime using geometric models. There are three geometric models of crime that Brisman examines and refutes in his book: Hagan's (1985) "pyramid of crime," the "square of crime" proposed by Left Realism (Young, 1994) and Henry and Lanier's (1998) "prism of crime." According to Brisman, each geometric model constructs and perceives crime, justice, victimhood and societal response to punishment differently. However, he argues that these geometries reflect adult definitions, constructions and perceptions, and do not take into account the ways in which youth act or understand the world. Offering a consideration of youths' perceptions of crime and delinquency, Brisman's book encourages readers to question how youth assess "appropriate responses to crime and delinquency by the criminal justice system, as well as their place within it" (Brisman, 2016, p. 26).

A well-structured thought-provoking book, *Geometries of Crime* has five chapters. In Chapter 1, Brisman sets the stage by introducing readers to a group interview of youth whom are attending the Red Hook Community Justice Center (RHCJC), a centre in the Red Hook neighbourhood of Brooklyn, New York. He recounts the youths' discussions of what constitutes a crime, how we might view offenders and how societies should respond (i.e., punishment or community-based alternative programs). In so doing, Brisman introduces the reader to the three geometrical models of crime: namely, the "pyramid of crime," the "square of crime," and the "prism of crime." In Chapter 2, Brisman offers an in-depth description and analysis of each geometrical model of crime. By

examining each geometric model's intellectual history—put differently, the ways in which each one emerges in response to perceived shortcomings of its predecessor—Brisman tentatively claims that Henry and Lanier's prism is the most accommodating in its integrative definition(s) and analysis (2016, p. 52). However, he contends the missing piece to the perception puzzle is still the lack of the ways in which young people perceive the severity of crime and delinquency and assess the appropriate response thereto.

Chapters 3 and 4 are the empirical chapters of Brisman's study. The chapters are based on ethnographic research conducted on the RHCJC, as well as an analysis of the proceedings of the Red Hook Youth Court (RHYC), a juvenile diversion program designed to prevent the formal processing of juvenile offenders (usually first-time offenders) within the United States' juvenile justice system. In Chapter 3, Brisman examines the RHCJC in relation to broader social issues of Brooklyn, New York, and the wider youth court phenomenon within the United States. As Brisman indicates, the Red Hook neighbourhood has undergone significant regeneration and capital investment since the late 2000s, yet simultaneously the majority of Red Hook residents (predominantly non-White) still live in public housing projects, with almost 40% of all reported incomes of all those living within the Red Hook community below the federal poverty line—more than New York City (19.9%) and the United States (14.9%) (2016, pp. 67-68). Interestingly, the RHCJC is the United States' first multi-jurisdictional community court, which combines youth court models to accommodate the youth and the family throughout the court process (Brisman, 2016, p. 95).

In Chapter 4, Brisman offers the reader a step-by-step account of several youth hearings to provide a sense of the rhythm, pattern, space and salient issues typically heard within RHYC proceedings. He ends Chapter 4 with an analysis of RHYC members' perceptions of criminal severity and the significance of respondents' demeanour and remorse. Brisman's discussions with RHYC members indicated a more favourable response, and meted out more lenient sanctions to

apologetic and forthcoming respondents over what Brisman deems “impenitent and aloof” respondents (Brisman, 2016, p. 140). Indeed, RHYC members wanted to deliver individualized justice. However, the youth typically conflated the concepts “proportional” and “fair and beneficial sanction,” and partnered with a lack of sanctioning options within the RHYC, so there were fewer alternatives and resources to craft individualized justice (Brisman, 2016, p. 148). Furthermore, Brisman’s findings suggest that all offences brought before the RHYC were considered to have community-level impacts (tied to the RHCJC’s belief that low-level offences could and would lead to more/greater deviance) resulting in youth “participating in and contributing to an increasingly coercive, surveillant, self-perpetuating system”—one that serves to further the state’s claims as the sole, legitimate authority regarding what may be considered proper, acceptable, true and desirable (Brisman, 2016, pp. 140-141).

In the final chapter, Brisman considers the RHYC members’ balancing of the gravity of the offence with the attitude and behaviour of the respondent. Brisman returns to the geometrical models of crime, and argues that no current geometrical model of crime adequately encapsulates the RHYC members’ perspectives. However, he does not promote a new geometric shape or analogy. Brisman suggests that it would be more constructive to think of the image of the criminal justice system presented to the youth by the RHCJC as that of a funhouse mirror, “not inaccurate, but grossly distorted, with some parts enlarged and others shrunken” (Brisman, 2016, p. 157). The youth were taught by the RHCJC that there is no such thing as a victimless crime; instead, all crimes have a negative impact on “the community,” and the definition of “community” appeared to encapsulate a seemingly infinite entity of space and population. Moreover, the RHCJC advised the youth that there are no macro-level root causes for behaviour defined as “criminal” (Brisman, 2016, p. 158). Finally, the youth were taught what the law was and what some of the consequences of its violation may encompass. However, the youth were discouraged by the RHCJC from asking why, for example, certain laws exist and whether the law’s application and

enforcement was always consistent and fair (Brisman, 2016, p. 158). Therefore, while scholars attempt to understand the construction of and discourse surrounding crime and justice, Brisman encourages a sensitivity and interest towards young people's perspectives.

One of the strengths of this book is Brisman's focus on the criminal justice system as perceived by RHCJC youth. Brisman critically assesses whether youths' perceptions can assist in developing more elaborate, robust criminological understandings of crime, justice and law. It is clear that Brisman was successful in this endeavour. *Geometries of Crime* provides critical insight for academics and criminal justice practitioners considering the relevance of youths' perceptions within the criminal justice system.

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