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Review of *Juvenile Delinquency: Causes and Control* (2nd edition) by Robert Agnew

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BOOK REVIEW

Juvenile Delinquency: Causes and Control (2nd edition) by Robert Agnew. Los Angeles: Roxbury, 2005. 555 p.

Juvenile Delinquency: Causes and Control is a comprehensive text addressing the causes of, and responses to, a major social problem in modern American society. Although Robert Agnew is best known for his development of General Strain Theory, an individuallevel strain theory rooted in classical anomie theory and the more recent literature on stress, his broader record of publication denotes him as one of the premier theoretical analysts in the fields of criminology and juvenile delinquency. This text reflects his command of the discipline.

The book is oriented according to a number of themes. First, it is designed to be shorter and more focused than most texts on juvenile delinquency. At more than 500 pages, the text is not brief in its entirety, but many of the subject areas are covered in a concise fashion. A second focus is the adoption of a more synthetic approach to the field of research on juvenile delinquency. Specifically, Professor Agnew synthesizes the majority of theory and research in the discipline into four generic theories: strain, social learning, control, and labeling. Explanations of delinquency, as well as societal responses and efforts to control delinquency, are then interpreted through these four general perspectives. Finally, an effort is made to produce a text that is student friendly through the use of specific questions in the descriptions of theory and research as well as using the synthetic approach to consistently interpret the majority of this theory and research in relation to only four perspectives.

The strengths of the text are many. One such strength is its comprehensive nature. In the opening section, Agnew addresses measurement, trends, and patterns of delinquency. Substantial sections also are devoted to theory, research, prevention, and control of juvenile delinquency. The latter segments of the book include overviews of the major components of the juvenile justice system as well as addressing issues of policy analysis, deterrence, and rehabilitation. The comprehensiveness of this book makes it a good fit for courses in juvenile delinquency lo-

cated in programs that do not have an additional course focusing on the juvenile justice system.

A second strength of the book is the synthetic approach that Agnew takes toward the coverage of theory and research. As an introduction to the field of juvenile delinquency, this book is an attempt to prevent students from missing the "forest for the trees." Rather than presenting detailed accounts of the variety of popular explanations of delinquency and crime, Agnew focuses on four generic perspectives: strain, social learning, control, and labeling. Throughout the book, specific theory and research is described and interpreted in relation to these four perspectives with the hope that students will develop a systematic view toward the field rather than becoming overwhelmed by a myriad of complex (and often conflicting) theories and empirical findings. Agnew adopts the view that there are too many theories in criminology and restricting our focus to a few clear theoretical perspectives progresses the goals of students, researchers, and policy makers.

Another strong point of the book is the teaching aids section in each chapter. These aids include discussions of controversial issues in juvenile justice as well as exercises that require students to apply their newly gained knowledge to issues of the control and prevention of juvenile delinquency. The teaching aids, as well as the text itself, are written in a conversational style that is largely devoid of technical writing, such as specific theoretical propositions. Through the use of ordinary language rather than technical jargon the book's content lends itself as a capable resource for guiding discussions of modern issues and controversies related to juvenile delinquency. These teaching aids bring to life the substantive content of the text and an effort is made to promote learning through having students apply the material in the readings to their own life experiences.

A shortcoming of the theoretical section of the book is the lack of attention paid to the background of theorists, the history of individual theories, and the ideological assumptions underlying various theoretical perspectives. Also, few theories are presented in their entirety. For example, although a chapter is devoted to control theories, there is no mention of the assumptions on which this perspective is founded regarding human nature and society. Hirschi is cited, but the social bond of his control theory, consisting of attachment, belief, commitment, and involvement, is not mentioned. Similarly, a chapter is devoted to social learning theories, but the principles of differential association are not outlined and the reader is not provided the history or background that motivated Sutherland or Akers in the development of this perspective. In defense of this approach, Agnew is correct in his assertion that his treatment of theory adds clarity and simplicity to the study of theories of delinquency. However, many theoretical scholars and purists will be unimpressed by this cursory review of some of the classical theories in the discipline. An obvious fix to this problem would be to match this textbook with a comprehensive theoretical reader, although given a book of this scope, the additional assignment of a theory reader seems unnecessary.

A similar concern is the separation of the theory section from the research section, particularly as they relate to issues of power, class, gender, and diversity. Although these issues are addressed in portions of the research section, they are largely ignored in the theoretical section of the text. Consequently, the reader does not get a sense that issues such as social and economic power, social class,

and gender were taken into account in the development of theories of delinquency. I find this disconcerting because these topics are central to a critical discussion of society, delinquency, and crime.

Overall, this text represents a comprehensive introduction to juvenile delinquency and the juvenile justice system. It reflects Professor Agnew's mastery of the discipline yet maintains a focus on clarity and accessibility to students. It addresses the nature and extent of delinquency, theory, and research in the discipline as well as control, prevention, and the juvenile justice system. Although the book could stand alone as a resource for students of juvenile delinquency, I would encourage the addition of a theoretical reader that provides a more in-depth analysis of the background of theorists, underlying assumptions of theories, and the internal logic of the theories themselves. Moreover, the book could be balanced with the addition of readings that take a more critical approach to this social problem. As it stands, the broad scope and clarity of this textbook by Agnew results in a useful resource for students and teachers of delinquency and crime.

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