



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Transient Criminality: A Model of Stress-Induced Crime. by Anthony R. Mawson
Martin Daly

Contemporary Sociology, Vol. 17, No. 5. (Sep., 1988), pp. 655-656.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0094-3061%28198809%2917%3A5%3C655%3ATCAMOS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-A>

Contemporary Sociology is currently published by American Sociological Association.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/asa.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

The JSTOR Archive is a trusted digital repository providing for long-term preservation and access to leading academic journals and scholarly literature from around the world. The Archive is supported by libraries, scholarly societies, publishers, and foundations. It is an initiative of JSTOR, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to help the scholarly community take advantage of advances in technology. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

failure. In contrast, politically circumspect reformers have had more success by presenting their programs as ways of preserving rather than undermining the family. If Pleck's analysis is correct, the future of battered women's shelters is problematic indeed.

Domestic Tyranny makes excellent reading for scholars who are interested in the history of the family in America, family violence, the oppression of women, or the cultural redefinition of certain conditions as social problems. If it were to be issued in a paperback edition in the future, it would be a fine supplementary text for upper-division undergraduate courses in family violence. Its only defect is that the analysis and generalizations contained in the introduction and the epilogue should be developed in greater depth.

Transient Criminality: A Model of Stress-Induced Crime, by ANTHONY R. MAWSON. New York: Praeger, 1987. 335 pp. \$45.00 cloth.

MARTIN DALY
McMaster University

This book represents an attempt to explain the occasional "criminal acts" perpetrated by "individuals who normally obey the law." Its thesis is that people seek "stimuli" that are familiar and congruent with their present knowledge and attitudes (collectively referred to as their "cognitive maps," an idiosyncratic use of a term with a much narrower specific meaning in psychology); that such congruity placates them, while incongruity arouses them to an increasingly "intense" quest for "congruent feedback"; and that the absence of such feedback causes the "disintegration" of one's cognitive maps and an excessive level of "stimulation seeking behavior," which together produce antisocial acts.

Although the theory is dressed up in psychobiological jargon, with much emphasis upon such things as mutually inhibitory "neurotransmitter systems," it is in fact extremely unsophisticated in this regard. Citing evidence that particular stimuli and chemicals may influence disparate behaviors, Mawson advances the curious thesis that all motivated behaviors are really part of a single "spectrum of stimulation seeking behavior" (SSB) varying only in intensity: "Feeding

behavior, for instance, is viewed as SSB within a certain range of intensities, shading into 'aggression' at higher intensities" (p. 117). (We are later informed that "sexual" behavior is what ranks just below "aggression" in "intensity," a contradiction that is apparently not noticed.) This notion of a unidimensional continuum of motivated activities lacking any specificity of causal influences is wildly at odds with contemporary psychobiology, and Mawson makes it central to his theory.

The more basic problem with Mawson's thesis is that he is unaware that the human psyche consists of domain-specific mechanisms that have been designed by a history of natural and sexual selection to achieve adaptive ends. His view of human motivation is the decades-out-of-date idea that we are nothing but homeostats seeking quiescence. More strategic conceptions of human action are not confronted with counterarguments, but are simply ignored; the possibility that the "disintegration of cognitive maps" might often constitute an adaptive reassessment of tactics and short-term goals in response to unsatisfactory returns from past actions is nowhere considered. When men who can muster few positive inducements to keep their wives from leaving them resort to assault, Mawson thinks their behavior is explicable as intensified "stimulation seeking," and when assaulted wives defend themselves with lethal force, why then

in seeking intense stimulation from their wives (i.e., in the initial assault), they provide so much incongruity that their wives are provoked into seeking intense stimulation from them. (p. 205)

By invoking stress-induced breakdowns and by analogizing "crime" to "disease," Mawson endorses the transparently establishmentarian view that crime (or at least that perpetrated by persons other than career criminals) is pathological.

This book constitutes one criminologist/epidemiologist's reaction against the view that lawbreaking is instrumental action directed by rational choices. Mawson is impressed that burglars sometimes indulge in unproductive vandalism and shoplifters sometimes respond more to glitter than to real value. So "criminals," like the rest of us, are imperfect cost-benefit machines. Did anyone really

doubt it? "Rational actor" models can indeed be overstretched, but Mawson stretches his contrary model to an absurd extreme.

Drugs in Adolescent Worlds: Burnouts to Straights, by BARRY GLASSNER and JULIA LOUGHLIN. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987. 301 pp. \$29.95 cloth.

Kids, Drugs, and Crime, by CHERYL CARPENTER, BARRY GLASSNER, BRUCE D. JOHNSON, and JULIA LOUGHLIN. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1988. 244 pp. \$27.00 cloth.

STELLA P. HUGHES
Oklahoma State University

Documented in these books are the results of an extensive research project designed to examine drug usage among adolescents. *Drugs in Adolescent Worlds* seeks not only to impart understanding of the extent of drug usage among adolescents, but also to shed some light on the social meaning drug usage has for this age group. The authors examine drug usage from the perspective of the adolescents themselves and place it in the context of the "social worlds" in which these young people live. Both users and nonusers reported access to drugs, were subject to peer interaction and pressure, indicated varying degrees of family control, as well as positive or negative role models, and talked about being bored, depressed, or looking forward to the future. Drug usage arose in certain types of social worlds and was modified as these social worlds underwent changes.

In *Kids, Drugs, and Crime*, an exploration of the relationship among adolescents of drug usage and criminal activity adds much to the pool of information now available. Examined in detail are such topics as adolescent explanations for how drugs influence crime, both for themselves and others; how and why youths sell drugs, and the relationship of drug dealing to drug use; how other thefts and assaultive crimes are linked to drug and alcohol usage; the relationships of various risk factors to early drug and alcohol use and delinquency; the interrelationships of drugs, alcohol, and crime in the life processes of serious drug-abusing delinquents; means employed for neutralizing or legitimizing criminal activity; and the deterrent properties of

criminal justice sanctions for adolescent drug users. Included is a drug profile of those committing serious crimes and detailed case studies of both youths at risk and seriously involved youths.

The research, an ethnographic project supported by the national Institute of Justice, begins with some questions posed by prior quantitative studies. Through interviews with adolescents, both users and nonusers, living in a northeastern U.S. community, the authors elaborated on the traditional quantitative methods of gathering information. Because they maintained that studies using correlations of different factors may not provide insight into what the adolescent world is really like, they sought to add an interactionist dimension to existing information.

With the above approach, the authors gathered data on a number of issues (e.g., the relationship of marijuana to more serious drug usage, how and why adolescents use drugs, how drugs are distributed, peer and family pressures, why some adolescents avoid drugs, and how drug usage is related to crime). Some prior findings were reconfirmed, others elaborated upon, and still others found to be conflicting. The adolescent drug users were seen not as sick, dysfunctional, unmotivated, lacking in self-control, or low in self-esteem, but as operating members of their own particular social groups.

Methodology for the study involved a combination of qualitative information gathering (participant observation and in-depth interviews), as well as scheduled questions and inductive, computerized data analysis. Field workers spent several months becoming acquainted with prospective subjects and establishing rapport. Lengthy interviews of 100 selected adolescents followed. These adolescents were chosen by three sampling methods: a random sample comprising forty youths selected from the community; a purposive sample of forty youths who had been identified as being active in drug use and/or delinquent behavior; and a detained sample containing twenty adolescents who had been officially labeled as delinquent and were currently under custodial supervision.

Altogether, this research adds much to the current knowledge of drug usage among adolescents. It is rare that a researcher has the luxury of gathering such detailed information.