

important studies of corporate and white-collar crime conducted in the past few years were supported by the National Institute of Justice. Already there are signs that it is retreating from this supportive policy. If this signals a general retreat by funding agencies, in just a few years we may look back at this book as the high-water mark of what was one of most promising developments in recent American social science.

Neal Shover

Professor
Department of Sociology
University of Tennessee
Knoxville

Decisionmaking in Criminal Justice: Toward the Rational Exercise of Discretion, Michael R. Gottfredson and Don M. Gottfredson. Pp. 359; bibliography. Cambridge, Mass., Ballinger, 1980.

This book raises the question of how, by examining decisions, we can develop and improve information on and alternatives for achieving criminal justice goals. The book reviews criminal justice research findings concerning victims' decisions to report a crime; the decisions to arrest, release, charge, convict, sentence, and dispose of the convicted offender within the community or within the bounds of a prison; and, finally, the decision to parole. One problem, clearly recognized by the authors, is the uncertainty of criminal justice goals. Not only are we often unsure of our aims, but, moreover, the aims may themselves be conflicting. The most basic conflict, as the authors point out, is between the urge to punish and "various utilitarian perspectives that stress crime reduction." The authors themselves adopt a utilitarian stance, emphasizing crime reduction through policies based upon the best available systematic research information.

There can be no question that this is a valuable, indeed indispensable, book for serious criminologists. The book is filled with carefully compiled information on every subject it discusses. Although I think there may be some problems with its approach, which I shall elaborate upon shortly, I nevertheless felt I was reading an exceptionally intelligent and reasonable discussion of whatever topic was being addressed. The authors are particularly acute in their criticism of the research designs of the studies they report upon, although sometimes overly polite in their appreciation of some of the studies. But no matter. These authors enjoy a vast knowledge of criminological research literature, plus a lucid expository style combined with keen intelligence.

Yet, as I read the book, I found myself wavering between admiration and some irritation at their insistent attachment to what C. Wright Mills

called "abstracted empiricism." They favor large-scale, aggregate studies, reducible to variables and analysis by multiple regression or some sort of correlational technique. Most of these studies are woefully lacking in any sort of rich interpretation of criminal justice decision-making processes and therefore offer little understanding of explanatory or intervening variables. In fact, this book is not so much about criminal justice decision processes as about relations among fairly commonsensical and conventional criminal justice variables.

Again, this is not to suggest that the authors demonstrate anything less than a keen analytic sense about many of the studies they report. But their analytical skepticism stops at a certain point. For example, the authors make a nice distinction between "data" and "information" collected by correctional agencies. They say,

Large sums of money and a great deal of concerned, even dedicated, effort will have been made collecting data on individual offenders. Much effort and more financial resources often will have been expended to record these data in individual folders, to prepare detailed personal and social histories, and to record recommendations of the clinical and custodial staff or of probation officers. Further large expenditures of time, energy, and funds will be made later in efforts to restudy the person, to reassign him or her, or to implement those recommendations already made. Little will have been spent in assessing the relevance of these data to the goals the agency wishes to achieve—either for the individual offender or for the agency's general mission. In short, there may be much data, but there is little information, and relatively meager resources are expended to improve the quality of information on which the decisions rely.

This passage exemplifies one part of my problem with abstracted empiricism. The passage, well written as it is, offers an interesting distinction, but it assumes that the "data" in correctional files are sufficiently valid so that if only they were processed carefully—that is, abstracted—they would provide "information." Yet we know perfectly well that the dynamics and realities of criminal justice, particularly of plea bargaining, generate unreliable crime category data. Indeed, if the claim were to be made that accurate "information" had been provided on the basis of such "data," we should be very skeptical.

Another part of my problem is this: The book omits studies of plea bargaining practices. In my opinion, there are two essential decisions in the criminal justice system. One is the policeman's decision to arrest. This decision can occur reactively or proactively, and it is often quite hidden. The other is the prosecutor's decision about whether and what to charge, often made as a result of some form of plea bargaining. Prosecutorial discretion has become even more significant as jurisdictions adopt determinate sentencing policies. Where indeterminate sentencing is the rule, the paroling authority is the key decision maker. But when determinate sentencing prevails, the charge—and time served—is determined by the

prosecutor. This outcome has profound methodological and analytic consequences. By omitting plea bargaining literature entirely, the authors have scanted perhaps the most significant part of the criminal justice process, the part that develops the "data" the authors call for transforming into "information."

Let me continue my criticism by suggesting that the authors' "decisional" apparatus is finally perhaps a bit overblown. After summarizing all the research, the "factor" that turns out to influence the "decision alternative" to call the police, to arrest, to be required to post bail, to be sentenced to prison, and to serve a lengthy prison term is the seriousness of the crime. The secondary factor is the seriousness of the offender's prior criminal record, and the tertiary factor is whether or not the criminal and the victim previously knew one another. The authors also report that where victim and offender know each other authorities will bend over backwards to reconcile the two rather than to incarcerate the offender. All this is undoubtedly true, but I suggest that none of it is news.

To summarize briefly my views about this book: It is sober, intelligent, carefully compiled, usefully informative, lucidly written. Whatever my reservations about the approach, the authors show themselves to be superb exponents of it. The book—the approach—has shortcomings, but nobody who reads this journal or who regards himself as a serious criminologist can afford to be without it.

Jerome H. Skolnick

Director, Center for the Study of Law & Society
Professor of Law
University of California
Berkeley

Taboos in Criminology, Edward Sagarin, ed. Pp. 149. Beverly Hills, Calif., Sage, 1980.

As a science, criminology seeks *true beliefs* about the causes of behavior. As a tool of public policy, criminology also seeks to promote *good behavior*. According to criminology's own theories, beliefs are important determinants of behavior. Thus the problem: Since true beliefs may promote bad behavior, and false beliefs may promote good behavior, the criminologist must often decide which he or she prefers, truth or goodness.

In some cases, the decision is easy. Most criminologists, I suspect, side with the evolutionists against the creationists, merely noting that in matters of fact science is superior to religion. Some of our theories require that we agree with the creationists that buggery, druggery, and muggery may be promoted by godlessness, but to most of us ordinary crime is sufficient-