

**Lanier, M.M., & Henry, S. (2010). *Essential criminology*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. ISBN 978-0-8133-4416-4 Paperback \$ 42.24 504 Pages.**

Unlike traditional book reviews that are written by academics for academics, this review is written from a student's perspective. Reviewing this text from this perspective is beneficial because students, particularly graduate students, are most likely the intended consumers of this book.

An undergraduate student, who is exposed to *Essential Criminology 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*, will find the sophisticated vocabulary and critical overtone of this text to be a significant hurdle. Through no fault of their own, any student who lacks exposure to in-depth, analytical writing, like that found in *Essential Criminology 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*, will struggle while attempting to follow the evolutionary path of theoretical development as it is presented in this text. Upper-class undergraduate students, who might have been exposed to texts such as Akers and Sellers (2004, 2008) *Criminological Theories* or Williams and McShane (2003, 2009) *Criminological Theory*, will be more likely to find this text helpful. By offering a comprehensive discussion of criminological theory in one book, the authors demonstrate their student-oriented focus by providing an affordable alternative to buying more books and spending more money.

Graduate students, who are expected to be more independent and theoretically sophisticated, will most likely use this text along with others such as *Vold's Theoretical Criminology* (Bernard Snipes and Gerould, 2009) to ensure their theoretical foundation is well rounded. Similar to other theory-based texts, Lanier and Henry offer critiques, applications and policy implications of each theoretical framework, in a well organized clearly written manner. However, *Essential C criminology 3<sup>rd</sup> edition* also offers an in-depth explanation of each framework starting with the ontological assumptions and ending with both a discussion of the supporting literature and a critical analysis of the theoretical

perspective. For graduate students, the advantages of using a text such as this are significant and help to aid the student in his or her task of synthesizing, analyzing and critiquing criminological theory. In order to complete their required tasks efficiently, graduate students need texts that offer these three equally important components offered by Lanier and Henry.

*Essential Criminology 3<sup>rd</sup> edition* offers an accurate history of each theoretical framework, presented in a chronological manner that starts at the abstract of philosophical level. Once the historical development of each theoretical perspective has been established, the text offers a discussion of how the framework has evolved into its current "revision" using landmark studies and empirical research to illuminate this evolutionary process. Following an introductory chapter that explains the social phenomena of crime, each of the subsequent chapters discuss mainstream theories such as the biological or social theoretical frameworks.

In an effort to engage the student, the authors open each chapter by offering an anecdote in which they illustrate how the theory being discussed in that chapter can be manifested. By offering these real-world examples, students are able to begin formulating possible critiques, policy implications and crime reduction strategies based on the theory or framework being discussed. The student will discover that they are able to better isolate both the general and specific characteristics of each framework presented. The text gives the student the necessary platform from which to make an educated assessment regarding the theoretical legitimacy of each perspective. Furthermore, because the student is able to ignite his or her critical thinking process, the students will be able to draw less superficial conclusions upon the completion of each chapter.

Another helpful student-orientated aspect of this text is the formatting of the chapter summaries and conclusion. Summaries are presented as charts that both organize and

highlight the key aspects of each chapter. These charts discuss crucial aspects of each theoretical framework by offering concise statements regarding ontological assumptions, criteria for causality, public policy and evaluations. The conclusion of each chapter also includes a limitations section that allows the students to assess his or her critiques compared to the authors', while also identifying significant limitations that the students may not have considered.

The authors have tailored this text to appeal to a specific audience with a specific purpose. Any reader of this book must keep that purpose in mind. Lanier & Henry clearly intended to offer a critical look at criminological theory, which invites the student to be challenged by the substantive dialog which seeks to address the theoretical short-comings, discussed within the pages of this book. By dedicating the final chapter to more nontraditional progressive perspectives within criminological thought, the authors have provided the student, vital tools that will enable he or she to embrace the ever-changing face of criminology and criminological theory.

The final chapter of this text is perhaps the most significant difference between Lanier and Henry's work and the multitude of other theory texts available. By offering students a chapter that discusses marginal or nontraditional theoretical frameworks, the reader is able to see the evolutionary nature of theoretical development that is not beholden to more traditional assumptions concerning what will be theorized, what will be counted and what conclusions may be derived from this process. Furthermore, the student is exposed to an alternate paradigm that addresses the importance of such social phenomena as language, stratification, social construction, and the philosophical difficulties concerning the pursuit of objective truth. Along with "marginal" frameworks, this chapter also offers a discussion of theory integration, which illustrates how frameworks can be integrated in order to offer a more complete explanation or description of criminal behavior. Although the concept of theory integration is openly rejected by some scholars in the discipline, Lanier

and Henry offer an objective discussion of this practice, once again allowing the student to make the appropriate, informed evaluation of the theoretical viability of such an approach to theory formulation.

Overall this book is well written and organized with the student's needs in mind, giving them a text that offers a more-comprehensive overview of each theoretical framework. When compared to other mainstream theory text books (i.e. Vold, Brenard & Snipes 2001; Akers & Sellers 2004, 2008; William & McShane 2009) *Essential Criminology 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*, emerges as a suitable alternative, offering a critical approach which emerges from a progressive theoretical orientation.