

Punishment & Society

**Ben Crewe, Andrew Goldsmith and Mark Halsey, Power, and Pain in the Modern Prison: The Society of Captives Revisited, Oxford; Clarendon, 2022, 416 pp., £80 (Hardback) ISBN 9780198859338**

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3 Ben Crewe, Andrew Goldsmith and Mark Halsey, *Power, and Pain in the Modern Prison:*  
4 *The Society of Captives Revisited, Oxford: Clarendon, 2022, 416 pp., £80 (Hardback) ISBN*  
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9 This book is a wonderfully crafted ensemble of examinations and critiques of Sykes's seminal  
10 work, *The Society of Captives*. Sykes (1958) recognised the value in understanding prison life,  
11 an institution that was shrouded in secrecy, hard to access and evaluate. Sykes provided a  
12 framework that emphasised the ways in which the prison institution applied their power toward  
13 the prisoner. In doing so, he was able to describe the experience of imprisonment and the impact  
14 it had on the prisoner subjected to it. Widely regarded as one of the founding and pre-eminent  
15 texts into the conditions of imprisonment, his work has stood the test of time as a starting point  
16 for understanding authority, power, and governance in the penal institution. The contributions  
17 to this edited collection recognise the significance of this work and skilfully situate and  
18 critically consider the theoretical and empirical notions of Sykes, within both historical and  
19 contemporary contexts, recognising the enduring relevance of Sykes in the penal landscape.  
20 This positions this book firmly as an accessible and insightful addition to both undergraduate  
21 and postgraduate students reading lists but also scholars in the fields of critical penology and  
22 theoretical criminology.  
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34 The collection of 16 chapters spans 4 key sections. Firstly, '*Situating Sykes*,' secondly, *The*  
35 *Pains of Imprisonment*, thirdly *Prisoner Culture and Society* and finally *Order and Authority*.  
36 Given the plethora of ideas and arguments presented, I focus attention on some core themes  
37 that emanate across chapters.  
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41 A key theme that emerges from the book is the somewhat myopic nature of Sykes' work  
42 (sometimes unwitting and time-bound), and its treatment in subsequent scholarly  
43 considerations of his work. In his chapter, Sparks advances the narrative that there is the  
44 propensity for seminal classic texts to produce and sustain a set of limited, 'standard' readings.  
45 Ugelvik's chapter resonates with this when considering Sykes work through a Norwegian lens,  
46 situating the perspective of Norwegian penologists as a narrow consideration 'lost in  
47 translation,' lacking reflection on the complexity of penal experience, preoccupied with the  
48 pains of imprisonment and as such precluding the 'many possible Sykeses' (p.85) that exist.  
49 These also contrive to create an iatrogenic outcome, pigeon holing focus on some aspects of  
50 his work at the expense of the other aspects of his purpose, in relation to social and political  
51 contexts of the time.  
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3 For Sykes, the prison is symbolic of the application of state power to punish and exclude. Prior  
4 to this there had been various commentators that had identified the negative impact of  
5 imprisonment and its imposition of social and material pains on those housed within them  
6 (Dickens, 1883; Mayhew, 1862). Yet in his chapter, Haney draws attention to what Sykes'  
7 account neglects and his failure to recognise or at least reconcile its connection with the  
8 conditions that presented in penal history. that also existed when conducting his study. In doing  
9 so he delivered a rather sanitising effect.

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11 It is unsurprising that pain receives so much focus in considerations of Sykes work, after all,  
12 pain is intrinsic to punishment yet as Toch (1977, cited in Johnson & Toch, 1982: 18) states,  
13 'it has become increasingly obvious that the pains of imprisonment are not uniform or  
14 constant... Prisons possess diverse ecologies and house diverse populations'. As such, Sykes'  
15 work, whilst it is applicable to a range of contexts and a framework, could never fully articulate  
16 or capture this, narrow in its reach as it was finite in space and time. Sykes himself stated that  
17 'social reality must not be crammed into rigid categories' (xxiii) and as Pratt and Hosoi  
18 elucidate in their chapter, penal typologies advanced by Sykes ceased to be representative of  
19 demographic change . As such, Sykes' framework is also one that requires adaptation,  
20 expansion and extension beyond its original remit to address a range of other pains. Thus this  
21 collection does so by offering a contemporary interpretation and is able to bridge some of the  
22 gaps in Sykes initial theorisation which are symbolic of the range of proliferating pains  
23 associated with the modern prison.

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25 In doing so, Pratt and Hosoi's chapter considers the increasing elderly prison population,  
26 Bucerius, Beradi and Haggerty explore the experiences of indigenous women and settler  
27 colonialism in a Canadian context, while Jewkes considers the role of architecture and design  
28 in masking the pain of imprisonment behind an aesthetically pleasing public front. Further,  
29 Ievins' engaging chapter considers sex offenders as a penal society; examining the pains and  
30 stains of imprisonment associated with being a 'sex offender', exposing distinct power  
31 dynamics and morality-based social consequences.

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33 Halsey also points to Sykes deficiencies surrounding race and ethnicity, which Gundur and  
34 Kavish also consider in their chapter, challenging the notion of imprisoned men at the time of  
35 Sykes as equals. They recognise the white power structures that underpin deleterious outcomes  
36 for people of colour and lament the 'colour-blind approach' of Sykes, which homogenised the  
37 carceral experience. They consider the dynamics of the prison society and how they manifest  
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3 in the context of race both within the walls and upon re-entry, overcoming Sykes' reluctance  
4 to speculate on post release outcomes of the prisoner society, evoking imagery of a 'racially  
5 amplified cycle of captivity.' Simon's chapter in a similar vein challenges the dominant  
6 positive identity of the white, heteronormative male offered by Sykes, the 'real man' who  
7 endures their sentence with dignity. Whilst recognising the value in the context of  
8 understanding humanity yet also needing reconstruction to accommodate the changes in how  
9 power is enacted in prisons in an era of mass incarceration, and how prisoners challenge the  
10 prison regime whilst enduring penal conditions and maintaining integrity of the self, shifting  
11 from the real man to the 'real human.'

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Liebling in her thoughtful account builds upon a moralistic foundation and considers the  
changing shape of penal power and authority, its balance between prisoners and staff and its  
interaction with humanity, through different models of order and power to provide a more  
nuanced and comprehensive recognition of power relations and differentiation between them.  
Here the book begins to consider more deeply how power is exercised, with Goldsmith  
providing a novel consideration of the dynamics of power through the lens of Sykes'  
'Corruption of Authority'. He considers the relationship between the problems of social order,  
conditions of containment and prison corruption, the latter an area largely ignored in penal  
scholarship. Meanwhile, Scharff-Smith's chapter uses a Nordic penal context to consider how  
this 'corruption of authority' concept varies between institutions, regimes and jurisdiction. He  
thereby challenges the notion of corruption as simply being between staff and prisoners,  
situating it instead within penal policy itself and the deleterious effects upon prison staff  
enacting their role.

Another theme of interest within the book is the often neglected methodological and reflexive  
approaches of Sykes which have shaped penal research in the years since. The ethnographic  
and inductive value of Sykes' work, and early use of gatekeepers in penal scholarship, is  
considered by Halsey who positions Sykes as a reflexive scholar in an age lacking ethical and  
institutional constraints. The emotional and time-consuming labour of ethnographic research  
is recognised as 'slow science' by Halsey whilst Gooch in her chapter recognises the value of  
such an approach in response to wider socio-political change and to 'keep pushing boundaries  
of knowledge to capture prison life as it is' (p.211) to reflect the ever evolving realities of  
prison life; Ugelvik positions ethnography as an 'antidote to simplistic analysis' (p.87).

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3 There is a level of despair that emanates from this book. Despite the documented shift in the  
4 penal landscape in the sixty plus years post-Sykes, and the scholarly endeavour of  
5 criminologists and penologists, many of the issues that existed in the penal system then, clearly  
6 endure. Many have indeed been amplified given shifts in power enactment and responsabilising  
7 strategies of governance in a neo-liberal society. Today we still write about pain and suffering  
8 experienced within the institution as a current theme in contemporary criminology, rather than  
9 being able to write of them as developments in the historical past.

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12 In closing, the editors of this book, Crewe at al., issue a rallying call to arms for penal scholars  
13 to up their game through critical enquiry. The contributions to this book provide the  
14 stimulation, conceptual and methodological thinking to encourage this . Yet the book also risk  
15 reinforcing ‘pain spotting’, identifying and typifying- “construing the world as a spectacle, as  
16 a set of significations to be interpreted rather than as concrete problems to be solved  
17 practically” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; 39). The development or otherwise of tangible  
18 mechanisms of reform, supported by a receptive audience in policy and government, dictate  
19 whether the pains of imprisonment will prove capable of being suitably addressed.  
20 Contributions to this book establish a firm foundation from which to take steps forward in that  
21 process.  
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