

# The social reality of violence and violent crime

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



The book "The Social Reality of Violence and Violent Crime" by Henry H. Brownstein concerns a very critical and disturbing aspect of life of our modern society. Indeed, some of the most hotly debated topics today are in one way or another connected to violence, be they issues of adolescent crime, the high percentage of violent behavior at the workplace, in families, violence by drug addicts, etc.

To put it simply - it must be acknowledged that the anxiety about violence as such within our society has become one of the most prominent elements of our world view. In this regard, the mentioned book by Henry H. Brownstein aims to accomplish a truly important task of uncovering the role that violence and violent crime play within our perception of the social reality that surrounds us.

In accordance with this task and considering the complexity of the field of his study, the author of this work decided to maintain a live connection with his audience by means of collecting stories from real life, which helps to characterize violence and violent crime in the United States from points of view of both individuals and social groups.

This approach of the author is really important as in this way he manages to convincingly show how violence may be perceived differently by different people, and how those differences in perception of violence have developed in our society during the last century.

Thus, the author's views on the perception of violence are to a large degree based on the principles of social constructivism which state that our

knowledge is not completely objective, but rather is to a certain degree subjectivity constructed by existing social influences (Brownstein 1999, p. 3).

I think that the useful tool that helped the author to achieve his aim was his ability to meld together his personal narratives and experiences of other people related to violence with excerpts from reports of media, official statistics, and research.

As the author opens each chapter with some story that helps readers properly understand what forms violence may take, where it exists, and what are probable reasons of its existence, readers can begin to see how all those complex and often seemingly separated from real life sociological concepts in fact stem from concrete historical and cultural conditions of our society.

Indeed, even though it might sound quite sad, it seems that for many of us who were lucky to avoid personal encounters with violence it takes only shocking stories of real victims of violence and violent offenders to be able to see violence not as a merely dry statistics but as a terrible reality.

At the same time, I think that one of the merits of Brownstein is that along with his personalized approach to interpretation of place of violence in our lives he nevertheless does not forget about more general social considerations and at the end of every chapter also discusses relevant social policies.

This allusion to the realm of political decision-making is valuable as such because of the competence of the author, and at the same time it helps complete the picture of how violence is socially constructed, because policies

towards violence too often impose upon us some fixed and almost compulsory perception of it.

Finally, I feel that aside from his academic talent, Brownstein managed to convey to readers some fine nuances of his personal, even intimate, perception of violence. This is done in a very subtle way through his writing style and his ability to depict moods of people and his personal experiences. For example, he begins his book with a very impressive description of his visit to the infamous Sing Sing prison, and as he described his slow advance through a series of security points and bars, I felt as if coming closer and closer to something truly terrible. However, the story of the man whom Brownstein interviewed in Sing Sing left me somewhat baffled due to its ambiguity.

On one hand, the author described the case of a dangerous murderer, but on the other hand left me wondering whether the circumstantial evidence against him based on his cocaine usage was sufficient to be sure in his guilt. This story vividly illustrates the power of stereotypes that shape our perception of violence, and serves as a good start for the author's endeavor to shed light on this complex phenomenon.

#### Sources

Brownstein, H., H. (1999). *The Social Reality of Violence and Violent Crime*. Allyn & Bacon.