

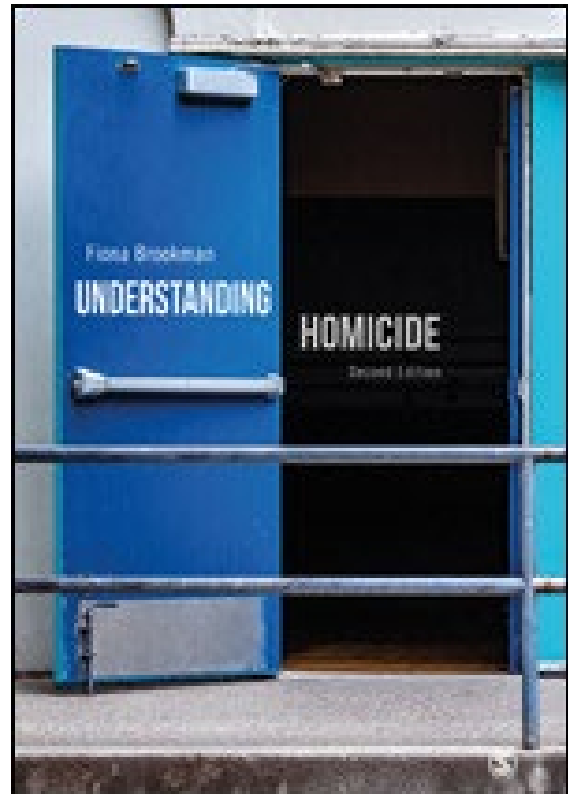
Book Review: Understanding Homicide

By Fiona Brookman
SAGE Publications Ltd
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Reviewed by Amber McKinley

Professor Fiona Brookman, University of South Wales, is a world leading expert on homicide and in *Understanding Homicide* (Second Edition) she has produced a comprehensive tome presenting key themes, including contextualising homicide in context, explanation for why people kill, breaking down specific homicide typologies and investigating and preventing homicides. It is 15 years since Brookman produced the first iteration of this invaluable text and this new edition is well worth the wait. For students and undergraduates, in courses such as sociology, criminology, criminal justice, forensic and psychology it is a well-written and organised textbook. It would also be fascinating to the lay reader as the text has been written in a style that assumes no prior knowledge. Critically, it is also a vital source of empirical evidence for scholars and law enforcement practitioners working in this area.

The value of this book comes specifically from Brookman's own research. The book is based upon decades of her own research on interpersonal violence, including that related to her PhD. Brookman interviewed violent offenders in the UK and USA seeking information related to the complex interplay of behaviour, motivation, motive, opportunity, and causes of fatal violence. Combining tailored analysis of the Home Office Homicide Index with case studies and ethnographic research Brookman's textbook discusses



police investigation and responses to it, the ‘how’ in relation to forensic scientist’s investigations and, most importantly, how homicide can be prevented.

Further, Brookman has synthesised a multitude of different theoretical approaches, ethnographic research and in-depth interviews to explain lethal violence. Brookman presents different homicide typologies and reveals inequities of gender, poverty, and ethnicity, identifying the complexities involved in the investigation, room for improvement and prevention of homicides. She also begins the book with the legal framework of unlawful homicide in the United Kingdom which provides a solid basis of what follows. In addition to the biological, psychological, and sociological explanations of fatal violence, other critical areas covered in the book include:

- Bystander effects
- Corporate homicide
- Family and domestic homicide
- Female offenders
- Homicide amongst men
- Killings that don’t count
- Serial and mass murder, terrorism

There are three notable features in this book. The first is the sub chapter called “Killings that do not ‘count’” – this section discusses matters and typologies that due to the legal requirement to establish culpability and guilt are not solved or prosecuted. An example of homicides that are not counted in the United Kingdom are death by driving, death in custody or at the hands of police and those that fall into the category of the ‘dark figure of homicide’ which are matters such as: ‘no-body’ homicides, missing persons and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

The second significant feature of this book is the *pause for thought* ‘bubbles’, which highlight useful ideas and points of interest for discussion and deeper consideration. These help the reader focus on specific points of learning and apply their learning in meaningful ways. Other features within this text, designed to assist the reader, include annotated suggested further reading, study tasks, questions to review previous chapter and, internet resources.

Thirdly, the book stands out for the author’s shift in focus from pure theory to a more practical, case-based varied international examples, which illustrate

theory in action. In this first of its kind research, Brookman interviewed investigators, forensic and digital experts, however the most critical work was completed when the author was able to observe police investigations from crime scenes to court outcomes:

...My research includes fieldwork [in the UK] and in the US, as well as interviews with over 120 violent offenders in the UK, including 30 females. I have been very fortunate to gather and analyse data from both offenders and those in the criminal justice system who investigate their offences”
(Brookman, 2022, p.1)

The book is unique in that it has very few competitors and it bridges a major gap in criminological literature. Although Brookman based much of the text on the UK homicide experience, the text makes an important addition to international literature. This text is accessible and masterfully presents the nature, trends, issues, and legal frameworks related to homicide. *Understanding Homicide* is an excellent companion reader for traditional theory classes, policing, sociology, criminal justice, in fact, anyone seriously interested in this fatal phenomenon.

About the reviewer:

Associate Professor Amber McKinley (BLibS, MCJ, PhD) is a Clinical and Forensic Victimologist and an Associate Professor at Charles Sturt University. She coordinates and lectures in JST345 - Theoretical, Applied and Forensic Victimology and CUS532 - Human trafficking: A global perspective. Her research includes: Australian familicide (1816 - 2021); serial homicide (1806-2022) and factors affecting the increase in Australian homicide.