Social Control: An Introduction
by James J. Chriss.

Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2013.
(ISBN: 9780745654393). 293pp.

James Bell (University of Glasgow)

Social Control: An Introduction, published this year by Polity Press and authored by James J. Chriss, Professor of Sociology and Criminology at Cleveland State University, is a valuable addition to the field of social deviance and its associated control mechanisms. Although introductions to this area are available, they tend to focus on one social group (see, for example, Toyin Okitipki's 2011 *Social control and the use of power in social work with children and families*) or are classic theoretical texts (Michel Foucault's 1964 *Madness and Civilisation*, for instance). Chriss has managed to produce a readable general account of how societies silence voices that are considered deviant or disruptive.

Social control, as the author explains, is the study of how society 'extracts compliance of individuals or groups to some ideal standard of conduct' (p.1). The volume's exploration of this theme is divided into two main sections. Part I first posits the idea that there are three main types of social control (informal, medical and legal) and charts the historical development of these categories as well as outlining the major theoretical ideas used in current sociological debate. Part II takes the ideas explored in Part I and applies them to various narrower areas of interest, such as the difficulty in distinguishing criminality from illness and the issue of racial profiling, in an attempt to show how the theories work in practice. The scope of the work is vast and so it would be impossible to do justice to its huge range, but several key points may be drawn out by way of illustrating, in the author's words, the wide applicability of this 'dynamic and fluid phenomenon' (p.vi).

The first two chapters of Part I establish a general background to the subject. The content here is heavily theoretical, encompassing the thought of F. Ivan Naye, Talcott Parsons, Edward Ross, Emile Durkheim and Jeremy Bentham, among others. One of the

main strengths of the book is already apparent at this early stage: Chriss does not leave the theory in the realm of the abstract but ties it to concrete examples, using clear language that is never patronising or reductive. The first chapter, for example, opens with a consideration of the shooting of Gabrielle Giffords in Tucson, Arizona in 2011 and in so doing links sociological concepts to real-world events in a way that will undoubtedly be valuable for students first feeling their way through this complex material. What is especially useful about this section, however, is that Chriss is eager never to shut down ambiguity. He constantly asserts the ephemeral and changeable nature of his subject matter and in so doing fosters a spirit of enquiry in the student.

This strategy is continued into the first of three thematic chapters that make up the rest of Part I. In the section devoted to informal social control Chriss sets forward the main tenants of the theory of socialisation, or the idea that individuals are shaped by their specific social circumstances and inculcated with the prevailing norms and values of their historical moment. The treatment of this theme is comprehensive and ranges from early theoretical work to more recent experimental studies. As is the case with every chapter, this one ends with a brief but apt list of further recommended reading and a selection of study questions. This is a welcome addition to the book, but as no suggested answers are given they will be of limited use to the independent learner.

The next chapter is dedicated to medical control and, following Foucault, sets out the theory that supposedly binary categories of 'sickness' and 'health', 'sanity' and 'insanity' are in fact culturally and historically specific. The modern trend towards government intervention in matters of public health should therefore not be taken as the apex of our society's moral development, but rather a reflection of current attitudes to control and regulation of behaviour. As Chriss does so expertly elsewhere, here he weaves theory with practice in an easy conversational style. However, the content does verge into needless repetition at various points, which does reduce its readability somewhat.

Part I ends with an exploration of various forms of legal control and charts the shift from informal modes of ensuring compliance to the rise of institutional bodies, such as the police and courts, that took over this function. Illuminating attention is also paid to

various theories of prison systems, including the early work of Jeremy Bentham and the later development of this theme by Foucault. The same strengths and weaknesses are again apparent here: what the reader may see as frustrating repetition is compensated for by clear exposition of complex ideas and apt linkages to experiments and examples of the theory in action.

Part II has the declared aim of applying the theoretical concepts of the first section to various case studies, however the book is only partially successful in doing this. Chriss homes in on various more localised examples of social control, encompassing the problem of housing segregation in the inner city, questions of the categorisation of illness in the case of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and selective mutism, the ambivalent position of violence in a medical context and the vexed question of racial profiling. There is also an additional chapter dealing with terrorism and a thought-provoking conclusion that usefully widens out the scope of the book. It seems, however, that it would have been more useful to focus on even more specific cases, perhaps based on an article or research paper, rather than essentially mirroring the approach of Part I and presenting further theoretical concepts merely attached to extended examples. For example, the chapter on terrorism includes an interesting discussion on the actions of Hezbollah in Israel since 2006. By structuring the chapter around a detailed consideration of this one case, the book could have been helpful for students taking research methodology classes by equipping them with the necessary skills of critical analysis.

This reservation does not diminish the generally excellent treatment of what are complex and multi-faceted phenomena. The most striking aspect of Part II is Chriss's ability to illustrate his theoretical observations with contemporary examples that will resonate even with young readers. The chapter on medical control and selective mutism mentions the Virginia Tech shooting in 2007, and the legal control section contains an analysis of the role of the 11th September 2001 terrorist attacks in fomenting racial tension in America. However the fact that the book attempts to encompass so much also means some sections feel a little superficial; greater detail on fewer topics might have worked better in Part II.

Social Control: An Introduction is a valuable resource for students starting out in the social sciences. Its rigorous treatment of theory, coupled with relevant examples, ranging from the place of mass media in modern society to the role of gonzo justice, also makes it useful in other contexts. The reader cannot but make links and associations that could be beneficial in the study of literature and literary theory, contemporary politics as well as history, psychology or criminology.

The Kelvingrove Review
www.gla.ac.uk/tkr