The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better - Richard G. Wilkinson and Kate Pickett

Pickett, K. and Wilkinson, R. (2009) *The Spirit Level*. London, Allen Lane

The Gist:

Absolutely ace book for statistics, this will be useful to anyone studying any branch of sociology, anthropology, criminology etc. So it basically presents a whole bucket load of data (taken from countries all around the world) and makes correlations between disparity of wealth, and societal problems.

By ‘societal problems,’ they cover a huge range of issues – teen pregnancy, mental illness, gun crime, social mobility, life expectancy, crime rates, percentage of incarcerated populations. Tonnes of it.

As you can probably guess, the higher the disparity of income (so how much richer and the richest people, than the poorest people in a country) is positively correlated with really shitty issues (like higher crime rates, lower life expectancy, higher percentage of population in prison etc).

Contents:

**Part I. Material Success, Social Failure**

* The end of an era
* Poverty or Economic inequality?
* How inequality gets under the skin

**Part II. The Costs of Inequality**

* Community life and social relations
* Mental health and drug use
* Physical health and life expectancy
* Obesity: wider income gaps, wider waists
* Educational performance
* Teenage births: recycling deprivation
* Violence: gaining respect
* Imprisonment and punishment
* Social mobility unequal opportunities

**Part III. A Better Society**

* Dysfunctional societies
* Our social inheritance
* Equality and sustainability
* Building the future

Ease To Read:

This is really easy to read, they have little tiny wee chapters that are broken up every 2/3 pages into subheadings. Written really well, this is honestly something you could read as a book for fun, it just feels like reading a normal book.

Also has fun cartoons every few pages to break up the text – this is one of the easiest academics books to read.

I’d recommend reading it with a highlighter and just marking down anything you think is interesting (and there’s loads of bits that are interesting).

If you still can’t be arsed, this TED Talk goes over the key bits, and it’s only 15 minutes long:

<https://www.ted.com/talks/richard_wilkinson_how_economic_inequality_harms_societies>

Best Bits:

I love how many studies they cite. You can read this book, or even a chapter of it, and have a huge chunk of your research for an assessment done. Each one is cited in the back (though not in Harvard – Sorry).

Chapter 11 (Imprisonment and Punishment – pp. 145-156) is fantastic as a criminologist. It is written in such an accessible way that is consolidates what you’ve learnt in lectures really well. Also Chapter 10 (Violence: Gaining Respect – pp. 129-144).

Part Three is great for a nice lil’ bit of optimism. Obviously a huge issue with criminology is that it’s super depressing and makes you want to give up on society and humanity – but this final part gives a lot of hope.

For example, p. 199: “In our research for this book, social status and friendship have kept cropping up together…as we saw in Chapter 6, friendship and involvement in social life are highly protective of good health.” Pure.

This book will give you tonnes to think about. Read it.