

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

**PAT CARLEN (ed.), *Women and Punishment: The Struggle for Justice*. Devon, UK: Willan Publishing. 2002, xiv+265 p., Index.**

Female prison populations have risen dramatically in the past few decades. Paralleling these rising numbers has been a growing concern about the way in which prison affects women's lives. Despite this increased attention, Pat Carlen writes in *Women and Punishment*, "¼questions of women's punishment are still fraught with confusion and contradiction – many of them having been aggravated, rather than alleviated, by recent twists and turns in the ongoing struggle to make the punishment of women less damaging to themselves and their families¼(p.5)."

To shed some light on current issues that surround the study of women and punishment, Carlen brings together criminal justice personnel, campaigners and/or academics closely involved in the evolution of women's imprisonment and the "struggle for justice," so aptly included in the subtitle of this book. One key objective of this edited volume is to describe current practices and provide detailed context about some key issues while, at the same time, offering critiques of how women are punished and imprisoned. In keeping with these goals, the collection of articles is divided into three sections – context, practice, and critique – and organized around seven themes that relate to both philosophical and practical issues that have reoccurred time and again in the literature on women and punishment.

For example, several contributors address the question of whether it is desirable for prisons to be used for 'treatment,' a common argument for women's incarceration. They ask whether potential benefits of treatment are possible when it occurs in a secure environment that erodes the voluntary aspect – an element of treatment believed to be important to successful outcomes. More broadly, other contributors focus on penal philosophy, asking whether non-criminal or 'social justice' issues should be goals of women's prisons. On the one hand, it seems reasonable because the majority of prisoners have needs that, if not addressed, will likely lead to re-offending once released (pg. 15). Doesn't it make sense to do something with people who come into the system when given the opportunity? On the other hand, is it wrong to offer care and treatment to people who commit crimes when the same care and treatment is not available to those who have not been labeled 'criminal,' but have similar needs? In short, contributors examine what should be the overarching goal of women's prisons?

The contributors agree that the number of women being imprisoned needs to be reduced and that this is not happening. In the face of this dilemma, the most appropriate question and the one that appears to underlie each of the chapters is how do we make the most of a bad situation? What is the best response to what seems to be, so far at least, an irreversible phenomenon? What are the barriers that need to be overcome before the situation can be addressed effectively? Some of the contributors who work within the system are committed to implementing programs that are best suited to the needs of women, recognizing that because the programs take place within a prison, their impact may be constrained. Others ask whether women should be sentenced according to different criteria than men and, similarly, whether the quest for a 'gendered justice' is viable? This age-old debate continues to persist because evidence suggests that gendered justice does exist – research shows that women are punished differently than men. Various contributors discuss a number of concepts that inform this debate – legitimacy, equality, parity and feasibility—discussing how these terms relate to decisions about gender and punishment. Those who focus on the practical issues of imprisonment appear to assume the need for parity, arguing that this leaves room for difference in programming whereas others conclude that gender specificity can be more limiting than originally intended and, as a result, should be approached with caution.

Overall, this edited collection represents one of the most comprehensive volumes on women and punishment currently available. Readers have access to a variety of perspectives on multiple issues such as sentencing, imprisonment, programming and reform. Perspectives and experiences from various locales are represented. As such, this book is useful for those interested in or studying women and punishment as well as for those working in the field. It is difficult reading at times, however, and so may not be accessible to undergraduate students, but well suited for graduate students in a course on women and justice.

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