

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

PAT CARLEN and ANNE WORRALL, *Analysing Women's Imprisonment*. Portland, Oregon: Willan Publishers, 2004, xi + 242 p.

Criminalized women are perhaps no longer “too few to count,” yet many of the assumptions, categories, and claims that correctional systems across the world draw on to determine what counts for this population are as problematic as the silence they fill. Carlen and Worrall, two internationally recognized feminist criminologists, begin their comprehensive overview by justifying their task – why a book on women’s imprisonment, if crime tends to be dominated by young men? Nearly thirty years since Carol Smart’s groundbreaking *Women, Crime and Criminology: A Feminist Critique*, the study of women and crime remains marginal to the discipline of Criminology. Carlen and Worrall nevertheless address tough questions about the relationship between theory and politics. As feminist discourses are neutralized by official penal policy and practice, I still wonder whether feminist criminology can be called upon to bring about what Carlen has called “women-wise penology” and what such a program would look like.

Carlen and Worrall offer three main rationales for the appropriateness of the project. First, increased interest in women’s crimes and the social control of women has accompanied a rapidly increasing prison population in England, Wales, and beyond since the 1990s. Second, empirical evidence demonstrates a marked difference in women’s experiences in courts and prison from men’s experiences. Third, understanding women’s imprisonment offers insights into contemporary politics of gender and penal justice.

Several themes in the monograph resonate with current debates on the criminalization of women. Some of the important questions addressed include the following: What are women’s criminogenic needs? (Chapter 1); Who are women in prison? (Chapter 2); How does the process of criminal justice construct the imprisonable woman? (Chapter 3); What are women’s prisons for? (Chapter 4); What are the alternatives to prison for women? (Chapter 5); What is the relationship between knowledge and politics? (Chapter 6); What practical issues are involved in investigating women’s imprisonment? (Chapter 7).

One key theme developed through the book is the shift witnessed in Britain and elsewhere whereby prison reform has been translated into prisoner reform. Carlen and Worrall argue that prison accountability has been

defined in official penal discourse as prisoner accountability. A similar trend is found in Canada, where categories of women's needs have been viewed through the lens of risk discourse. In the context of neo-liberal governance and coupled with a co-opted version of feminist discourses of empowerment, such seemingly benign "needs" have become rationales for punishment. Carlen and Worrall argue that the use of "empowerment" in relation to women's imprisonment is disingenuous, as it fails to recognize the prison structure or overriding goal – to incarcerate.

Common concerns about women in prison transcend national borders. Of these, the following excerpt is telling of the problematic direction of women's penality:

Prison could be justified on two related grounds: if a woman's needs were such that she was at increased risk of committing crime in the future she should go to prison because, being needy, she posed a risk; and by going to prison she could have her needs addressed and the risk would be diminished. Needless to say, the needs to be addressed in prison were psychological needs related to the adjustment of how the woman viewed her criminal behaviour and social situation; rather than the material needs that, according to anti-prison campaigners had, in part, created the conditions conducive to many women's lawbreaking behaviour in the first place (21, emphasis mine).

Institutionalizing women "for their own good" has a long history. The process harkens back to mid-19th century campaigns in North America and Europe to domesticize, feminize, and otherwise make good out of bad girls, who were differentially defined as incorrigible, sexually promiscuous, idle or dissolute, but similarly treated as 'other.' As Carlen argued in her chapter in *Punishment and Social Control* (1985), the male motto of "discipline and punish," for women was translated into "discipline, medicalise, domesticise, psychiatrise, and infantalise." The text leaves space to elaborate by including work on the incarceration of women in non-penal sites, of which Linda Mahood's (1990) *The Magdalene's* is exemplary. As more and more women are sent to prison, a new rationale – for the greater good – has been championed in the Western world. Need/risk categories are not only used to protect women from themselves, but to keep the alleged rising tide of the "new breed of female criminal" behind bars, constricted, and controlled. The target of this new punitiveness is young, single (racialized) mothers.

Another key issue Carlen and Worrall tackle is the alternatives to custody debate. Alternatives, they argue, tend to ignore what leads women to custody. Alternatives become part of wider governance strategies that fail to locate the women who find themselves in prison in structural terms. What Mary Eaton in *Women After Prison* (1993) refers to as "the structural preconditions of social justice" are peripheral to responsibilization strategies which shift attention away from social structure and toward women's desire, or willingness to assume sole responsibility, for both their offending history and change.

Carlen and Worrall demonstrate that the pains of imprisonment are just that: painful. After reading their work, however, I do not have a greater appreciation of what those pains are. *Analyzing Women's Imprisonment*, if indicative of the wider literature it represents, tells us very little about what it is like to be in prison. An excellent example of this project is Elizabeth Comack's (1996) *Women in Trouble*, which weaves together the stories of criminalized women, their troubles with the law, their prison experience, and their abuse histories. I would have also liked to have seen more about how female prisoners respond to being in prison. I have gained a greater appreciation of campaigns to abolish women's prisons altogether and the contradictory place feminist discourse holds in prison reform. Since criminalization is not a process that ends once women are behind bars, further work in the area of how women respond to or negotiate their reality inside those bars is necessary.

To conclude, the book is applicable for undergraduate and graduate students, although their aim is toward a wider audience. It provides a good compass for students to navigate through the historical and contemporary discourses on women's imprisonment. Clear chapter themes, a "concepts to know" section, and topics for discussion are included among other useful aids.

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