

Book Review of *Women and the Criminal Justice System*

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Women and the Criminal Justice System

By Katherine Stuart Van Wormer and Clemens Bartollas

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The authors of *Women and the Criminal Justice System* add to the body of knowledge about women and criminal justice by presenting the topic through the unique theme of empowerment. The book focuses on issues of racism, sexism, and classism faced by women in varying stages and positions of the criminal justice system. Each chapter approaches its particular focus by means of an empowerment perspective. The book covers women and their roles in the criminal justice system as offenders, as victims, and as professionals.

The authors begin by stating the purpose of the book: "A major purpose of this text is to empower women who are offenders, victims, and workers in the criminal justice system" (p. 3). The authors present the argument that society and the criminal justice system are both dominated by men. This book highlights this fact and argues that whichever role the woman plays in the criminal justice system "her special needs and contributions are overlooked" (p. ix).

Five feminist themes were developed throughout the text: 1) women offenders, victims, and practitioners experience sexism, racism, and classism, and these forms of oppression contribute to the feelings of "multiple marginality;" 2) effects of multiple oppressions are not additive but interactive; 3) focuses on the social construction of knowledge and how it is typically male oriented; 4) emphasizes social context in a patriarchal society; and 5) empowerment. These feminist themes offer insight for the reader and for future research. This book focuses not only on the experiences of women in the United States criminal justice system but also provides women's experiences in other countries allowing the reader to compare and contrast different criminal justice systems.

Chapter one provides the social context of women in a patriarchal society. This background

establishes women's position in society and how that position is reflected in the criminal justice system. The authors address the oppression, racism, and classism experienced by women.

Women as offenders are addressed in the second chapter. Explanations for female criminality and different theories are discussed. The chapter also offers the extent and nature of female criminality; whereby the authors strongly debate whether female criminality is increasing and whether it is increasingly masculine in nature. The information provided on female criminality focuses on drug crimes and crimes of violence in order to refute or accept the debate. The authors provide data on the dramatic increases in female criminality in varying forms of violence over the ten-year period of 1988-1997. However, female criminality is typically characterized by less serious property offenses, which the authors neglect to acknowledge until the end of the section. A discussion of female criminality in all its forms should be added to the chapter in order to properly address female criminality in its whole. Also, providing males as a comparison group would have highlighted the difference in the nature and extent of criminality between the sexes. For example, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (1998), men made up 78 percent of the persons arrested in the United States (p. 222). Information of this type provides the reader with the understanding that female criminality is a small proportion of all criminality and allows the reader to place the crimes discussed in the chapter into perspective. The chapter ends with a review of a differential case processing between females and males, yet highlights only two studies on differential case processing. This section would have been strong if the authors had incorporated different perspectives from the vast amount of literature available.

Women in the prison system are discussed in the third chapter. The authors review the differential movement between the reformatory and custodial prisons based on race and sex. While this is an important topic, the authors' argument might have been stronger had they included Rafter's (1990) work on these dual movements, which examines these two dual historical movements of

the reformatory and the custodial prisons used to house female offenders. She found that white middle- and upper-class women would be sentenced to reformatories whereas minority women would be sentenced to custodial institutions. As a result, minority women experienced more hardships in custodial institutions. Rafter (1990) provides a wealth of information on these movements, which could have supported the authors' argument.

The fourth chapter covers women as victims and their involvement in the criminal justice system, tying racism and classism to sexual assault and child sexual abuse. The authors discuss the criminal justice response and victim-blaming within these realms. A unique aspect to the chapter is the discussion of the influence of media on perceptions of rape and rape victims, as this aspect is important and rarely addressed in textbooks. Also, the authors present a feminist perspective and discuss the changing attitudes about rape. They offer a unique approach by providing information on treatment and empowerment for sexual assault victims. In the authors' discussion of rape, they denote that there are various types of rape but only address the types that occur most frequently. This leaves the reader wondering what other types of rape or sexual assault exists.

The fifth chapter discusses partner abuse and since the book is focused on the empowerment of women, little is discussed about females in the role of abuser. The book presents one research study that finds women participate in domestic violence as much as men. The authors state that women participate in partner abuse as abusers; however, the distinction between women as abusers and women abused would have provided more useful information.

The final chapters focus on women's involvement as professionals in the criminal justice system and examine the entrance of women in law enforcement. The authors also focus on the culture of law enforcement officers and where women officers fit into that culture. Along with the discussion of the law enforcement culture, the authors include a discussion of coping strategies utilized by women officers.

The legal profession is addressed in the seventh chapter. This discussion includes the patriarchal nature of the legal profession. Women's historical entrance into the corrections profession, and the problems and barriers that they face, are addressed in the eighth chapter. Sexual harassment is a theme that is echoed in all the chapters covering women as professionals in the criminal justice system.

The final chapter summarizes the book and brings together all five feminist themes. It discusses the future trends in the criminal justice system and pathways in research. Overall, the book offers many insights into women and the criminal justice system by providing information from an empowerment perspective. The authors present this theme well and have begun the process of empowering women in the criminal justice system with this book.

References

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