

## Book Reviews

Alan R. Rosenberg, Editor

EASY TIME, FEMALE INMATES ON TEMPORARY RELEASE. By Belinda Rogers McCarthy. Lexington Books, Lexington, Mass. Pp. 214. 1979. \$21.50.

Anyone who has ever worked in prisons curing the sick must find utility as well as hope in this book. The utility lies in the superb overview of women in prison, as well as of the history and function of temporary release programs as correctional devices. The recommendations for change, based on the research project which forms the basis for the book, are especially sound and rational. The hope lies in the refreshing, consumer-oriented approach to actually studying the internal workings of a correctional program and its impact on inmates, in an effort to show how and why things go as they do. Hans Toch's lofty foreword is a delight in itself and is worth the price of admission. Essentially a review, it reduces my own to the mawkish carplings of a prison psychiatrist who has served hard time in tough joints.

The research study itself has flaws, and the language is often stilted and tends to read like a U.S. Government study of woodpulp grading. Dr. McCarthy, through content analysis of structured interviews, sought to assess the impact of furlough on the functioning of two groups of furlougees – women at prisons in New York and Connecticut. Viewing furlough as a stressful transition, she studied the behavior and feelings of women prior to, during and shortly after furlough, based on the assumption that unusual behavior or acting out not related to “external stimuli” must relate to various stressors of furlough. She found, somewhat surprisingly, that furlough seldom was associated with severe distress, and that almost uniformly women reacted well to furlough and perceived it as a positive thing, a nondemanding respite or vacation from prison.

Dr. McCarthy's principal finding – that inmates maximize the “party-time” or vacation aspects of furlough so as to do “easy time” – is an obvious and overwhelming conclusion. It seems to say that women who are locked up with several hundred other distressed, self-centered, sex-starved women love getting out, even if only for a while, and won't voluntarily make it an unduly challenging experience. The woman on the street could have told us that, and therein lies my only serious criticism.

This study's conclusion, especially in comparison to the customary objectives of furlough and the high expectations of furlough programs as rehabilitative devices, seems to suggest failure of the programs studied. On the contrary, I believe the jury is still out. A major problem with the study was that it failed to compare the actual or *official* objectives of the furloughs

granted in the study with the actual results (at least as perceived by the women). It may be, for example, that the furloughs were not granted for definitive or reintegrative purposes and were left purposely vague. It would be no surprise, then, that women perceive the furlough as a vacation. Another perhaps more important criticism of the research methodology lies in the client-centered "self-report" method. The author herself put her finger on the problem in the discussion of the difficulty of assessing the impact of furloughs on inmate mothers. In bemoaning the difficulty of self reports, she noted that inmates found motherhood a very sensitive topic and commented, "It may be that only the surface of the inmate [mothers'] feelings are touched . . ." and "had interviews been conducted weeks prior to and following [furlough] . . . a different picture of inmate [motherhood] might have emerged." (Parentheses mine — the comments apply to all inmates studied.) Which brings me to Koson's Rule: If you want to know how a woman is doing in a prison, don't ask her. Ask her cellmate, or count her trips to sick call. The uniform perception of the furlough experience as a good deal is a monument to the powers of psychological denial, which were only alluded to in the study. Indeed, I marveled at how much the author managed to learn without a collaborating psychologist or psychological materials by simply sitting down virtually "cold turkey" and interviewing groups of women. A sequel, done with psychological data and more "in depth," attempting to assess more of the overall impact of furloughs on the inmates' functioning and course, would be rich and impressive.

All in all, apart from my almost obligatory grumblings, the book is an impressive and worthwhile one. Anyone who thinks he or she might go into the prisons to rehabilitate or reform prisoners should read it. I especially like the focus on women, whose correctional programs, resources and literature often take a back seat to the men's. Dr. McCarthy's book is at once a challenge and a call to arms to correctional workers of all kinds to lay down their comfortable views of rehabilitative programs, the fashionably nihilistic rhetoric of rehabilitative programs, and take a hard look at what it really takes to "reform" people, and why it might be that nothing seems to work. It might just be that things are working exactly as they are designed to work.

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**SEX, CRIME AND THE LAW.** By Donal E. J. MacNamara and Edward Sagarin. The Free Press, Macmillan, New York. Pp. 224 plus Note, Glossary, Bibliography and Index. \$4.95 (paper).

This book represents an excellent review of current views of sex by the law as a reflection of society's attitudes. Psychosocial and theoretical considerations and the most recent important research are reviewed. The law's approach is discussed in philosophical, theoretical and general terms.

There are citations for each chapter, an extensive glossary, an excellent bibliography and a good index. This is a good book for a general review of the subject or for teaching purposes.

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