

**Pat Carlen & Anne Worrall, *Analysing Women's Imprisonment*,
2004, Willan Publishing, Devon, UK**

The upsurge in interest in prisons over the past decade has been fuelled by the rapid rise in prisoner numbers across the world. The increase is nowhere more obvious than in women prisoner numbers, with not only a rise in actual numbers, but a significant rise in the proportion of women in prison compared to men in countries like the USA, Australia, Canada and the UK. Over two decades the proportion has risen from about 3% to 7% providing a new challenge to advocates, abolitionists, sentencers and prison managers alike. It is in this context that Carlen and Worrall, two of the foremost criminologists in the UK, have written this text. They have both published substantial works on women in the criminal justice system and have both been active in attempting to improve conditions for women. In fact the authors provide a fascinating discussion on activism and prison reform for women, but more of that later.

As a text-book this does not have the focus of a particular argument or follow through a theoretical position as many of these authors' other works have done, although their views most certainly come through — one could not mistake that these authors are feminists and are advocating serious change. And their own positions from earlier works, such as 'women-wise' penology (Carlen) and Worrall's work on the blurring between prison and community, come through clearly in a number of places.

The historical insights helpfully place the current era using Foucault's idea of archival knowledge, which is 'ever reconfigured' (p 24) to produce the form of women's imprisonment we have today. As the major focus and information relates to the UK system, the section on 'the facts' is less helpful to a non-UK audience. This is always a problem in any work from the other side of the world and should spur those of us in the Antipodes to produce more. Although there is a section on international comparisons that includes a discussion of Western Australia's changes to women's prisons, in my view the comparison sections are the least engaging as they are so brief or so specific to a particular situation that they leave one a little frustrated. So the reader must make allowances for much of the discussion being based in the UK system. This though does not take away from the wide-ranging and challenging points and discussions throughout, that are not geographically dependent.

Many of the contemporary issues covered are indeed universal — human rights, being treated with respect and imprisoned mothers, but of course the particularly disgraceful over-imprisonment of Indigenous Australian women is not dealt with. This would take a key place in any work on Australian women in prison.

The broader theoretical chapters — 'Theories of women's imprisonment' (pp 77–117) and 'Feminist theories of imprisonment and penal politics' (pp 155–182) are excellent, thoughtful and critical introductions to key thinkers both in women's imprisonment and in general penological theorising. There are not only introductions to earlier theorists like Ward and Kassebaum who argued in the 1960s that women in prison had different needs, but also to Smart, and from Carlen to Hannah-Moffat who, in the 21st century, argues that reformers have failed to recognise the realities of carceral relations that limit the success of any reform program. The dilemma faced by all 'prison reformers' who want to see a

reduction in numbers in prison, that reform activities have seemed not only to have not worked but to have resulted in more women being imprisoned, turns up a number of times in the book in a fascinating internal dialogue. Carlen provides insight into her own personal dilemma with the story woven through Chapter 6, of her own deep involvement in the Women In Prison group that sought over many years to bring change to women's imprisonment in the UK and the growing disappointment and cynicism as each reform agenda was coopted by the 'system'. For example focusing on needs eventually resulted in needs being conflated with risk and women who were no risk to the community were kept under greater security because they were 'high needs': a challenging but familiar debate to Australian activists.

Not only are theorists on women's imprisonment discussed, so are general social theorists like Marx, Cohen and Foucault whose work has been highly influential in criminological thinking. Again there is a challenging section on whether reform of women's prisons should be debated separately from men's, that is should prison per se (male and female), be the focus of critical analysis and reform (p 169); yet another thorny question that has been debated for some decades, and is a great problem for students to tease out. You will need to read the book to find out what the authors think!

The chapter on research in women's prisons and with women prisoners is helpful for the broad issues it raises about ethics, participation and the place of the researcher but because some of the information is UK specific, some aspects are not applicable to the Australian or other contexts.

Two more things stood out for me. The book's absolute insistence on the recognition of women prisoners' experiences as having the central place in debate and discussion; that is theorising about women's imprisonment must be grounded in, and never forget that it is about the women's experiences and lives. And its refusal to be a static text or a book that glosses over the really hard questions of combining theorising with activism and relations with prison authorities.

Analysing Women's Imprisonment is more than a text as it not only introduces and discusses the major issues and questions in contemporary women's imprisonment and provides further reading, discussion and essay topics for each chapter, thus most helpful to undergraduate teachers, but also pulls the reader into the current and perplexing debates about the future of women's imprisonment, thus providing engaging material for postgraduates. In that respect it is a 'must have' book for teachers and supervisors.

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