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Review of *Making it in the "Free World": Women in Transition from Prison*. Patricia O'Brien. Reviewed by Katherine van Wormer.

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However, this is an aspect that is somewhat under-researched in this book. Two chapters look at Canada and the United States. Hugh Shewell notes a steady decline in public provisions in Ontario, but he has some faith in a strong labor movement (along with an entrenchment of a charter of social rights in the constitution) to restore social justice. Nevertheless, his discussion of such entrenchment is rather scant. The main theme in the US's chapter is that privatization is not on the policy agenda. However, Max Skidmore's analysis looks over-optimistic now that George W. Bush has become the President who is intent on reducing tax as well as exploring ways to privatize social security.

Overall, this book gives us some in-depth case analyses of private/public mix in social security within an international perspective. Despite some editorial oversights and somewhat randomness in the choice of countries for analysis, this book is a most welcome addition to the literature that helps us to understand the nature and dynamic of privatized social security programs across nations.

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Patricia O'Brien, *Making it in the "Free World": Women in Transition from Prison*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001. \$18.95.

Women who are punished with incarceration are far more victims of society than they are victimizers. As compassion takes a back seat in a progressively more punitive society, women connected to crime through family ties—workers who protect their drug-dealing children, or wives and girlfriends of drug-using men—are now subjected to punishment for crimes that were previously considered victimless crimes. Poor women and women of color, swept up in the hysteria of the war on drugs are paying the price for women's liberation at the upper echelons of society. Their children, through loss of their mothers and their homes are paying the price as well. After women served their sentences, transition back to the society and to the role of motherhood is exceedingly difficult. Where can such women, now stigmatized as ex-convicts find sober support systems? How can they find meaningful work

that pays well enough to enable them to support themselves and their children?

There are many books on female offenders and women in prison but none previously to my knowledge on women in transition following imprisonment. *Making it in the "Free World"* admirably fills this gap. Because formerly incarcerated women's voices have not been heard describing the vicissitudes of their transition from the institution of freedom, the narrative methodology, the qualitative, ethnographic design allows for the capture of stories and insights that otherwise would not be possible to obtain.

In contrast to most authors that utilize a naturalistic paradigm based on personal interviews, Patricia O'Brien skillfully integrates the narrative with theoretical analysis, a major contribution to the literature on female offenders in itself. The theory that informs this volume integrates the most relevant theories from social psychology (for example, Goffman's concept of stigmatization and institutionalization) with social work's feminist-based, empowerment formulations. Accordingly, *Making it in the "Free World"* would make a nice addition to any criminology or social-work-with-offenders course.

Divided into five interesting and readable chapters, this book moves from a theoretical overview through a follow-up in the lives of the eighteen ex-offender interviewees. Consistent with the strength perspective, the theme of resilience against overwhelming odds permeates each chapter.

Following a theoretical survey of the literature on recidivism and data on female inmates, chapter 2, "Establishing Home" reveals the individual problems facing women newly released from serving time. These problems, for the most part, arise not from personal deficits but from the failure of society to meet the needs of all people. The challenge to a woman on parole is very real: when a woman leaves the institution, she is required to identify the address to which she is going. Without income supports in place, without a boost from halfway houses or family members, a successful re-entry into the community would not have been possible. A continuum of care needs to be offered to women trying to re-establish their lives after prison. Social

services are vital to such women who may be tempted to return to the "old ways" without proper help and guidance.

In conclusion, as O'Brien eloquently states:

A feminist vision of justice would view offenders as members of the relational web of the community, for whom and by whom the social contract has been broken in both directions . . . We can begin using this approach immediately with nonviolent offenders through the creative application of community-based alternative sentencing programs that incorporate models for mediation and reconciliation (p. 140).

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