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From the Selected Works of Beth Huebner

January 5, 2015

The Ex-Prisoner's Dilemma: How Women Negotiate Competing Narratives of Reentry and Desistance. By Andrea M. Leverentz. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2014. Pp. xii+231. \$26.95 (paper).

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grants to live with simple human dignity and to provide the basics to their families. Similarly, she uses the term family “strategy” to describe why and how families migrate because it captures their volition but rejects the term’s apparent implication of control over their choices and conditions.

Sacrificing Families is well done and readable. At under 200 pages, it will be an appealing course book. Abrego’s work carries on a useful dialogue with other scholars, especially Joanna Dreby, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Cecilia Menjívar. Abrego ably extends this work and her analytical lens into the psychosocial interior of the transnational family. Her well-chosen ethnographic examples poignantly describe awful realities. The book is an important step in what is developing into a very promising scholarly career.

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An emerging body of theoretical and empirical evidence suggests that women’s and men’s exposure and response to life circumstances are distinct, signifying that the array of factors producing successful outcomes following release from prison may vary across gender lines. To date, little work has captured the unique narratives of women returning home from prison. Andrea Levenentz’s book *The Ex-Prisoner’s Dilemma: How Women Negotiate Competing Narratives of Reentry and Desistance* is an important addition to the literature, as she captures the lived experiences of women returning home from prison to a dynamic and often conflicting social context. Her qualitative study of women returning home to a transitional living facility documents the unique ways in which community structure, social relationships, and treatment programs shape the reentry experience and resulting personal narrative. This book also helps fill a void in the literature by detailing not only the unique gendered pathways of women in and out of prison, but more important, painting a picture of the ever-changing and duplicitous nature of identity management following a stigmatizing event like imprisonment.

The Ex-Prisoner’s Dilemma draws upon the narratives of a sample of women who were current or former residents of Mercy Home, a transitional facility for returning female inmates in Chicago, Illinois. Mercy Home provides no-cost housing and transitional programming with the goal of linking residents to positive hooks for change. Most women in Leverentz’s sample have not had to negotiate the criminal label before, and she documents the

manner in which the supportive housing program helps residents gain confidence in their ability to manage life after prison. As important, the facility provides a stepping stone to successful integration as it affords women a safe, structured place to help nurture and recreate identities. Little research has so fully described the nature of the halfway house, particularly among a sample of women. Leverentz paints a detailed picture of the facility, deepening our understanding of life in the transitional facility, and her work may aid other social service agencies in developing programming of this type with the goal of better understanding what works for female parolees.

Leverentz builds on two rich theoretical perspectives to describe the experiences of women. Leverentz centers her work on Robert Sampson and John Laub's age-graded life course model. Unique to much of the extant work with female parolees, she interviewed women multiple times, allowing her to paint a rich picture of the reentry experience as it evolves. Her work provides further documentation of the manner in which women's lives are embedded in an historical and physical context. For example, she does an excellent job of contrasting the excitement and optimism the women express with early reentry goals with the frustration and monotony that come with maintaining a "normal" life. She also describes the role that relationships as parents and romantic partners play in understanding reentry. Her study goes beyond the individual level and looks at how structural factors influence women and their interactions with others and society. For example, Leverentz documents the role of relapse as part of the narrative. Instead of characterizing dichotomous outcomes, she captures the vacillating nature of reentry and recovery. Overall, she is very successful in highlighting the duality and changing nature of social relationships, particularly with romantic partners, and this work denotes the importance of longitudinal studies of women and social experiences.

Her work also draws on Herbert Blumer's symbolic interactionist framework. Building on Shadd Maruna's study of male prisoners, Leverentz details how women make sense of their lives through their interactions with others, the community, and the environment. Narratives noted in the book are strongly influenced by race, social structure, relationships, and women's perceptions of their role in society. She pays particular attention to how women construct their pasts and how these narratives inform current reentry efforts and desires for eventual desistance.

Drug use was a pivotal pathway for the women at Mercy Home and influenced how women perceived and described their pathways to desistance. Leverentz's work provides a unique perspective on drug treatment and the 12-step narrative. Most women found the treatment narrative to be helpful in providing the clients with a language of recovery and acceptance; however, the nature of the program was not designed to accommodate the structure of women coming home from prison. As Leverentz points out, the

drug treatment narrative was one of many messages of “who they are, who they should be, and how they should live their lives” (p. 6). Drug treatment protocol is another example of how multiple identities could conflict post-release. Women strived to maintain the role of good mother, daughter, and intimate partner, but these same individuals were often concomitant with the people, places, and things that made treatment and reentry success more difficult. One of the key contributions of the work is her discussion of the duplicity of social roles, societal expectations, and prosocial pathways to transition. Few scholars have provided such a detailed description of the challenges of staying on the road to desistance while developing a sense of self amid a myriad of societal narratives and responsibilities.

Leverentz’s book is an important addition to extant work on prisoner reentry, but a few methodological limitations should be noted. Like most research of this type, the sample is restricted to women who volunteered for the Mercy House, and individuals must have indicated a desire to change to be enrolled in the program. The Mercy House did not provide facilities for children. Therefore, women with strong social networks and or child care needs may have chosen alternate arrangements. Challenges aside, she provides a nuanced description of the lived experiences of women returning home from prison. The book makes it clear that the reentry process is far from linear and that social relationships, treatment, and social identity cannot be considered absent of the context of which it occurs. This book is beautifully crafted, making it an important read for students, scholars, and policy makers alike.

Leaving Prostitution: Getting Out and Staying Out of Sex Work. By Sharon S. Oselin. New York: New York University Press, 2014. Pp. xii+207. \$75.00 (cloth); \$23.00 (paper).

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In *Leaving Prostitution: Getting Out and Staying Out of Sex Work*, Sharon S. Oselin, assistant professor of sociology at the University of California, Riverside, identifies the characteristics of successful “prostitution-serving organizations” (PSOs) exit programs for women engaged in street-based prostitution. Few scholarly works have provided in-depth examination of nonprofit exit programs, making Oselin’s book distinctive. Further, the book provides empirical data on the reasons why some women (here, street-based sex workers engaged with a PSO) begin to, continue to, and in some cases, stop selling sex. In so doing, *Leaving Prostitution* offers new contributions to criminological and sociological theories of sexual labor.