Living Inside Prison Walls: Adjustment Behavior


Victoria R. DeRosia’s *Living Inside Prison Walls* is a presentation of her empirical study of “how advantaged offenders, as a subpopulation, adjust to prison.”

The advantaged offender is defined as having a significantly higher level of education, income, and occupation, as compared with the bulk of the prison population. The advantaged offender also possesses a keener sense of self, a better overall personality integration, and a more meaningful social support network in one’s family and community.

These attributes provide the advantaged offender the basis for a successful prison adjustment, using the coping strategies of high status offenders: “denial of criminality, conformity with institutional rules, and imagined superiority over other inmates” (p. 15).

Before reporting the specifics of the research protocols and findings of her study of the prison population in the facilities of the New York State Department of Correctional Services, DeRosia presents “A profile of the Prison Inmate” and an overview of current “Prison Life,” relating to both the advantaged (upper social class) and the disadvantaged (lower social class) offenders. These two presentations are succinct updates, highlighting the present prison culture of the young, the violent, and the drug abusers. The author elaborates on this culture throughout the book, and she suggests that increased research on inmate behaviors is a key to better decision-making and planning, replacing the crisis management approach.

DeRosia provides in the first two chapters not only an orientation to life in prison and statistical profiles of offenders across the nation, but she offers a sharp reminder of the sheer magnitude of the total prison population, the constant expansion prison facilities, and the many dysfunctional societal aspects which underlie deviant behavior in the United States.

Based upon the results of her study, DeRosia concludes with implications and recommendations for improving prison management and effectiveness. Among these are: a major overhaul of the antiquated prison rules and regimen; the arbitrary manner of rule enforcement within an already chaotic environment; a clarification and agreement concerning a philosophy of positive behavioral change; the need to recruit, select, and train corrections personnel; and an increased effort to ensure a productive and busy schedule particularly for the subpopulation of “advantaged offenders.”

DeRosia’s important study should stimulate a response to the challenges in both inservice training and continuing education for personnel at all levels within correctional systems.

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