

# WOMEN GUARDS

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Lynn E. Zimmer. *Women Guarding Men*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Studies in Crime and Justice, 1986). xiv + 264 pp. Notes, appendix, bibliography, index. \$25.00.

Until recently, guard work in prisons for adult male felons was the exclusive province of males. The prevailing attitude was that the violence and unpredictability of those prisons precluded the employment of women guards. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2 (1976), as amended in 1972), however, guaranteed women's rights to seek employment in men's prisons. Prison administrators could no longer argue that "male-ness" was a bona fide occupational qualification. Since the 1970s the number of women working in men's prisons has risen significantly. But these women have found that getting hired is only the first, and in a sense the easiest, obstacle to overcome. Once on the job they must cope with the resistance of male administrators and coworkers, the pressure from inmates, and the problem of finding an appropriate role in this nontraditional occupation.

*Women Guarding Men*, by Lynn E. Zimmer, is an account of the problems faced by the "token" women officers in two male prisons. Her work is based on observations and interviews done over a two-year period in prisons in Rhode Island and in New York. Zimmer devotes chapters to such matters as how women come to be guards, whether they can do the job, and the future of women in corrections. Her primary focus and main contribution, however, lie in her treatment of three issues: (1) the nature and extent of resistance to women officers, (2) the coping strategies women adopt, and (3) the appropriate explanations for the patterns of adjustment the women officers reflected.

Although male prison personnel are resistant to almost any change, they are particularly opposed to the sexual integration of the guard force. Male officers feel strongly that their female counterparts are unequipped to handle the violence and other confrontations that occur in male prisons. Many men are also overly protective and paternalistic toward women on the job. As a result, women officers are often excluded not only from certain assignments but also from the informal interaction with veteran officers that is critical to correctional officer's socialization, regardless of sex. Particularly problematic for the women in Zimmer's study

were various forms of sexual harassments ranging from lewd jokes to blatant propositions. Although both prisons in her study had regulations prohibiting such harassment, the women officers seldom reported problems because they felt that complaining through formal channels would do little good and could even worsen their job situation.

Significantly, women officers appear to have less trouble with inmates. Although initially prisoners test women officers more severely and in some cases engage in sexual harassment themselves, Zimmer found that the officers' relations are more positive with inmates than with male officers.

Although all of the women in Zimmer's study experienced discrimination on the job, they did not all respond alike. She identified three coping strategies. The first she termed the "institutional role," whereby the women try to follow all prison rules as closely as possible and perform on an equal basis with men. They downplay their female status and try to ignore opposition. Other women adopt the "modified role" in which they support the notion that women cannot perform equally; they are sympathetic to male opposition to "women's libbers." A final coping strategy is the "inventive role." These women usually work directly with inmates, experience the most harassment from male guards, and feel their superior intuitive and communication skills more than offset their lack of physical strength.

In the final chapter, Zimmer moves the inquiry toward theory by contrasting the "gender model" and the "job model" that others have used to explain the occupational experiences of women. She concludes that these models should be combined. That is, the varying experiences and reactions of women guards are shaped in part by job variables and in part by gender variables.

Despite some redundancy in the description of male officer resistance, the book is carefully researched and generally well organized and written. *Women Guarding Men* makes an important contribution to the sociology of corrections and the sociology of occupations.

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#### STATUTE CITED

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2 (1976).