

*Reform in the Making: The Implementation of Social Policy in Prison*, by Ann Chih Lin.  
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Ann Chih Lin's *Reform in the Making: The Implementation of Social Policy in Prison* brings an important, fresh perspective to our understanding of prison program failure and success. Her keen eye, her ability to listen and observe, and her ability to tie all of the ethnographic fragments into a coherent picture of program implementation make an important contribution to understanding the context in which prison programs operate. Ann is also a consummate writer. She uses language almost as an artist uses her materials to paint a vivid portrait of the panorama of staff and inmate interactions. To gather material for her ethnography, she spent 10 to 12 hours a day for 3 weeks in each of 5 prisons. She conducted 354 semi-structured interviews lasting 45 to 90 minutes each, and recorded observations of programs, meetings, staff-inmate conferences, and casual conversation.

The premise of the book is that program implementation in a prison depends on the collective efforts and good will of the line staff. Those staff include both those that deliver the programs and those that are responsible for day-to-day operations of the prison. Ann's ethnography examines the structure of program implementation framing the problem as an extension of the concept of the "street level bureaucrat." In his classic, *Street Level Bureaucracy* (1980), Michael

Lipsky argued that line staff, rather than policymakers or agency directors actually make policy. “They exercise wide discretion in decisions about citizens with whom they interact. Then, when taken in concert, their individual actions add up to agency behavior” (Lipsky 1980: 13).

Most current assessments of program implementation see the problem as poor staff training, or problems in staffing resources. Ann’s insight is that successful program implementation depends on the attitudes and the cultural context of the entire prison, both inmates and staff. She fosters our thinking about these issues by developing an analysis along two dependent dimensions. The first is called prison centered needs. To the extent prison programs also promote or are complementary to the primary needs of a prison, both the administration and the line staff will accept those programs. As Ann and others have noted, the primary need of a prison is for order. Prisons must be safe for both inmates and staff. Rules and routines help to establish expectations about behavior.

The dual purposes of programs – as ways to keep prisoners busy, and as opportunities for self improvement and a better life – are, in this telling complementary. Programs keep prisoners busy because they provide rehabilitative opportunities that prisoners value: at the same time, the busy-ness prevents violence and alleviates boredom.” (Lin 2000, p. 44)

The second dimension she labels institutional values. This dimension contrasts an institution where the overriding ethos is for staff to support one another – the notion of staff solidarity– to an institution where staff and inmate communication are emphasized. In the former culture, the administration backs up staff even when they are wrong. Staff solidarity is a shorthand for a

culture that features an “us versus them” mentality. In a staff solidarity culture, “...for many staff, the two actions – backing each other and running to help when a colleagues’s life is threatened– are morally equivalent. Any relaxation of solidarity leads to a slippery slope. There must never be any doubt about where one’s loyalty lies.” (Lin 2000, p. 51)

In a culture of communication, staff interact with inmates by openly trying to understand the inmate point of view, by encouraging inmate participation in programs, by seeking to understand the inmate’s dilemma. These are, of course, idealized abstractions. Because prisons are about order, there will always be a sense of staff solidarity, us against them. But it does not take long for both staff and inmates to learn that communication and problem solving can preclude violent interactions, defusing situations before they get out of control.

Ann uses these two dimensions to characterize and categorize 5 institutions, four federal and one State facility, that she made site visits to. Successful implementation occurs in institutions where the institutional culture endorsed communication and programs met the needs of the institution. In that institution she observed variety and flexibility of programs; staff that encouraged program participation; an emphasis on staff-prisoner communication; and an acknowledgment by staff that the institution had a reputation of excellence which encouraged staff to support programs. In the institution where she observed neglected implementation, even though there was a culture of communication, programs did not meet prison centered needs. In this prison, too few inmates were enrolled in programs to make a contribution to prison order; programs seemed like an extra burden; however, because there was a history of quality programs at the prison and the

relationships between staff and prisoners was good, there was still a tolerance for program innovation. The institution with subverted implementation was one in which programs met the needs of the prison; however, the prison culture emphasized solidarity. In such a prison, staff maximize program enrollment to solve the problem of prisoner supervision; however, prisoners resent staff and are not interested in programs. Because of the emphasis on staff solidarity, staff modify programs to serve institutional needs rather than inmate needs. In abandoned implementation, there is a culture of solidarity and the prison programs do not meet prison centered needs. In such an institution, staff emphasizes solidarity among themselves and social distance from prisoners. The reputation of excellent custody means program staff have no leverage to ask for changes that might benefit programs and prisoners avoid participation out of resentment of staff.

If I have a quarrel with Ann Lin's dimensions, it is that she has taken what is well known in corrections as the conflict between programs and custody, or as the conflict between rehabilitation and "risk management," and woven it into an abstraction to suit the purpose of her thesis. I think most prison administrators understand the compromise everyone makes on a daily basis in a prison between keeping order and helping inmates improve themselves. The key to Ann Chih Lin's theoretical argument is understanding how prison program implementation can succeed or fail as a result of the emphasis placed upon prison needs and the institution culture. As I read her book and the many examples she uses to support her thesis, I was left wondering how we would begin to understand how these institutional cultures get established in the first place and how they are maintained. The glib answer is to say that management sets policy and staff adhere to that

policy. But if we are to learn anything from Ann's book, it is that the intended policy is often not the policy on the ground. Perhaps her next book will instruct us on the genesis of institutional culture.

I also came away from *Reform in the Making* with a deeper understanding of the meaning of rehabilitation and what it means in the context of how the prison system and the individual prison orient its staff to programs. If you only have time to read one chapter of Ann Lin's book, then read chapter 5 "The Importance of Successful Implementation: Recasting the Debate Over Mandatory and Voluntary Programs." In Chapter 5, we are introduced to different principles of rehabilitation. This is my terminology. Ann Lin argues that the most dominant approach to prison programming is the "will + skill" model. Prison administrators, indeed prison systems design good training programs, but the prisoner must be motivated – have the will – to participate and benefit from those programs.

In this kind of approach, programs are voluntary. Ann traces the genesis of the voluntary program model to Mitford's *Kind and Unusual Punishment* (1974) in which the author described abuses of the "medical model." Quoting Ann Lin "For Mitford, "treatment" was a euphemism for breaking prisoner's wills, ..." (Lin 2000, p. 131). Others were concerned about the possible excesses of the rehabilitative ideal which could result in too much discretion given to parole boards who made the collective decision of when a prisoner had been reformed. Norval Morris (1974) and others proposed voluntary programs that allowed inmates to develop skills. Morris' model was more complicated than that; however, it was adopted by the Bureau of Prisons as the humane treatment

model. The Bureau leadership, at the time, acknowledged that the science to diagnose and treat inmates was too immature, and that if inmate behavioral change were to occur, it had to emanate from the prisoner. Morris' model was to protect prisoners from the abuse of those who thought they knew how to transform the individual; however, it also included enough mandatory training so that the inmate realized what a particular program or skill could offer.

The distinction Ann Lin is drawing between what Norval Morris envisioned and what was finally adopted by the Bureau of Prisons could be called the difference between guided reform and self-directed reform. In the Morris approach, inmates are subtly directed to participate by a showing them the benefits of programs. In the latter approach, inmates must choose to take responsibility for their actions, and once taken, participate in programs that will help them get on the right course. Ann calls this latter approach the will + skill model. The will + skill approach satisfies both the liberal and conservative critics of reform. The liberal critics are satisfied that prisoners are not coerced. The conservative critics are satisfied that inmates receive their just desserts and that programs are an afterthought to punishment. However, Ann Lin is not satisfied. The will + skill model can justify prison post-release failures as the fault of the offender while exonerating the prison administration. The logic is as follows: the programs were offered; the offender simply did not take the responsibility to benefit from those programs through his or her participation. As Ann Lin argues, by accepting such a model, prison administrators are also less inclined to monitor the impact of their programs. They are also less concerned about implementation strategies or program techniques.

Chapter 5 also contains a discourse on “Hitting the Streets.” Her interviews of inmates are very telling. Inmates are well aware of the difficulties and obstacles they face when they are released. But they strike a concordant theme. By their sheer willpower, their determination, released offenders will overcome those barriers. Ann Lin concludes that prisoners, on the whole, have too high an expectation about what their will can do for them. That part of prison training ought to be “... to lower expectations giving [inmates] some room to construct goals that will not leave them disappointed.” (Lin 2000, p.144). Thus, rather than viewing rehabilitation programs as those that benefit the motivated prisoner, interventions might be viewed as those programs that generate realistic expectations, a kind of tempered or moderated will. The solution is to create an environment that creates both will and skill. This puts the burden back on the prison system to examine and study the processes they use to engender inmate motivation and design programs that give prisoners skills that will realistically help them reintegrate back into society.

Ann believes the modern literature on rehabilitation is evidence that such programming is possible. The principles of criminogenic needs and responsivity promoted by Andrews, Gendreau, Bonta and others, is seen by her as providing the theoretical underpinnings of a model that promotes skills that in turn affects will. Thus, teaching inmates self-control, Ann argues, is a technique for controlling will. Targeted programs, furthermore, address the specific problems of the offender and imply that the offender may need guidance in understanding his or her unique deficits.

While there is much more to learn from *Reform in the Making*, Ann’s discourse on experimental research design is a point of disagreement between us. Ann argues that we need to know the

context in which programs are conducted and that experiments do not provide this information. While I am in agreement that context is an important dimension of successful programs and that ethnographies such as Ann Lin's offer us tremendous insight, there are experimental and quasi-experimental designs that can also yield crucial information about the context of program implementation and program effects. Program and context effects can be studied simultaneously in many different subtle longitudinal and hierarchical designs. Our disagreement ends with Ann's assertion "...that process evaluation should be taken as seriously as outcome evaluation." (Lin 2000, P. 171).

*Reform in the Making* is a book that should be taken seriously. The inmate and staff vignettes tell us a lot about the difference between intended and implemented policy. Ann Chih Lin's analysis provides a theoretical framework to understand those differences.



## REFERENCES

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