

BOOK REVIEW

Holly A. Miller,¹Ph.D.

Review of: *Reforming Punishment: Psychological Limits to the Pains of Imprisonment*

REFERENCE: Haney C. *Reforming punishment: psychological limits to the pains of imprisonment*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006, 386 pp.

A classic study in social psychology, conducted by Haney et al. (1), first brought attention to the possibility that imprisonment was psychologically damaging. In their 25-year post Stanford Prison Experiment update, Haney and Zimbardo (2) retain their initial suggestion that prison inflicts undue amounts of pain. Haney's *Reforming Punishment: Psychological Limits to the Pains of Imprisonment* provides a compelling summation of his works, as well as that of other scholars, dating back to his famous Stanford Prison Experiment in the mid-1970s. Haney argues that the American criminal justice system continues to pursue imprisonment policies that not only create undue pain of those incarcerated, but actually increase the likelihood of recidivism. The theme throughout this book is the influence of social context.

In the first chapter, Haney provides the groundwork that illustrates how psychological theory can be utilized to make more intelligent and practical connections between the nature of crime and how our society punishes crime. Although it can be stated that both psychological and criminological theories have contributed to the importance of understanding "context," Haney argues that mainly modern psychological theory has the greatest relevance for revamping prison policy. In this first chapter, Haney provides four summary examples that offer the overarching structure for the remainder of the text. For each of these summary examples, he provides data to support the problem, and then details how psychological theory may play a role in changing policy related to crime and punishment.

First, Haney states that exclusively individual-centered approaches to crime control are likely to fail unless they simultaneously address the contexts that help to cause crime in the first place. The first section of the book provides a background to demonstrate how the individual-centered approach has failed and is especially harmful to minority offenders. He presents a compelling argument, and one that I will now discuss in my classes, that our current system mandates the use of the *fundamental attribution error* as the centerpiece of crime control and prison policy, and that this decontextualizing of crime and punishment heightens focus on particular kinds of drug-related criminal

behavior and helps account for the increasing race-based disparities in our criminal justice system.

Haney provides persuasive evidence as to how prison failure begets prison growth and the rising costs of rapid prison expansion. He presents persuasive evidence on what correctional systems are spending each year to imprison more and more offenders. Haney notes that the close to 40 billion dollars spent on total correctional care in the United States in 2001 could have provided child care for every family that could not afford it, a college education to every high school graduate, and a living-wage to every unemployed youth. In chapter 10, Haney states that prison should be utilized more sparingly and supplanted by context-based strategies, like community-based facilities and restorative justice models, for crime control.

Haney's second and third summary examples (the primary focus of the book) state that the prison environment, itself, is potentially damaging and that long-term exposure to this environment acts as a criminogenic agent for both the prisoners and for the persons connected to them. The book includes four compelling chapters on the criminogenic influences of prison and convincing research findings detailing the effects of both juvenile and adult prison institutions, the research on prison overcrowding, and, in Chapter 8, the prevalence of vulnerable or "special needs" prisoners. Although Haney provides several examples of the plight of those with mental illness and developmental disabilities, some of the references in Chapter 8 are outdated. For example, much has changed in the Texas prison system regarding the housing and treatment of sexual offenders since 1995. Additionally, Haney could have made his point even more forcefully by discussing the current state of prison health care.

In chapter 10, Haney suggests several mechanisms to decrease the amount of prison harm, including making the prison environment as much like the free world as possible, by allowing more prisoner-free world contact, and by increasing the prison staff's commitment to helping, rather than hurting. Additionally, Haney describes the importance of resurrecting a closely monitored and evaluated rehabilitative ideal, a kind of "no prisoner left behind" way of monitoring and holding prisons responsible for those they incarcerate, increasing prison psychological treatment, and engaging in race and gang-related prison reform.

¹College of Criminal Justice, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX.

The fourth summary example argues that prisons must take into account the context in which prisoners are placed once they are released so as to sustain whatever gains were achieved during imprisonment. Haney provides examples of what may be required to maintain any gains from imprisonment when released. He suggests ways to reverse the prisonization process that most prisoners go through when adapting to prison life, to assist families and communities in preparing for the return of imprisoned individuals (e.g., job placement programs), and to shift the focus of parole away from surveillance and social control to reintegration.

I highly recommend this book for both the novice and veteran readers with an interest in crime and punishment. It provides a

compelling argument that prison reform is warranted—even if it disagrees with Haney's proposed methods. This book should be required reading for criminal justice decision makers who, in the past, have failed to understand or act upon the crisis of our current system of crime and punishment.

References

1. Haney C, Banks W, Jaffe D, Zimbardo P. Interpersonal dynamics in a simulated prison. *Int J Criminol* 1973;1:69–97.
2. Haney C, Zimbardo P. The past and future of U.S. prison policy: twenty-five years after the Stanford Prison Experiment. *Am Psychol* 1998;53:709–27.