

Study Guide for *Voices from Inside*

(Questions from **Teaching Sociology** review by Janet Bogdan)

Questions instructors might use with **Voices from Inside** would vary depending upon what course they were teaching, and this video could be used in a wide variety of courses. However, for an introductory course that includes a unit on crime and punishment, some of the questions might include:

1. Like others who are in "total institutions," the women we learn about in **Voices from Inside** have undergone a process of re-socialization. Describe some of their comments that indicate this re-socialization—for example, what they have to be or do to survive in this prison.
2. Three of the women interviewed extensively in this video are African Americans, one is Puerto Rican. To what extent does this sample reflect the proportions of ethnicities and races of America's female prison population? How reflective of this population is the whole group of "circle of caring" participants? How has the female prison population changed over the past 30 to 40 years? What are some of the reasons for these changes? For example, what crime laws in recent years have contributed to these changes?
3. Why does Karina Epperlein, the filmmaker, say she could not carry out such a program at Dublin prison if she were to try and start it now? Dublin prison is in California. What recent changes in the laws of that state affect who goes to prison, the length of their incarceration, and their prison experience?
4. How are children and families affected by their mothers' imprisonment? Why do female prisoners receive fewer visitors while in prison compared to male prisoners? What policies could change this situation and what policies presently work against children visiting their mothers in prison? How will recent changes in welfare law affect women released from prison? For example, how will they contribute to or detract from their ability to effectively assume family responsibilities?
5. What insights does sociology offer to understand what is happening, and what could be done to address the problems? Why would these women be considered deviant in American society? What reasons can you think of that explain why relatively little scholarly research has been done on women in prison?