

SOME OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF ESTABLISHING  
A HORTICULTURAL THERAPY AND/REHABILITATION  
PROGRAM FOR USE IN A WOMEN'S/PRISON

by

MARY ELIZABETH MANDEVILLE

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## Section 1

### INTRODUCTION

Recently, the Kansas Correctional Institution for Women requested help in setting up a Horticultural Therapy and Rehabilitation Program. Traditionally, most prisons have used some type of horticultural activity such as farming, but the emphasis was on hard labor and producing food rather than changing attitudes and producing useful citizens.

In order to bring about effective change, it is necessary to define the psychological makeup of the female criminal. The underlying social and emotional problems which have caused her ineffective means of dealing with life must be understood. Then horticultural activities designed to meet her needs can be developed and implemented. A program which would give these women an opportunity to increase their self-awareness and improve self-concept, develop their capacity for sensible judgment, emphasize planning ability, and encourage initiative, while training in job skills. A Horticultural Therapy and Rehabilitation Program, headed by a competent and trained horticultural therapist, would be beneficial to both the inmate and society.

## Section 2

### THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FEMALE CRIMINALS

Women who commit crimes are failures, they have failed to meet societies expectations, they have failed themselves, they have even failed in crime (6). This failure syndrome causes her to have a very poor self-concept, which is further aggravated by the confusion over women's roles in our society, resulting in frustration and tension. Unfortunately, prisons as they are presently set up are destructive of the remaining dignity and self-worth, and the vocational training is concentrated mainly in institutional maintenance. Therefore, it would be beneficial to the inmate and society if a different approach to treatment were implemented.

Women criminals rarely represent an overt danger to society. The crimes they commit are usually related to sex or property and instead of harming others, they tend to harm themselves (11). Their involvement in these crimes is passive, instead of robbery—a forceful method of obtaining money, female criminals use forgery, cash bad checks, or embezzlement where no one is threatened. Even in crimes such as child abandonment or neglect the woman has acted passively and usually has not physically harmed the child.

Women criminals are viewed differently by our society. They are most often seen as disgraced and dishonored because traditionally their most frequent offenses were violations of the normative

codes with respect to sex and drunkenness (10). Anglo-Saxon criminal laws tend to define the woman as a dependent, to be protected, not fully responsible person, incapable of many actions (2).

Female offenders are characterized as being weak, dependent, and helpless (16). They have a confused and poor self-concept, lack planning ability and mental organization, act impulsively without anticipating the consequences of their behavior, and fail to plan for the future (15). They experience an intolerance for tension manifested in a tendency to act without thinking and an inability to delay responses (12), thus pointing out their need for immediate gratification. Female delinquents have been discriminated from non-delinquents on the basis of their internal chaos and impulsivity; they were shown to have a "faster internal clock" resulting in future time being constricted, time passing slowly, and less accuracy in time judgment (12).

Alienated from herself and the rest of society, the female criminal experiences loneliness and self-hatred, because her self-concept is totally bound to her acceptance as a woman (13). For a woman in our society to commit a crime the pressures towards deviance must be great, because the generally accepted role for her is one of conformity and submission - or at least so it has been until recently (4). General cultural expectations that a woman is somebody kind, good, beautiful, and non-aggressive, are painful reminders of the discrepancy between what she is and what she should be as a representative of her sex (13).

Criminal women and delinquent girls often perceive themselves as compelled, driven, "broken in initiative" (2). Their