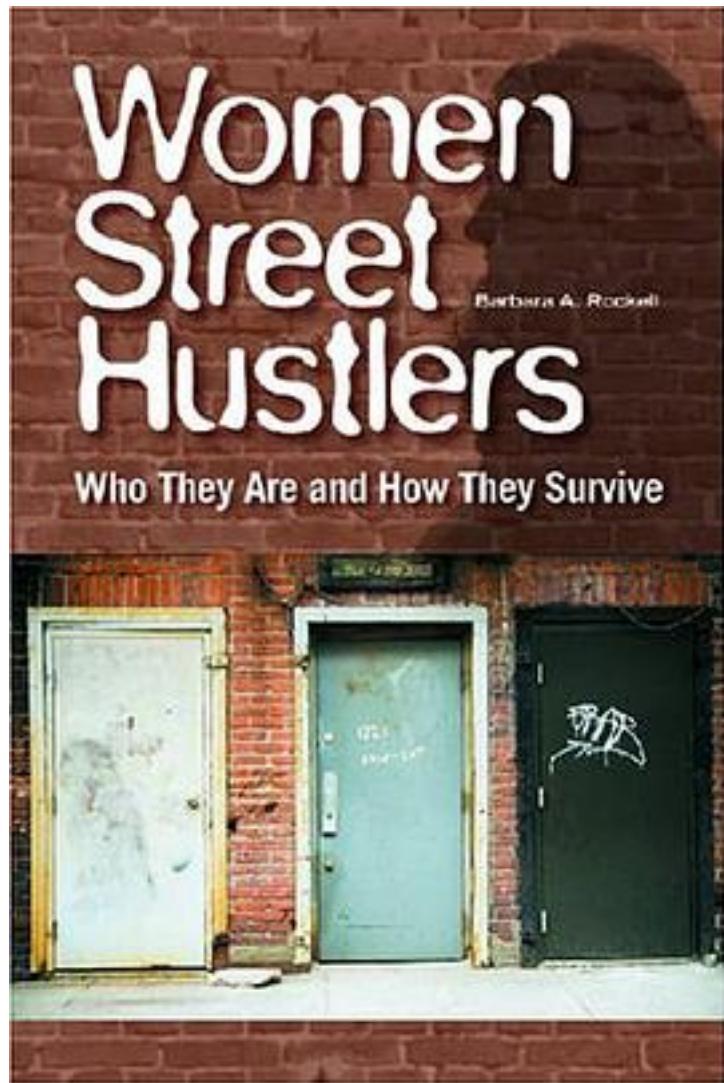


# Women Street Hustlers



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While the number of women in U.S. jails remains low in comparison with the number of men, over the past 10 years their admission rate has soared and now surpasses the rate of increase for men. Who are these chronic low-level female offenders, and what path leads them to drug involvement, prostitution, and petty larceny-- illicit activities best described as "hustling"? While demographic information is available on these women, it tells us little about who they are as people, how they become repeat offenders, or how they survive on the street. Barbara Rockell sheds light on these questions in a fascinating and empathic study of female repeat offenders admitted to a New York state jail. Their varied life trajectories reveal the difficulties of growing up in an unstable environment where adulthood begins early, and survival depends on "street smarts." Despite the women's self-defeating behaviors, many of them reveal a surprising degree of initiative and self-sufficiency. This finding runs counter to previous research in which drug use and criminal activity by women have been viewed as reflecting the perpetrators' victim status and lack of agency. The author argues for seeing these behaviors in a broader social context and suggests avenues for future study, as well as more humane and constructive intervention strategies.

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