THERAPY BEHIND PRISON WALLS

A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS?

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Imagine.....a system where the emotionally wounded people who end up in prisons could find real healing. Healing of their childhood wounds, healing of their self-esteem, healing of their severed sense of connection with other people and with a greater Source.

Although this discussion includes findings from an evaluation conducted under contract to the Correctional Service of Canada, the views expressed are completely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Correctional Service of Canada.

Reading this, I am reminded of a spiritual retreat. I envision friends supporting one another in an atmosphere of open sky, foliage, and the whispers of a warm breeze. However, the system being referred to is the prison system. The quote is from a pamphlet produced by The Lionheart Prison Project: Houses of Healing. The aims of the project are to provide "healing for prisoners" and to take "the first steps to transform prisons into 'houses of healing'."

What do the prisoners think of the program? Tim's testimony regarding the benefits of the Lionheart Project is as follows:

I think when I was on the street I wasn't really free at all, but now I feel like I'm becoming truly free. You've shown me I can feel good about myself — I know life is not over for me. Now it's only just beginning.

Mat has this to say about the program:

...Grace has brought me to prison to be free of the self-imposed prison I had myself locked away in all those years. For me this class has been a blessing.

Here, prisons become "houses of healing" wherein people can find "freedom" from their own self-imposed prisons. Such language also exists within the pages of George Orwell's novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four.* In Orwell's futuristic totalitarian society of Oceania, the official language is Newspeak, where everything is expressed as its opposite. New words are invented, undesirable words eliminated, and remaining words are stripped of any heretical or ambiguous meaning. In this way, the language, makes it impossible for people to even think in ways that may challenge the social order. As Cohen (1985:273) remarks, Orwell shows us how language can be used politically, and how it serves to "insulate their users and listeners from experiencing fully the meaning of what they are saying and doing." Cohen (1985:275) further states that language surrounding "punishing, treating and helping" - which he calls Controltalk - is a particularly anaesthetizing and potent form of social control. "Controltalk" is central to therapeutic and correctional practice, where coercion and treatment are rationalized on the grounds that it is for the prisoners "own good". The language of "rehabilitation" "therapy" and "helping" reframe punishment as a humanitarian effort, and our conscience is assuaged. As Edelman (1977:100) writes, "it appears that people can deliberately hurt others only by persuading themselves and as wide a public as possible that it serves a therapeutic purpose."

As I was struggling with writing the introduction to this article, the Lionheart Prison Project leaflet arrived through the post. As I read it, I realized with alarm that it echoed a similar initiative in Canada; the replacement of Canada's only federal female prison (the Prison for Women) with four new cottage-based regional "correctional facilities." The new facilities are to be located on several acres of land and employ an architectural design maximizing natural light, space, privacy and fresh air. Security measures are to operate largely through dynamic means - relying on a high degree of staff-prisoner interaction - rather than on conventional surveillance and discipline. All

aspects of the facility will embody a wellness model guided by the following principles: empowerment, meaningful and responsible choices, respect and dignity, supportive environments and shared responsibility. Integral to this model is an emphasis on recovery from past trauma, as well as the development of self-esteem and self-sufficiency which are to be achieved through programming that is woman-centered, holistic and culturally sensitive. Indigenous women are to have their own facility, called a healing lodge, which is to be modelled on Native healing principles (Creating Choices, 1990; Correctional Service of Canada information pamphlet).

It would seem almost blasphemous to criticize these plans for the new facilities, because they appear so very progressive and humanistic. However, as Cohen (1985:69-70) warns us: "the most benign innovations come to mask the most coercive practices and consequences." If we look closely and critically at the proposals for the new facilities, we might discover that Newspeak or Controltalk is in operation. While therapeutic regimes within prisons are not new, a therapeutic model championed as feminist (or woman-centered), is. I am concerned that the language of feminism is being appropriated and stripped of its subversive potential by corrections in order to facilitate the correctional agenda. This does not mean that individual prisoners will not benefit from the new facilities, nor does it imply that the motives of individuals working within corrections are not well-intentioned. It does, however, suggest that we must ask ourselves what this language is masking. It is my contention that the language of feminist therapy is currently being used to encourage popular support for the construction of new prisons, and to co-opt those who are most likely to be resistant to such plans. The end result is that alternatives to imprisonment remain concealed, and that more women will face the dehumanization and degradation of life behind bars. This conclusion is partially informed by a program evaluation on therapeutic services I carried out within P4W while under contract to the Correctional Service of Canada.[1] The findings from this research will be reported further on in this article, but in order to contextualize my analysis, I will now turn to a brief descriptive overview of women's imprisonment in Canada.

In Canada, responsibility for the justice system is divided between the provincial and federal governments. The correctional split is based upon a two year rule: those people receiving sentences of less than two years become a provincial responsibility, and those serving two or more years become the responsibility of the federal government. However, an exchange-of-services agreement between the provincial and federal governments allows for some federally sentenced offenders to serve their time in provincial institutions. Thus, approximately one-half of women serving federal prison sentences are incarcerated in provincial institutions and the remaining one-half are housed in Canada's only federal female prison, the Prison for Women (P4W) located in Kingston, Ontario. While numbers fluctuate, there are approximately one-hundred and fifteen women imprisoned at P4W.

Since opening in 1934, there has been a continual recognition that women serving time at P4W experience great hardship and suffer severe deprivations due to geographical dislocation as well as inadequate programming and facilities. Since women imprisoned in P4W come from all over Canada, many are thousands of miles away from friends and family. Over nine major government task forces and committees urged the closure of P4W and advised a shift toward decentralization that would allow women to be closer to their homes (Moffat, 1991).

The frequent recommendations to close P4W were largely dismissed until the most recent Task Force report, *Creating Choices - The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women* was released in April, 1990. The federal government accepted the recommendations made in the report to close P4W and replace it with four new "regional facilities", and initiatives are presently underway for the development and

1 For the final reports of this evaluation, see: K. Kendall, *Program Evaluation of Therapeutic Services at the Prison for Women* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1993); K. Kendall *Companion Volume I: Literature Review of Therapeutic Services for Women in Prison* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1993); and K. Kendall *Companion Volume II: Supporting Documents* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1993).

construction of the recommended facilities[2]. The question must be asked, why after all of these years, is P4W finally being closed and a decentralized strategy being implemented? The social and historical forces must be looked at. As Shaw (1993) writes, coinciding with the Task Force recommendations were: pressure from nongovernmental organizations (particularly women's groups and Indigenous Peoples groups) to address the plight of Canadian prisoners, broader changes in attitudes and priorities regarding human rights issues for women and Indigenous People, and the appointment of a new and innovative Commissioner of Corrections.

Additionally, a series of particular incidents raised public awareness about the plight of prisoners within P4W. In 1981, for example, the Canadian Human Rights Commission ruled that female offenders were being discriminated against on the basis of sex because relative to male prisoners, they were provided with unequal access to training and rehabilitation programs (Berzins and Hayes, 1987). Furthermore, reports released in 1988 by the Canadian Bar Association and the Standing Committee on Justice, each forcefully echoing earlier calls to shut down P4W, received a great deal of media attention. Moreover, between December 1989 and February 1991, six prisoners committed suicide. A seventh woman died in 1992 following an earlier suicide attempt from which she never regained consciousness. All but one of these suicides were committed by Indigenous women. The relationship between prison conditions within P4W and the prisoner suicides was recognized in a 1990 court hearing, The Queen v. Carol Maureen Daniels. The judge ruled that the defendant's right to life and security would be violated if she were incarcerated at P4W because she would be at great risk of committing suicide. The judge added that incarcerating the defendant in P4W would be cruel and unusual punishment because of its geographical distance from her home (Vachon, 1993).

Thus, numerous social and political factors helped to create a climate which was conducive to the endorsement and implementation of the recommended plan forwarded within the Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women (1990). I believe that another critical factor in the acceptance of the report was the feminist structure, philosophy and language which underscored the Task Force and its report. To begin, the Task Force generally used a feminist approach to organization. As Shaw (1992,1993) reports, the Task Force was established as a partnership between the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) and the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Society (CAEFS, an advocacy group for women prisoners). The steering and working groups were each chaired jointly by representatives from CSC and CAEFS, and thirty-eight of the forty-two task force members were women, including two former prisoners. Almost half of the steering committee members were from non-governmental organizations and women's groups. Additionally, efforts were made to ensure that Indigenous women were fairly represented and consequently, the Task Force came to see itself as a tripartite initiative, composed of CSC, CAEFS and representatives from Indigenous Peoples communities.

The Task Force further held consultations with numerous groups across the country, and commissioned feminist research which emphasized the experiential accounts of federally sentenced women, as well as research which specifically addressed the experiences of Indigenous prisoners.[3] The report appears feminist in structure, content, and language. As noted earlier, the report concludes with recommendations to close the Prison for Women and replace it with five regional facilities, a healing lodge for Indigenous women and expanded community-based services. As this article goes to print, plans are underway for the design and construction of the new facilities. As a promotional brochure produced by CSC states, the new facilities will "address the historical disadvantages experienced by federally sentenced women" through the application of a wellness model based on the principles of: empowerment, meaningful and responsible choices, respect and dignity,

2 The government decided that The Burnaby Correctional Centre, already constructed in Burnaby, British Columbia, would serve as the Pacific regional facility. See Faith (1993a) for a discussion and critique of this high surveillance prison which is constructed on a Panoptican design.

3 See Shaw (1992) for a discussion of the constraints and difficulties which impinged upon the research.

supportive environments and shared responsibility. An essential part of this model is the inclusion of treatment programs and services designed to assist women to recover from past trauma, develop self-esteem and gain self-sufficiency.

The tone of this initiative is feminist - drawing on key phrases and ideas often evoked in feminist scholarship and politics. However, framed within a therapeutic model, the meaning of words change as they become depoliticized. For example, do we really believe that the "historical disadvantages" encountered by imprisoned women, such as racism, sexism, and violence can be dealt with by incorporating a wellness model into prisons? Implicit throughout the Task Force Report and in the implementation plans, is a psychological mode of understanding which concentrates on individualized causes and cures. That is, individual women, rather than social, political, and economic structures become the objects of inquiry and instruments of change. In this way, the political is reduced to the personal. An illustration of this is the way in which the term "choice" is used in the Task Force Report. Indeed, the report itself is entitled Creating Choices.

The report defines social equality and alternatives to incarceration as long-term goals, thus implying that it would be unrealistic to address these issues in the present. We are then left with two immediate options: either prisons that are woman-centered and rooted in a wellness model with expanded community-based services, OR prisons that are not. In a linguistic sleight of hand, social and political transformation, as well as alternatives to imprisonment are rendered invisible and a false duality of choice is created.

The emphasis upon choice further results in blame being placed on individuals for making "wrong" or "irresponsible" choices (Kitzinger and Perkins, 1993). If women do not become empowered, healed, or have improved self-esteem, or if they continue their criminal involvements, it is their own fault because they were given choices for a better life and failed to take the opportunity.

What this assumption masks, is that our choices are constrained and controlled by the material and cultural context within which we live: "when material conditions eliminate 99 per cent of the options, it is not meaningful to call the 1 per cent of things a woman can do 'choice'" (Douglas, cited in Kitzinger and Perkins, 1993). The reality of poverty, violence, racism and sexism will not change, and prisons will be expanded rather than abolished. The promise of choice being offered to imprisoned women is an empty one, indeed. Yet, because the Task Force report and the resulting implementation plans are shrouded in liberal feminist scholarship and language, legitimacy is given to the scheme and resistance is weakened.[4]

The all-encompassing therapeutic paradigm to be employed within the new prisons is worrisome for additional reasons. As Shaw (1992) notes, the "cult of victimhood" - the idea that women are victims and therefore require therapy in order to recover from past trauma, is apparent throughout the Task Force Report and it is also central to the wellness model. This perspective denies women of any agency, and directs them to continually regress inward and backward into past experience, rather than to move forward and look outward to more political understandings and actions (Scott and Payne, 1984). Additionally, the emphasis upon victimization tends to rest upon a false universalism which perceives all women to be the same, thus concealing women's diversity and differential circumstances.

Even under what might be seen as the "ideal" situation of feminist therapy, there remain serious problems. A brief overview below, of some of the issues raised regarding the limitations of a feminist therapy will also highlight the flaws intrinsic to all therapeutic frameworks.

Feminist therapy is a philosophy of treatment, rather than a specific technique.

4 As Ferguson (1984:19) writes, bureaucracies operate in a "dialectic of domination and resistance that must be constantly reproduced. It generates oppositions, tensions and counter trends..." In this regard, resistance to the creation of the new women's prisons has largely come from the communities in which the prisons are to be built. Stated opposition rests generally on the grounds that the prisoners will pose a threat to safety and that housing prices will decline. This situation was often referred to as "the not in my backyard syndrome." The use of the word "syndrome" is interesting, as it once again denotes an individualization of the phenomena. The implementation committee have held a series of public meetings in order to deal with the opposition.

That is, its practitioners use a range of models (ie. object relations theory, transactional analysis, client-centered therapy, etc.) from a feminist perspective. While feminism itself is very diverse and sometimes conflicting, feminists are united by a recognition that females experience oppression on the basis of their sex, and are committed towards the erosion of that oppression. Thus, feminists attempt to locate women's distress within the broader social environment and to assist their clients by connecting the personal to the political. As various writers have argued, this aspiration is laudable but within the context of therapy, the political is necessarily reduced to the personal and individual solutions are prescribed (Kitzinger and Perkins, 1993; Kitzinger, 1993; Ussher, 1991; Scott and Payne, 1984). Some therapists recommend that their clients augment their therapy with political activism. However, as Kitzinger (1993:490) writes: "Women who participate in feminist activism with the goal of feeling better about themselves are likely to be disappointed." Despite the rewards of activism, it can often be distressing and exhausting. Furthermore, while therapists themselves are encouraged to be politically active, the reality of waiting lists and over-extended schedules often preclude such involvement.

Feminist therapy also attempts to reduce the power imbalance between therapist and client, by rejecting the role of expert and establishing a mutual relationship based on cooperation and partnership. However, a therapeutic relationship can never be equal. Therapists do hold a high degree of power over their clients: "one person is paid, is secure, has knowledge and training. The other is distressed, often frightened, and needing help" (Ussher, 1991:235). Therapeutic relationships are intrinsically unequal, and to pretend otherwise is deceptive and potentially harmful to clients. Moreover, feminist therapy is an expert model, despite its feminism, because it still forwards as an explanation of women's distress, and it is used as justification for intervention. Therapists, rather than friends or family, are called upon to intervene because of their expertise (Ussher, 1991; Kitzinger and Perkins, 1993). Thus, the notion that therapeutic relationships can be equal and that the therapist is not an expert, is an ideal rather than a realistic prospect. The problems inherent within therapy, are greatly intensified within a coercive environment, where power imbalances and the potential for abuse are already extreme.

A project I was involved in at P4W highlights the serious obstacles in the way of "helping" women through therapy (or other means) while they are imprisoned. However, the research also indicates that prisoners can benefit from their interactions with a therapist. These benefits result not from the therapeutic technique per se, but from the practical assistance provided and the experience of a supportive human relationship. Before discussing the research findings in more detail, I will provide some background information to the evaluation.

Between May 1992 and March 1993, I carried out a program evaluation of therapeutic services at the Prison for Women while under contract to the Correctional Service of Canada (Kendall, 1993abc) The evaluation was meant to assist in the development of programs for the new regional prisons, and to help provide direction for programming in P4W until its closure. A number of reports recommended such an evaluation,[5] and a 1990 Board of Inquiry investigating the attempted suicide of a prisoner advised that the strength of the prison's programs be assessed by an external consultant.

Furthermore, there had recently been an increase in the number of therapists within the prison and the incorporation of a new therapeutic approach - feminist therapy. One can speculate that the increase in the therapists and the allowance of feminist therapy was at least partially granted to stave off public condemnation following the suicides, recent court challenges and the Task Force Report.

5 See for example: M. Evans, *A Survey of Institutional Programs Available to Federally Sentenced Women* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1989); R. Ross and E. Fabiano, *Correctional Afterthoughts: Programs for Female Offenders* (Ottawa: Solicitor General of Canada, 1985); L. Berzins and S. Dunn, *Federal Female Offender Program 1978 Progress Report* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1978); and L. Berzins and S. Cooper, "The Political Economy of Correctional Planning for Women: The Case of the Bankrupt Bureaucracy" *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, 24, 4 (1982): 399-416.

The evaluation was qualitative in design, and consisted of observations, interviews and document analysis. Initially, in order to determine the key issues and concerns, interviews were held with 72 prisoners, staff and program providers. The issues identified in this phase were then addressed in subsequent meetings with 40 prisoners and 20 staff members. While the prison population of P4W fluctuated during the evaluation, there were on average, 115 prisoners. There were ten therapists, two staff psychologists, and a social work intern providing individual therapy. The majority of these individual therapists were under contract (rather than employed as members of staff) and were coming into the prison on a less than part-time basis. Taken together, there were approximately 51/4 full-time individual therapy positions. Additionally, there were numerous group therapies offered, including: the Peer Support Team (prisoners trained to counsel one another), the Women and Fraud group, living skills programs, a variety of substance abuse groups, and groups specific to the cultural diversity of the population.

The therapists generally stated that they worked from a feminist philosophy of therapy which stressed the importance of healing from trauma. Personal problems were not regarded as illnesses or weaknesses originating from within, but were understood in relation to the context surrounding people's lives. In particular, the therapists recognized the close connection between women's marginalized status (as a result of, for example, poverty, abuse, sexism and racism), the offences women are charged with, and their imprisonment. In particular, the degree of violence encountered by prisoners was central to the counsellors approach and practice.[6] Yet, the therapists stated that they did not regard women simply as victims, but also saw them as active agents who resisted and survived violence, and found creative ways of coping.

Staff recognized the following general benefits of prison therapy: the stabilizing effect on the prison environment, crisis prevention and easier adjustment of prisoners. Yet, a number of staff felt that therapy led prisoners into self-injury, volatile behaviour and suicide. That is, they felt that prisoners were pushed into dealing with personal issues (such as abuse) through therapy, and thus opened up a "Pandora's Box" of misery which would better be left closed. Yet, when asked about "Pandora's Box", 92 per cent of prisoners stated that they were ready to deal with the issues they had addressed during therapy. If they felt unprepared to discuss specific problems, they informed their therapists of this and moved on to other issues or temporarily or permanently withdrew from counselling. The remaining 8 per cent who stated that they had confronted issues during therapy for which they were unprepared, indicated that such experiences transpired a number of years ago and with different therapists than those working at the time of the evaluation.

In fact, prisoners reported overwhelming support for the therapists at P4W. Indeed, the majority of women (67 per cent) were seeing someone for individual counselling, some women were seeing more than one counsellor, and there was a waiting list. Despite the high number of women receiving individual therapy, 80 per cent of prisoners interviewed felt that there should be more individual therapy available, while the remaining 20 per cent thought that the level of therapy should be maintained. Eighty-eight percent of the women stated they wanted to work with a therapist. The women also indicated that they should never be obliged to become involved in therapy, and that they should have the choice to work with someone with whom they are comfortable.

That so many women wanted therapy is not surprising given the hardships many of them have experienced in their lives, and the trauma of imprisonment. Prisoners reported that their negative feelings (of pain, anger, grief, frustration etc.) were overwhelmingly

6 Surveys of federally sentenced women in Canada indicate a high degree of violence in the lives of prisoners. For example, Shaw et al. (1990) found that 82% of the 102 women surveyed at P4W and 72% of the 68 women surveyed inside provincial prisons reported physical or sexual abuse. Abuse was found to be even more prevalent in the lives of Indigenous women: overall, 90% disclosed physical abuse and 61% reported sexual abuse. Additionally, surveys highlight the severe nature of disruption throughout the lives of prisoners, such as parental death at an early age, foster care placement, suicide attempts, self-injury, prostitution, homelessness and substance use. See for example,, Shaw et al. (1991). The degree of violence is often intensified by racism. See for example, F. Sugar and L. Fox (1990).

rooted in the lack of control they had over every aspect of their lives while imprisoned. Space, movement, schedules and activities were all dictated by prison rules and regulations and were under the control of staff (who often used their power arbitrarily).[7] Despite the lack of real possibilities for taking self-determined actions, women indicated that they were still expected by staff and the parole board to display personal initiative and responsibility. This paradox between what women were **allowed** to do, and what they were **told** or **expected** to do was described as crazy-making and often reminiscent of earlier experiences of abuse. Women said that the "deepest cut" was that made during the process of becoming a prisoner, in which they felt they were stripped of their own identities and given the label of prisoner - a status which they expected would haunt them forever.

Examples of measures which could reduce the hardship of imprisonment were provided by the women. Therapy was emphasized, but was said to be helpful only if women could choose to take part. As it was, women reported feeling obliged or forced to take programs because their case management officer conveyed either directly or indirectly, that program participation was mandatory if they wanted a positive recommendation for parole. Other suggestions for improvements included: a dignified planning process, freedom to safely express emotions, and improved access into the community.

When asked to define what they felt was therapeutic, the prisoners identified: **a space to be themselves** (a respite from a sense of constant surveillance), **to be in control of their own lives** and/or an **opportunity to value and be valued by others.** These same elements are those which prisons inherently suppress and deny. This brings us to the basic question posed by this paper: is therapy behind prison walls a contradiction in terms? The evaluation at the Prison for Women, while revealing the benefits of the therapy practised at P4W also shows that the elements prisoners identified to be therapeutic are in opposition to the very nature of prisons.

That individual prisoners benefited from their interactions with therapists at P4W cannot be denied. What was it about therapy at P4W that the women found most beneficial? The prisoners identified the personal characteristics and approach of individual counsellors to be very helpful. The therapists were very committed to the women with whom they worked, they put in many extra hours and often went far beyond the "call of duty". The prisoners stated that therapists provided them with very practical assistance, treated them with a great deal of respect, and often showed support by advocating for them on various issues. The women felt that the therapists provided them with the elements they defined as therapeutic: a space to be themselves, assistance to be in control of their own lives and the experience of being valued by others. Thus, the benefits of therapy stemmed from involvement in a supportive human relationship and the practical assistance provided, rather than from a particular therapeutic technique.

The general limitations of therapy noted earlier in this paper are exacerbated within a prison environment. The imbalance of power between therapist and client is intensified within prison where bureaucratic limitations, demands and pressures are forced upon therapists. In addition, as the women indicated during the evaluation interviews, prisoners are often given no real choice to refuse therapy. As well, many Black, Asian, and Indigenous women felt that their needs were not met because there were no Black, Asian or Indigenous therapists. Similarly, French women commented that the one French therapist could not handle the demand for a French speaking therapist. Language and cultural differences were heightened further among prisoners originating from outside countries.

Since so much of therapy depends upon individual therapists, and because there is such a distortion of power within prisons, the potential for harm is great. While the prisoners clearly gained from their interactions with the therapists at P4W, there have been many accounts of abuse under the

7 For similar findings, see: M. Eaton, *Women After Prison* (Buckinghmam: Open University Press, 1993); J. Heney *Report on Self-Injurious Behaviour in the Kingston Prison for Women* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1990); M. Velimesis, "Sex Roles and Mental Health," *Professional Psychology*, 12 1 (1981):128-135; and S. Pollack *Opening the Window on a Very Dark Day: A Program Evaluation of the Peer Support Team at the Kingston Prison for Women*, unpublished Masters Thesis, Carleton University School of Social Work, 1993.

mantle of therapy in prisons elsewhere.[8] The supportive human relationships offered by the P4W therapists may be an exception to the rule. Furthermore, the benefits of therapy listed by the women (a space to be themselves, to be in control of their own lives and opportunity to value and be valued by others) were said to be available through alternative means such as: hobbies, spiritual events, exercise, study, and most importantly, visits with friends and family. However, the prison often imposed grave restrictions on access to all of these.

This paper has demonstrated the contradictions inherent in attempts to provide therapy within prison. More generally, it has problematised the notion that prisons can be transformed into "houses of healing." The paper has also shown how feminist language provided legitimacy for and weakened resistance to current Canadian prison reform efforts. The subversive potential of feminist analysis and activism is diluted as feminists direct their energies toward reforming rather than challenging the correctional system. As Faith and Currie (1993) demonstrate in their analyses of the Canadian battered women's movement, the state adopts feminist knowledge in order to accommodate feminist resistance and to give the illusion of state concern. Governments also hire feminists but retain them so long as they do not present a serious threat to the state. The state will furthermore provide funding for women's programs and services but the money comes with the proviso of state regulation. In this process of feminist engagement with the criminal justice arm of the state, women's issues are redefined and compromised, often beyond recognition. Likewise, feminist incorporation into the correctional agenda depoliticizes analysis and erases the possibility of abolition.[9]

Feminists must not lose sight of abolition as an alternative. As Hudson (1987:183) writes: "whether or not abolition of prisons is attainable in the foreseeable future, an abolitionist stance makes it possible to look carefully at whether imprisonment is really necessary, and if so for whom." Women's prisons are a good place to begin abolition efforts because women prisoners are generally relatively small in number and are regarded as low-risk (Faith 1993c, Carlen, 1990).

To voice these criticisms is to risk unintended consequences such as the withdrawal or decrease of therapeutic programs which may be the only or one of the very few services and supports granted to prisoners.[10] Moreover, deconstructing efforts around women's prison reform will not provide imprisoned women with immediate comfort. The reality of their distress must be acknowledged: "we can't abandon women while we 'do' politics..." (Barnsley cited in Faith, 1993b:29).

Perhaps what we can best directly offer prisoners is support from a sympathetic listener, and practical assistance with such matters as communication with family and friends, parole preparation and housing upon release. These do not need to be obtained through therapy and yet could provide women with a space to be themselves, some degree of control over their own lives and an opportunity to value and be valued by others. Yet, despite the importance of this type of intervention to

8 See for example: K. Faith, *Unruly Women* (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1993); J. Sim, *Medical Power in Prisons: The Prison Medical Service in England 1774-1989* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990); P.R. Dobash, R.E. Dobash and S. Gutteridge, *The Imprisonment of Women* (Basil Blackwell, 1986); and T. Hattem "Vivre avec ses peines: Les fondements et les enjeux de'lusage de medicaments psychotropes saisis a travers l'experience de femmes condamnees a l'emprisonnement a perpetuite" *Criminolgie*, 24, 1 (1991) 137-156.

9 For further critiques of feminist reform and more general concerns related to the Task Force report and the new correctional facilities, see: K.H. Moffat, "Creating Choices or Repeating History: Canadian Female Offenders and Correctional Reform" *Social Justice*, 13, 3, (1991):184-203; M. Shaw, "Issues of Power and Control: Women in Prison and Their Defenders" *British Journal of Criminology*, 32, 3 (1992):438-452; and K. Faith "Correctional Crossroads in Canada: Decarceration? or Proliferation of Women's Prisons?" Paper presented for American Society of Criminology Conference, Phoenix, October, 1993.

10 Hudson (1987), for example, argues that the rapid and severe decline in prison services and the outright neglect of prisoners in Britain, was a consequence of the justice model of corrections. This model advocates that the criminal justice system should not be involved in rehabilitation, but rather, should focus upon the fair administration of punishment. Criticisms of treatment within corrections were used to give legitimacy to this model. Similarly, Ussher (1991) writes that critiques of psychiatry were used to legitimate the closure of institutions which has resulted in a vacuum of care.

individual prisoners, it is very limited because it does not address the structural roots of subordination nor will it affect prisoners who are denied access to such services.

The point of this paper is not to suggest that feminists avoid or withdraw involvement with the prison system. Very often, feminists provide the only source of support and their involvements have resulted in improved conditions.[11] I am suggesting that we need to demystify the language surrounding correctional reform and not be misled by projects which appear to be feminist, but which are in fact, not feminist. Involvement in the system risks co-optation and depoliticisation but it is necessary to the prisoners locked inside, and there are points of resistance in any bureaucracy through which challenges may be posed. However, opposition must come largely from the outside where illusory language and false images can more easily be demystified and where change remains most promising ■

When Oldspeak had been once and for all superseded, the last link with the past would have been severed. History had already been rewritten, but fragments of the literature of the past survived here and there, imperfectly censored, and so long as one retained one's knowledge of Oldspeak it was possible to read them (Orwell, 1986:250).

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11 Examples of positive feminist intervention include the family violence program at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, New York State (See Gohlke and Humphrey, 1994); and the Santa Cruz Women's Prison Project (see Faith, 1993a).

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MIXED PRISONS

MISOGYNISTIC & MISGUIDED

On 23 April 1990 a group of women prisoners was transferred from Pucklechurch to Holloway because their safety could not be guaranteed. Pucklechurch was in the grip of a particularly violent riot. Justice Woolf and Judge Tumim were advised by Women in Prison of the consequences for the women involved. Initially the group was fearful both of going to London and to Holloway. They were upset at the sudden separation from their friends and families, worried about contact with legal advisers and justifiably concerned about not being produced at court (the women's court appearances were in fact delayed).

In time, most of the women preferred Holloway to Pucklechurch and, notwithstanding problems with families, friends, legal advisers and court appearances, they wanted to stay there.

Their preference would come as no surprise to anyone who has lived in both a women's unit attached to a men's prison and in an urban women's prison. What is surprising, in the light of the Pucklechurch debacle, (and Pucklechurch was the only riot prison which held women prisoners), is the recommendation by Tumim and Woolf that women could be held in small units annexed to local men's prisons (or, in yet another

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