The Invisibility of Women Prisoners' Activism

Revised Edition

By Victoria Law

This is a work-in-progress researched and written while waiting for and riding the subway, between nursing the baby and changing her diapers, cooking and cleaning and working for a living- all the things I appreciate after reading some of the women's letters. As I learn about and contact other women in prison, this paper will change and grow.

After reading one of many drafts, Jerome White-Bey, the president and founder of the Missouri Prisoner Labor Union, was moved to form the Women's Issues Committee, which will support women involved in organizing and resistance from within. Contact me with any suggestions, comments, criticism, praise or questions. Or if you are or know of a woman in prison whose story should be told. Or if you re interested in supporting women prisoners in their fight.

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Obviously anti-copyright. Just acknowledge that I wrote this. Or better yet, write me for the newest revised copy.

Introduction

Within the scant research published about prisoner activism and instances of resistance, women are nearly invisible. Although women in prison comprise under six percent of the nation s prison population, their numbers are increasing more rapidly than those of their male counterparts between 1990 and 2000, the rate of female incarceration increased 108%. (1) However, the interest in women prisoners struggles against the prison-industrial complex remains much lower thin that of male prisoners.

This invisibility is not new. In the early 1970s, recognizing that prisoners are one of the most marginalized and voiceless populations in America, activists expanded their interests to include those of prisoners and their rights new, critical analyses of prisons emerged, prisoners rights organizations and unions were created, and there were new communications among prisoners, academics and community activists During this time, prisoners writings became required texts in numerous university courses and some universities began teaching courses inside prisons. However, in 1970, researcher and activist Karlene Faith discovered that, to the male inmates of Soledad, female prisoners were as invisible to them as they were to the broader public. Faith argues that this overlooking of women prisoners occurred because not only were they fewer in number, but they (also) were not as politicized as the men (prisoners), and they did not engage in the kinds of protest actions that aroused media attention. Women's concerns, if recognized at all by the prisoners' rights movements, were dismissed as personal, self-centered and apolitical. Similarly, it was not that women did not engage in protest actions but that these actions were ignored by outside movements, who chose to focus on the better-known names of male prisoners. Thus, while male prisoners gained political consciousness and enjoyed support from outside groups and individuals, many women in prison were neglected by these same groups. With exceptions of well-known women inmates such as Angela Davis and Assata Shakur, the prisoners' rights movement overlooked the female prison population. These same

observations hold true today. Male prisoners seldom know about their female counterparts while the broader public, if knowledgeable at all about prison issues, tends to focus on men. Juanita Diaz-Cotto, one of the few scholars to study women prisoners' activism, has stated that the silence around women prisoners resistance from outside prisoner rights and service groups steins from a reluctance to support activism within women's prisons. (4)

Similar to the resurgence of interest in prisons and prisoner issues which ignores prisoner activism, the new literature on women in prison focuses on the causes, conditions and effects of imprisonment, but does not delve into what the women themselves do to change or protest these circumstances. Faith, who had coordinated the Santa Cruz Women s Prison Project in the 1970s, cites virtually no examples of women s individual or collective acts of resistance in her book Unruly Women. In the *Mix Struggle and Survival in a Women's Prison*, Professor Barbara Owen admits that she developed a visible rapport with prison staff at the Central California Women s Facility to facilitate her interviews with the inmates. This obvious rapport may have led to distrust by prisoners engaged in acts of resistance, resulting in either silence about their actions or a total decline to be interviewed. Similarly, prison staff may have steered her away from problem inmates so as not to expose any gross violations or abuse occurring within the institution. Even Daniel Burton-Rose's The Celling of America, which includes articles of prisoner organizing, omits instances of female resistance, reflecting the continued lack of outside recognition for women prisoners who act as their own agents for social change.

Why the cloak of silence? One more prominent woman prisoner, Barrilee Bannister, offered this explanation: a lot of women believe themselves to be helpless, due to how, they were raised, or perhaps abused as a child. I see a lot of women with very low self-esteem/worth. (5) A study by the U.S. Department of Justice found that over forty-three percent of women prisoners, as opposed to twelve percent of male prisoners, had been physically or sexually abused prior to their admission to prison. (6) It also

affirmed that women s earlier socialization had limited their independence and occupational choices. While this study was not directed towards the lack of activism among women prisoners, its findings did affirm Bannister s observation. While interviewing women inmates for her book In the Mix, Owen was told, it is easier for women to get bullied in here. If an officer raises his or her voice to you, some women are petrified. The fear from past abuse comes back and they are scared. Very scared. A 1999 Department of Justice study confirms these observations, finding it almost half of women in jails and prisons had been physically or sexually abused prior to their incarceration a much higher rate than reported for the overall population. Thus, women prisoners have to contend not only with the apathy or inertia of their fellow inmates and the fear of administrative retaliation, but also the issues of past abuse and socialization of obedience and subservience that affect women. As a woman incarcerated in Illinois put it, “Do you think women who are conditioned to be subservient to their men (and the world) are going to come to prison and suddenly just grow a backbone?” (10)

Another explanation might be that women are perceived as passive, Faith counters the argument that women prisoners lack self-esteem as a blaming condescending projection by class-biased people who can t imagine that women with so many problems could think well of themselves ... Given that most incarcerated have had to hustle in some way to survive, many of these women might well have a greater sense of their resourcefulness than is the norm among women, even when their means of survival appears self-destructive to others. This perception leads to the dismissal of the notion that women can and do contribute to struggles for change. Just as the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s downplayed the role of women in favor of highlighting male spokesmen and leaders, the prisoners’ rights movement focuses on men to speak for the masses. Such neglect leads to the definition of prison issues as masculine and male dominated, dismissing prison issues which are distinctly feminine (i.e. the scarcity of sanitary hygiene products, the lack of medical care specifically for women, especially prenatal care, threats of sexual abuse by guards, etc.) and thus any actions

which women take to address and overcome these concerns. Thus, researchers and scholars do not search out acts of defiance among the growing female prison population. (12) For instance, on 28 August 1974, inmates at Bedford Hills protested (tic beating of a fellow inmate by holding seven staff members hostage for two-and-a-half hours. However, the August Rebellion is virtually unknown today despite the fact that male state troopers and (male) guards from men s prisons were called to suppress the uprising, injuring twenty-five women and that twenty four women were transferred to Matteawan Complex for the Criminally Insane without the required commitment hearings. Because it lasted only two-and-a-half hours, no one was killed and the story was relegated to a paragraph buried in the back pages of The New York Times, the August Rebellion is seen as less dramatic than the Attica Rebellion. The women at Bedford Hills also did not have the opportunity to contact media, contact supporters and politicians, as the men at Attica did. Thus, the August Rebellion is easily overlooked by those seeking information on prisoner protests and disruptions.

Similarly, women in a California prison held a Christmas riot in 1975 Protesting the cancellation of family holiday visits and holiday packages, inmates gathered in the yard, broke windows, made noise and burned Christmas trees in a solidarity bon fire. However, because no one had threatened violence, this act of disruption is more easily overlooked by those researching prison disturbances.

Juanita Diaz-Cotto stated that she was moved to record post-Attica prisoner activism among Latinas in New York State after volunteering at a women s prison Just as women in the outside community struggle daily to change conditions we perceive to be oppressive, there have always been groups of women who have organized within prison walls to try to change conditions. (16) However, just as much of the research on women s issues downplays the role of women themselves in challenging, if not changing, oppressive social policy and practice, most research on women prisoners and their concerns do not share Diaz-Cotto’s concern for documenting women as active agents of social change.

Diaz-Cotto argues that social scientists studying women prisoners highlight the role played by women s prison family groups and kinship networks, almost to the complete exclusion of other types of prisoner organization. The emphasis on prison families not only substitutes for research into inmate resistance but also reinforces the stereotype that women s sole concern is to maintain their traditional gender roles. Diaz-Cotto has also observed that, after the 1971 Attica Rebellion, the prevalence and importance of prison families declined as prisoner groups and social services for female inmates emerged. (19) Similar to the overlooking of prisoner activism in favor of outside prisoner rights movements, research on women prisoners overwhelmingly favors details of prison family kinship networks over the more painstaking task of searching out and documenting the less visible instances of resistance. This becomes a self-perpetuating cycle by highlighting the various family and kinship networks to the exclusion of other forms of organization, scholars give the impression that this is the only form of organizing within women s prisons, not only silencing the voice of women prisoner activists but also paving the way for others to do the same. Such emphasis also overestimates the prevalence and influence of prison families. While Barrilee Bannister confirms that these families still exist, she states that there are very few here in Oregon and that others kind of frown on it being (that) everyone sees them stab one another in the back a lot of times, or they fall out.

Bannister also acknowledges that the he lack of numbers is also an obstacle to forming a women s movement behind bars. Male prisoners, on the other hand, have more than sufficient numbers to organize inmate-led movements within their facilities. Women prisoners not only lack a visible movement, but they are often neglected by their male counterparts Despite its large membership, the Missouri Prison Labor Union, a five thousand member organization of Missouri male prisoners and outside supporters which advocates minimum wage and decent working conditions for all prisoner workers, has no women inmates as members. Only in 2001, four years after

its formation, have its organizers attempted to outreach them and address their issues.

Women prisoners also lack a common history of resistance. While male prisoners have the example of George Jackson, the Attica uprising and other well-publicized cases of prisoner activism, women remain unaware of precedents relevant to them. Both Dawn Amos, imprisoned in Canon City, Colorado, and a woman incarcerated in Illinois have remarked that illiteracy also plays a role in women s lack of protest and resistance. Amos noted that most of the women around her are very illiterate, they don t even have education to take a pre-GED test, let alone read a law book or even a newsletter about other prisoners and what they have been subjected to. They can hardly comprehend the rules that we have to live under let alone a way of comprehending a way to stand up for their rights. (22) Amos' observation echoes that of an earlier letter from a prisoner in Illinois I know illiteracy is one of the hindrances to pursuing any relief, she wrote. We need to educated women how to write grievances and we need to have available people to help (the) illiterate and (the) mentally/emotionally ill prepare grievance(s) regarding their rights. (23)

Added to this is the administrative harassment, dissuading possible participants. One woman stated that the level of harassment is so great that most of your fellow prisoners think that you must be crazy for even attempting to challenge the prison system wrong doings in anyways. (24) Kebby Warner, a prisoner in Michigan, has encountered similar resistance from her fellow inmates once she started to become aware that her plight was shared with thousands of other women, she tried to organize and educate those around her about the prison industrial complex I was laughed at and they went so far as accusing me of being a Klan member because of the way Amerikkka was spelled in the zines I passed out. They wouldn't even read them. A woman released from a Texas prison offered this explanation as to why she chose silence I once tried to get my mom to know that there was abuse happening in the unit. But when my letter was read, it was turn(ed) in to the warden, which in turn called me in the office and said if I

wanted to remain in population I better keep my opinions to myself. And I did not want to be in solitary confinement ... so I closed up. (26) Similarly, Barrilee Bannister, Dawn Amos and a California inmate who wished to remain anonymous have stated that they are reluctant to write about certain aspects and instances because their letter can be and, at least in Bannister s case, are read by prison officials. Thus, even for those interested in women prisoners organizing and acts of resistance, the prison s monitoring of mail makes it virtually impossible to delve deeply.

Women prisoners also face different circumstances during their incarceration and thus have different priorities and different ways of challenging their conditions than t heir male counterparts. Prevalent ideas of prisoners are masculine the term prisoner usually connotes a young, black man convicted of a violent crime such as rape or murder. Politicians seeking votes and media seeking sales play on this representation, whipping the public into hysteria to get tougher on crime and build more prisons. However, the image of the young, black male felon omits the growing number of women imprisoned under the various mandatory sentencing laws passed within the past few decades. (28) Because women do not fit the media stereotype, the public chooses to overlook them rather than grapple with the seeming paradoxes inherent in women prisoners, who, by virtue of their incarceration, have somehow defied the societal norm of femininity. This is compounded by the seeming contradiction of prisoners as mothers, as women with reproductive rights (or even the ability to reproduce), and as women in general. Women prisoners and their differing needs and concerns complicate the public perception of prisons and prisoners. However, prison authorities have been slow to recognize these differences and thus accord them the same, if not worse, treatment as their male counterparts.

Medical Care

One pressing issue for women prisoners is the lack of or poor medical care they receive. While all prisoners face poor medical care, prison administrations often ignore or neglect the particular health care needs of women prisoners. That the majority of lawsuits filed by or on behalf of women in prison are for inadequate medical services testifies to the importance placed on health care and treatment. Even prison wardens agree that several of the particular needs of pregnant women have yet to be dealt with in any of the facilities, including adequate resources to deal with false labors, premature births and miscarriages lack of maternity clothing the requirement that pregnant inmates wear belly chains when transported to the hospital and the lack of a separate area for mother and baby. (2) Pregnant women are also not provided with the proper diets or vitamin supplements, given the opportunity to exercise or taught breathing and birthing techniques. The director of Legal Services for Prisoners with Children, Ellen Barry, accused the prison system of a shocking disregard of basic humanity that I saw reflected in the type of treatment to which pregnant women were subjected. One horrifying example is that of a twenty-year-old woman who was almost five months pregnant when incarcerated. Soon after, she began experiencing vaginal bleeding, cramping and severe pain. She requested medical assistance numerous times over a three-week period, but there was no obstetrician on contract with the prison. She was finally seen by the chief medical officer, an orthopedist, who diagnosed her without examining her physically or running any laboratory tests, and given Flagyl, a drug that can induce labor. The next day, the woman went into labor. Her son lived approximately two hours.

Dr. Patricia Garcia, an obstetrician and gynecologist at Northwestern University s Prentice Women s Hospital, has stated that shackling a laboring mother compromises the ability to manipulate her legs into the proper position for necessary treatment. The mother and baby’s health could be compromised if there were complications during delivery such as

hemorrhage or decrease in fetal heart tones. Despite these dangers, women continue to be shackled in the name of security. In an interview with Amnesty International, one woman described giving birth while an inmate in Chicago. Her legs were shackled together during labor and, when she was ready to birth, the doctor called for the officer, but the officer had gone clown the hall. No one else could unlock the shackles, and my baby was coming but I couldn't open my legs. (5)

In addition to medical ignorance/neglect by staff, women who have given birth are not only immediately separated from their newborns, but, in the name of security, are sometimes subjected to vaginal exams despite the risk of infection. (6)

Pregnancy is not the only specifically female medical concern ignored by prison officials. Prevention, screening, diagnosis, care, pain alleviation and rehabilitation for breast cancer are virtually nonexistent in prisons. In 1998, a study at an unnamed Southern prison found that seventy percent of the women who should have had mammograms under standard medical protocol had not been tested. Although many of the women were at high risk because of family histories, they were not provided with a clinical breast exam, information or basic education on self-examination upon admittance. (7)

Not only are the particular health cafe needs of women ignored or dismissed, but health care in general is often inadequate or life-threatening. (8) In February 2000, Wisconsin prisoner Michelle Greer suffered an asthma attack and asked to go to the Health Services Unit (HSU). When the guard and captain on duty contacted the nurse in charge, he did not look at Greer's medical file, simply instructing her to use her inhaler (which was not working). Half an hour later, Greer's second request to go to HSU was also ignored. After another half hour, Greer was told to walk to HSU but collapsed en route. When the nurse in charge arrived, it was without a medical emergency box or oxygen. A second nurse arrived with the needed emergency box, but again with no oxygen. Forty-five minutes after her

collapse (and less than two hours after her initial plea for medical help), Greer died. (9)

However, women have been active about trying to change their sometimes life threatening medical neglect. The most successful and well-known prisoner initiated project organized around health care is the AIDS Counseling and Education Project (ACE) at Bedford Hills. AIDS is the leading cause of death among U.S. prisoners, being five to ten times more prevalent in prison than in the outside society. (10) In 1999, the New York State Department of Health found that the rate of HIV infection among women entering the New York State Correctional Facilities was nearly twice that of their male counterparts. (11) In 1987, women at the maximum-security Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in New York, motivated by watching their friends die of AIDS and by the social ostracism and fear of people with AIDS, started ACE. (12)

ACE founders hoped to educate and counsel their fellow inmates about HIV/AIDS as well as help to care for women with AIDS in the prison infirmary. While the prison superintendent, Elaine Lord, cave the group permission for the project, ACE continually faced staff harassment and administrative interference. For instance, because both Kathy Boudin and Judith Clark, alleged members of the Weather Underground, were active ACE members, the group was constantly monitored and sometimes prevented from officially meeting. The fear that the one-to-one peer counseling sessions would lead to inmate organizing and the staff's own ignorance and fear of HIV/AIDS led to staff harassment and interference. Educators from the Montefiore Hospital holding training sessions were banned from the facility for suggesting that the Department of Correctional Services lift its ban on dental dams and condoms. (13) A year after its formation, ACE members were prohibited from meeting at its regular time, to use its meeting room, give educational presentations or to refer to themselves as counselors. (14)

Despite these setbacks, the members of ACE not only managed to implement and continue their program, but also received a grant for a quarter million dollars from the AIDS Institute and wrote and published a book detailing the group s history and its positive impact on women with AIDS as a guide for other prison AIDS programs. One interesting aspect is that despite ACE s success, male prisoners attempting to set up similar programs at their facilities continue to meet with administrative resistance and retaliation.

Other women political prisoners have also focused on the AIDS crisis behind bars. Marilyn Buck, for example, started an AIDS education and prevention program in California. (15) However, with the exception of ACE at Bedford Hills, researchers and scholars have either largely ignored these programs or overlooked the difficulties and administrative harassment faced by those organizing around HIV/AIDS issues in prison.

Women have also worked individually and without the auspices of administrative approval to change their health care. Until her recent death, Charisse Shumate worked with her fellow inmates with sickle-cell anemia to understand the disease and the necessary treatments. (16) She also advocated the right to compassionate release for any prisoner with less than a year to live and was the lead plaintiff in the class-action lawsuit Shumate v. Wilson. (17) Unfortunately, Shumate herself died at CCWF, away from family and friends, because the Board of Prison Terms recommended clemency rather than compassionate release. Governor Gray Davis refused to approve the Board s recommendation. (18) Four years before her death, Shumate wrote I took on (the battle) knowing the risk could mean my life in more ways than one... And yes, I would do it all over again. If I can save one life from the medical nightmare of CCWF Medical Department then it's well worth it. (19) Her work did not cease with her death. Women who had worked with her continue the task of teaching others how to understand their lab-work and how to chart their results, keep a medical diary, hold these people accountable to what they say and do to them. (20) Sherrie Chapman, one of the twenty-six inmates who testified in Shumate v. Wilson,

became the primary plaintiff in a class-action suit over medical conditions as well as filing a civil suit charging the CDC with cruel and unusual punishment after waiting over a decade for cancer treatment. (21)

Just as scholars and researchers have ignored women's organizing around HIV/AIDS, they have also ignored the struggles of individual women for adequate health services and support. The works of ACE, Marilyn Buck, Charisse Shumate and other women may not be as dramatic as a work strike or a boycott, but they nonetheless address crucial issues facing women in prison and contradict the notion that women do not and cannot network and organize to change their conditions.

Children

Separation from children is another major issue for women inmates. In 1998, more than a quarter-million children under the age of eighteen had a mother behind bars. (1) When a 1990 American Correctional Association survey asked women prisoners to name the most important person(s) in your life, fifty-two percent identified their children. (2) These numbers should warrant that all women s prisons have family and parenting programs available. However, such is not the case. Inmate mothers, many of whom were single heads of household prior to incarceration, are left on their own to navigate the rocky path of maintaining contact and custody of their children. Faith argues that this lack is due to the idea that no woman who has used drugs, worked as a prostitute or otherwise shown deviant or criminal tendencies can be a good mother. (3) Women prisoners are viewed as incapable of being good mothers and thus do not automatically deserve the same respect and treatment accorded to mothers on the outside. While this may be the case in some instances, such as drug-addicted mothers, such a sweeping generalization ignores the fact that many inmate mothers were single heads of household, the sole provider for their children and may have been forced to rely on illegal means to support their family. The view of the

inmate mother as somehow unfit and unworthy has been used to legitimate prison and social services policies regarding the children of imprisoned parents. A 1978 directive of the Department of Social Services specified that it can refuse imprisoned parents visits with their children placed in foster care if it believes that visits will hurt the children. (4) In 1997, the Federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (AFSA) was enacted, reducing the time in which children may remain in foster care before parental rights are terminated. Under this act, if an incarcerated parent does not have contact with his or her child for six months, he or she can be charged with abandonment and lose parental rights. If the child is in foster care for fifteen of the last twenty-two months, the state can terminate parental rights. Once these rights are terminated, parents have no legal relationship with their children and are not permitted to have any contact with them. (5)

Maintaining family ties, however, is not an issue addressed by many of the male prisoner activists. In this way, prison and its inmates reflect the outside world and its expectations women are expected to be the keepers of hearth and home and, when a mother is incarcerated, the burden to maintain ties to her children falls upon her. In 1998, over two-thirds of all women prisoners had children under the age of eighteen, and, among them, only twenty-five percent said that their children were living with the father. In contrast, ninety percent of male prisoners with children under the age of eighteen said that their children were living with their mothers. (6) Ten percent of inmate mothers in contrast to two percent of inmate fathers stated that their children were living in a foster home, an agency or an institution. (7) Thus, mothers in prison are forced to navigate the legal maze of family law more often in order to maintain contact with and retain legal custody of their children.

A 1993 survey of women prisoners in eight states and Washington, DC, found that fifty-four percent of the inmate mothers interviewed were never visited by their children. (8) One major factor in this lack of visitation is distance More than sixty percent of inmate mothers were incarcerated more

than one hundred miles from their child s home. Less than nine percent were within twenty miles of their child. (9) However, the courts have reflected the opinion that inmate mothers have forfeited their rights to see their children. In 1987, Pitts v. Meese determined that prisoners have no right to be in any particular facility and may be transferred both within and out of state according to the institution s needs.10 Such a decision gives prison authorities the power to effectively sever a woman s ability to see her child. Not only the distance, but the travel time and expenses make frequent visits less likely. For instance, while Barrilee Bannister is imprisoned in Pendleton, Oregon, her eight-year-old daughter lives with Bannister s relatives in Gloversville, New York. (11) I'm lucky to see them every six or eight months, writes Bannister. (12) In almost every letter, she expresses her longing for her daughter, "When I was arrested, she was four months shy of becoming three years old. I've missed the best years of her life. She'll be thirteen and a half when I get out." (13) However, Bannister still retains full custody of her daughter, a rarity among inmate mothers. (14) Distancing women from their families is often used, effectively weakening, if not severing, a woman s ties from her loved ones. Maintaining parental ties has not been won through prisoner boycotts, work stoppages or hunger strikes, tools traditionally used by male inmates to challenge their conditions. (15) Rather, those women who want family maintenance programs must work with their prison administrations, a far less glamorous path for researchers and activist academics.

One example of such a program is the Children's Center at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in New York. The Center houses a nursery where inmates and their babies are allowed to live together for the child s first year as well as a program helping the new inmate parents learn to be mothers. Although it is staffed by inmates, the Center is administered by the Brooklyn Diocese of Catholic Charities and funded by the state's Department of Correctional Services. (16) However, under the Center s auspices, inmates, realizing the need for supportive programs for mothers, organized two parenting courses for Bedford's inmates, one on infancy for new mothers

and pregnant prisoners and the other a ten-week course called Parenting Through Films, with each week devoted to a new subject on growth and care for children. (17) These were the prison's first courses both organized and taught exclusively by inmates. Out of the Children s Center also came more far-reaching change. Until 1983, children of prisoners placed in the New York State foster care system did not have the legal right to visit their parents in prison.

Inmates at Bedford Hills who had been unable to have their children visit them because of this formed the Foster Care Committee which, with the help of outside advocates, led to new legislation not only giving prisoners with children in foster care the same rights and responsibilities as parents who are not incarcerated but also the right to monthly visits provided that the prison was not too far away. (18) In addition, inmates involved in the Children's Center published a foster care handbook for women prisoners whose children had been placed in the foster care system. (19)

The success of the Children's Center did not go unnoticed by the more reform-oriented penal authorities Modeled on the Children s Center, a similar nursery at the Taconic Correctional Facility opened in 1990 with twenty-three inmate mothers. (20)

That prisoners strive to maintain contact with their children and other family members can also be a reason not to do anything that would label them as troublemakers or rabble-rousers. They (the prison staff and administration) would attack people (advocating for reform) through their emotions, stated one inmate at Bedford Hills. "Like the family would Come in to visit somebody and they wouldn't find the inmate's chart and tell the family they weren't there and turn the family away at the gate." (21) Another inmate claimed that prisoners who publicly criticize the Bedford Hills personnel were often denied entry into the facility's Family Reunion Program. (22) Women inmates impregnated by prison staff may also be denied participation in the nursery program solely because of the father's status. Human Rights Watch found that two of the women they interviewed

who had been sexually assaulted and impregnated by prison staff were denied entry. (23) Thus, an inmate s desire to spend (more) time with her child(ren) can also be used to dissuade her from organizing for change.

Women who give birth while incarcerated not only face the trauma of immediate separation from their newborns but also administrative and social service pressure to relinquish their new child. The case of Kebby Warner, a pregnant woman imprisoned for a bad check, illustrates the institutional belief that inmates cannot and should not retain custody, or even contact, with their children.

Warner, after having been misdiagnosed as having a stomach flu during her first month in prison, was informed that she was pregnant. Luckily, Warner s parents agreed to take care of the baby while she was incarcerated. After the birth of Helen, Warner refused to passively accept the prison requirement that separates mother and newborn after only one day she refused to eat and thus won two more days in the hospital with her child. When the guards finally managed to separate them and bring her back to prison, she was told that if she had wanted to have children, she should have stayed out of prison. This one remark sums up the prevailing view of inmate mothers.

Although her parents had custody of her daughter, the pain and stress of separation still weighed upon her mind, leading to anger and fits with other inmates, disciplinary tickets and the reputation of defiance, which resulted in a denial of parole. With the death of her father, however, came another loss her mother, unwilling to care for a half black baby alone, gave Helen to the foster care system.

The law allows for the termination of parental rights after two years. In Warner’s case, this was certainly true. When her daughter was two years old, a judge terminated Warner s parental rights on the grounds that she neglected and abused my child due to the length of my incarceration. When she started to appeal this decision, her caseworker and the Family

Independence Agency threatened to place Helen with a new foster family who would adopt her immediately, thus permanently sealing her file and preventing Warner from ever being able to find her. Under this pressure, Warner finally signed an affidavit relinquishing her rights as a parent.

However, this loss inspired Warner to action against the prison-industrial complex's policy of breaking up families she is currently forming a support organization for incarcerated parents. The organization she envisions will stand at the courthouse and protest the kidnapping of a child that deserves to know who her mother/father is. (24) Thus, although the prison-industrial complex negatively impacts families and severs family ties in an attempt to break the individual inmate, women both collectively and individually resist such efforts.

Sexual Abuse

A far greater problem for women prisoners than male prisoners is the sexual aggression of male corrections officers. In 1996, international human rights group Human Rights Watch released All Too Familiar, a report documenting sexual abuse of women prisoners throughout the United States. The report, reflecting two-and-a-half years of research, found that sexual assaults, abuse and rape of women prisoners by male correctional employees were common and that women who complained incurred write-ups, loss of good time accrued toward an early parole and/or prolonged periods in disciplinary segregation. (1) In 1994, the U.S. Department of Justice launched an investigation of two women s prisons in Michigan and found that nearly every woman ... interviewed reported various sexually aggressive acts of guards. (2) These instances included not only rape and sexual assault, but the mistreatment of prisoners impregnated by guards, abusive pat frisks and other body searches and violations of privacy, including searches of the toilet and shower areas and surveillance during medical appointments. One pregnant inmate was escorted by two male

officers while in labor. The two men handcuffed her to the bed in the delivery room and then positioned themselves where they could view her genital area and make derogatory comments throughout her delivery. (3)

The case of Heather Wells, an inmate at Washington Corrections Center for Women, illustrates not only the prevalence of sexual assault but also the prison system's treatment of mothers. In December 1996, Wells was raped and impregnated by a guard in the prison laundry room. She charged the guard with rape but, even after a paternity test proved her claim, the state of Washington did not file charges. Instead, the guard was allowed to quit his job and move out of state. Only weeks after the baby was born, she was taken from Wells and placed in a foster home. (4) This callousness in separating a mother and her newborn infant is commonplace in most women s prisons, reflecting the attitude that incarcerated women have forfeited their rights (and feelings) as mothers. (5)

Unlike the sexual predation in male prisons, the perpetrators in female facilities are usually those in a position of authority, such as guards and other prison staff. This makes it impossible for women prisoners to form protective groups like their male counterparts. Guards hold the keys to their cells and are authorized to watch inmates, conduct full-body frisks and strip searches, and enter cells at any time. Thus, the direct approaches of male groups such as the Angola Three or Gay Men Against Sexism, male y inmate groups that bypass the administration by physically protecting weaker prisoners from sexual predators, do not work for women who wish to stop the sexual harassment and rape in their facility.

In the case of Barrilee Bannister, sentenced under Oregon's mandatory sentencing law, she and seventy-eight other women were sent to a privatized, all-male prison in Arizona run by the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA). Not only were they separated from family and friends, but from any outside support that could have prevented their sexual abuse. Only weeks after the women s arrival, some were visited by a captain, who shared marijuana with them. He left it with them and then returned with other

officers who announced that they were searching the cell for contraband. However, they promised that if the women performed a strip tease, they would not search the cell. Two of the girls started stripping and the rest of us got pulled into it, Bannister recalled. From that day on, the officers would bring marijuana in, or other stuff we were not suppose(d) to have, and the prisoners would perform (strip) dances. From there, the guards became more aggressive, raping several of the women. Bannister reported that she was not given food for four days until she agreed to perform oral sex on a guard. (6)

Once out of segregation, Bannister called outside friends and told them her story. They, in turn, informed the media. The media attention led to the return of some of the women to Oregon, where they filed a federal suit, resulting in a public apology, a promise of stricter rules concerning sexual abuse, and the reimbursement of attorney's fees. (7) The negative publicity also led to the suspension and dismissal of three dozen CCA staff. (8)

Bannister's story is unusual only in that the women themselves were able to organize and obtain sufficient outside support to stop their abuse. Women inmates who have been assaulted by prison staff usually lack the outside support services which male prisoners may turn to. For instance, male inmates raped by other inmates can turn to outside groups such as Stop Prisoner Rape (started by an ex-inmate who was himself raped in prison). Women raped by prison staff, on the other hand, face not only administrative harassment and retaliation for complaining but also a lack of support services outside the reach of the prison administration. Dawn Amos, herself having experienced sexual misconduct, stated that when two women were physically and sexually abused, they were transferred to a facility in Denver while the offending officer remained, un-reprimanded, on the job. In her own case, the District Attorney has yet to press charges against the offending officer. I'm still in the middle of trying to find an attorney to take my case, she stated. (9) This absence of a support network, both inside and out, not only mirrors, but magnifies the general lack of support for rape victims.

Education

While women prisoners face issues not pertinent to male prisoners, they also share issues. However, these similarities are often neglected. One issue commonly overlooked when defining the issues of women prisoners is education. Studies of the impact of education have traditionally focused on male inmates. While education is not a particularly masculine concern, the omission of women in these studies indicates that researchers do not perceive this as an important issue for women.

However, such is not the case. In the 1970s, inmates participating in the Santa Cruz Women s Prison Project, the first program to ever offer university courses in a women s prison, demonstrated their eagerness for higher education. In 1972, when Karlene Faith, one of its teachers and coordinators, was temporarily banned from the prison, inmates organized a work strike and a sit-in before the warden s office. Similarly, when the project was barred in 1973, the students circulated petitions, held work strikes and met with the administration to protest the project s removal.1

In 1981, the administration at Bedford Hills finally agreed to observe Powell v. Ward and set Lip a $125,000 settlement fund to be spent by the prisoners for improvements at the prison. (2) Inmates spent all of this fund on educational tools expansion of the library collection, books on African American history, the hiring of an educational consultant, computers for business classes, and Spanish vocational classes. (3) That the inmates chose to spend exclusively on books and other educational materials shows that women, like men, are often eager to learn.

More than a decade later, when the cuts in federal and state funding ended prison college programs, the inmates at Bedford Hills worked with the prison administration and representatives from various colleges and universities throughout New York State to restore higher education programs. In 1996, they succeeded, in implementing College Bound, an undergraduate college program aimed toward a Bachelor of Arts in

Sociology. Nearly thirty-three percent of Bedford s inmates pay the equivalent of one month's wages to participate in either the college or precollege program. (4) This fact alone should disprove the unspoken notion that education is not an issue for incarcerated women.

Professor Michelle Fine, with the aid of eight Bedford inmates, conducted interviews with College Bound participants, their children and correctional staff. While her study focused mainly on the effect of education on recidivism, she also observed that graduates have gone on to develop, facilitate and evaluate prison programs addressing issues such as anger management, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, sexual abuse, parenting support and prenatal care. (5) They have also gone on to help their fellow inmates with their education. Martina Leonard, the executive assistant to the president of Marymount Manhattan College, one of the colleges offering courses to tile College Bound program, recounted that former students transferred to another York State prison became leaders ... "They were tutors and mentors to other students and they feel that just having that college program at Bedford Hills has really allowed them to begin to ... help other people." (6) Thus, the impact of higher education transforms women's self-perception from passive objects and victims into active agents of both self and social change.

Ironically, Fine observes that for many women, prison has become a place for intellectual, emotional and social growth... "A space free of male violence, overwhelming responsibilities, college-in-prison carves out a space which nurture a kind of growth and maturity that would perhaps not have been realized on the outside." (5) While Fine does not delve deeply into this issue, it does suggest that women often are unable to focus on learning with the myriad of responsibilities and distractions of tile outside world. Most of the women who attended the College Bound program from 1997 to 2000 came with past histories of academic failure Upon entering Bedford Hills, forty-three percent had neither a high school diploma or GED twenty-one percent had a GED and twenty-two percent a high school diploma and only fourteen percent had some college credit. (7)

Other women have found ways to circumvent the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Acts prohibition of federal financing of prisoners education. Dawn Amos, for example, applied for and was awarded scholarships for college courses despite her status as a prisoner. (8)

At the Ohio Reformatory for Women in Marysville, Ohio, a woman who has participated in the facility's Tapestry Therapeutic Community, a residential drug and alcohol treatment program within the prison, recognized the need for education. Many of the women here have not had a chance to get their education due to their drug addiction, she wrote. In fact, some of us can barley read. She propose the idea of a book club to instill the importance of Education, and the joy of reading, and sharing with others to the Tapestry staff and, once her idea was approved, solicited book donation from various books- to-prisoners programs. (9) The books she requested from Books Through Bars in New York City were surprising choices feminist studies, radical political analyses of the Israel/Palestine conflict, a political biography and The Canterbury Tales. (10) Thus, women find ways to further their education despite the lack of governmental and institutional funding.

Prison Labor

With the explosion of critical literature about the prison-industrial complex in the mid-1990s came a rising outcry about the use of prisoner labor. Women prisoners, however, once again overlooked by both academics and activists in this debate.

When asked, women in prison state that there are very few job opportunities available to them and that almost none of these jobs are for outside corporations. They believe that male prisoners have access to better jobs and better wages, in some cases actually receiving minimum wage for their efforts. While in reality, male inmates often receive little, if any, pay for their work, they often have a greater variety of jobs to choose from.

One of the common threads among women prisoners is that if they do work, the do so at jobs considered feminine, such as cooking, cleaning, clerking or teaching. Male prisoners also do this type of work but, for the most part, men's prisons have more job choice. In Oregon, where Measure Seventeen mandates that all prisoners work, male inmates have access to jobs which provide them with skills such as small engine repair, cabinetry, welding, furniture making, plumbing and computer programming. (1) They also have the opportunity of working for the clothing manufacturer Prison Blues, which, although eighty percent of an inmate s earnings are withheld for incarceration costs, victim restitution, family support and taxes, pays a starting wage of $6.60 per hour. These jobs are so desirable among the (male) prisoner population at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution that there is a three-year waiting list for an interview. (2) Women prisoners, however, have been excluded from this opportunity.

However, Barrilee Bannister observes that most (of these) jobs are not available to women prisoners. (3) Bannister herself has not been assigned a job because of her attitude problem. (4) The women who do have jobs do kitchen work, cleaning and being orderlies. (5) They are paid eight to eighty-four dollars per month for their work, but the prices in commissary do not reflect these wages. For instance, less than a month s Supply the of toothpaste, soap, shampoo and deodorant costs ten dollars. (6) Thus, those making the minimum salary often cannot afford to buy all of these items.

In the women s section of Canon City, Colorado, inmates fare little better. All prisoners are required to either work or attend school. Until February 2002, the daily pay rates ranged from sixty0three cents to $2.53 for jobs such as kitchen, laundry, housekeeping, maintenance, library, secretary and GED teacher. (7) Dawn Amos earned sixty-three cents for each of the four days she worked scrubbing and buffing the floors. However, the prison administration lowered inmate wages in March 2002, I guess we were over budget or something, Amos speculates. I'm sure that s a lie too cause the cops didn't get a pay cut. (8) As in Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, the prices in Canon City s canteen do not reflect the women s income and

purchasing power. One generic Tylenol costs forty cents a stick of generic deodorant costs ninety-six cents the cheapest soap available can be the equivalent of a day s earnings sixty-three cents. Specific feminine items, such as tampons, cost $3.60 and must be saved for, even by those with the highest wage. There are no free items (They) don t give indigent people things cause technically there aren't any indigent inmates that s why they pay us. (9)

Unlike women on the outside, the women at Canon City have virtually no job mobility. Amos states that if you want to leave a job for another one, it doesn't mean you can, it all depends on if your boss wants to let you go or not. (10) Thus, efficiency on one job can work against the ability to transfer to another.

Most women, unlike Amos, are unable to get a job. Kebby Warner in Michigan is still on the waiting list. Although there are ninety-six women on her unit, there are only fifteen jobs available to them. And, despite the lack of jobs at Scott Correctional Facility, the parole board holds lack of employment against applicants. Once an inmate is placed on a job, she must work at least ninety days. If she is fired or quits before then, she is forced to stay in her cell for thirty days and risks being ticketed for Disobeying a Direct Order or Out of Place. (11) The hourly pay scale on her unit ranges from seventy four cents to $2.08. Those who work in food service earn even less seventeen and a half cents to thirty-two and a half cents per hours.12 Unlike Amos and Bannister, does not receive money from family on the outside. Thus, to mail a letter, she irons other inmates clothes in exchange for stamp(s). (13) Other women who lack both jobs and outside support are given seven dollars each month, which the prison takes out of any future funds they might receive. (14)

Not only do women have fewer job opportunities and little pay, they also risk injury. At Dwight Correctional Center in Illinois, the average monthly pay is fifteen to twenty dollars for forty hours of work per week. (15) Women working as seamstresses are paid literally pennies by the piecework. Because

they are paid by the piece and the supervising staff is paid in proportion to their workers output, women rushing to make the cutoff day have injured themselves on sewing machines sewing their fingers. (16) Similar to the plight of undocumented (female) workers in sweatshops, the inhumane conditions of women prisons industry have garnered no attention or outcry from outside groups and organizations.

Women are seldom offered what they perceive as the better, corporation-run jobs. The Central California Women's Facility (CCWF) is one of the few exceptions. Inmates work assembly-line jobs for Joint Venture Electronics. They are paid $5.75 an hour for putting together electronics. However, after the CDC's deductions for taxes, room and board, victim restitution, savings for release and family support, they are credited only $1.15 to $2.30 to their inmate account. Still, compared to a daily sixty-three cents or a monthly eight to eighty-four dollars, their paycheck is considered high. One worker stated that her electronics job was a very good work opportunity. The other workers also praised the program. (17) The women were interviewed, however, at the assembly line, presumably within earshot of the prison guards. What they would have said about the program without fear of write-ups, pay docks or being fired may have been different.

Work programs for women such as Joint Venture Electronics are still relatively few. Because it is the best paying job at CCWF, Joint Venture has the ability to refuse to hire women with disabilities. (18) These programs not only garner profits for corporations who save money on overhead, taxes, vacation, sick leave, worker's compensation and unemployment, but they also keep prisoners from other, less desirable activities, such as organizing against and/or disrupting the day-to-day operations of the prison.

Why have those studying and organizing around prison labor neglected the female prison population? Perhaps it is because women prisoners themselves do not list work as a priority. According to Juanita Diaz-Cotto and Chino Hardin, former prisoner turned activist, women s first priority is release from prison. (19) Sexual abuse, inadequate medical care, education

and separation from children are also far more pressing issues than the lack of job opportunities or minimum wage. This is not to say that women have never protested prison labor in 1975, inmates at the North Carolina Correctional Center for Women staged a five-day demonstration, specifically citing oppressive working atmospheres as one of their concerns. (20) And, just as outside workers have used sabotage to express their dissatisfaction with labor conditions, women prisoners can sometimes use their jobs to defy their captors, When Barrilee Bannister was a cook in the kitchen of Oregon Women's Correctional Center, she not only spit in the officers food but also showed her contempt for those incarcerated for crimes against children by placing bugs in their food. (21)

Just as traditional women s work has been devalued and ignored by labor groups and activists on the outside, when these same jobs are hidden behind prison walls, they are even more easily overlooked and dismissed.

Grievances, Lawsuits and the Power of the Media

Women s struggles to change their conditions often lie in filing grievances and lawsuits rather than physically challenging or confronting prison officials. In 1995, women at Central California Women's Facility at Chowchilla and at the California Institution for Women at Frontera filed Shumate v. Wilson, a class-action suit against the state demanding an immediate improvement to the life-threatening medical care given to all women prisoners of the state. (1) On 27 March 1996, seven women prisoners in Michigan filed a class-action lawsuit on behalf of all women incarcerated in Michigan, charging the state's Department of Corrections with sexual assault, sexual harassment, violations of privacy, and physical threats and assaults. (2) That both suits included women prisoners throughout their respective states in their charges and demands dismisses the assumption that there is no sense of solidarity among the relatively few women prisoners.

Gaining media attention goes hand in hand with filing lawsuits. Barrilee Bannister and the other 77 women transferred to Florence were removed from the abusive all-male prison only after their plight caught the media s attention. Prior to that, those who complained about the guards sexual assaults were placed in segregation units, had good time taken away and were sometimes monetarily fined while their attackers suffered no consequences. (3) In Washington, what appears to be consensual sex between in inmate and a prison employee is not explicitly outlawed. Only after Wells case was made front-page news did the state's legislators propose banning all prison sex.

However, three years later, no such law has gone into effect. (4) In Michigan, lawmakers began to consider harsher penalties against Corrections Department workers who have sexual contact with all inmate only after prisoner lawsuits drew embarrassing publicity to the state. The power of the media became evident when, in 1999, national television journalist Geraldo Rivera's report oil official sexual misconduct in prison was cited several times during a House debate about prison-related legislation. (5) But while prison abuse remains behind closed doors and out of the public eye, policymakers, legislators and the courts remain reluctant to interfere in the daily operations and conditions of prisons.

Another example of the power of the media occurred this past year. An anonymous female prisoner telephoned the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel to report the medical neglect leading to Michelle Greer's death. This one phone call prompted Sentinel reporter Mary Zahn to begin investigating. Two weeks after Greer's unnecessary death, she not only publicized the story, but also turned the death into a minor sensation. The publicity led the Wisconsin Department of Corrections to investigate the incident and suspend the two nurses who initially ignored Greer s requests for medical assistance and then bun led their eventual response, leaving her to die. The article also prompted the state s Assembly s Corrections and Courts Committee to hold investigative hearings into the incident. (6)

This one story led to the paper s own investigation as to whether the neglect causing Greer's death was an isolated incident. For the following eight months, Zahn and a fellow journalist Jessica McBride investigated every prisoner death since 1994, revealing a dysfunctional health care system in which gravely ill prisoners, often while literally begging, for medical treatment, are ignored and sometimes even disciplined for being aggressive or disruptive. (7) Their findings led to a series of articles about the inadequate and often times life-threatening medical care in Wisconsin prisons, prompting the state's lawmakers to introduce legislation requiring better-trained medical staff, improved medical recordkeeping, and the creation of an independent panel of outside medical experts to review prison deaths. (8)

Had that one phone call not been made, the deaths of Greer and other Wisconsin inmates, both male and female, would have remained swept under the rug. This anonymous woman prisoner protested the conditions of the prison-industrial complex in a similar way as male inmates like Shearwood and Fleming, inmate work workers who blew the whistle oil corporation CMT Blues' exploitation of prison labor by gaining media exposure to the issue. However, because she refused to identify herself, her contribution to the struggle against the prison-industrial complex remains neglected by scholars in favor of the more vocal and visible forms of resistance.

In California, prison policy bans the media from talking to specific inmates. (10) This prevents prisoners from drawing more widespread attention to the abuse and neglect behind bars, reinforcing the invisibility of prisoners and ally struggles to challenge and change their conditions.

Although prisoners can file grievances against abuse and neglect by the prison administration, many have become disillusioned and/or fearful of this process. One woman prisoner interviewed by Human Rights Watch stated that the correctional officers will tear it up and throw it in the garbage… or (they) will say, Go ahead and 602 (file all official complaint) me

because I know it won t go nowhere. Most 602s get thrown in the garbage before you go away. It's a joke to them. In California and many other states, any prisoner filing a grievance for sexual abuse must first speak to the perpetrator. (11) Who knows how many women have been intimidated into inaction by this outrageous requirement?

If the inmate does face the perpetrator and if her grievance does not go in to the garbage, she also faces a largely unsympathetic review board that values the word of a staff member more than that of a prisoner. According to a former counselor at a Georgia prison, officials expect impunity for their actions because of the pervading belief inmates are criminals... their credibility is going to be in question from the very beginning. (12) A prisoner also has to contend with the belief that she does not merit humane treatment simply because she is incarcerated When Paula Strothers, a prisoner at a federal prison in Florida, was escorted naked through her housing unit, she told the (male) officer, fuck you and kiss my ass. For her outburst, she was written a disciplinary ticket for Insolence Towards a Staff Member. When she appealed the ticket, the administration denied that her circumstances justified her outburst. (13) This administrative attitude reflects the larger public dehumanization of women in prison.

Strothers' treatment is an indication of the hostility towards women prisoners who complain. As late as 1995, the Michigan Department of Corrections policy allowed an employee to participate in investigating a grievance against him or her. The accused employee often made the response to the complaint as well. (14) Although policy changes in 1995 removed the accused employee s participation in the investigation, tile employee is still informed of the complainant s name and identification number at the outset of the investigation. (15) In Canon City, Colorado, the accused employee is still the one to address the inmate s formal grievances, making it inevitable that the grievance will be denied. Dawn Amos observed that during her two years incarceration, she has never, ever seen anyone win a grievance. (16) One woman in Illinois state that most women know the grievance process is futile, unfair, and not complied with so they won t use

it. She, however, files grievances in order to exhaust the grievance system before moving on to seek court intervention. (17)

Those who file lawsuits are also subject to administrative retaliation. An inmate who participated in a recent class-action lawsuit in Canon City received two disciplinary tickets and was transferred to a prison in Denver. That may not seem harsh to you or others, explains Dawn Amos, but the women in here over time find security and stability, with friends, lovers, or their jobs and the fear of being uprooted and moved to another city really scares them. (18) Barrilee Bannister and the other women transferred to Florence now viewed as troublesome prisoners and have Security Threat Group status. (19)

The most horrifying is the prison s willingness to jeopardize an inmate s health in retaliation for filing a lawsuit. Because she was the lead plaintiff in Shumate v. Wilson, Charisse Shumate only received the blood transfusions necessary for those with sickle cell anemia once every three months. (20) That such practices are allowed to continue signifies the extent that prison authorities have kept public scrutiny, and thus outrage, from their walls and can therefore conduct daily operations as they see fit. Despite the threat of administrative retaliation, women continue to file grievances and lawsuits. As one lone woman who files grievances and civil suits in an attempt to improve her surroundings stated, “if I give up I may as well lay down and die.” (21)

Conclusion

Women prisoners are seen through the same lens as the feminists of the 1960s and 1970s were both groups are seen as violating the accepted societal bounds of femininity and are thus subject to dismissal, if not ridicule, punishment and misrepresentation. Women prisoners are further marginalized and overlooked by mainstream society because of their relative invisibility and the pervading assumption of all prisoners as dangerous criminals. While the feminists of the 1960s and 1970s were able to gain some attention to their demands through demonstrations and rallies, women prisoners must rely on sympathetic outside supporters to draw visibility to their issues. With the current hysteria about crime and punishment, this is no easy task for the relatively few Outside groups with both the desire and the resources to support women in prison

However, this does not mean that women in prison passively accept their conditions. Women inmates have both individually and collectively struggled to improve their health care, abolish sexual abuse, maintain contact with their children and further their education. And it seems that more and more women are finding the courage to demand fair and humane treatment. At the new women s prison, Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, the administration holds monthly town hall meetings in which it promises that no woman will be harassed or retaliated against for her complaints. At the first one, Bannister observed, I was surprised at how many women have finally found their voices. And there are other women whose outrage outweighs their fear. As one woman wrote, I anticipate repercussions for speaking out, but I have to speak. The abused are silent and the abuse goes on! Such actions are often ignored or dismissed by those studying the prison-industrial complex, prisoner rights activists and outside feminists, making documentation and research all the more important in giving women inmates a voice in the discourse.

Notes

Introduction

1 Beck, Allen J. and Harrison, Paige M. Prisoners in 2000. U.S. Department of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics August 2000. 1. This increase is due, for the most part, to the mandatory sentencing laws. First-time offenses, which would have been treated as misdemeanors, mandated treatment or dismissed altogether now warrant harsh sentences. New York s Rockefeller Drug Laws stipulates a sentence of fifteen years to life for anyone convicted of selling two ounces or possessing four ounces of a narcotic. No regard is made to circumstances or (lack of) prior history. The results ? In 1973, when the Drug laws were enacted, four hundred women were imprisoned in New York State. As of January 1, 2001, there were 3,133. Over fifty percent had been convicted of a drug offense and one in five were convicted solely of possession. (Women in Prison Project of the Correctional Association of New York. The Effects of Imprisonment on Families. Cites New York State Department of Correctional Services The Hub System Profiles of Inmates Under custody oil January 1, 2001.) According to the Sentencing Project, the number of women imprisoned nationwide for drug offenses rose 888 percent from 1986 to 1996. (<< Drug Laws Putting Too Many Women in Prison, Reform Group Says. >>)

2 Faith, Karlene The Santa Cruz Women s Prison Project, 19721976. Schooling in a Total Institution. 174. For example, between 1969 and 1973, there were four disturbances at a women s prison in Milledgeville, Georgia. In 1973, ninety percent of the prisoners at the California Institution for Women in Clinton, New Jersey, organized a three-day work k, stoppage to protest the facility s poor mail distribution, food and medical care. In 1974, inmates at the North Carolina Women s Prison in Raleigh held five days of protest about the facility s poor medical and counseling services and demanded the closing of the prison laundry. (See Juanita DiazCotto s Gender, Ethnicity, and the State Latina and Latino Prison Politics. Albany, NY State University of New York Press, 1996. 3 18.) Despite tile fact that these women employed tactics similar to those of their male counterparts, these acts of organizing and resistance are relegated to the footnotes.

3 When I began this research, I asked the former president of a male prisoner organization, a member of the Missouri Prison Labor Union and an anarchist prisoner what they knew about women prisoners. Their responses confirmed that male prisoners, even those struggling against the prison industrial complex, remain virtually unaware of their female counterparts and the issues confronting them.

4 DiazCotto, Juanita. Re/Constructing Intimacy and Sexuality. With/Out Walls. CUNY Graduate School and University Center, 12 April 2002.

5 Letter from Barrilee Bannister, postmarked 2 February 2001.

6 Morash, Merry. Bynum, Timothy S. Koons, Barbara A. Women Offenders Programming Needs and Promising Approaches. U.S. Department of Justice. National Institute of Justice Research in Brief. August 1998. 1.

7 Ibid. 10.

8 Owen, Barbara. In the Mix Struggle and Survival in a Women s Prison. Albany State University of New York Press, 1998. 164.

9 Richie, Beth E. Tsenin, Kay. Widom, Cathy Spatz. Female Offenders, Pornography and Prostitution, Child Abuse and Neglect. U.S. Department of Justice Research Forum Research on Women and GiiIs in the Justice System. Volume 3. 1 ,99.

10 Letter from Dwight Correctional Center. Dated 20 March 2002.

11 Faith, Karlene. The Politics of Confinement and Resistance. The Impri son ment of Women. Criminal Injustice Confronting the Prison Crisis. Ed, Elihu Rosenblatt. South End Press, 1998. 168.

12 Radical scholar Nancy Kurshan, in acknowledging the lack of documentation around women prisoners activism, argues, We do not believe that is because resistance does not occur, but rather because those in charge of documenting history have a stake in burying this herstory. Such a herstory would challenge the patriarchal ideology that insists that women are, by nature, passive and docile. She then cites of resistance and rebellion in women s prisons from the Civil War period to the 1970s.

13 Diaz-Cotto, Juanita. Gender, Ethnicity, and the State Latina and Latino Prison Politics. Albany, NY State University of New York Press, 1996. 3245

14 The New York TImes coverage of the August Rebellion was all of one paragraph on page 33 on 30 August 1974 and another short paragraph on page 51 on 10 October 1974. That the Times also characterized the cause of the uprising as a fight between inmates dismisses the notion that the women involved were protesting tile staff s treatment of them.

15 Faith, Karlene. Unruly Women The Politics and Confinement of Resistance. Vancouver Press Gan. Publishers, 1993. 235.

16 Diaz-Cotto, xiv.

17 lbid, 5.

18 For more information on prison family groups among women, see Angela Davis s autobiography, Joycelyn Pollock-Byrne s Women, Prison and Crime, and Diaz-Cotto. However, according to Diaz-Cotto, the existence of such prison family groups did, in some instances, facilitate inmate organizing While individual prisoners might not care much about organizing to reform prison conditions, when requested to do so by other family members, they typed petitions, translated grievances, collected evidence of guard abuses, and passed messages to prisoners in other housing areas. (DiazCotto, 302)

19 DiazCotio. Re/Constructing Intimacy and Sexuality.

20 Letter from Barrilee Bannister. Dated 20 April 2002.

21 Letter from Jerome WhiteBey. Dated 4 November 2000.

22 Letter from Dawn Amos. Dated 15 March 2002.

23 Letter from Dwight Correctional Center. Dated 2 January 2002.

24 Letter from Oregon Women s Correctional Center.

25 Letter from Kebby Warner. Dated 29 April 2001. In many radical and prison abolition writings, especially those found in zines (underground publications), America is spelt Amerikkka to signify the country s institutional racism.

26 , H.D. re Women Prisoners Resistance. Email to the author. 2 May 2002.
27 One issue particular to female inmates is the distribution of sanitary napkins. For instance, in New York State prisons, each inmate is allocated a set nuiFiber of napkins per year. Because of the scarce supply, many women are forced to reuse and share them. (Human Rights Watch Women s Project. All Too Familiar Sexual Abuse of Women in U.S. State Prisons. Washington, DC Human Rights W,itch, 1996. Cites interview with Rhea s. Mallet, The Correctional Association of New York. 30 January 1996.)

28 Both Bat Barrilee Bannister and Dawn Amos, white women, were sentenced under their respective states mandatory minimum laws for violent crimes, and are only two of many women who contradict the Stereotype of the young, black, male predator. However, in Bannister s case, her ineligibility of sentence reduction for “rood behavior” gives her little to lose for speaking out, “They really can’t do much to me other than keep writing me up keep me in seg longer and fining me. They can t break my spirit or freedom of speech.” (Letter from Barrilee Bannister. Postmarked 7 January 2002). In California, fifty-four percent of the women in prison were sentenced for drug offenses in comparison to thirty-eight percent of the state s total population. In Minnesota, twenty-seven percent of women in prison were sentenced for drug offenses in comparison to live percent of the state s total population. (The Sentencing Project. Executive Summary. Gender and Justice Women, Drugs and Sentencing Policy.)

29 Diaz-Cotto details the seeming paradox of women prisoners and the Department of Corrections reaction to their transgression of societal expectations in her section on Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in Gender, Ethnicity and the State.

Medical Care

1 Belknap, Joanne. Programming and Health Care Accessibility for Incarcerated Women. States of Confinement Policing, Detention and Prisons. Joy James, ed. New York St. Martin s Press, 2000. 112.

2 Boudouris, James. PhD. Parents in Prison Addressing the Needs of Families. Lanham, MD American Correctional Association, 1996. 11.

3 Inside the Women s Prisons of California. Revolutionary Worker #911. 15 June 1997. . Cites Ellen Barry s paper Women Prisoners and Health Care. Locked Up and Locked Out.

4 Amnesty International. Not Part of My Sentence Violations of the Human Rights of Women in Custody. March 1999. 11.

5 Ibid. 10.

6 PollockByrne, Joycelyn. Women, Prison and Crime. Pacific Grove, CA B rooks/Cole Publishing Co., 1990, 147152.
7 Cooper, Cynthia. A Cancer Grows. The Notion. 6 May 2002.

8 In 1976, in Estelle v. Gamble, the Supreme Court ruled that deliberate indifference to serious medical needs violates the Eighth Amendment. Despite this ruling, prison health care continues to neglect and even jeopardize the health of both its male and female inmates.

9 Pens, Dan. Bag m, Tag m and Bury m Wisconsin Prisoners Dying for Health Care. Prison Legal News, Volume 12, #2. February 2001. 12.

10 The Women of the ACE Pro.ram of the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, Breaking the Walls of Silence AIDS and Women in a New York State MaximumSecurity of Prison. Woodstock, NY The Overlook Press, 1998. 23.

11 Women in Prison Project of the Correctional Association of New York. Women Prisoners and HIV. Cites LAURA Manuschak s HIV in Prisons and Jails, 1999. Bureau of Justice Statistics. July 2001, revised 25 October 2001.

12 ACE, 41-44.

13 ACE, 54.

14 ACE, 66-67.

15 Resistance in Brooklyn. Enemies of the State A frank discussion of past political movements, victories and errors, and the current political climate for revolutionary struggle within the u.s.a. with European-american political prisoners Marilyn Buck, David Gilbert and Laura Whitehorn. 1999. Marilyn Buck is imprisoned for conspiracy to free Assata Shakur and armed bank robbery to support the New Afrikan Independence Struggle. She is currently at FCI Dublin in California.

16 The Fire Inside. (Newsletter of the California Coalition for Women Prisoners) #4. May 1997.

17 Shumate v. Wilson was the classaction lawsuit filed by inmates at the Central California Women s Facility and the California Institution for Women against the state, alleging that those with cancer, heart disease and other serious illnesses were being denied medical care and that the prisons medical staff failed to protect the confidentiality of inmates with HIV and AIDS. In August 1997, the California Department of Corrections agreed to a settlement in which untrained prison employees would be barred from making judgments about inmates medical care, the prisons would ensure medicines without undue lapses or delays, and medical staff would offer preventive care, including pelvic and breast exams, pap smears and mammograms. See << California Agrees to Settle Inmates HIV Privacy Claims. >) AIDS Policy and Law Prisons, Vol. 12, #17. 19 September 1997. On 31 July 2000, in light of evidence of tampering with medical files in preparation for the assessors visits, the Department of Health Services reports citing CCWF s failure to comply with regulations, and the CDC s failure to retest prisoners who had received fraudulent lab results, the plaintiffs attorneys submitted a motion to reopen discovery in the cast!. The motion was denied by Judge Shubb and the case was dismissed in August 2000. (See Strategies for Change Litigation.)

18 Pierson, Cassie M. Memorial for Charisse Shumate. First Unitarian Church, San Francisco, California. 23 September 2001.

19 Shumate, Charisse.) The Fire Inside. December 1997.

20 Letter from Central California Women s Facility. Dated 3 March 2062.

21 Thompson, A. Clay. Cancer in the Cells. San Francisco Bay Guardian. 24 February 1999.

Children

1 Greenfeld and Snell, 8.

2 Owen. 120. Cites American Correctional Association s The, Female Offender What Does the Future Hold? Washington, DC St. Mary s Press, 1990.

3 Faith. 204. Cites Serapio R. Zalba s Women Prisoners and Their Families. Sacramento Department of Social Welfare and Corrections, 1964.

4 Henriques, Zelma Weston, Imprisoned Mothers and Their Children A Descriptive And Analytical Study. Lanham, MD University Press of America. 1982. 132.

5 Women in Prison Project of the Correctional Association of New York. > 3.

6 Morash et al. 1.

7 Snell, Tracy L. Women in Prison Survey of State Prison Inmates, 199 1. U.S. Department of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics. 6.

8 Human Rights Watch. 18. Cites Barbara Bloom and David Steinhart s Why Punish the Children? A Reappraisal of the Children of Incarcerated Mothers in America. San Francisco, CA National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 1993. Table 29.

9 Ibid. Cites Bloom and Steinhart. Table 210.

10 PollockByrne. 173. Cites Pitts v. Meese, 684F. Supp. 303 (D.D.C. 1987).

11 Letter from Barrilee Bannister. Postmarked 26 January 2001.

12 Letter from Barrilee Bannister. Dated 2 March 2001.

13 Letter from Barrilee Bannister. Dated 8 March 2002.

14 Letter from Barrilee Bannister. Dated 2 March 2001.

15 This is not to say that women prisoners do not employ tactics of disruption. In 1971, women at Alderson Prison staged a four-day work stoppage in solidarity with the uprising at Attica. The 1975 demonstration at the North Carolina Correctional Center for Women protested not only oppressive working atmospheres, but also inaccessible and inadequate medical facilities and treatment, and many other conditions. (Kurshan, Nancy. Women and Imprisonment in the United States History and Current Reality. Monkeywrench Press, 25)

16 Morash et al. 8.

17 Harris, Jean. Stranger in Two Worlds. NY MacMillan Publishing Company, 1986. 286.

18 Boudin, Kathy. The Children s Center Programs of Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in Maternal Ties A Selection of Programs for Female Offenders. Cynthia L. Blinn, ed. Lanham, MD American Correctional Association, 1997. 69.

19 The success of the programs at Bedford Hills is documented by books, articles and manuals written by its inmate participants. Unlike the writing and publications of most prisoner activists, these documents are more widely accepted and acknowledged by general society.

20 Boudin, 84. The American Correctional Association has published several books on mothers in prison, giving the misleading impression that there are, more than enough programs and facilities which encourage family contact.

21 Diaz-Cotto, 347. Cites anonymous interview, New York City. 15 April 1989.

22 lbid, 3667. Cites anonymous interview, New York City. 22 March 1989.

23 Human Rights Watch, 298.

24 Letter from Kebby Warner. Dated 29 April 2001.

Sexual Abuse

1 Human Rights Watch Women s Project. All Too Familiar Sexual Abuse of Women in U.S. State Prisons. Washington, DC. Human Rights Watch, 1996.

2 Ibid. 2367. Cites letter from Deval Patrick, assistant attorney general, U.S. Department of Justice, to John Engler, governor, Michigan. 27 March 1995.

3 Ibid. 2489.

4 Cook, Christopher D. Parenti, Christian. Rape Camp USA The Epidemic of Sexual Assault in Women s Prisons. Disbarred The Journal of the National Lawyers Guild Prison Law Project, #16. 1.

5 This attitude is reflected in the 1977 Los Angeles County Department of Adoptions vs. Hutchinson decision. The court terminated a woman s parental rights six months before her release from prison o n the flimsy reasoning that she was not going to be released immediately. (See Joycelyn PollockByrne s Women, Prison, and Crime. Pacific Grove, CA Brooks/Cole Publishing Co., 1990. 177. Cites Los Angeles County Department of Adoptions vs. Hutchinson, No. 2 Civil 48729.)

6 Letter from Barrilee Bannister. Dated 21 June 2001.

7 Ibid.

8 Thaxton, Rob. Red, White and Blue Fascism. Chain Reaction #5. 6 ,

9 Letter from Dawn Amos. Dated 28 September 2001.

Education

1 For a detailed account of the Santa Cruz Women s Prison Project, see Faith s Unruly Women.

2 Powell v. Ward affirmed an inmate s right to due process during disciplinary hearings.

3 Diaz-Cotto, 351-2.

4 Fine, Michelle. Torre, Maria Elena. The Impact of College Education on Inmates in the New York State Region. Testimony to the New York State Democratic Task Force on Criminal Justice Reform. Public Hearings. State Office Building. Brooklyn, New York 4 December 2000. 2.
5 Fine, Michelle et al. Changing Minds The Impact of College in a Security Prison. Graduate Center of the City University of New York. September 2001.

6 Ibid. 20.

7 Fine, Michelle et al. Changing Minds. b

8 Letter from Dawn Amos. Dated 7 April 2001.

9 Letter from Ohio Reformatory for Women to Books Through Bars New York City. Undated. Although there are various programs which send free books to prisoners throughout the United States and Canada, only one exists specifically for women. The other programs receive requests Mostly from men, lending to the belief that women prisoners neither organize nor network.

10 Letter from Ohio Reformatory for Women to Books Through Bars-New York City. Dated 17 January 2002.

Prison Labor

1 Letter from Barrilee Bannister. Postmarked 4 April 2002.

2 Prison Blues.

3 Letter from B arrilee Bannister. Undated.

4 Letter from Barrilee Bannister. Dated 2 March 2001.

5 Letter from Barrilee Bannister. Undated.

6 Letter from Barrilee Bannister, Dated 12 May 2001.

7 Letter from Dawn Amos. Dated 15 July 200 1.

8 Letter from Dawn Amos. Dated 15 March 2002.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Letter from Kebby Warner. Dated 29 April 2002.

12 Attachment A to Policy Directive 05.02.110. Michigan Department of Corrections. 16 July 2001.

13 Letter from Kebby Warner to Anthony Rayson. Dated 7 March 2002.
14 Letter from Kebby Warner. Dated 29 April 2002.

15 Letter from Dwight Correctional Center. Dated 2 January 2002.

16 Letter from Dwight Correctional Center. Dated 20 March 2002.

17 Inside Jobs.

18 Letter from CCWF. Dated 22 April 2002.

19 Fighting Homophobia in the Prison Industrial Complex. From Cell Blocks to City Blocks Building a Movement in Search of Freedom. Conference at SUNY Binghamton Workshop presented 17 March 2002. Juanita DiazCotto and Chino Hardin.

20 Kurshan, Nancy. Women and Imprisonment in the United States History and Current Reality. Monkeywrench Press. 25.

21 Letter from Barrilee Bannister. Postmarked May 2002.

Grievances, Lawsuits and the Power of the Media

1 Defend the Lives of Women in Prison. Prison News Seivice, #51. May/June 1995. 2.

2 Human Rights Watch. 232. As of 1999, the suit was still unresolved. However, the Michigan legislature approved legislation that year that Would remove all of its prisoners from the state s civil rights and disabilities laws. The legislation would apply retroactively, thus eliminating the lawsuit, brought under the Civil Rights Act. See Attacking Prisoners Rights. The New York Times. 21 December 1999. A30.

3 Thaxton, Rob. Red, White and Blue Fascism. Chain Reaction #5. 67.

4 Cook and Parenti, 3.

5 Heinlein, Gary. Prison Sex Could Draw Prison Term. The Detroit News. I I October 1999.

6 Pens, Dan. Bag m Tag m and Bury m. 2.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid, 7.

9 Light, Julie. Look for That Prison Label. The Progressive, June 2000.

10 Thompson. Cancer in the Cells.
11 Sisters Behind Bars Inside the Women s Prisons of California. Cites All Too Familiar Sexual Abuse of Women in U.S. Prisons. Human Rights Watch Women s Rights Project, December 1996.

12 Unruly Women. 250-251.

13 Paula Strothers Regional Administrative Remedy Appeal, 6 November 1997. (Reprinted in Art From Inside Out. January 1998. ABC No Rio.)

14 Human Rights Watch. 2567.

15 Ibid, 259.

16 Letter from Dawn Amos. Dated 14 May 2001.

17 Letter from Dwight Correctional Center, Dated 20 March 2002. In many states, a prisoner must go through and exhaust the prison s bureaucratic grievance system before going to the courts for intervention.

18 Letter from Dawn Amos. Dated 14 May 2001.

19 Letter from Barrilee Bannister. Dated 21 June 2001.

20 The Fire Inside. #4. May 1997.

21 Letter from Dwight Correctional Center. Dated 8 May 2002.

Conclusion

1 Letter from Barrilee Bannister. Postmarked May 2002.

2 Letter from Coffee Creek Correctional Facility. Dated 5 May 2002.