

# **PROPERTY OF CORRECTIONS:**

The Experience of Incarceration for Female Inmates in a New Zealand  
Prison

By

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines what it means to be an inmate as experienced by female inmates serving sentences at Christchurch Women's Prison. Using an auto-ethnographic methodology, combined with a mixed-methods approach, 82 female inmates completed a questionnaire and 10 were interviewed via semi-structured conversations. The data from the questionnaire are presented and analysed within the context of research from overseas studies. The conversations are further analysed and complemented by my own insider knowledge of prison life. This study was undertaken when I was a serving inmate and I made the decision to situate myself in this body of research. Excerpts from my prison journal entries, consisting of shared personal reflections from my years of imprisonment, are interspersed throughout the thesis. Three primary motivations drove this research. The first was to discover and interrogate what it means to be a prisoner from the prisoner's perspective. The second was to explore how the prison experience relates to the possibility of future successful reintegration and, finally, I wanted to give women inmates a platform to share their stories in the hope that it would empower them. It achieves all three. The stories that the women shared, and their understandings of lived prison life, illustrate the ineffectiveness of incarceration and its inability to serve as a foundation for successful future reintegration. The findings provide a preliminary platform for further studies in this area and contribute to the extant academic understanding of an often misunderstood population.

## **The Prisoner's dilemma**

Is it true that you remove us from society to punish us for our crimes?

Deter us from future offending?

Rehabilitate us?

Teach us that actions have consequences?

Show us a 'better' way of being?

So we can learn how to live in the free world, make good choices and exercise good judgement?

Is that true?

Then how do you expect this to happen whilst being locked inside a parallel universe where up is down and right is wrong?

Where the skills you need to survive are the very skills that got us sent there in the first place?

Where daily, minute-by-minute, you breathe in the constant reminder that you are different

Let me explain .....

You say you want us to take responsibility for our actions, yet you take all responsibilities away

You say that you want us to remain crime free and to associate with the less criminally minded, yet you put us in a place where all the caught criminals are,

Where there is no one else to associate with

Then you condemn us for hanging out together ....

You say that you want us to remain drug free

Yet prison is a place where drugs are the norm, where drugs abound, where drugs are currency

Then you wonder how an addict could succumb to temptation

A better question would be how they don't succumb more often!

You say that we are manipulative,  
Yet you put us in a place where you have to manipulate to survive,  
Where to show weakness is to die,  
Where to express emotion is to have that very emotion used against you  
Where the mantra is, from both the locker and the locked,  
“Suck it in”

Where to practise keeping secrets is a survival mechanism, keep your mouth shut or  
suffer the consequences – no-one likes a nark

You tell us each and every day in so many different ways that you don’t want us back  
“3-strikes and you’re out”  
“Not-In-My-Back-Yard”  
“Once a crim always a crim”

And wonder why we have trouble fitting back into society!

And then, you send us back to a world that doesn’t want us, a world where we are  
branded “Property of Corrections”, where we sit and listen, day in and day out  
to ....

Lock them up and throw away the key  
No job for you, you can’t be trusted now,  
No access, no right of way, no way  
Until there is no way but back but to the beginning

Is it true that you remove us from society to punish us for our crimes?  
Then why have you designed your system for us to fail???

## **Acknowledgements**

When I decided to undertake a Master's Degree and that my thesis topic was going to be the experience of incarceration for female prisoners serving sentences at Christchurch Women's Prison, I sat down and wrote the preceding poem in an attempt to encapsulate what I saw as the irony and the futility of the prison system from the perspective of an inmate. I attempted to show how, on the one hand, we hear Corrections Department rhetoric telling us that the goal of imprisonment is to change lives for the better, yet, seeing on the other hand, the dissonance between the rhetoric and the actual lived experience. The gulf to me seemed very wide, and I wondered what other inmates had to say about it.

This thesis has been a journey in self-discovery and a journey in academic growth. I started with several ideas about the prison system and by the time I had finished I had learned to see the familiar through unfamiliar eyes. I had seen the prison system through the eyes of the inmates who did not, for whatever reasons, have the easy time that I had. This thesis, like I am sure other theses, became more than a piece of academic research, it became the sharing of myself and my friends on paper.

I have so many people to thank that I hardly know where to begin, so I shall just start. Firstly I would like to thank my Mum and my Dad (who sadly passed away whilst I was in prison) for always believing in me, always standing beside me and teaching me to never give up. I would like to thank my children, for allowing me back in their lives and for forgiving me for not being there for them, my sister for teaching me how to be a sister and so much more.

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# Chapter One – The Sentence Begins

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## ***Personal Reflection 12/2/2007***

*A nineteen year old girl died tonight. She hanged herself, alone in a prison cell while the rest of the wing was at volley-ball. To feel that life has no more to offer, no more surprises, and no meaning at the age of nineteen is perhaps the very depth of despair. Her death seeps into the walls of this prison and lingers. The sadness of the women who came before her, the ones who remain and the ones yet to come pervades this place. The Sensible Sentencing Trust says that we have it too easy in prison - they have no fucking idea! To rise above the pain each and every day, each and every week, every month, every fucking year becomes the Mt. Everest of emotional endeavours.*

*“The whole system is designed to show you that there really is a ‘bottom of the heap’ ... and you’re it” (Ex-inmate, cited in O’Neill, 1989:26).*

*“Female prisoners have specific issues which need to be carefully considered and addressed.” Jo Fields, General Manager, Service (Department of Corrections, 2014a).*

## **Introduction**

In New Zealand the number of female prisoners is growing at a rate that exceeds that of their male counterparts (Ministry of Justice, 2004; Newbold, 2007). The New Zealand Justice Department predicted that, between 2004 and 2010, there would be a 15 per cent increase among the female prison population from 330 to 380; in 2010 there were 536 female inmates in New Zealand prisons; a 62 per cent increase (Department of Corrections, 2010). These female prisoners are tacitly told that they are being removed from society so that they can be ( a ) punished by removing them from the community and safely and

humanely contained, and, (b) rehabilitated so that they can be released from prison and become contributing members of society. As Ray Smith, Chief Executive of the Department of Corrections, states, *“The bottom line is public safety but the ultimate goal is about turning lives around and creating change for the long run”* (Department of Corrections, 2013a). There is no doubt that the first criterion is fulfilled. There are few escapes from New Zealand prisons; from 2007 to the date of writing there have been only 13 prison escapes (Department of Corrections, 2014) and New Zealand prisons have a good track record of humane containment. As evidenced by the official statistics (Nadesu, 2009), however, the goal of turning lives around and creating change for the long run is falling short<sup>1</sup>.

Those are the facts, however, what do they mean to the women who are being incarcerated? They are not just numbers. Every statistic relates to a human being. It is very real people, on both ends of the continuum, from victim to perpetrator, who are being affected. Therefore, in order to investigate possible reasons as to why this goal is not being achieved, this thesis seeks to explore what it is like to be a female prisoner in a New Zealand prison; specifically Christchurch Women’s Prison. By asking the female inmates to talk about their experience of prison, by questioning what female inmates thought about the prison system and where, and if, they saw it falling short, this thesis hopes to bring a different perspective to this issue. Very little is known about what it is like to be a New Zealand female inmate; what it means to the women serving out their prison sentences.

Is prison a place where they can heal, where they learn the lessons that they are supposedly there to learn?

Does prison teach self-responsibility and encourage independent decision-making? Does

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<sup>1</sup> Whilst it is acknowledged that the Department of Corrections is now moving towards a collaborative community centred reintegration approach, this is a recent shift (Workman, 2007). During the research period and subsequent writing of this thesis, the primary holder of responsibility for reintegrating and rehabilitating the New Zealand inmate population was the Department of Corrections. It is stipulated therefore, that although there is a shift occurring within the Corrections Department regarding reintegration, it was not within the scope of this thesis and therefore, whilst briefly discussed in future chapters, is not expanded upon

prison, in fact, do what it is charged with doing; namely rehabilitate? Or conversely, does prison take on the role of the abuser and perpetuate the loss of power and control that so many female inmates have already experienced, and, make future offending more likely? By discussing these issues with female inmates at Christchurch Women's Prison, this research shines a light on this little known world, the hidden world of the New Zealand female inmate.

This study details the process whereby female inmates discard their previous identity of free-woman and take on the persona of prisoner. From entering the Receiving Office and undergoing the first strip search, to entering the Wings and finding a place within inmate society, this thesis shows how step by step, and little by little, what was once considered foreign and frightening becomes the norm. The outside world fades away, and life behind the wire fence is the defining world against which all actions and thoughts are now considered. The research uncovers how, in order to survive in prison, the inmate must fit in to, what is essentially, a dysfunctional world. It is, however, a world that, as the persona of prisoner becomes more entrenched, subsequently becomes functional in relation to daily lived experience.

As this research uncovers, being in prison is no easy thing, however, it does not argue that prison should be an easy thing. This thesis does, however, argue that it should be an effective mechanism for change, and that rather than fulfilling its public mandate of rehabilitation, the experience of prison itself currently, and historically, reinforces an offending lifestyle. It argues that in order to survive a prison sentence, one has to develop an inmate persona; one has to fit into the inmate society, which in turn reinforces the inmate identity and further increases the likelihood of future offending.

As is discussed further in subsequent chapters, I was one of those female inmates. In 1997, I was sentenced to a term of life imprisonment with a non-parole period of 10 years. I served the majority of my sentence at Christchurch Women's Prison (C.W.P.) and although I



am no longer incarcerated, this thesis is based partly on my time at that prison. This research, however, is not about my crime; it is not my intention to glorify, sensationalise, or in any way capitalise on what was, and still is, a tragedy. After much thought, however, I decided to disclose my personal history and situate myself within this body of research as I believed it would contribute to the extant literature on female prisoners; therefore, I saw the benefits as outweighing the costs. I hope that the quality of my academic work will speak for itself, and the risk to disclose my story will be seen for what it is: part of the necessary context, and not an object of curiosity. The following section outlines the chapters in this thesis and provides a brief synopsis of their contents.

## **The Chapters**

### **Chapter Two – Methods and Methodology**

Alongside detailing the methods and the underlying methodology behind this thesis, this chapter situates my personal prison experience within the body of research and explicates fully the reasoning behind this decision. Furthermore, in order to contextualise my place and my story in this research, I decided to situate the Methods and Methodology chapter prior to the Literature Review. This chapter further clarifies the inclusion of a questionnaire in a predominantly qualitative study and discusses the other data collection sources: semi-structured interviews; my personal jail journal; and official statistics from the New Zealand Corrections Department.

It then moves on to examine some of the challenges involved in auto-ethnographical research, and in particular the challenges associated with being a serving inmate and what that meant in terms of undertaking research without easy access to resources. It further discusses the unforeseen dilemmas that were encountered throughout this journey and the manner in which they were resolved.

### **Chapter Three – Literature Review**

The literature review firstly examines the discourse of female imprisonment and situates it within the larger patriarchal discourse. It moves on to briefly discuss some of the issues surrounding this in relation to being a female inmate. The review then explores how early studies on female prisoners were based on prevailing gender-based assumptions of what it means to be a woman, and how socially constructed views of womanhood, or appropriate notions of femininity, still impact today on female prisoners and their experience of imprisonment.

Overseas literature was sourced in order to ascertain whether the characteristics of the women inmates at Christchurch Women's Prison were comparable to female prisoners in other institutions, and demographic variables, international and local, were discussed. The literature review then moves on to consider how the formal and informal structures operating within a prison impact on the people living and working within the system, which in turn reinforces the negative attributes that the Corrections Department seeks to change.

### **Chapter Four - Welcome to Christchurch Women's Prison**

This chapter provides a snapshot of the women residing in Christchurch Women's Prison during Labour Weekend, 2008; myself included. It introduces the inmates in this study in terms of demographic variables, and presents the data that were gathered in the questionnaire, supplemented by personal reflections and quotes from some participants. It further contextualises the data by situating it within a broader framework and compares some of the prison figures to the general New Zealand population.

It illustrates how the women in this study were disadvantaged prior to their incarceration, and shows how they are overrepresented in all negative statistics. Painting a picture of a population of disenfranchised, often-times abused, members of our society, it sets the framework for the subsequent chapters where the women's voices are heard for the

first time.

## **Chapter Five – It's life Jim, but Not as We Know It**

In this chapter, the women tell how they navigate their daily lives in prison. From the accounts of first-time inmates experiencing their first strip-searches at the Receiving Office, to the words of the longer serving inmates, this chapter illuminates the progression from shock to acceptance of this new world. First-time inmates' voices are juxtaposed with recidivist offenders showing the contrast between what was once considered abnormal and has now become the 'norm'. The genesis of the inmate identity and the methods used to navigate the prison world are discussed, including finding a place in the inmate social system; getting along with other inmates, and learning the unspoken rules of this world.

An inside view of prison politics is revealed via a description of the wing dining rooms. Finding a place to sit, the table that you sit at, and movements between tables are all indicative of an inmate's place within the inmate hierarchy. Furthermore, the staff monitor behaviour in the dining rooms and use the seating arrangements as a surveillance technique. First-time inmates explain the process of finding a seat and explain the anxiety around that process

## **Chapter Six – And These are The Days of Our Lives**

Returning to the theme of developing an inmate identity, this chapter shows how these changes are reinforced via day-to-day life in prison, and how 'prisoner' becomes the overriding identity standard. The women describe how prison is a world of inverted meanings where crime is the norm. The inmates speak of how they have to lie and manipulate to move through the system, and how this behaviour is rewarded. They feel that simply serving their sentences is not considered enough, they have to come to think of themselves as 'less than' in order to fulfil the unstated requirements of their sentences. The women then move on

to share how they came to identify as 'Property of Corrections' and what this mean to them in terms of going back out into society.

### **Chapter Seven – Sentence End**

The conclusion reviews the themes that developed from the data and discusses what they mean in totality regarding the experience of prison for my participants. It looks at how they felt about prison, and whether they thought it could act as a mechanism of rehabilitation. It continues on to discuss the question of where the responsibility for rehabilitation lies; is it with the prison system, or is it, in actuality, outside the prison walls? Further areas for study, which arose as a result of this research, are also discussed. The chapter and the thesis conclude with a personal reflection revealing how I feel about disclosing my past today and how living with the label of ex-inmate informs my view of the world.

## **Conclusion**

Very few would argue against the necessity of prison for people who commit serious crimes against society; one would hope, however, that this argument would be predicated upon the belief that prison needs to be an effective mechanism for change, or else what is the point? This thesis reveals, however, that for the majority of female inmates, prison is counter-productive and reinforces a criminal lifestyle rather than changing it. As previously mentioned we are imprisoning female offenders in ever increasing numbers, and given that in New Zealand every female inmate has the possibility of release back into the community, one would hope that prison would have a positive, rather than deleterious, effect on its inhabitants. That does not appear to be the case. It is my argument, that it would behove us to re-look at the issue of women's imprisonment in its entirety and ask "How can we do this differently?" as it is apparent that the status quo is not working.

This research uncovers the world of the female inmate, shares their stories and

provides inside information about what female inmates think about the prison system. The subsequent chapters explicate fully the experiences of a cohort of female inmates serving sentences at Christchurch Women's Prison, during 2008, and show how the welfare of any individual inmate depends on how she manages to live and relate with the other inmates who constitute her crucial and only meaningful world. It explores how prison reinforces and compounds the issues that many female prisoners arrive with. It shows how it is what she experiences in this world - how she attains satisfactions from it, how she avoids its pernicious effects, how she survives in it

- that determines her adjustment and contributes to whether she will emerge from prison with an intact or further shattered sense of self.

**Figure 1: Example of Prison Art by Anonymous Female Inmate**



# Chapter Two - Methodology and Methods

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*“Somehow I realized that I must learn to use my life experience in my intellectual work: continually to interpret it and to use it” (Mills, 1980: 64).*

*“Good autoethnographic writing is truthful, vulnerable, evocative, and therapeutic” (Ellis, 2004: 135).*

## Introduction

This chapter details the underlying epistemological and methodological foundations that guided this research, and which were subsequently used to assess the impact that prison has on New Zealand female inmates serving time at Christchurch Women’s Prison (C.W.P). More than that, however, this chapter also situates the author decisively within this body of research and provides a reasoned argument as to why. My initial position was one of attempted ‘removal’ from the research and my participants, however, having been a serving inmate at the time the research was conducted this soon proved impossible. I was an inmate, I was serving a prison sentence, and, as such, I was as much a participant in this study as the other inmates. As the thesis progressed, it became apparent that not only did I need to include myself firmly within the research; it would be a disservice to this work if I did not. Therefore, I the author am as much a part of the study as the study is a part of me. It is as much the story of my experience as it is the story of my participants’ experiences.

This chapter commences with a concise statement outlining the dual aims of this research. Subsequently a description of interpretive constructivist qualitative methodology is provided later in this chapter specifying how it has informed and then been integrated into the current research. Although the methods used to gather data are a reflection of

larger ontological and epistemological paradigms, it must be acknowledged that the boundaries between paradigms are becoming much less clear cut than before, with previously irreconcilable and competing differences between theorists now intertwining and informing each other's arguments (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The methods section, therefore, will set out the argument for adopting the particular methods used in this research as well as addressing the issue of employing a quantitative questionnaire within what is essentially a qualitative research project.

I then provide an outline of the overall data collection approach, including participant selection, interview/conversation techniques and questionnaire, together with an explanation as to why those particular methods were used. Other areas I discuss in this chapter are a brief discussion on the analytical framework, management of potential biases including data selectivity bias and interviewer effect bias, ethics, and methodological and practical limitation of the methods. The chapter then moves on to examine the ethical dilemmas that a qualitative researcher is faced with, in particular the ethical dilemmas that I faced due to my unique position within my research community. In the conclusion I draw on various aspects of the methods and methodology process and write of how they were experienced and processed.

## **Research Aim**

*“The Government’s priorities for the Department of Corrections reflect its commitment to improved public safety, more effective prisoner rehabilitation, and obtaining the best value from the resources available” Hon. Judith Collins (Department of Corrections, 2011b)*

In order to investigate the dissonance between Corrections stated aims of rehabilitation and what I saw as the reality of prison life, I thought to ask my fellow inmates what they

thought of prison, how they experienced day to day life in prison. In this manner, I hoped to bring a new perspective to this issue. My focus originally revolved around the central research questions of “how do female inmates learn to do time?” and “how do they come to identify as a prisoner?”

As both the thesis and my understanding evolved, however, the research questions deepened and sharpened to include a more refined focus on the impact that incarceration has on female inmates’ sense of self, specifically “how do female inmates experience prison”, and “what is the impact of prison on these female inmates’ sense of self?” I felt that by asking those questions, I could uncover what the prisoners thought of prison and what serving a prison sentence meant to the women in my study.

A second, and just as important, aim was to provide a space for the women’s voices to be heard, to allow them to tell their stories in their words and inform the reader what female inmates think of the New Zealand prison system. I hoped to provide a sense of empowerment, to give the people whose lives were also being affected by prison a voice, a feeling that they all too often did not experience in their lives. The primary data for this study has come from the women, including myself, from conversations, both in the informal and formal senses of the word, and from my prison journals.

### **Interpretive Feminist Methodology and Reflexive Auto-Ethnography**

Historically, when it came to researching crime, including prisons and prisoners (Taylor, 2004), there has been an overriding emphasis on the positivist tradition which implies that there are uniform precise rules that organise the world. Positivists (Bonta, Pang, Wallace-Capretta, 1995) maintain that in order to ensure academic validity, social researchers should be value neutral and not allow their personal values to influence their research. Interpretive feminist methodology however applies feminist principles to analyse



text and social constructs and implies that women will have different reactions and experiences to men, and acknowledges that there are multiple realities, there are multiple narratives and meaning is constructed within those realities and narratives (Blaikie, 2007). Interpretive feminist methodology allows for both the values of the researcher and the researched to be heard.

Becker (1963) further argued that one cannot help but to allow one's values to influence both the choice of proposition to investigate and the various uses to which we put the findings. I served a lengthy sentence at C.W.P and this experience influenced both my decisions of what to study and why to study this particular population. As a result of my experience, therefore, it is my position that a positivist approach does not allow for a full understanding of actual lived experiences. In this particular instance one cannot ascertain what it 'means' to a female inmate to be a female inmate by looking at official records and statistical data alone as these do not capture the multi-dimensional lived experiences of this population (Owen, 1998). Marjorie De Vault (1995:625, cited in Girshick, 1999:5) wrote that the goal of qualitative research is not to search for "generalizable differences among categorical groups; *the aim is to understand how a member of such a group is caught up in the social relations of her context*" (my italics).

This research, and its subsequent analysis, is further informed by feminist (Bosworth, 2000; Carlen & Worrall, 2004) and postmodern re-examinations of research (Charmaz, 2006) and the place of the researcher within that research. These reconsiderations stress the necessity of interpretive, ethnographic methods that can help us understand how, in this instance, the particular inmates in my study construct meaning. Learning how these constructions of meaning are constantly being accomplished via daily interactions with other inmates and staff, how meaning becomes embedded within the social system of the prison, how stories of past prisoners' exploits get passed down through the years to become the

‘folklore’ of the prison; none of these can be explicated without first-hand observation.

This means listening to inmates’ stories of prison and of their lives, to try to see the world through their eyes, to attempt to grasp their realities; realities that are shaped by a myriad of mental constructions, both externally and internally felt, local and specific, and dependent on their form and content on the persons who hold them (Guba, 1990). Moreover, this research is infused with the goal to understand context rather than discover universal, law-like truths. This is

the process of reflexive ethnography, the form of ethnography whereby the writer uses their own experiences within a culture to reflexively to frame self-other interactions (Ellis, 2004); I am researcher and researched simultaneously.

It is not my argument, however, that because of my insider status I am necessarily in a ‘better’ position to research female inmates or that the quality of my work will be of a higher standard than that of any other researcher. I, like other researchers before me, and like other prison inmates, know only what I have experienced myself, and what others have agreed to share with me. I am a white middle-aged female, who comes from a stable middle-class background, a two parent family with no history of childhood abuse, therefore I cannot know, for example, what it ‘feels’ like to be a young Māori woman from a single-parent family with a history of abuse. All I can do, like other researchers, is try to make sense of what my participants have shared with me, although my ‘sense’ will always be filtered through my own lens, which in turn is informed by my fundamental belief system about life and how it works.

This research, therefore, has been informed by previous feminist prison research (Carlen, 1998; Carlen & Worrall, 2004; Owen, 1998) and interpretive feminist methodology inasmuch as the meaning was co-formed and interpreted in relation to the context of the lives of the participants. It is reflexively ethnographic indicating that the researcher was also part of

the research process and fully immersed in the population of interest. Furthermore, it is reflective of my belief system, namely that the world is composed of multiple realities, one size does not fit all, and there is no one objective 'Truth' out there waiting to be discovered, but rather there are multiple versions of truth (Becker, 1963; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Denzin, 1997; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Hesse-Biber, 2007). The perspective that social meaning is created during interaction, and that positivist techniques of observation do not reveal the meanings social actors themselves attach to their everyday lived experiences, has fully informed my methodology, which in turn provides the rationale for data collection.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

Whilst this thesis employed a mixed-methods approach, those methods were not so much a conscious choice as a process of evolution both personally and academically. At the start of this process I had an idea of what I wanted the end result to be, however I had little idea about how to get to that point. The data collection process, therefore, is also part of the data; it tells the story of me, the story of what it is like to be an inmate/researcher, wearing both hats at the same time, attempting to gather data, whilst simultaneously attempting to remain part of the inmate body, and not having easy access to university resources. My unusual circumstances are a contributing factor to the inclusion of a questionnaire in what is essentially a qualitative study; I did not know that questionnaires, albeit open-ended ones, were not traditionally conducted in this type of research (i.e. Greer, 2000; Kruttschnitt, 2005; Owen, 1998). In my academic innocence the inclusion of a questionnaire seemed to be the logical choice whereby I could ask nearly the whole inmate body what they thought. However, as will be discussed further in the questionnaire section, it was not as straightforward as that, although the questionnaire led me to re-think the methods I needed to use in order to get to the richness of data that I was looking for.

As previously stated I do not believe that the experience of imprisonment for women can be captured solely by the data in a Corrections Department Offenders Volume Report. These data can provide background information regarding various demographic variables such as ethnicity, gender, or the number of previous sentences, but it cannot articulate what it feels like to be a prisoner, to be addressed by a surname, to be called 'convict', to have a torch shone on you during the night while you sit on the toilet, and have that same guard tell you not to take too many potatoes at evening meal parade, or tell you that you are getting fat; none of those things can be explained via census data. Those questions can only be answered via personal communication, and even then the level of understanding is dependent upon researcher rapport and the writer's ability to convey the depth of emotion attached to the experiences.

Furthermore, although certainly not traditional, I do not believe that any other process, the constant to-ing and fro-ing that I underwent and the constant questioning and re-questioning of what I was doing, could have captured this experience with the same depth of detail and richness that I eventually found. The reflexive process of bending back upon self, and situating the self in the other, allowed me to see my part in this process and the effect my presence had, as well as what I brought to the process. As much as I gave to this project I got back: it was learning about myself as much as learning about others.

### **Data Sources**

The primary sources for data collection were personal observations/interactions, in-depth interviews/conversations with inmates, which were either written down in a field journal or recorded and then transcribed as the situation merited, and personal journal entries kept over the years of my prison sentence. Periodically over the years of my incarceration I kept journals and it is those journals, ranging from 1997-2009, that I drew on for part of this

research. Through those journals, I have been able to provide insight into the world of the female lifer, albeit a white, middle-aged female lifer, a world that is largely unknown (Owen, 1998).

The in-depth interviews and conversations provided many opportunities for laughter as the women would tell me: “Don’t write that down”; “Change the date on that one OK” – (particularly if we were up to no good); “Don’t make me look like a dick-head”; “Tell them how beautiful I am”; “Tell them the screws<sup>2</sup> are a bunch of wankers”, and various other comments to that effect. I assured all my research participants that anything I used in this study would only be with their informed consent, if material arose outside the ‘official’ interview, it would only be used with their knowledge, and that of course I would tell them how beautiful we all were. The majority of staff and the full management team at Christchurch Women’s Prison were extremely supportive and helpful during this process. They allowed full access to all the wings, apart from the segregated (Punishment Area) and A.R.U. (At Risk Unit) for security and safety reasons, and took an active interest in the progress of the research.

In order to maintain researcher credibility and eliminate potential researcher bias effects, international and national prison research was also investigated to give this study breadth. In addition, and to provide a comprehensive overview of the current status of female inmates in terms of demographic variables, other data sources include: (a) official publications from the Department of Corrections; (b) regulations and standard operating procedures from Christchurch Women’s Prison; and (c) questionnaires distributed to the inmate population concerning socio- demographic variables. These sources were used solely for the purpose of description and not in- depth statistical analysis.

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<sup>2</sup> Commonly used term for a prison officer

## **Participant Selection**

The technique used for participant selection was unconventional due to the circumstances surrounding the project: I literally walked out of my cell door and there was my research population. Moreover, as I had been an inmate for many years, and a substantial number of my fellow inmates had either been in prison for the same amount of time, or in and out over the period of my incarceration, it was already common knowledge that I had been studying in prison. Furthermore, when it became known that I was undertaking a Master's thesis, and was looking for volunteers to take part, many of the inmates approached me and asked to be included in the study. In order to ensure research neutrality and broaden the sample, however, notices were also placed in each of the wings (see Appendix 1) informing the women about the study and asking for participants.

It could be argued that because I was unable to canvass other prisons and hence speak to other inmates, this research is limited in its scope or ability to provide a full description of life as an inmate. I would counter that argument, however, with the assertion "knowledge is always partial, never complete, as it is always acquired in a manner that is limited and 'site specific'" (Naffine, 1996:57). Furthermore, although bound by ethical constraints, I am able to draw on many years of personal insider knowledge, including periods at other New Zealand female prisons; therefore, what this study may lack in breadth, it makes up for in depth and richness of detail.

## **Questionnaire**

As previously stated, the aim was to fill a gap in the academic literature and write from the 'inside out' to reveal what inmates thought about the prison system, how they as a whole viewed the concept of incarceration, and whether or not it was an effective mechanism. The conundrum was how to tap into that reservoir of knowledge and set those voices free. As so many women wanted to take part and I wanted to give as many women as

possible the opportunity to 'speak' in this work, I decided that the best way to allow everyone to have their say was to construct an open-ended questionnaire and ask as many women as possible to fill it in. The response was overwhelming. Of the 91 prisoners available to take part in the questionnaire, 82 of my fellow inmates chose to participate. The questionnaire was administered to Wing One and self-care inmates on Saturday 25th and Wing Two and Wing Three inmates on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2008 respectively. They had previously been informed that I would be coming into the wings and asking for volunteers to take part in a questionnaire. As the same procedure for both units was followed, only one description of administrative techniques is given.

The inmates were asked by staff to assemble in the dining room. As each inmate entered the dining room, I handed them a piece of paper with typed instructions on it containing a brief introduction about myself and a brief explanation of the questionnaire (See Appendix 2). When all the inmates in the respective wings were seated, I introduced myself and explained a bit about what I was doing, and asked the inmates to read their papers, and asked if they had any questions. There were two questions, around confidentiality; "Will the screws see the answers?", "Will I be identified on the questionnaire?" I answered no to both of the questions. I went on to explain that participation was completely voluntary and if there were any questions that some-one did not want to answer, they could chose to leave it blank. No-one chose to leave the dining room, so I then distributed the questionnaires to the women, and sat down and completed my questionnaire at the same time (See Appendix 3 for questionnaire).

The sight of over 40 female inmates sitting in the Wing One dining room, with pens in their hands, filling in the questionnaire that I had written, was humbling. To see them there, willing to share their personal history with me, their secrets, because they trusted me to tell their stories, trusted me to respect them as human beings, was overwhelming. This was a

group of people who had been badly hurt in their lives, who did not trust easily, and who did not trust many, so to be granted this privilege was immense, and one I do not take lightly. So many of the women came up to me afterwards and thanked me for the opportunity to have their say, encouraging me to 'get it out there', to tell people what it was like, because, contrary to public opinion, female inmates generally want prison to be effective, they want it to 'help', they want to come out better people than when they went in.

### **Interviews/Conversations**

After administering the questionnaire and realising I needed to refine my methods, I had a series of 'formal' conversations with ten female inmates. I use the word 'formal' to distinguish between the more informal conversations, which were a part of my day to day life, which subsequently, with permission, also became part of my research. Approximately 30 inmates answered my notice; therefore, I was in the enviable position of having too many respondents and needing to make a decision about who to choose. It would have been quite easy for me to pick the people I thought would have the most to say, or whose words would most closely approximate what I wanted to hear. I was very careful to avoid that situation, and devised a random selection process in order to circumvent any favouritism on my part. I divided the participants up into five groups: long-termers, recidivists, older inmates, first-offenders, and young inmates. I wrote each inmate's name on a piece of paper, and placed it in a hat, and asked another inmate to draw two names from each group. Once I had my list of participants, I informed everyone as to whether they had been selected or not. The women whose names had not been pulled from the hat all asked to be considered if someone pulled out. All inmates in this study signed informed consent forms (see Appendix 4)



The interviewing process was more difficult than anticipated. I had thought that, because these were my friends, interviewing them would be as simple as having a chat. I soon discovered that there was more to the art of interviewing than I had realised (Rubin, 1995). Talking with my friends was one thing, but interviewing them added a new dimension to the relationship. I had initially thought that it would be my closest friends from whom I would get the richest detail: however, that turned out not to be the case, and the inmates whom I didn't know so well I found both easier to interview and a richer source of material. Friends were concerned with giving the 'right' answers, and, furthermore, since I was asking questions to which we both were aware I already knew the answers; they found the whole process quite strange.

Another challenge for me during this phase was learning to actively listen. As I was attempting to ascertain what 'doing time' meant to my participants, I had to ensure I let them speak and did not hear only what I wanted to hear. Douglas (1985:15, cited in Denzin, 1989:43) calls this type of interviewing "creative interviewing", whereby the people involved, including the researcher, "openly share experiences with one another in a mutual search for greater self- understanding". I discovered I had a tendency to answer for my respondents, particularly friends, and when I tried to desist, they would ask me directly – "Well what do you think", and, if I said "I want to know what you think", oftentimes the answer would be, "You know what I think". This was quite frustrating as it was important to me to attempt to allow the interviewee to write the story instead of using the interview to support my own theory or viewpoint. Challenges aside, this was a valuable learning curve for me, and I am thankful that it happened amongst the safety of my friends. Discovering how inept I was at interviewing was difficult; however, having friends there to support me, and laugh at my sometimes amateurish attempts to get them to open up, turned what could have been a disheartening experience into quite an adventure.

These interviews lasted on average an hour and were conducted either in empty offices or in my self-care unit<sup>3</sup> and recorded on a digital recording device. Due to the trust that prison management at C.W.P had in me, I was granted special permission to have the recording device which enabled me to digitally record the interviews, which I was then able to transcribe in my cell at night. It cannot be overstated what a rare privilege this actually is in the world of prisons. All recording devices are normally banned from prison grounds, and this ban also extends to prison staff. This was a privilege, and I did not take it lightly, nor did I abuse it. I always kept it in the back of my mind that I was opening the door for future inmates to study, and that my

behaviour did not just impact upon myself, but also upon the possibility of another inmate being able to do conduct research within the prison walls.

### **Analysis and analytical framework**

Constructivism as a paradigm posits that learning is an active process. The learner is an information constructor. People actively construct or create their own subjective representations of reality. New information is linked to prior knowledge, thus mental representations are subjective. Constructivist grounded theory, which is the analytical framework used in the analysis of data, was proffered by Charmaz, (2003, 2006) as an alternative to classic (Glaser, 2011) and straussian grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1998). Charmaz (2003:250) theorises that her version of constructivist grounded theory “takes a middle ground between postmodernism and positivism, and offers accessible methods for taking qualitative research into the 21<sup>st</sup> century”. Furthermore, Charmaz (2003) argues that her version allows for, and assumes, the belief of multiple social realities, and it recognises the mutual creation of knowledge.

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<sup>3</sup> A stand-alone four bedroom house on the prison grounds, in which reside up to four minimum security inmates, where they do their own shopping, and are not technically locked in at night in preparation for release. At C.W.P there were 9 self-care units, although they were not all occupied at any one time

By utilizing a constructivist framework, grounded theory can be moved further into the realm of interpretive social science with a Blumerian (1969) emphasis on meaning. Blumer (1969) believed that what constitutes society is created by people engaging in social interaction. Therefore it follows that social reality only exists in the context of human experience without assuming the existence of a unidimensional external reality. Furthermore the meaning of something is a social product; it is not inherent in things. Constructivist grounded theory recognises, both the interactional nature of data collection and subsequent analysis as well as the place of the researcher within these processes.

During the fieldwork and creative interviewing process, themes emerged, which were compared across cases and then discussed with my participants and often clarified. These themes were then reworked and refined into conceptual categories: negotiation, trust, identity changes, Corrections ownership, emotional management and hopelessness via constant comparison and conversations with my participants throughout the process. Thus the analytical framework and subsequent analysis were a collaborative and flexible interactive process, allowing for modification and mutuality across all the categories. In this way I felt that I was representing my participants with integrity and providing the space for the full interactional nature of this research to develop.

### **Management of Biases**

Identification and management of potential bias are an integral part of any study and although my belief system, incorporating the underlying epistemology of my research position, would by definition argue that it is the participants' subjective and partial viewpoints, and by extension their biases, that one is looking for, nonetheless I still had to remain mindful of any personal bias towards my participants and the data and safeguard against it. It would have been very easy to only include the data I wanted to reveal,

interview only the participants I wanted to speak with, and paint the picture of prison life in the way that I wanted it to be painted; however, this was not just about me. Therefore, in order to remain true to the research and my research population, I remained mindful about any personal biases I may have felt, and questioned myself regularly.

### **Data Selectivity Bias**

Becker (1963), however, has argued that all sociological analysis is from ‘someone’s’ point of view. Therefore; by definition, it is partisan. This also applies to data selection and the challenge of managing data selectivity biases. The data selected for inclusion in this research were selected by me from my point of view, albeit in collaboration with my research population; thereby, by definition, it is coloured by my view of the world. One personal bias that bears mentioning was my favourable predisposition towards the prison staff and prison management. I was treated exceptionally well at C.W.P and did not realise quite how well until I was at another prison and had a point of comparison. There were times when I simply did not want to ‘hear’ the negative comments about how some of my participants were treated, and I certainly did not want to include them in this research. I did, however, want this research to be honest and reflect the true stories of the inmates. Therefore, I had to put my own bias aside and remain unpartisan in order to let the data speak for itself.

Due to the extent of my own personal lived experience, knowledge regarding my research population, and aforementioned bias toward the prison staff, the potential to steer the data in an invalid direction was very much present, and a challenge that had to be rigorously managed. Nevertheless, the iterative process, in conjunction with conversations with my participants, helped ensure that bias was both identified and managed, with the stipulation that data were interpreted from my point of view.

## **Interviewer Effect Bias**

It is well documented that prisoners' perceptions of outsiders (Carlen & Worrall, 2004; Giallombardo, 1966; Heffernan, 1972; Owen, 1998; Sykes, 1958; Ward & Kassebaum, 2007) have the potential to hinder rapport between respondent and interviewer. However, I am not an 'outsider'; I am a member of the prison community. I initially thought that my position as 'inmate' would largely mitigate any power imbalances between interviewer and interviewee, and that furthermore, because I was an inmate, it would be easier for my participants to speak frankly and openly with me. My status, to a degree, was beneficial, insomuch as I was not in a position whereby I could be duped into believing, or gathering, false information. However, an unexpected issue became apparent during an interview with one of my fellow lifers<sup>4</sup>.

The first interview I conducted was with one of my fellow lifers, with whom I had served over 10 years, and as the interview proceeded I could see from the look on her face that she was finding the whole process really trying. I stopped the interview and said "What's wrong, you've got a real weird look on your face?" she looked at me and said "You know you can't ask these questions, why are you asking me?" I explained that even though I knew the jail protocols, I wanted to hear what she thought in her words, and she looked at me and said

"Haven't you been listening for the last 10 years?" We both had a laugh and eventually continued with the interview, however, it was a learning curve for me to realise that my friends were not going to be the ones who were the easiest to interview; I had to rethink my interview strategy.

I discovered that being a member of my research population, and so aware of the

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<sup>4</sup> Prison slang for an inmate serving a life sentence

customs and mores of prison life, made it harder to ask some of the questions I wanted to ask. I knew what was allowed to be asked and what was not allowed, and, more importantly for this process, the other inmates knew that I knew. Prisoners live in a world of invisible boundaries and unspoken knowledge; we all may know what is going on, but for the sake of the smooth running of the institution, we do not speak of it. An outsider interviewer will be given some leeway in this situation; they very well may be called a “nosey bitch” after they have gone, but nonetheless they can ask those hard questions. I, on the other hand, did not have the same luxury. I was expected to understand the concept of prison respect, but I had not factored that into my interviewing technique at the beginning, and, as the interviews proceeded, it became more and more apparent that being an insider was not necessarily the advantage I had imagined it was going to be. In fact, in some instances it was a hindrance, and that was not the only problem I encountered as a result of my proximity to my participants.

The other major issue I discovered was the effect of my own position within the prison hierarchy. As a ‘lifer’, I was accorded a certain amount of automatic respect, rightly or wrongly. Therefore it must be acknowledged that there was an element of power imbalance manifest in my relationships with my fellow inmates and that was something of which I as both an inmate and a researcher had to remain mindful. Furthermore, due to my educational achievements whilst in the prison, I was also considered to be an authority on academic matters. This in effect meant that people were ‘afraid’ of giving me the ‘wrong’ answer because they did not want to let me down. I continuously assured everyone that there were no wrong answers, that there were no right answers: only their answers.

I explained to my participants that this was ‘our’ process, that we were building the data in collaboration with each other, that I was interested in their point of view, and that

together we would construct a picture of what jail means to us. I had begun the interviewing process thinking that it was going to be relatively smooth and easy, however that is not how it unfolded. Over the years I have watched many interviews on television and thought “that looks really easy,”; but as I discovered to my discomfort, interviewing is an art form and, one that requires a lot of practice to become adept at.

## **Ethics**

My participants are firstly human beings, with attendant problems, concerns and feelings. Therefore, in asking inmates to share their stories with me, first and foremost I was aware what a privilege this was and remained mindful to treat all my research participants with the respect and consideration that as human beings they had the right to expect. This is a group with limited control over their lives, women who have, in most cases, suffered various forms of abuse at the hands of those supposed to protect them. They are a vulnerable population and, as such, all efforts were made to protect them from any real or perceived abuse of power. Questions such as: ‘What is my responsibility if I have knowledge or observe illegal behaviour?’; ‘Do my participants understand the full ramifications of taking part in this research?’; and ‘Does informed consent ever expire?’, had to be asked and strategies developed.

On the informed consent form the women signed, it stipulated that I had a moral responsibility to inform the prison if they told me that they were going to escape, self-harm or harm another inmate. Regarding the last two categories, irrespective of this study, I would feel bound to do my utmost to prevent any occurrences of violence to self or others. Regarding

planning an escape, however, I quite frankly asked my participants not to tell me, as I did not want to be in a position where I had to say something. That may sound like moral

cowardice or, worse, flagrant law-breaking. However, I had an ethical duty to myself as much as to any other inmate, and if I became known as a ‘nark’<sup>5</sup> my safety could be at risk and, moreover, no one would ever speak to me and this research project would have been finished. In respect of any other incidents of rule-breaking or illegal behaviour my participants shared with me, these remained between the two of us for much the same reasons as the aforementioned ones, with the added codicil that I was not prepared to breach my participants’ trust. Moreover, given the fact that my participants knew quite a bit about my past, I would feel like a hypocrite if I told the authorities on my friends.

One other ethical consideration directly relating to my inmate status needs to be discussed, namely role conflict dilemmas: how could I in my research role separate the “I” as inmate, keep myself safe and respect my fellow inmates’ right to privacy, whilst concomitantly investigating their lives in prison? This was no easy matter for me to resolve: however, through constant collaboration with my fellow inmates, by asking for their input at each stage of the data collection, it was jointly decided that incidents they did not want included in the research would be discarded. Thankfully, the women in this study were so open and giving that this was not a big issue. The fact that C.W.P is a small prison was also discussed, and although all efforts would be made to preserve anonymity, there was always the possibility that their identities would be recognised by others reading the final work, a factor that had to be taken into consideration upon their agreement to participate in the research.

Overall, the principles that guided this research were as follows: always consider the participants’ rights first; safeguard those rights, interests, and sensitivities; clearly communicate

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<sup>5</sup> Prison/criminal slang for informant



research objectives, and ensure that they are understood; protect the privacy of participants; remain mindful of the trust that has been placed in my hands; ensure that the possibility of exploitation is guarded against; and keep participants informed of the research process at all steps (Rynkiewicz & Spradley, 1976).

### **Personal Challenges and Practical Limitations**

The majority of challenges and limitations have been discussed throughout this chapter. However, two final challenges also need mentioning: firstly, my own challenge of revealing my story and, secondly, my closeness to the inmate body. Regarding the first challenge, this was not an easy decision. To say that I was torn about revealing my story is somewhat of an understatement. The more I wrote, however, the more I realised I could not write what I was writing without situating myself in the middle of this research. The ability to gather the data, and the methods used to gather it, were a direct result of my own position within the inmate body. I was granted this privilege both by Corrections and by the inmates because of my position within this community. Therefore, how could I leave out my story yet still write from the inside? I could not.

The second challenge, resolved by an unexpected prison transfer, was one I had not seen until then. I was so close to my research population at C.W.P., and so accustomed to being at that prison, that I failed to see what it was like for other prisoners. I saw the experience of incarceration solely through my own lens. I was accorded a degree of respect, albeit one I had earned, from the staff that other women did not have and, as such, what to me was quite a relaxed and easy day-to-day existence was, for others, a very hard one. Going to Arohata prison helped me see that and what I learnt during that period has changed not only this thesis, but also has changed me; both I hope for the better. I realised that I was the biggest limitation to my

success and that only by revealing my own vulnerabilities and my own secrets could I truly do justice to this work.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, a final word regarding the exclusion of prison staff from this study, and saying goodbye to my friends, is necessary. Initially I had planned to include a substantial section on staff and inmate interaction from both perspectives; however, I was transferred to Arohata before I could finish all the in-depth interviews with staff. This was an unfortunate and unintended consequence of my transfer; however, as I have discovered, qualitative research is not a linear process, and does not proceed in a nice, orderly fashion from start to finish. This thesis was like a living entity, it evolved and changed and grew as we both progressed together.

The last issue that I had to resolve was saying goodbye, or more formally, how to leave the field (Owen, 1998). This was in part resolved by my inmate status as leaving the field was not dependent upon research completion; it was dependent upon the parole board releasing me. I had very little personal control over that, and, moreover, all prison inmates know that, if the board sees fit to release you, then you go. Therefore, disengaging from my participants was a given and something we take into account in our daily lives. We form relationships with people in here and they leave; we know this and we expect, and accept, this. That is not to suggest saying goodbye to women with whom I had, in some instances, served over 13 years was an easy process. It was not. There was sadness at leaving behind the women with whom I had shared a large part of my life: these women are my friends, we have laughed together and we have cried together; they shared the death of my darling father with me; they shared the birth of my grandchildren. We fought, and we argued, but above all else we had each other's backs and no matter where my life journey takes me, I will take a part of them with me. I remain in contact with some of them, but all of them remain in my heart.

# Chapter Three - Women's Imprisonment

## A Literature Review

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*"To put it simply, gender matters in corrections, and a woman in prison is not, and never will be, identical to her male counterpart" (Chesney-Lind, 1998:5).*

*"Prisons are, by nature, sites of inequality, control, and oppression. They are the means by which society regulates, and on some level hopes to transform its criminal, its poor, its unwanted, its disturbed, and its sometimes-violent members" (Bosworth, 2003: 137).*

### **Introduction**

Current figures show that in approximately 80 per cent of penal systems around the world female prisoners are a minority group making up between two and nine per cent of the overall prison population (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2004; Carlen & Worrall, 2004; Carlen, 1998; Department of Corrections, 2012; Gondles, 1998; Harpham, 2011; Kruttschnitt, Gartner, & Miller, 2000; Kruttschnitt & Gartner, 2003). Furthermore, research has shown that female prisoners are often considered to be an adjunct, or an add-on, to their more numerous counterparts: the male prison population (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2002; Cranford & Williams, 1998; Hannah-Moffat, 1995; Kruttschnitt et al., 2000), and that rehabilitation programmes for female offenders are sadly lacking (Newbold, 2007; Opie, 2012). Reviewing the literature on female inmates reveals that there are a limited number of studies that deal directly with the first-hand experience of adult women prisoners and ask what they think about the prison system and whether or not it delivers its goal of rehabilitation. Adult female prisoners are a population that have tended to be ignored both

internationally (Bloom & Covington, 1998; Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2004; McQuaide, & Ehrenreich, 1998; Owen & Bloom, 1995) and locally (Newbold, 2007; O'Neill, 1989); they remain largely an invisible and forgotten population (Girshick, 1999; Fryer, 2006).

The paucity of research becomes even more apparent when applied to the New Zealand female prisoner. Within the New Zealand context, qualitative studies which focus solely on the actual lived experience of adult female prisoners in the prison environment are practically non-existent, with the last investigation being Rose O'Neill's (1989) study of inmates at Arohata Women's Prison. As there have been so few New Zealand studies conducted on this topic, it was necessary to broaden my search parameters and review the international literature as well as the local studies. The chapter commences with a discussion of how an appropriate notion of femininity is interwoven throughout the historical and current discourse of female imprisonment, how that discourse influenced the early studies into female imprisonment and how today it still remains a strong influence in shaping the experience of prison for female inmates. The chapter then moves on to examine the social demographics of female prisoners in several countries, including New Zealand, and moves on to look at the social structure of prison and the impact that has on female inmates.

### **The Continuing and Pervasive Notion of Punishment**

*"A woman, when she commits a crime, acts more in contradiction to her whole moral organization, i.e., must be more depraved, must have sunk already deeper than a man" (Leiber, 1833 cited in Hahn-Rafter, 1983:138)*

The narrative of female prisons speaks to the narrative of appropriate notions of femininity (Barton, 2000; Belknap, 2007; Bloom, 1995; Bosworth, 2000; Carlen, 2002, 2002a, 2002b; Hahn-Rafter, 1983; Hannah-Moffat, 1995). There are specific gender-based behavioural expectations attached to female prisoners which parallel and conform to notions

of a sanitised appropriate femininity (Chesney-Lind & Rodriguez, 1983; Chesney-Lind, 1998; Faith, 1993; Feinman, 1983; Geiger & Fischer, 2003; Harm & Phillips, 2000; Mageehon, 2008). Women prisoner are marginalised not only by race and class but also by gender (Bloom et al., 2002, 2004; Bradley & Davino, 2002; Carlen, 2002, Carlen & Worrall, 2004; Chesney-Lind, 1998; (Simpson, Yahner, & Dugan, 2008)). As the literature shows this is a population of people who have been already traumatised before they enter the prison gates (Carlton & Segrave, 2011; Segrave & Carlton, 2010) and as such have a special set of needs that research has consistently shown are not being fully met (Monroe, 2009; Moore, 2010; Scraton, Moore, & Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, 2007; Scraton & Moore, 2006; Stern, 2011). Although the manifest conditions of female imprisonment may have changed, what has remained constant is the historically explicit, and currently implicit, paradigm of patriarchal ideology under which gender and class assumptions were formed, and, which to this day, continue to inform and shape the incarcerative and lived experiences of female prisoners.

### **Being a Female Inmate**

First-hand experience shows that a female prisoner serving time in Christchurch Women's Prison (C.W.P.) is expected to behave in a manner befitting a 'lady'. Comments regarding what is and what is not considered suitable attire, suitable behaviour and/or acceptable standards of hygiene abound along the corridors, both from staff and other inmates. This reinforces an identity standard of what it means to be a woman (Burke, 2006). Moreover, as female inmates are considered doubly deviant (Heidensohn, 1986), a criminal and a 'bad woman', they find it harder than their male counterparts to negotiate a favourable identity once the label of criminal had been attached (Geiger, 2005). Female prisoners are subjected to various strategies designed to regulate them and reform them back to more

‘acceptable’ standards of womanhood (Geiger & Fischer, 2003). Prison for female inmates is not just about serving prison sentences, it is about socially constructed ideals of womanhood, and this is as true today in the 21st century as it was when prisons for women were first constructed (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Faith, 1993; Hahn-Rafter, 1983).

Prison infrastructures are geared towards the custodial needs of the majority population, male prisoners, and policies and programmes have tended to be directed towards men, with female inmates often seen as little more than add-ons (Belknap, 2007; Bloom & Covington, 1998a; Bloom et al., 2002, 2004; Lashlie, 2003; Lord, 1995; Mageehon, 2008; Owen, 1998). Women in prison, therefore, present significant challenges to prison authorities (Cranford & Williams, 1998). Furthermore, female prisoners have needs specific to being women, they do time differently from their male counterparts and are different from male prisoners (Owen, 1998). Elaine Lord (1995), superintendent of New York’s Bedford Hills, noted that whereas male prisoners concentrate on doing their own time and rely on feelings of inner strength to see them through their sentences, female prisoners’ identities remain inextricably interwoven in the lives of significant others on the outside; they are relationship oriented.

This relationship-centred orientation is also carried over to prison life (Bill, 1998). Female inmates typically turn to each other for support (Girshick, 1999; Owen, 1998; Severance, 2005) however, clear distinctions are made between associates and friends (Greer, 2002). The friendships that female inmates form are a critical component of the way they navigate their sentences as having someone who can watch your back is a crucial tactic in keeping one’s self safe (Kruttschnitt et al., 2000). Although female prisoners form friendships and there is a degree of support and cooperation (Jiang, 2006), it is selective and not indiscriminate. Part of negotiating the prison world is learning who they can and who they cannot trust (Severance, 2005). This contributes to the already-existent challenge of

managing female inmates as the prison system is not structured to accommodate a relational social organisation.

Previous research has shown that there is no such thing as just “doing your own lag”<sup>6</sup> in a female prison as every female is, to a greater or lesser degree, involved in the sentences of her fellow inmates (Lashlie, 2003). A story often shared by Celia Lashlie (personal communication) when explaining the differences between male and female prisoners is the analogy of asking an inmate to dig a hole – ask a male inmate and he will say, “Sure, where do you want it”; ask a female inmate, however, and she will say, “Well you can’t put it there, that would be stupid, don’t have it that deep, why not put it over there – why don’t we have a swimming pool instead” – there has to be a discussion about everything!

With female inmates displaying a wider range of emotions, differences in communication skills and their openness to sharing intimate aspects of their lives (Cranford

& Williams, 1998), a view of women in prison as argumentative, emotional and manipulative and difficult to manage has developed (Greer, 2002; Lashlie, 2003; Lord, 1995; Pollock, 1986, 1999). According to staff at Christchurch Women’s Prison who have worked at a male prison, female inmates are harder to deal with than male inmates. They are more emotional, will not take no for an answer and need more attention (personal communication). A staff member told me that, “Being a guard in a female prison means being part counsellor, part social worker and part prison officer” (personal communication). This view was prevalent at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Barton, 2000) and whilst not so overtly displayed today is still a major component of the current female imprisonment discourse (Carlen, 1998).

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<sup>6</sup> Prison slang for prison sentence



## Early Research

Early research into the social organisation of female prisoners found it was shaped by conceptions of normative femininity, what it means to be a 'normal' female. It was considered fundamental to the meaning of womanhood that females, when deprived of male company, would 'naturally' seek family, or sexual, relationships. Within that paradigm researchers focused on same-sex relationships and/or pseudo-families (Ford, 1929; Selling, 1931). The development of homosexual and/or family relationships between female inmates was considered to be a response to living in a single-sex environment. Whilst their findings supported a social system predicated on sexual, or family, relationships, they did not define exactly what was meant by a sexual relationship, and therefore we are left with an unclear picture as to their meaning (Hensley, Tewksbury, & Koscheski, 2002). These assumptions regarding gender-role socialisations held sway over explanations for differences in responses to female incarceration for many years. Using the two main early male based models of prison life, the deprivation (Sykes, 1958) and the importation (Irwin & Cressey, 1962) models, which argue that (a) prisoner culture forms as a result of the deprivation of liberty, amongst other things or (b) is formed by the already existing social values and mores of the criminal fraternity which are then 'imported' into the prison, respectively. Prison researchers then based subsequent studies on how female prison organisation may, or may not mirror that of male prison organisation (Giallombardo, 1966; Heffernan, 1972; Ward & Kassebaum, 2007).

The deprivation and importation models continued to be the major analytical tools for several decades with homosexual relationships and sex-role theory remaining focal points (Alarid, 2000; Greer, 2000; Hensley, Castle, & Tewksbury, 2003; Hensley, Tewksbury, & Koscheski, 2002; Severance, 2005). This continued reliance on these theoretical frameworks was problematic, as both models were developed based on research into male prisoners and

therefore did not situate female prisoners' experiences within the larger gendered discourse. The first three major studies into female prisoner social organisation (Giallombardo, 1966; Heffernan, 1972; Ward & Kassebaum, 2007) all compared male and female prisoners rather than acknowledging female prisoners as a research topic worthy in their own right, thereby denying women the truths of their own experiences. Today, the emphasis on comparative inter-gender prison studies still, to a certain degree, prevails, however there is now a shift towards intra-gender studies, and examining women prisoners is now seen as a stand-alone research topic.

## Characteristics of Women Prisoners

*“The Department of Corrections has recognised that women offenders have specific needs, prompting the development of policies on security classification of female offenders (Department of Corrections, 2002) and enhancing the effectiveness of offender management for women offenders (Department of Corrections, 2003a)” (Department of Corrections, 2005)*

Whilst we have seen shifts in the focus of female prison studies, what has remained constant over time is the particular population of women who are going to prison. Researchers have used both quantitative (Frost, Green, & Pranis, 2006; Greenfeld, & Snell, 2000; West, 2010) and qualitative (Girshick, 1999; Greer, 2000; Greer, 2002; Hunter & Greer, 2011; Kruttschnitt, 2005; O’Brien, 2001; Owen, 1998) methods to gain an understanding of the female inmate. Although originating from different epistemological paradigms, both methods have shown that female inmates share common characteristics. Research has shown that they are predominantly young, minority populations, victims of childhood and/or adult sexual abuse, un- or under-employed, receiving some form of government benefit, and lacking formal education (Belknap, 2007; Easta, 2001a; Kruttschnitt & Gartner, 2008; Mageehon, 2008; Morris & Wilkinson, 1995). Moreover, these characteristics have remained relatively stable over time, with the women going to prison in the early part of last century (Dalley, 1993; Dobash, Dobash, & Gutteridge, 1986; Hahn-Rafter, 1983) similar in background to those in the new millennium (Carlen, 1998; Corcoran, 2010; Kuhlmann, 2005; Scraton et al., 2007).

Currently, there are three women’s prisons in New Zealand: Auckland Region Women’s Corrections Facility (ARWCF), Arohata Prison; and Christchurch Women’s Prison (C.W.P). At the time of writing they could hold respectively: 286, 154 and 138 female

inmates, a combined total of 578 prisoners<sup>7</sup>. As of June 2011, there were a total of 543 women in prison in New Zealand (Department of Corrections, 2011a). This may appear at first glance to be a relatively small population, however, as ARWCF was only opened in 2006, Arohata has increased by approximately 100 in the last ten years, and C.W.P has had over 94 beds added since it was opened in 1974, with over 44 beds added since 2005, a clearer picture of the growth of this population begins to appear (Newbold, 2007). We have a growing population of female prisoners who are oftentimes disenfranchised and marginalised before they begin their sentences, and are further marginalised by the time they leave.

### **The Growth in Female Prisoners**

Recent studies have shown that the fastest growing prisoner population, both internationally (Ash, 2003; Australia Bureau of Statistics, 2013; Kruttschnitt & Gartner, 2003; Stern, 2011; Walmsley, 2006; West, 2010) and in New Zealand (Department of Corrections, 2003, 2012; Harpham, 2011; Newbold, 2007) are females. The increase in female imprisonment rates has primarily occurred over the last three decades (Department of Corrections, 2003, 2012; Newbold, 2007; Owen & Bloom, 1995; Walmsley, 2012; West, 2010). Until the 1980's female prisoners in the United States did not exceed ten per 100,000 however, between 1980 and 2000 it had increased over fivefold to almost 60 per 100,000 (Kruttschnitt & Gartner,, 2003). Between 1977 and 2004, in the American federal system alone, the number of women serving sentences of more than a year grew by 757 per cent, twice the 388 per cent increase in the male prison population (Frost et al., 2006). It must be remembered, however, that female prisoners still constitute a minority and percentage increases appear bigger with a smaller base number.

In Australia there was a reported 60 per cent increase over the past decade amongst

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<sup>7</sup> As I was writing this section in my prison cell and had no access to the internet I asked the officer on duty to have a look on the intranet for me and tell me what the prison 'musters' of the three female prisons were that day

female prisoners in contrast to a 35 per cent increase amongst male prisoners during the same period (Australia Bureau of Statistics, 2013), with the percentage of females relative to male prisoners rising from 2.6 per cent in 1977 to 5.7 per cent in 1997 (Borzycki & Baldry, 2003). Recently, between 2008 and 2009, the women's prison population increased by 30 per cent alone (Segrave & Carlton, 2010). In England and Wales we see a similar situation, where between 1993 and 2001 the average female inmate population increased by 140 per cent; whilst during the same period the male prison population rose by 46 per cent (Ash, 2003). By March 2005, the total population of female prisoners in England and Wales had increased by 178 per cent (Newbold, 2007). In Scotland the situation is critical, with its only prison for women, Cornton Vale, severely overcrowded (Monroe, 2009). In 1998, there were 199 women in prison, in October 2011 the number was 444, equating to an increase since 1998 of 123 per cent (Stern, 2011).

In New Zealand, this situation is comparable. In 1987 females constituted 4.1 per cent of the total New Zealand prison population, in August 2004 that number had increased to 5.8 per cent (Newbold, 2007). This increase at first paralleled that of the male prisoners, but post 2001 the number of women in prison began to grow faster than that of men (Newbold, 2007, p. 206). According to the Offenders Volumes Report (2007) in 2000, female prisoners comprised 4.34 per cent of the total prison 'muster', in 2007 however, this had increased to 6.33 per cent of the total prison population (Harpham, 2008). As of September 2013, female inmates accounted for 6.05 per cent of the overall prison population (Department of Corrections, 2013b), a slight decrease since 2007.

According to the Census of Prison Inmates and Home Detainees, 2003 (Department of Corrections, 2003) 66 per cent of all female prisoners in New Zealand have served more than one sentence (see table 1) and these trends also hold true across America, Canada, Finland, Japan, Canada, and Australia (Bonta, Pang, & Wallace-Capretta, 1995; Chesney-

Lind, 1998; DeCostanzo, 1998; McQuaide & Ehrenreich, 1998), yet virtually nothing is known about the determinants of recidivism among women.

**Table 1: Number of Previous Sentences, female inmates New Zealand**

<b>Number of Previous Sentences</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
<b>0</b>	89	34.0%
<b>1 - 10</b>	57	21.8%
<b>11 - 20</b>	20	7.6%
<b>21 – 30</b>	23	8.8%
<b>31 – 40</b>	16	6.1%
<b>41 – 50</b>	15	5.7%
<b>51 – 60</b>	6	2.3%
<b>61 – 70</b>	9	3.4%
<b>71 – 80</b>	4	1.5%
<b>81 – 90</b>	7	2.7%
<b>91 - 100</b>	1	0.4%
<b>100 – 200</b>	12	4.6%
<b>200 +</b>	3	1.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

*(Department of Corrections, 2003)*

As evidenced by the above table, two-thirds of female inmates have served have served more than one prison sentence, with 44 per cent having served more than ten previous sentences. A comprehensive study by Bakker and Riley (1999, cited in Newbold. 2007:304) discovered a strong relationship between probability of re-offending and previous prison sentences. Furthermore, studies have consistently shown that a person's likelihood of reoffending bears little or no relation to correctional treatment (Newbold, 2007).

## **Ethnicity**

Women and men of colour are disproportionately represented in prison statistics world-wide (Walmsley, 2012). In the United States, African American women account for approximately 13 per cent of the US population, yet almost half of the female prison population is black (Girshick, 1999; Owen, 1998; Sokoloff, 2005). Bureau of Justice Statistics (2010) show that one out of every 300 Black women in America is in custody, one out of every 704 Hispanic women, and one out of every 1,099 White women (West, 2010). In Canada, indigenous aboriginal women are greatly overrepresented in the female prison populations; they account for about 23 per cent of women in provincial and federal facilities, but only 2 per-cent of the general female population (Glube, Audette, & Henriksen, 2007; Hannah-Moffat, 1995; Kruttschnitt & Gartner, 2003). In England, Scotland and Wales over 31 per cent of female inmates are from minority groups, (Ash, 2003; Prison Reform Trust, 2010). In British female prisons, black and other minority groups rose by 124 per cent between 1992 and 2002 whereas the overall prison population rose by 55 per cent (Joseph, 2006). Proportionate to the total population, black women in England are 10 times more likely to be sent to prison, and Asian women four times more likely (Kruttschnitt & Gartner, 2003). In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait women are 14 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-aboriginal women (Australia Bureau of Statistics, 2013; Baldry, 1997; Easteal, 2001b).

In New Zealand, Māori women, particularly young women, are decidedly overrepresented (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2013; Kingi, 1999; Newbold, 2007; McIntosh & Mulholland, 2011). The latest available statistics show that young Maori women, aged 20 – 24 are three times more likely to be in prison than Pakeha women (Quince, 2007). Overall, Māori women are over 5 times more likely to be apprehended and ten times more likely to receive a custodial sentence than New Zealand European women (Workman,

2011). In 2007, Māori women made up 57 per cent of the overall female prison population, with 54 per cent being held at Arohata prison compared with 22 per cent held at Christchurch Women's Prison (Newbold, 2007). In 2011, 60 per cent of all women prisoners are Māori, and in Arohata prison 86 per cent identify as either Māori or Māori affiliated (A. Abraham, personal communication, 2011). In 2012/13, 65.3 per cent of all female inmates in New Zealand were Māori (Statistics New Zealand, 2014), yet Māori constitute only 15 per cent of the general population overall, and in 2006 approximately only 7.97 per cent of the total South Island population (Statistics New Zealand, 2007).

The disproportionate overrepresentation of Māori in the criminal justice system is of grave concern. Kim Workman (2011), in a presentation at the 'Justice in the Round' Conference, proposed that one of the reasons why Māori are so overrepresented is because they have been historically denied equal opportunities for redemption and acceptance which are available to the wider community, and that furthermore, this is a situation that continues into the present day. Unfortunately it was beyond the scope of this thesis to investigate this social issue further; however, it is crucial that it is acknowledged.

### **Marital Status, Children and Family background**

Previous studies on female prisoners worldwide, both currently and historically, have shown that they are more likely than both the general female population and male prisoners to have never been married and far more likely than their male counterparts to be a parent, or rather to have care of their children pre-incarceration (Belknap, 2007; Bloom et al., 2002, 2004; Department of Corrections, 2003; Faris & Miller, 2010; Haney, 2010a; Van Wormer & Kaplan, 2006). In the US approximately two-thirds of women in prison have at least one dependent child under the age of 18 and over half of those children never visit during the period of incarceration, primarily because of the distance from city of origin to prison location



(Bloom & Covington, 1998a; Harris, 2010; Kruttschnitt & Gartner, 2003; Kuhlmann, 2005). The impact that this has on both the women in prison and their children cannot be underestimated, as they themselves have most likely grown up in a single-parent home and approximately 50 per cent have at least one family member who has been incarcerated (Carlen & Worrall, 2004; Cranford & Williams, 1998; Owen, 1998; Owen & Bloom, 1995). Therefore, this, in turn, increases the chances of children of incarcerated mothers ending up in prison, perpetuating the cycle of imprisonment and creating an intergenerational prisoner family legacy, a situation that remains quite common in New Zealand today (O'Neill, 1989; Taylor, 2004).

In the United Kingdom over half have at least one child under 19, and a third have a child under five (Newbold, 2007). At the time of sentencing 47 per cent of women reported being the primary, or only, care-giver (Carlen, 1998, Carlen & Worrall, 2004; Monroe, 2009; Scruton, Moore, & Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, 2007). In New Zealand, a study by Kingi (2000) revealed that over 91 per cent of the female inmates had children under the age of 18 at time of prison entry, 63 per cent were single parents, and over half the respondents had their children with them at the time of their arrest. The Howard League for Penal Reform reported that 92 per cent of New Zealand female inmates had one or two children and collectively 20 per cent had children under five (numbering 135 children), and 51 children were under the age of two (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2013). As is discussed in Chapter Four, various studies have shown that children with mothers in prison suffer from a greater range of social and emotional issues relative to the general population (Snelson, 2001; Travis & Waul, 2003).

## **Education and Employment Histories**

It is well documented that internationally prison inmates typically have considerably less formal educational qualifications than the general population (Bloom et al., 2002; Covington, Burke, Keaton, & Norcott, 2008; Easteal, 1994; Hunter & Greer, 2011; Jackson & Stearns, 1995; Joseph, 2006; Lamb & Women of York Correctional Institution, 2008) and this remains constant within New Zealand female prisons (Goldingay, 2007; Kingi, 1999; O'Neill, 1989; Taylor, 2004). Women inmates are also less likely than either the general population or their male counterparts to have engaged in any vocational training prior to incarceration, and those who have received some training have tended to focus on traditional women's jobs, such as cosmetology, clerical work, and/or food service related industries (Baldry, 1997; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Frost et al., 2006; Kuhlmann, 2005; O'Brien, 2001). Furthermore, once incarcerated, the female inmate has a lowered likelihood of obtaining meaningful employment upon release. All too often I have witnessed female inmates being unable to find work upon release, becoming beneficiaries, supplementing their incomes with petty crime, being arrested and returned to jail. It is a vicious circle.

## **Offending Patterns**

Research shows that the largest category of offences, in American, Australian, Canadian, and United Kingdom prisons, are drug related (Ash (ed.), 2003; Carlen & Worrall, 2004; Easteal, 2001b; Haney, 2010; Holtfreter, & Morash, 2003; Sabol & Couture, 2007; Scraton et al., 2007; West, 2010). Between 1986 and 1996 the number of women in the American penal complex incarcerated for drug offences rose by 888 per cent (Mauer, Potler and Wold, 1999 cited in Bloom et al., 2002). In Australia, 60 per cent of female inmates are incarcerated for drug related offences (Easteal, 2001a). Internationally, female prisoners are less likely to have committed violent offences, and more likely to have committed property and/or drug related crimes. In the United States, 62 per cent of female inmates incarcerated

for violent offences reported having a relationship with the victim of their offending; moreover, three out of four women in prison for violent offences are charged with common assault, oftentimes a shove or a single slap (Bloom, et al., 2004).

The New Zealand statistics for 2009/10 show that property offences, including unlawful entry, breaking and entering, property damage and theft related offences combined, are the largest category (see Table 2) accounting for 22.68 per cent of all female custodial sentences, with offences against justice slightly less with 20.06 per cent, violent offending at 19.08 per cent and drug offending accounting for slightly under 10 per cent (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). These figures, however, do not paint a complete picture as it is reported by the Department of Corrections, (2013c) over two-thirds of all New Zealand prison inmates have a drug problem, and 50 per cent of crime is committed by people under the influence of either drugs or alcohol.

**Table 2: Imprisonment by Offence type, New Zealand female inmates 2009/10**

<b>Offence Category</b>	<b>Imprisoned</b>
<b>Homicide and related offences</b>	14
<b>Acts intended to cause injury</b>	95
<b>Sexual assault and related offences</b>	1
<b>Dangerous or negligent acts endangering persons</b>	16
<b>Abduction, harassment and other offences against the person</b>	12
<b>Robbery, extortion and related offences</b>	36
<b>Unlawful entry, breaking and entering</b>	75
<b>Theft and related offences</b>	115
<b>Fraud, deception and related offences</b>	115
<b>Illicit drug offences</b>	86
<b>Prohibited and regulated weapons and explosives offences</b>	6
<b>Property damage</b>	18
<b>Traffic and vehicle related offences</b>	142
<b>Offences against justice procedures, Governments Security and Government Operation</b>	184
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>917</b>

*(Statistics New Zealand, 2014)*

### **Substance and Other Health Issues**

A major problem for women prisoners everywhere is drug and alcohol abuse issues (Australia Bureau of Statistics, 2013; Belknap, 2007; Bergseth et al., 2011; Bloom & Covington, 1998b; Joseph, 2006; Kevin, 2003; Simpson, Yahner, & Dugan, 2008). A special report by the American Bureau of Justice showed that 40 per cent of women were under the influence of a drug at the time of their arrest, and 29 per cent were under the influence of alcohol (Greenfeld, & Snell, 2000). More recent figures show that 80 per cent of American female inmates have a substance abuse problem, about half of them were under the

influence of some chemical at the time of their offence, and over half described themselves as daily users (Bloom et al., 2004). In England and Wales, 58 per cent of female inmates reported that they used drugs daily in the six months prior to coming to prison, and 75 per cent stated that they had used drugs on more than once occasion (Prison Reform Trust, 2010). In 1995 seven per cent of female prisoners in England and Wales were imprisoned for drug offences; by 2005 that figure had risen to 35 per cent (Joseph, 2006).

Within the Australian and New Zealand context (Newbold, 2007; O'Neill, 1989; Taylor, 2004), there are also higher than average levels of addiction. Furthermore, international research has shown that world-wide women are far more likely than their male counterparts to have drug related issues: economic hardship; prostitution; self-harming and physical or mental health problems (Greer, 2002; Hunter & Greer, 2011; Kruttschnitt & Gartner, 2003; Kuhlmann, 2005; Sokoloff, 2005). Estimates of addiction history amongst Australian female prisoners vary from between 60-80 per cent, with 75 per cent being incarcerated for drug-related crimes, and 65 per cent using (but not necessarily caught) drugs during their sentence (Easteal, 2001b; Kevin, 2003). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2000) reported that almost 12 per cent of women in prison are serving time for possession/use, dealing/trafficking, or manufacture/cultivation. This contrasts with 8.9 per cent of men. Drug use is a defining factor in the participation of crime for women internationally (Willis, Rushforth, & Australian Institute of Criminology, 2003).

Going hand-in-hand with substance abuse issues are mental health problems. In the New Zealand Census of Prison Inmates and Home Detainees, 2003 which was the last year this Census was held, figures showed that 28.0 per cent of female prisoners at C.W.P were receiving psychiatric medication, compared to 9.0 per cent and 9.4 percent at Arohata and Mt Eden respectively (Department of Corrections, 2003)<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> This is a thought provoking anomaly, however it was beyond the scope of the thesis to investigate further

A report on the effects of imprisonment on mental health by the National Health Committee in New Zealand showed that female inmates are represented at grossly elevated levels, in particular post-traumatic stress disorder, compared to the wider community (National Health Committee, 2007). They reported that 89 per cent of female prisoners had substance abuse and dependence issues, 45 per cent had a gambling problem at some stage in their lives; almost two-thirds had sustained a head injury at some point in their lives; a third reported a history of having one or more of the listed communicable diseases asked about; 83 per cent of female prisoners with a diagnosed mental illness had a co-morbid substance abuse condition; 57 per cent had one or more personality disorders; slightly over a third of the prisoners were unable to see a nurse when they asked; and approximately one fifth of all female prisoners had high levels of suicidal ideation (National Health Committee, 2007). These figures are alarming and strongly speak to larger social issues for these women that are not being addressed, either in the community or whilst incarcerated. As the next topic will reveal, given the high numbers of female prisoners who have suffered abuse at the hands of those who they are meant to be able to trust, it is little wonder that mental health issues are so prevalent.

### **Abuse History**

Research has shown that one of the most consistent features of women in prison world-wide, across time, culture and other socio-economic features, is an extraordinarily high rate of previous physical/sexual and/or emotional abuse (Baldry, 1997; Belknap, 2007; Chesney-Lind & Rodriguez, 1983; DeGroot, 1998; Friestad, Åse-Bente, & Kjelsberg, 2012; Jeanne Fryer, 2006; Leigey & Reed, 2010; Leonard, 2001). Figures vary according to different sources, however estimates range from just under half of all women coming into prison being physically or sexually abused (Greenfeld & Snell, 2000) to over 80 per cent

experiencing some form, or combination, of abuse (Bergseth, Jens, Bergeron-Vigesaa, & McDonald, 2011; Friestad et al., 2012; Severance, 2005).

Research from Australia shows similar trends, with the majority of women prisoners reporting that they had been, or were still, victims of incest and/or other forms of sexual and physical abuse (Baldry, 1997; 2010; Easta, 2001b; Willis et al., 2003). In a comprehensive report by Lievore (2002, cited in Willis et al., 2003) it was estimated that 85 per cent of all women prisoners had been victims of sexual abuse, and that the figures for physical and emotional abuse may be even higher. The data from New Zealand is sparse; however what available data from the last Department of Corrections census (2003) points to similar high levels of abuse suffered by the majority of female prisoners.

## **Summary**

As the data has consistently shown, the majority of women in our jails are not a cohort of well-educated, middle-aged, white women from good backgrounds who have cold-bloodedly and for personal gain committed crimes. They are, as the literature has revealed, predominantly young, of an ethnic minority, un- or under educated, victims of both childhood and adult sexual abuse, suffering from drug and/or alcohol problems, have mental health issues and most likely receiving some form of government benefit (Belknap, 2007; Carlen & Tombs, 2006; Carlen, 2002; Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006; Haney, 2010a). This is only part of the picture. It is what happens when this group of women intersect with the prison environment that is where the real dilemma lies. The next section briefly examines the intersection of female inmates and the prison environment.

## **The Impact of Prison**

*“For most women, prison is just a chapter in their life, but for some, it’s the whole damn book” (Christy Marie at Valley State Prison for Women, in Camp, 2000a:2 cited in Zaitzow, 2003:38).*

The characteristics of the female prisoners show who is going to prison, however, what those characteristics do not show is the impact of imprisonment on these already fractured individuals. This is a population of women who are already socially excluded and traumatised by life prior to entering prison, conditions which are then in turn further exacerbated by the experience of prison (Segrave & Carlton, 2010). As Celia Lashlie (cited in Newbold, 2007:209) states, “There is no understanding of the deeper issues surrounding women in prison and no interest in exploring deeper than the top half an inch”. However, as the characteristics of female prisoners have shown, and Carlton & Segrave (2011) argue, it is a mistake to think of prison as the focal traumatic experience; prison is an extension of the already existent trauma that permeates female inmates’ lives. It is insult added to injury in lives that are already damaged. In order to understand how prison aggravates the extant damages, however, it is first necessary to briefly examine the way that prison itself is structured.

Prisons are commonly referred to as “total institutions” (Goffman, 1961), as almost every aspect of the individual inmate’s life is provided for, and controlled, by the organization (Ross & Richards, 2002). There are two major social systems operating within each individual prison: the formal system, composed of a series of bureaucratically arranged positions including management, custodial staff, administrative and professional employees, and the informal system comprising a wide array of offenders containing, amongst others, recidivist offenders, first-time offenders, serious violent offenders, white-collar criminals, and the mentally ill (Carlen, 1998; Giallombardo, 1966; Newbold, 2007; O’Neill, 1989). The



formal administrative structure is vertically hierarchical; it has a set of rules governing the behaviour of all members of the prison society and has the legal authority to impose additional punishments for infractions of those rules. The female inmate social system is also somewhat hierarchical, with the lifers at the top, and the child-killers and narks at the bottom and it also has prescribed rules of behaviour. Whilst the inmate subculture has no 'legal' authority to punish members for deviation from the rules, it can, and does, impose sanctions upon those prisoners who violate inmate subculture norms, ranging from ostracism to physical beating or in the parlance of C.W.P. "the bash".

The prison community is an interactional and relational system and there are multiple effects of incarceration, both on those who guard the prisoners and the prisoners themselves. As previously stated, prison is a total institution and as such inmates come to identify closely with the prisoner body subsequently exhibiting and internalising the social values and norms that reflect as well as accommodate the reality of their incarceration (Geiger, 2005; Geiger & Fischer, 2003a). They begin to inform, and become informed by, their social world of imprisonment. Therefore, social relationships within prisons, both inmate-inmate and guard-inmate, when relationship is taken to mean any interaction, are developed in response to existing structural factors and current dynamic factors which are interdependent. This fragile interdependence is an ongoing and unstable process, one that involves constant monitoring of the subtle nuances occurring within the prison population, and involving a high level of emotional management (Greer, 2002). What may not be transparent to an outside observer is quite clear to the residents of the prison. They become acute observers of their world; this is an imperative. Their safety, both physical and emotional, can depend upon the reading of the signs correctly, and if they are adept at interpreting their world, they adjust their behaviour and their way of relating to their environment accordingly. This can result in the inmate being constantly on guard, or becoming hyper vigilant. The skills that a female inmate has to

learn in order to navigate her new world are the very skills that can then make the transition to the free world so difficult.

## **Conclusion**

This is a population of women who needed help before they ever arrived in prison, and as Owen (1998) noted, prisons are called on to deal with the already complicated problems of a damaged population that society has ignored. It is accepted that there is only so much that the Corrections Department can do, however, they should do more. Data have consistently shown that, Corrections Department rhetoric notwithstanding, female prisoners are not getting the help they need while incarcerated and in fact, the problem is growing (Segrave & Carlton, 2010). We are faced with a situation of growing female prisoner numbers and still many of the prison programmes and policies are designed specifically for male prisoners. We have a group of largely disenfranchised women, many of whom have been traumatised prior to coming to prison, entering our prisons and discovering that not only were they not good enough on the outside, they are also not good enough on the inside. It is not their behaviour that the prison is seeking to reform; it is them (Carlen & Tombs, 2006; Carlen, 2002; Faith, 1993; Hahn-Rafter, 1983).

The rehabilitation programmes available for women are limited, and those that do exist are oftentimes modified versions of programmes for male prisoners (Newbold, 2007). Furthermore, access to programmes is contingent upon several factors including the length of sentence, time served, individual behaviour and programme availability (Opie, 2012). Therefore, for the shorter serving female inmates, the likelihood of placement is small, and as the majority of female inmates are serving short sentences (Department of Corrections, 2003), the bulk of female inmates are not eligible for programme attendance.

Female inmates are not a group of people, however, who are passive victims of life.

They do not just “roll-over” and “lie-down”. They may be society’s victims on paper, but do not tell them that. As much as they have been hurt and abused by those whom they should have been able to trust, they are more than anything else – survivors. The next chapter introduces the inmates, in terms of their demographic variables, who were residing there at the time of this study. Interspersed throughout the chapter are personal reflections, some made during the writing of this thesis and some from my prison journals, accompanied by extracts from the inmates’ stories.

# Chapter Four - Welcome to Christchurch

## Women's Prison

(This is your new home)

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*Personal reflection on 17/1/1997*

*I remember driving through those gates, in the back of a police car, just charged with Murder, I felt so numb, I really didn't know what the hell was going on, and the police in the front were talking about a Tina Turner concert that was on that Saturday night, and one of them turned around, looked at me and said "Ha, it'll be a long time before you get to go to a concert again!"*

### **Introduction**

What is a prison? Is it a purely physical structure that securely contains members of society who have broken the laws of that society (and been caught!)? Is a prison a specialised facility designed not only to contain but also to rehabilitate the people who have been sent there? Is being in prison the worst thing a person could ever experience? Is prison a deterrent? Or could a prison be the safest place some of the inmates have ever been, the longest single continuous address, the place where all your friends are? There is not one simple answer as a prison is many different things to many different people. For some people it is the worst experience, a deterrent against future offending, but for others, sadly, it becomes home and the safest place they have ever lived.

Who are the people who live in the prison? Those who are there 24/7 are not there by choice. They cannot leave when they decide to, their lives are prescribed and routinised.

They are there for a wide variety of reasons, with varying sentences, ranging from life<sup>9</sup> to weeks. A few may be innocent while most are guilty, some may feel safe and a few will hate it. Whether serving a short lag or a long lag, whether innocent or guilty, whether hating it or feeling safe, the inmates have more similarities than differences as this chapter will show.

This chapter looks at one particular prison, Christchurch Women's Prison (C.W.P.), and one particular set of New Zealand inmates residing in that prison on Labour Day, 2008<sup>10</sup>. This chapter initially describes the prison from a purely physical point of view, and then introduces the inmates in terms of their demographic characteristics, with a semi-qualitative commentary on those characteristics.

## The Prison

Christchurch Women's Prison is one of the three female prisons in New Zealand, alongside Arohata Prison in Wellington and the Auckland Regional Correctional Women's Facility, and the only prison for women in the South Island. Situated on the south-western outskirts of Christchurch, at Templeton, it can house up to 138 prisoners with security classifications ranging from minimum to high medium. The Prison, which was the first built specifically to house adult female inmates, opened in 1974 and prisoners and staff were transferred to the site from the Dunedin prison and Christchurch Prison's Women's Division

Figure 2: Razor Wire surrounding



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<sup>9</sup> A life sentence in New Zealand for women at that time generally had a non-parole period of 10 years after which time the inmate could apply to the New Zealand Parole Board for release

<sup>10</sup> Labour Day, which commemorates the struggle for the 8 hour working day is celebrated in New Zealand on the fourth Monday of October every year, and a considered decision was made to conduct the survey on that day, as all the inmates would be in their respective wings, and the Officers have a tendency to be more relaxed on that day as the movement around the prison is curtailed

in Addington. It is part of the Prison Services' Southern Region and employs 70 staff, custodial, managerial and administrative (Department of Corrections, 2011c).

Physical security varies from prison to prison and as C.W.P. houses inmates who have been assessed as posing a potential risk to public safety, the level of physical security is high. The prison is surrounded by a secure double perimeter fence with a 'dead zone'<sup>11</sup> between each fence; the latter topped with razor wire to prevent them being climbed. Upon induction into the prison, new inmates are informed about the razor wire and told that, should they attempt an escape, they will not be cut down until a specialist team arrives to remove them (Prison Officer, personal communication, 2008). The area around the fence is also equipped with lighting, surveillance and motion detection equipment, as well as cell-phone jammers to prevent the use of cell phones. The prison itself has a single point of entry; everyone entering the prison, including staff, has their belongings scanned. Inside the prison buildings, security devices and cameras, closed circuit TV, and video motion detectors are used in conjunction with the more obvious steel doors, grilles and bars on the windows in the secure units.

These security measures had only been in place for approximately two years prior to 2008, when C.W.P. underwent a large-scale building and renovation process. The new measures included the double perimeter fence, with the razor wire and cameras, and increased surveillance capabilities inside the prison. Alongside the security upgrade the administration building (housing management's offices) was totally revamped, with a new receiving office, new reception area, and new visitors' area built. Furthermore, the 'muster' capacity was also increased with five new self-care units (four bedrooms per unit) and a 24 bed extension built to Wing One. In respect of the increased security, the official reasoning centred on a perceived intensification of risk. It is the position of this writer and of long-term

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<sup>11</sup> An area of bare land

inmates, however, that the upgrade in security had more to do with a change in public discourse regarding male and female inmates, as opposed to some intrinsic change in the inmate population. Historically, when C.W.P. housed maximum security inmates there was no double perimeter fence, no razor wire on top, no motion detectors and on more than one occasion the prison gate was left open<sup>12</sup> and no-one ever escaped!

A prison, however, is more than its physical components; it is a home, however temporary, to the people who reside there. There are lives being lived inside its walls, there are dramas being played out on a daily basis. A prison is full of very real human beings, with real feelings and real hopes and fears, who more often than not arrived at the prison not only having caused damage, but having been damaged by life themselves.

The next section looks at these real people.

### **On the Surface - The Inmates**

*Personal Reflection (written on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my incarceration 17/1/2007):*

*Are we the sum of our parts? Does everything that we have ever done and ever said every thought that we have had define who we are? Or are we instead to be defined by one act, be it an act of supreme kindness, or an act of supreme evil, do we then become the act itself? What if an evil person commits a great kindness, does that negate all the wrong they have done? Conversely what if a good person commits a great wrong, does that negate all the good that they have done? What about for the majority of us, who are not at the extremes of the evil/good continuum, but rather fall somewhere in the middle? What happens when we commit some momentous deed, be it good or bad, who are we then? Are we the sum of all our deeds, all our parts, or are we instead our greatest, or our worst moment?*

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<sup>12</sup> Personal knowledge

Who are the inmates? Who is going to prison in New Zealand? The following sections introduce the inmates who were residing in Christchurch Women's Prison on Labour Day, 2008. At this time C.W.P had the smallest muster out of all the three female prisons, approximately holding 20 per cent of the total female prison population (Department of Corrections, 2009). At that time there was a total muster of 91 inmates, some of them had already been there many years; while some of them had only just arrived. Of those 91 inmates, five were unable to take part in this study (three in the At Risk Unit and two in segregation). Of the remaining 86 prisoners available to take part in the questionnaire 82 chose to participate.

What will become apparent is that regardless of how long they had been there, where they were from, or how they had got there, their similarities were greater than their differences. This is not a population of people who have had easy, happy lives; these are people who, more often than not, were victims well before they became offenders. What follows is a series of tables, with some quotes, and some personal reflection added, outlining who our female inmates are in terms of variables such as age, ethnicity, levels of education, etc. Whilst the tables offer an overview of the socio-demographic variables of some of New Zealand's female prisoners, what they do not do, nor pretend to do, is tell you who the very real human faces are behind these numbers. They do, however, provide the framework within which the stories of the inmates can sit, and they show the reader how very similar these women are.

### **Ethnicity and Age of the Inmates**

It is a commonly accepted statistic, as noted in Chapter Three, that whilst Māori make up approximately 15 per cent of the general population of New Zealand, they account for over 50 per cent of the prison population. Ann Abraham, the Prison Manager of Arohata Women's Prison, recently estimated the number of Māori inmates in that prison at over 60



per cent (A. Abraham, personal communication 2011). Whilst higher than the number of Pakeha inmates however, the number of Māori inmates at Christchurch Women's Prison is lower than in the rest of the country (see Table 3), which is indicative of the prison's geographical location, as the South Island has a smaller Māori population relative to the North Island. According to the 2006 census (most recent census at the time of writing due to the Christchurch earthquake), there were approximately 79,700 (7.97%) Māori out of a total 998,800 people living in the South Island compared to 544,200 (17.08%) Māori out of a total 3,185,100 people residing in the North Island (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). However, irrespective of there being less Maori female in C.W.P., Maori women are significantly overrepresented in the female prison population, and whilst this thesis does not analyse this matter, it must be acknowledged that Maori women carry the burden of multiple disadvantages, and this is something we should all be concerned about.

**Table 3: Ethnicity of Female Inmates at C.W.P., Labour Weekend, 2008**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Pakeha</b>	26	31.71%
<b>Māori</b>	34	41.46%
<b>Pakeha/Māori</b>	3	3.66%
<b>Pacific Islander</b>	2	2.44%
<b>Asian</b>	2	2.44%
<b>Other<sup>14</sup></b>	12	14.63%
<b>No Response</b>	3	3.66%
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

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<sup>14</sup> Refers to women who self-identified as Pacific Island/Pakeha , Pacific Island/Māori, and New Zealander

The largest age-group in C.W.P. are the 20-29 year olds, and when the under 20's are

added this translates into 46 per cent being under 30 years of age. (see Table 4). This alone is a sad indictment upon our society that so many of our young women are in prison; however, when age and ethnicity are cross-tabulated the picture is even bleaker (see Table 5). Slightly over 63 per cent of Māori women in prison are under 30 years old. These figures on ethnicity and age are congruent with international findings from England, (Ash (ed.), 2003; Carlen, 1998, 2004 (Prison Reform Trust, 2010) Australia (Baldry, 1997; Easta, 2001b), the United States (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2004; Kruttschnitt & Gartner, 2003). The data also confirms previous local findings in New Zealand (Newbold, 2007; Quince, 2007).

**Table 4: Age of Inmates at C.W.P, Labour Weekend 2008**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Under 20</b>	7	8.53%
<b>20-29</b>	31	37.80%
<b>30-39</b>	20	24.39%
<b>40-49</b>	19	23.17%
<b>50-59</b>	3	3.65%
<b>60+</b>	1	1.23%
<b>No response</b>	1	1.23%
<b>Median Age</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>31.59 years</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>100.00%</b>

When ethnicity is cross-tabulated with age, Māori inmates in the 20–29 age brackets, including Pakeha/Māori greatly outnumber other ethnicities, and when the ‘Other’ category is added in, this number becomes even higher. The available statistics paint a bleak picture for Māori across the criminal justice system (McIntosh & Mulholland, 2011; Workman, 2011). Overall Māori are 3.3 times more likely to be apprehended for a criminal offence than non-Māori (Quince, 2007). Māori adults are 3.8 times more likely to be prosecuted than non-Māori and 3.9 times more likely to be convicted of an offence. Nine times as many

Māori are remanded in custody awaiting trial and, of all the cases that resulted in conviction in 2005 where the ethnic identity of the offender was known, 43 per cent involved Māori (Quince, 2007). Interestingly, Pakeha inmates are the largest group in the 30-39 age brackets, with a substantial decrease in Māori inmate numbers, equalling out in the 40-49 age group.

**Table 5: Age x Ethnicity of Female Inmates at C.W.P, Labour Weekend, 2008**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Māori (%)</b>	<b>Pakeha (%)</b>	<b>Pakeha/Māori (%)</b>	<b>Pacific Islander (%)</b>	<b>Asian (%)</b>	<b>Other (%)</b>	<b>D/A (%)</b>
<b>Under 20</b>	4.87	0.0	1.22	0.0	0.0	1.22	2.44
<b>20-29</b>	19.51	7.31	1.22	2.44	1.22	6.09	1.22
<b>30-39</b>	7.32	13.42	1.22	0.00	0.00	2.44	0.00
<b>40-49</b>	8.54	8.54	0.00	0.00	1.22	3.66	0.00
<b>50-59</b>	1.22	2.44	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>60-69</b>	0.0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.22	0.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>41.46%</b>	<b>31.71%</b>	<b>3.66%</b>	<b>2.44%</b>	<b>1.44%</b>	<b>14.63%</b>	<b>3.66%</b>

### **Marital Status, Children and Other Family Members of the Inmates**

Over 50 per cent of the women reported being currently single (see Table 6), which, when taking the average age of the prison population into account, at first glance appears to be congruent with general population figures; however, when the women inmates with children (see Table 7) are factored into the equation, the picture changes. Over 68 per cent of the women at C.W.P. had children under the age of 18, and, of those children 142 were under the age of 18, 19 under five, and 36 aged between five and ten. This translates into a lot of young children spending time living without the presence of their mothers.

**Table 6: Marital Status of Inmates at C.W.P, Labour Weekend 2008**

<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Single (never married)</b>	38	46.35%
<b>Married</b>	9	10.98%
<b>De facto</b>	5	6.10%
<b>Separated/Divorced</b>		
<b>(currently single)</b>	8	9.75%
<b>Relationship</b>	13	15.85%
<b>No response</b>	9	10.97%
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Only 23 out of the 82 inmates at the prison at the time this questionnaire was distributed reported not having any children; therefore, among the remaining 59 inmates there was a total of 179 children. Granted some of the women had grown-up children, and even grandchildren, and some of the women had had their children removed from their custody prior to incarceration; nevertheless, that still leaves 179 children living without a mother and 59 women separated from their children.

**Table 7: Percentage of Inmates at C.W.P. Labour Weekend 2008 with children**

<b>Number of Children</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<sup>15</sup> <b>Yes, Under 18 (142)</b>	56	68.30%
<b>Over 18 (37)</b>	14	17.10%
<b>No</b>	21	25.60%
<b>No Response</b>	2	2.40%
<b>Total (179)</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Not only are these figures disturbing on a human level, they are disturbing on the social level as well. Looking at the next table (see Table 8), the number of female inmates who had previous family members in prison speaks to an intergenerational issue. Many of the women at C.W.P. spoke of going to visit their mum or dad, their aunties and uncles, and even their brothers and sisters in prison, and a proportion of them were inside with their mothers and sisters, while their fathers and brothers were across the road at Christchurch Men's Prison. One of my friends was in prison with both her mother and her daughter, and it was at that point that she realised, if anything was ever going to change, she was going to have to do it, because the system sure wasn't going to!

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<sup>15</sup> Total number greater than total population as some women have children aged both under and over 18

**Table 8: Percentages of female inmates at C.W.P, Labour Weekend 2008, with family members who have been incarcerated**

<b>Family In Prison</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	46	56.10%
<b>No</b>	34	41.46%
<b>No response</b>	2	2.44%
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Whilst the number of prisoners with family members who have been incarcerated, as opposed to the number of prisoners without, is not a huge gap, if having family in prison was a possible determining factor on the likelihood of the next generation entering prison, then it becomes quite a different story. Irrespective of whether this can be linked to the increased likelihood of future imprisonment, it has been found to have a profound effect in other areas of the children's lives, including, but not limited to, behavioural problems, social exclusion, lowered educational achievements, and increased risk-taking behaviour (Howard League for Penal Reform, 1993; Shaw, 1992; Snelson, 2001; Travis & Waul, 2003).

### **Home, School, and Employment**

Of the 82 inmates who answered this questionnaire, over 50 per cent had left home before they were 16, and almost 16 per cent left before they were 14 (see Table 9). As unimaginable as those numbers are for the majority of the population, the stories behind them are even more unimaginable. When asked why they left home so early, the answers all had the same tragic ring to them:

*“Sick of getting the bash”*

*“Got kicked out”*

*“I was brought up by my Nan, and when she died, there was just nowhere to go, and I*

*wasn't going to go to no group home"*

When inmates were asked what they had done for money, or how they survived, the theme was always around “wheeling and dealing”, or a variation thereof. As children, inmates had lived on the street, hustled, picked up butts in the gutter, prostituted their bodies for money so they could buy food or buy a bag of glue, and all developed a central defining belief that no-one cared for them, therefore, why should they care either? This particular subset of female inmates saw the world as a cruel and hostile place, a place that did not want them. That was what they have known and when they were released oftentimes that is what they would experience all over again – so where else were they going to go?? Back to where their friends are, and even the officers would, and do, say, “Come back to see your mates, did ya?”

**Table 9: Age of Leaving Home amongst Female Inmates at C.W.P, Labour Weekend, 2008**

<b>Age Of Leaving Home</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>13 &amp; under</b>	13	15.85%
<b>14-15</b>	29	35.36%
<b>16-17</b>	17	20.73%
<b>18+</b>	20	24.40%
<b>No response</b>	3	3.65%
<b>Median Age</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>14.9 yrs.</b>

With the average age of female inmates leaving home 14.9 yrs., it is unsurprising that the average school leaving age was 14 years old (see Table 10). Apart from the desire to attend school, the practicalities, when not having a stable home to live in, are beyond the average 14 year olds ability to deal with. This in turn creates a group of young people who have few, or no, qualifications (see Table 11).

**Table 10: School Leaving Age amongst Female Inmates at C.W.P, Labour Weekend, 2008**

<b>School Leaving Age</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>11-12</b>	7	8.54%
<b>13-14</b>	19	23.18%
<b>15-16</b>	51	62.20%
<b>17+</b>	3	3.65%
<b>No response</b>	2	2.44%
<b>Median Age (14 years)</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

**Table 11: Level of Formal Academic Qualifications Amongst Female Inmates at C.W.P, Labour Weekend, 2008**

<b>Qualifications</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>None</b>	51	62.20%
<b>School Certificate</b>	3	3.65%
<b>One Or More NCEA Level</b>	13	15.85%
<b>University Entrance</b>	5	6.10%
<b>Tertiary</b>	1	1.22%
<b>Other<sup>16</sup></b>	4	4.88%
<b>No Response</b>	5	6.10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

<sup>16</sup> Overseas qualification

With 62 per cent having no academic qualification whatsoever, it would be easy to assume that this population of women were not particularly scholastically orientated, or interested in school. It was my direct observation and experience that this is not the case. Whilst some of these women would struggle to pass exams, my personal experience is that



this was a population of talented human beings. When you have been kicked out of home, or have run away from home at an early age, and are living on the streets, however, there is not much time to study when your main concern is making enough money to buy food. The reality of the situation is, this was a group of people who had not been given the opportunity to learn, rather than a group of people who did not want to learn.

For these women, facing life with no qualifications means ending up in a minimum wage job with very limited career prospects, further compounded by the stigma of the criminal conviction/s. Once again we see that this is a group of women who, right from the start, did not have the same life-chances as the majority of the population.

**Table 12: Pre-incarceration employment amongst female inmates at C.W.P, Labour Weekend, 2008**

<b>Pre-Incarceration Employment</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Employed</b>	31	37.80%
<b>Benefit</b>	51	62.20%
<b>No response</b>	0	0.00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

What the pre-incarceration employment table (see Table 12) does not reveal is that of the 31 inmates who reported being employed, seven also stated they were on a benefit at the time, and a further three were working as prostitutes. Of the 51 inmates on benefits or unemployed, eight openly admitted committing crime to supplement their incomes<sup>17</sup>. As I spent many years with these women, however, anecdotal evidence would suggest that at least 80 per cent of the inmates incarcerated at C.W.P. at any given time have been involved in earning money illegally. Whether through drug dealing, shoplifting, fraud, or other methods, most had ‘an earn on the side’ to supplement their benefits. Furthermore, given the low level of educational achievement, the employment opportunities available were predominantly minimum wage jobs, and therefore, low paying.

**Table 13: Percentage of Female Inmates at C.W.P, Labour Weekend, 2008 who had worked as a prostitute**

<b>Sex Work</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	29	35.38%
<b>No</b>	49	59.75%
<b>No response</b>	4	4.87%
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Prostitution was a difficult subject to broach as sex and sex work are, as in our wider society, contentious issues amongst some of the female inmates in C.W.P. There is a strong prudish morality prevalent amongst the women, with violence considered more acceptable than sexual promiscuity. It is not uncommon to hear women inmates call their fellow inmates' pejorative terms relating to overt sexual behaviour such as "slut", "crack-whore" "p-whore" "hangi-pants". Therefore, for these reasons, the 35%, whilst relatively high, could be an underestimation as admitting that you were a sex-worker carries a high level of stigma attached to it.

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<sup>17</sup> Due to my insider position however, I believe that this figure is underestimated

## Offence Type

Forty-seven respondents (57.32%) had multiple offences; therefore I decided to record their most serious offence, which, as evidenced by table 14 is violent offending. This accounted for 40.23 per cent of all offence types, and, when offence type and age were cross-tabulated it was predominantly the younger women (20–29) who were committing the more violent offences, apart from Murder, which was spread evenly across the age groups. As the Corrections Department has theorised, however, over two thirds of all offences are committed under the influence of drugs (Department of Corrections, 2013c). These figures, therefore, whilst showing the category of offence do not, and cannot, show the major contributing factors in the offending.

**Table 14: Offence type amongst female inmates in C.W.P, Labour Weekend, 2008**

<b>Offence Type</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Murder</b>	8	9.75%
<b>Violence</b>	25	30.48%
<b>Drugs</b>	14	17.10%
<b>Burglary</b>	8	9.75%
<b>Fraud</b>	8	9.75%
<b>Shoplifting/Theft</b>	5	7.32%
<b>D.I.C (Driving)</b>	4	4.87%
<b>No Response</b>	10	12.20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

## **Alcohol, Drugs and Gambling Abuse**

Although statistics on the proportion of inmates using drugs are well documented (Bloom, Owen, , & Covington, 2004; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Eastal, 2001; Geiger & Fischer, 2003; Harpham, 2012; Joseph, 2006; Kruttschnitt & Gartner, 2003), it should be recognised that the numbers are indicative of a major social problem. Over 53 per cent of respondents from C.W.P. indicated that they used drugs, over 57 per cent used alcohol and over 14 per cent stated that they gambled (see Table 15). Discounting for a moment the harm that drugs, including alcohol, can do to people, the cost to society is enormous. If we could only address the percentage of inmates with drug problems, then we would move a long way towards significantly reducing our offending rates, as a large proportion of the offending committed, either directly, or indirectly, is related to drugs, i.e. possession and/or supply, manufacturing drugs, offences committed whilst either under the influence, and/or in order to get money to obtain drugs.

**Figure 3: Rolling a 'joint' (Marijuana)**



**Table 15: Alcohol, Drug and Gambling Prevalence among Female Inmates at C.W.P, Labour Weekend, 2008**

<b>Alcohol, Drug or Gambling</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Drug Use</b>		
<b>Yes</b>	44	53.65%
<b>No</b>	32	39.05%
<b>No Response</b>	6	7.30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Alcohol Use</b>		
<b>Yes</b>	47	57.32%
<b>No</b>	30	36.58%
<b>No Response</b>	5	6.10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Gambling</b>		
<b>Yes</b>	12	14.65%
<b>No</b>	60	73.15%
<b>No Response</b>	10	12.20
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

## Abuse Histories

The topic of childhood abuse was another sensitive area around which to ask questions. Therefore, rather than ask “Did you suffer sexual abuse as a child” or “Did you suffer physical abuse as a child”, I chose to ask a broader version “Did you suffer abuse as a child (If so, what type of abuse – sexual, physical, mental etc.)”. As shown by Table 16, the numbers are high. Furthermore as Table 17 shows, a substantial number of this particular population has mental health issues, therefore, I was hesitant to delve too deeply into issues that were so personal, and in many cases still so raw, in case I exacerbated already fragile psyches.

**Table 16: Percentage of Inmates at C.W.P, Labour Weekend, 2008 who have been abused**

<b>Abuse</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Abuse as a Child<sup>18</sup></b>		
<b>Yes</b>	47	57.32%
<b>No</b>	29	35.36%
<b>No Response</b>	6	7.32%
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Abuse as an Adult<sup>19</sup></b>		
<b>Yes</b>	45	54.88%
<b>No</b>	31	37.80%
<b>No Response</b>	6	7.32%
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

<sup>18</sup> Abuse is defined as either sexual, physical or psychological

<sup>19</sup> Abuse is defined as either sexual, physical or psychological

As the preceding table shows, the percentage of women who have suffered some form of abuse is very high. Over half of all the female inmates reported being abused both as a child and as an adult. Of the 47 who suffered abuse as a child, only 11 had been abuse free as adults, and, thirty-five reported being sexually abused, generally at the hands of their fathers, or in one case, by three family members. Breaking the data into abuse categories revealed that 15 female inmates had suffered from all three forms of abuse: sexual, physical, and mental. That accounts for 18.3 per cent of this total population. One of the women wrote “I was sexually abused for 14 years”. That inmate was only 26 when she wrote that; over half her life she had been abused. The comment that touched me the deepest, however, was from an 18 year old, who, when answering the question, “Did you suffer abuse as an adult?” answered “I don’t know if I’m an adult yet”. She was serving a life sentence.

**Figure 4: Female Inmate sits in her Prison Cell, Arohata Prison, circa 1980**



**Table 17: Mental Health history of Female Inmates at C.W.P. during Labour Weekend, 2008**

<b>Mental Health History</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Psych History</b>		
Yes	32	39.05%
No	40	48.75%
No Response	10	12.20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Suicide Attempt</b>		
Yes	31	37.80%
No	45	54.90%
No Response	6	7.30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Self-Harming History</b>		
Yes	19	23.17%
No	58	70.73%
No Response	5	6.10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Although causality between abuse and mental health is not implied with these tables, it is unsurprising given the high levels of abuse suffered by this population that the positive responses across all three categories of Mental Health History is so high (see Table 17). Slightly under thirty-eight per cent of this population has attempted suicide.



## **Conclusion**

As the preceding tables have shown, the largest percentage of female inmates have left, or been kicked out of home, at an early age, have left school before gaining any formal qualifications thus lessening their chances of meaningful employment, and, have had multiple children. They are often labouring under the burden of a drug addiction, have been abused from early ages, and many have attempted suicide. This is not a group of happy, carefree, young woman for whom life is full of endless possibilities, doing their O.E's, marrying Mr Right, building a career and raising a family. They are wounded, they have known great pain, often from an early age, and yet they go on.

The tables further provide a profile of who was an inmate at C.W.P. during Labour Weekend, 2008, and, by inference, some of the background factors that contributed to their offending. Moreover, the tables also show that these women are survivors, they are tough and they are adaptable. They keep their families together against the odds, and whilst the majority of us would crumble in the face of such adversity, they pick themselves up and carry on. As the next chapter will confirm, there is much more to these women than the data shows; they are multi-dimensional human beings, who have thoughts about the prison system, what is right and what is wrong, and ideas about how to do it differently. It is to those stories that we turn next.

## Chapter Five

### “Its life Jim, but not as we know it”

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*“Prison is about finding your place and being true to who you are – ya just can’t fake it” – Inmate G*

*“Prisons are places of intense pressure and like all war zones, produce intense change; for better or worse, no one will leave the same” (Christie Marie Camp at Valley State Prison for Women, in Camp, 2000b:1, cited in Zaitzow, 2003: 29).*

#### **Introduction**

The life of a female prisoner is routinised and prescribed. Unlike popular media stereotypes, female prisoners are more likely to suffer from boredom than from violence imposed by other inmates. Whilst lesbian relationships are more common in prison than in the outside world, they are also not abundant; not every female prisoner is in a same-sex relationship nor are they generally coerced into one. Female prisoners at C.W.P, as introduced in the previous chapter, are predominantly aged between 20-29, single mothers and beneficiaries, and a great deal of their time is spent worrying about their children, what has happened to their belongings, what their partners are up to, how they are going to get through this sentence and what is going to happen when they get out. What first-timers do not realise yet is that they are going to be different versions of themselves when they come

out; prison alters not only inmates' perspectives of themselves, but also alters the way they see their place in the world.

How different this version is depends on several factors. Doing a successful prison sentence is a state of mind. It is being able to live with oneself comfortably for long periods of time locked in a small cell. It is learning to keep emotions in check and, above all else, it is learning how to survive in the prison world whilst at the same time keeping a part of oneself locked away so that, when released, the inmate is able to re-enter the outside world, the other world, and have some chance of fitting in. It is being able to put on the mantle of 'inmate' whilst simultaneously retaining and identifying with the outside persona and being comfortable with that dichotomy. It is a delicate dance between fitting in and becoming institutionalised – fit in too well and the outside becomes too strange; not fit in enough and prison is an unbearable hell. This chapter will look at that process of becoming a prisoner, the transition from who the inmates saw themselves prior to prison to who they learn to see themselves as during prison.

**Figure 5: Christchurch Women's Prison from outside the wire**



## Reception

*The recruit comes in to the establishment with a conception of himself made possible by certain stable social arrangements in his home world. Upon entrance, he is immediately stripped of the support provided by these arrangements ... he begins a series of abasements, degradation, humiliations, and profanations of self. His self is systematically, if often unintentionally, mortified (Goffman, 1961).*

*It's just so degrading for a woman... you know ... they just look at all your private bits and pieces, tell ya to bend down, show them your bum, lift your feet, you're just reeling from it all. Come from court, still in bloody shock about the sentence, the worst day of your life and BAM – you're standing there half-naked lifting ya tits up, wondering what the hell is going on – Yay-welcome to prison – you really are nothing (Inmate K).*

The first encounter with either a prison or a prison officer for the majority of prisoners is at the Receiving Office (R/O), and it is where the first step in the transformation from free woman to inmate officially begins. Once a sentence of imprisonment or a remand in custody is handed down by the court system, and court is finished for the day, the prisoner/accused is generally<sup>13</sup> transported immediately to prison. The prisoner sits in the van while the police and the Receiving Officer go over the paperwork and confirm identity. Like Garfinkel's (1956) degradation ceremonies, whereby identity is reformed and rebuilt due to the impact of the event, the newly named 'inmate' is becoming, in the eyes of society, literally a different and new person, not simply changed but reconstructed. From the moment the prisoner walks out of the prison van, and into the reception office, or RO, their bodies become the Property of the New Zealand Corrections Department, and, as further

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<sup>13</sup> Sentenced Inmates can be held at police stations if they are from out of town and no transport to the prison is available

examination of the data will reveal, their ability to retain ownership of their sense of self also becomes subsumed within correctional ownership. All the things that most likely were taken for granted now take on different meanings. Simply going for a walk alone, acceptable clothing and reading materials, when, and how long an inmate can shower for, the type of food, and the amount of it that can be consumed: all are now controlled by the Department of Corrections. The person's day-to-day life is about to change, and the way she felt about her place in the world is altered forever.

*Personal Reflection:*

*"You are asked nothing, you are told nothing, you sit there and listen to your business being discussed, your personal details shared with strangers, you are starting to lose your existence and your identity as a free person; the transformation is beginning. When I was arrested the police arrested me under my married name, even though I told them I didn't use that name any longer. Then when I got to the prison, I tried to get received under my maiden name, no sorry can't do it, that's not your name, your name is what is on the warrant! What do you mean that's not my name - all my identification was under my maiden name, my driver's license, my passport, my bank accounts, everything, but NO, apparently that's not me any longer, I had to be received under my married name even though I had been divorced for 16 years – bad enough they took away my belongings, but they took my fucking name as well"*

The prisoner is placed in a holding cell in the reception area; a cell with a toilet and, maybe, a small screen to shield her from sight, a hand basin and a narrow stainless steel bench along one wall and a camera on the ceiling. There is graffiti on the walls "MMM" (Mighty Mongrel Mob), "Yo Fuck Yo" (Black Power), "Sistas foreva", "*Such-and Such* is a Nark". There is constant battle between prison authorities and graffiti, and, if an inmate is caught defacing prison property, she will be charged with an offence against 'good order

and discipline'. The first timers, however, do not know that then; all they can see is all these messages, and, depending upon their background, they are comforted, angered, or terrified:

*"O god I remember getting out of the police van, fuck I didn't want to and I got put straight into the holding cell, and told that I would have a wait cos they were busy .I sat there, and I sat there freaking out not knowing what was going to happen and started reading the shit on the walls (asked her what she thought of that) um.. I think the worst, well what scared me the most was the lovey stuff – all the hearts with names in them – fuck me I thought, I don't want no chick coming on to me!" (Inmate A)*

Or from another perspective:

*"It's [the graffiti] kinda like a newspaper if you know what I mean – reading it and finding out what people have been up to – oh yeah I know her, oh fucking bitch she narked such on such, you can get a lot of information from the tagging"(Inmate D).*

The speed with which the new inmate is processed depends upon several external factors: how busy it is at the RO; the amount of property (personal belongings) the inmate has with her; staff availability; and time of day. The whole process can take up to several hours. Inmates over the years have recounted how they were just starting to relax and starting to think it was not too bad when the Receiving Officer opened the cell and asked them to step out, because she was ready to do the induction. This whole process is designed to reinforce the lowly status of the inmate in relation to that of the officer (O'Neill, 1989).

This symbolic statement of their relationship is something that will pervade the inmate's daily experience of imprisonment:

*"It felt like watching a video of me, an out-of-body experience almost, all your personal details being discussed like you are a commodity, or not even really that, less than that, the whole thing is so dispassionate, it's you, but it's not you anymore if that makes sense" (Inmate A).*

Instructions are peremptorily given, and a set of standard questions asked. Stand up against that wall, click goes the camera, turn to the side; is this your first time in prison; do you have a drug/alcohol problem; are your family members angry with you; do your family know you are here; have you ever tried to kill yourself; have you ever self-harmed; have you ever seen a psychologist? If the answer to any of these questions is yes the inmate is deemed to be "at risk", and put on ob's<sup>1421</sup>, awaiting a Unit Manager's sign off. Most first-timers come up "at risk" in fact most prisoners will come up at risk. Although, a necessary and sometimes life-saving management tool, the more seasoned prisoner will answer no, knowing consequences if the answer is yes can be extremely trying and invasive. A common 'joke' amongst the inmates is "If you weren't at risk before you were put on ob's, you would be at risk afterwards": Inmate K commented, half-jokingly:

*"When you first get there – they ask you all these questions, ask if you've got a drug problem, alcohol problem, do you feel like committing suicide – and all those answers were no – not at the moment, but give me few days ha-ha – I was joking, but man they didn't think it was funny."*

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<sup>14</sup> Observations – 15 mins, 30 mins or hourly checks by prison staff at which time you are expected to answer, even in the middle of the night

After asking a series of questions, and completing the other paperwork, the Receiving Officer will go through the property, and explain what can be kept and what cannot, the correct procedure for bringing property into the prison, how much property is allowed, and what will happen if found with contraband, and a detailed explanation of what contraband is. In prison the meaning of the word ‘contraband’ is taken to a whole different level. The colour red is banned as it is deemed to be a gang colour; therefore having something red in your possession is deemed as contraband; extra sugar is contraband; extra bread, extra margarine, too many toiletries, all can be considered as contraband items, and as such become tradable, taking on a worth far above their inherent face value.

While women inmates at C.W.P. were allowed to wear their own clothes<sup>15</sup>, there are dress codes, an official one and an unofficial one, determining what clothes are deemed acceptable and what are not. Officially, all red clothing is banned, including red pyjamas and even sometimes red underwear; even a red toothbrush would not get in. Skirts that are considered too short, shorts that are too short, tops that are too low – all not acceptable, no hooded tops, no clothes with alcohol or drug paraphernalia on them, no clothes that could be considered gang related, no high heels, no hard-toed boots, and the Receiving Officer will often caution a first time inmate against wearing label gear, as that could leave them open to stand-overs or theft. The unofficial dress code, consisting of mainly track pants and/or jeans, with t-shirts and sweat-shirts, nothing too short or too tight, is one of the many unwritten inmate rules that the inmate will learn.

Property is confined to a certain limit which must conform to what is known as “Cell Standards”. Cell Standards cover every single item that is allowed in a cell (see Appendix 5).

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<sup>15</sup> This has subsequently changed, and female inmates are now in ‘kit gear’ = prison issue clothes



The number of prison blankets, sheets, and towels are all part of cell standards. How much food can be kept in the cell is also detailed, how many articles of clothing, which must belong to the inmate, or she will be charged (internal discipline); similarly, only a certain number of books<sup>16</sup> (12), magazines, CD's and/or cassettes (12) is allowed. The list is specific and inclusive: toiletries must fit into a shoe box<sup>17</sup>, craft gear must fit into a shoe box (what is allowed is heavily prescribed), no glass items or no banned items. Inmates may apply for permission to have a radio/CD player, a TV and a kettle; however any extra electrical equipment, reading lamps, fans, and/or computers are dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Life in prison is detailed and prescribed.

After the official paperwork side of reception is completed, the inmate will then be told that under Section (98) of the Corrections Act, they will now be required to undergo a Strip Search for the purposes of the detection of any banned articles, and this search will be completed in the presence of two female officers. Dobash, Dobash, & Gutteridge (1986:5) state that “searches at these times served as a symbolic function of reaffirming imprisonment, shame, and lack of status”, which is clearly illustrated by this inmate’s experience:

*“When I first arrived at the prison, I had my mate, you know, my period, and I was bleeding quite heavily, so I had put a tampon in and was also using a pad. Well when I got stripped I told them that I had my period and had – you know – a tampon in – well she just looked at me and said – it makes no difference – you are still getting stripped, take the tampon out and hold it up please – I felt like my world had stopped in that moment – standing there, no knickers on, blood soaked tampon dangling from my hand, and I knew that in their eyes I*

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<sup>16</sup> You are able to apply to have more books if you are doing a recognised course of study

<sup>17</sup> Too many toiletries can be considered examples of trading

*was a piece of shit, no - even worse than that – I was nothing – it's the weirdest thing!" Inmate B*

The strip search acts as a further stripping of identity (DeGroot, 1998) since the inmate, if she has been held in the police station, will already have been stripped that day; it is a confirmation of your status as an inmate. The inmate will be required to strip in a specific fashion, in a specific order, and follow a set of instructions and they are not to begin disrobing until the instruction is given: "do you understand these instructions?" When understanding is indicated, the strip procedure will begin. This procedure is particularly degrading and upsetting for many women, as the majority of female inmates have been sexually abused and numerous studies (Easteal, 1994; Friestad et al., 2012; McCulloch & George, 2009; Scraton & Moore, 2006; Zaitzow, 2003) have shown that being strip-searched is more traumatic for women than it is for men. The meaning of the body for women is a site of contested power (Mageehon, 2008) women usually only show their bodies to their partners, or to doctors. Asked how they felt about this procedure, participants' responses were generally negative, with a certain sad acceptance. Two first-timers explain the experience for them:

*"It's demeaning, I was mortified when I got strip-searched, but it's kind of already been so surreal that when they start stripping you – you're just resigned to the whole bloody thing!" (Inmate B)*

*"They brought three of us down from (small town in South Island) and one of the girls was not quite right in the head, and when they went to strip her, man she freaked out, she was crying and yelling, and we (the other two) were sitting there listening to this, that was just wrong" (Inmate A).*

When asked, “how did the staff doing the procedure treat you?” answers varied, showing a great deal of inconsistency in this process. One young inmate said:

*“They were quite rude actually, I think it was (names an officer), and she was all just ...all very straight to the point and I don’t know, a wee bit rough I guess and I’d been in the van for 7 ½ hours spewing my brains out, so I was feeling really sick, so she was trying to throw all this information at me, and I don’t know, she must have been having a bad day, yeah, cos I’ve heard that’s she quite nice usually” (Inmate A).*

Another young inmate commented:

*“They must get sick of doing it, they probably get sick of doing it day in and day out but they forget what it’s like for us coming in and not having any idea about what is going to happen” (Inmate B).*

Whilst another said:

*“[says Receiving Officer’s name] was real nice to me, she was kind and told me not to be scared that it would be ok, and that there were some nice women in the prison, and that once I had settled in I would be ok – she did tell me not to trust anyone though (laughing) – but Nah, she was real nice when I first got here, it’s still awful though taking ya gear off in front of complete strangers” (Inmate C).*

When I asked a lifer how she found the process, however, the answer was quite illuminating:

*“You just get used to it, I don’t even think about it now, it’s like a ... um ... whaddy call it??? It’s like I’m trained - I just start taking my clothes off – I know, like on automatic pilot, shoes off, socks off, knickers down, crouch down turn around, tits up, ya just do it, ya can’t let it get to you or they’ve won! – and to be honest, it’s more about who you are as to whether they search you all the time or not anyway. Some of the screws are hard arses about it, but most of them, especially the old ones who have known ya for a while know that*

*you are not going to have any shit on ya – so they just let ya go through – but ya can't count on it, you know what I mean”(Inmate G).*

Another long-termersaid:

*“I don't think the screws particularly like it either, well not most of them anyways. I don't think that they quite realise the damage that they are doing to the inmate, Oh God, I hope they don't realise the damage they are doing to the inmate!” (Inmate M)*

After the strip search is completed, the inmate can get fully dressed, or, in cases where the clothes were either unsuitable or un-wearable, will be placed in a strip-nightie<sup>1825</sup> awaiting wing assignment. At Christchurch Women's Prison, depending upon cell availability and her mental state<sup>19</sup>, the newly arrived inmate will be housed in the general population in either Wing Two or Wing Three, which are both Unit Two wings. You are now officially an inmate, and on the surface have lost your physical freedom. There are new rules and regulations to get used to, but what the new inmate generally does not realise at this stage is that she has lost a lot more than just her freedom; the loss of freedom is the easiest thing to deal with, it is what comes next that is hard.

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<sup>18</sup> A canvas nightgown heavily stitched to prevent tearing

<sup>19</sup> If disturbed or under the influence of drugs/alcohol the new arrival may be placed in the At Risk Unit (ARU) so they can be closely monitored

## **The Dark Side – Wing Two and Wing Three**

*“Hell is other people” Jean Paul Sartre (1905 – 1980)*

*“The worst thing about prison is the other inmates” (Inmate M)*

After the receiving process is completed, the inmate is allocated a cell in her designated wing. At this point the inmate most likely does not have her property, as this will be searched thoroughly at a later date, and she is either in her own clothes, or a prison nightie, a dressing gown if lucky and almost certainly prison ‘Reeboks’<sup>20</sup>. A sentenced inmate, who has presented without obvious signs of distress, will generally be housed in Wing Two, one of the two wings in Unit Two, or the dark side. This part of the prison is colloquially known as the dark side in reference to the poor quality of light that enters Wing Two and Wing Three. The corridor lights are always on and there is very little natural light in this part of the prison, it is gloomy and depressing. Some women spend years in these wings. Wing Two has capacity to hold 24 inmates with security classifications ranging from High Medium to Minimum<sup>21</sup>. It is set out with all cells opening off a single corridor, and a clear view from the grille to the end of the wing. Coming off the corridor is the dining room and the lounge room area. The shower block is behind the grille, directly opposite the wing office. Upon entering the wing, an officer unlocks a thick steel door allowing access into a sally port (a holding area between the steel door and traditional prison grille door). In this area is a door leading to the staff office, with a large window bisected by the grille door, and the afore-mentioned shower

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<sup>20</sup> What inmates call the canvas sand-shoes, without laces, that the prison gives to those whose shoes did not pass cell standards or those who do not have any shoes

<sup>21</sup> Classification is calculated via a set of actuarial calculations including length of sentence, type of crime, and sentence status

and toilet block. Access to the office is only by staff unlocking the grille and allowing you entry, which in effect also means that in order to access the shower, you have to ask permission, and, as the inmate is going to find out, this it is not always given.

Upon arrival in the wing, the inmate is taken into the office and interviewed by the Wing Staff. There will be two officers in the wing, a SCO (Senior Corrections Officer) and a CO (Corrections Officer). The inmate will be allocated with a cell, asked if she would like a phone call to her family, and be given a brief run-down on wing routines, including unlock times, meal parade times, lock-up times and shower times; it is all about time!

The typical Wing Two routine was as follows:

8:00 a.m. – Unlock and proceed to line-up parade<sup>22</sup>

8:45 a.m. – Lock-up for the morning except for workers (of whom there are very few)

11:00 a.m. – Lunch parade

11:50 – Lock-up for Staff lunch

1:00 p.m. – Unlock for yards or remain in cell

3:00 p.m. – Unlock for afternoon

4:00 p.m. – Evening meal parade

5:00 p.m. – final lock-down for evening

An inmate described it thus:

*“Lock-up, unlock, line-up, lock-up, unlock, and line-up again, get to your cells, go there, go here – day in and day out – orders barked at you and you learn pretty damn quick to be where you are supposed to be at the right time!! Oh and the noise – no-one tells you about the noise, how fucking loud jail is!! Shit (orders) coming over the intercom all the time, girls yelling, laughing, stereos going, TV’s, people talking out cell windows – noisy, noisy, noisy” (Inmate A).*

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<sup>22</sup> The process whereby inmates line-up against the wall and get counted off the muster sheet

Another inmate explains how the meals are routinised and run according to a set menu:

*“Every bloody thing in here runs to a timetable – even the meals – the food you get is on a 4 week rotating schedule – ha-ha if it’s Monday it must be some form of sausages for tea, if it’s Thursday it’s stew, and if it’s Sunday it’s pies, and so on and so on” (Inmate C).*

Day after day the inmate gradually acclimatises to her new environment and becomes used to the sounds and the routines of the prison wing. The deprivations become a point of commonality with the other inmates in the wing, and conversations become based upon the shared experience of living in prison. A tenuous solidarity develops, a “we’re all in this together” mentality, and the woman who arrived at the Receiving Office, shell-shocked and unsure, begins to identify with the inmate body and the prison world. Before that happens, however, she must find her place in this new world, and one of the locations where this plays out is the wing dining room, and it is to that we turn next.

### **The Dining Room**

Meal times in the wings are the times of the day when the greatest number of inmates are together in one place at one time. They can be volatile occasions, with a substantial number of fights and arguments, and as meal times have a meaning above and beyond simply eating in relation to prison politics, this deserves a special mention. As previously mentioned, inmates line up along the corridor outside the dining room door and the inmate’s

position in the line-up is indicative of the inmate's status in the wing, and newly arrived inmates will be standing at the end of the line. The inmates then get counted off, file into the dining room, collect a plate from the meal trolley and a staff member will dish out the meal. Getting the rations is the easy part, the new inmate is now confronted with a room full of other inmates, and negotiating the next step in this process can determine the tone of an inmate's sentence. Finding a seat takes on a meaning above finding a seat; it is finding a place in the overall hierarchy and asserting the right to be there. When the inmate moves to another wing, who they sat with in the previous dining room is generally already known and determines who they will sit with in the next wing. There is a definite order to this. The top table, or top two tables, will generally seat the lifers with their friends, and there will be bottom tables where the inmates who have transgressed against the social order in prison, or whose crimes are such that they are not welcome to sit with the other inmates, are seated, with the majority of tables in-between these two polarities. New inmates generally find this a trying process. In a conversation with me, two first time inmates revealed how the process was for them:

*Inmate A:*

*"That first morning, walking into the dining room- man I hated the dining room, I thought where the fuck are we going to sit – oh no"*

*Inmate B:*

*"Yeah, me too!!"*

*Inmate A:*

*"Yeah the first day that I went in there, I was just in line getting my food still and one other girl went to sit down and she got told "you're in my seat get the fuck outta here" type thing and that's really scary eh – so you end up just kinda waiting till last and seeing what seats are left"*

*Inmate B*

*"And then you sit down, and you're too scared to talk to anyone"*



*Inmate A:*

*“Yeah (whisper) can you pass me the salt please”*

*Inmate B:*

*Yeah that’s real intimidating eh”*

*Inmate A:*

*“But most of the time it’s all for nothing - like sure you do have to get your own seat, and that’s kinda silly the way they do that, but once you’ve got your own seat there, everyone’s real friendly and we do all get along – so it’s not so bad, as long as you’ve just got enough courage to talk to someone – 9 times out of 10, they’ll be polite and talk back – and then you’re fine!”*

Once the inmate has established her place, the wing figuratively breathes a collective sigh of relief and the inmate is subsumed into the wing culture. Dining room seating places are dynamic and not fixed features of a prison and an inmate can move up via invitation, or down via a perceived or real transgression. This positioning is an important aspect of prison life, and also an indirect method by which the officers gather information. By observing the inmates at meal times, watching who is sitting where, or who has changed seats, the officers monitor the ‘emotional barometer’ in the wings and know where trouble is likely to erupt. The officers are constantly observing the inmates, and the inmates are watching the officers watch them. There is a high degree of emotional management involved in the day to day activities of the average inmate, as every move an inmate makes, her moods, her comments, the way her cell looks, the way she looks, is noted and written down in the inmate’s files and in the wing diary.

Being aware that her behaviour is being monitored by the officers is one aspect of prison life; being aware that her behaviour is also being monitored by the other inmates is another, and, in terms of day-to-day comfort, far more important. As is commonly said in prison “It’s not the screws you have to watch out for, it’s the other inmates!” As

previously mentioned, a tenuous solidarity develops and exists amongst the inmates; however, it is not solidarity built on mutual respect necessarily, but rather expediency. There are genuine friendships made and maintained in prison, however, they are few and far between, and the majority are situational and not dispositional. The inmate would be naive to imagine that the ‘friends’ she has met in prison would stand beside her in a fight, or, until they have known each other for some time, can be trusted. The next section explores some of the dynamics of inmate friendships.

**Figure 6: Female Inmate hides her face from camera at Christchurch Women's Prison**



## The Other Inmates

Learning how to get on with the other inmates is an important part of navigating the prison sentence (Greer, 2000; Jiang, 2006; Mageehon, 2008; Severance, 2005), as the ability to decipher who can and who cannot be trusted plays a central role in determining the tone of the inmate's sentence. Trusting the wrong people can literally mean the inmate is in danger of being physically attacked. When I asked a female inmate, who was currently serving a sentence of eight years, if she trusted her fellow inmates, this is what she replied:

*"I trust some – not all but that's because you can't form relationships with everyone in prison, you have to suss out who you can trust .... You have to have people in your life that you can trust, pretty fucked up if you trusted no-one but at the same time you would be a fucking egg if you trusted everyone – and let's face it Mitchy (My jail name), most of those bitches can't be trusted"* (Inmate P)

When asked "Why can't they be trusted?" she replied:

*"Cos women are scandalous bitches, more scandalous than men and let's face it, we're not in prison because we're honest types, but really female inmates are no worse than females in general – I think that's just for me cos the things that have happened in my life –where I've been shit on, been hurt has been from women who are meant to be my mates"* (Inmate P).

When asked "What would happen to an inmate that breached trust?" she said:

*"In the past I probably would have robbed their room, treated them like shit and in some situations attacked them – now I'd just tell them don't even look at me – don't talk to me, put them on the coat<sup>23</sup>, which in some ways is worse"*

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<sup>23</sup> To ostracise some-one and to not talk or acknowledge their presence at all

*than getting the bash<sup>24</sup>, cos a smack in the face only feels bad for a couple of hours – and then you get the rest of my mates not talking to them either – so yeah there are ways of fucking people over without hitting them, and best they don't think it's going to end when they get out either – they best hope they don't come back!!” (Inmate P).*

As mentioned by Inmate P “you have to have people in your life that you can trust”, and in prison this becomes a priority, as choosing to remain aloof from the general population, whilst a legitimate survival technique, can create a raft of problems, as illustrated by the following example. During general unlock hours the inmate’s cell door is left open, therefore, inmates have the choice of either staying in their cells, or mingling with the general population. Both options have pitfalls and having a friend mitigates the likelihood of negative consequences for either option. The older wiser inmates will generally keep themselves to themselves, hanging out in their cells, socialising with a few chosen friends, and keeping out of what Owen (1998) termed “the mix”, the general day-to-day happenings in the wing. For the new inmate, leaving her cell unattended and mixing with the other inmates can make her susceptible to being ripped off, and can also create a whole raft of other issues, as “the mix” can be a dangerous place. Having a person she can trust, therefore, can pre-empt thieving from her cell, and can also act as a back-up if she falls into trouble. The inmate therefore needs to work out rapidly who she can and who she cannot trust, as this often determines the ease with which the inmate navigates her sentence. It can, and does, make the difference between an easy lag and a hard lag. An experienced prisoner describes a common scenario for a newly arrived inmate:

*“You see it all the time, a newbie arrives in the wing, all the predators come out of the woodwork – [puts on an affected voice] ‘Hi, how are you, are you*

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<sup>24</sup> To get the bash means to get physically attacked, not just a slap in the face, but at least a couple of punches

*ok?’ and you know, you just know they are setting them up for a rip<sup>25</sup>, or to be a shopping dolly<sup>26</sup> Ya just wanna yell at them to get away, but hey – we all had to learn didn’t we, it’s sink or swim in here” (Inmate G).*

Another lesson the inmate must learn swiftly is the importance of personal control, for to not control her feelings and her actions can result in a myriad of different official, and unofficial, consequences. Officially, ‘acting out of character’ is a catch-all phrase used as an impetus to call the inmate into the office and investigate what is happening, or it can be ‘reasonable grounds’ for a urine test.<sup>27</sup> The new inmate will often mistake this for genuine personal concern, rather than the official surveillance technique that it actually is, and will often-times disclose more information than is desirable, either for other members of the wing, or for her own personal safety and well-being. Unofficially, talking with the officers about wing business, albeit innocently, is a trap that can leave her vulnerable to abuse and violence from the other inmates. An inmate who is unable to maintain personal restraint is looked down upon by the other inmates, and is not trusted, and is therefore likely to serve a hard sentence. There is a grace period, however, as one older inmate describes it for the newly arrived inmate:

*“Well for a newbie it is a different story because I mean being a new person who’s never been to jail - they ain’t going to know what’s what because no-one’s actually taken them into their circle, so they might get one pass, but in saying that, the newbie who’s been here for a couple of days and goes into the office and says “Oh my smokes have been pinched” I mean, that’s not ok, yeah there will be groups that will call that person a nark. Yeah, there will be groups that’ll actually keep picking on that person, and that can be dangerous, it can be very dangerous!” (Inmate G)*

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<sup>25</sup> To steal

<sup>26</sup> Jail slang for an inmate who buys another inmate their weekly shopping either for protection or for sexual favours

<sup>27</sup> A procedure whereby the inmate is required to provide a sample of urine to be tested for the presence of drugs and/or alcohol. The inmate can be chosen either randomly or on ‘reasonable grounds’ if an officer suspects they have taken an illicit substance

Another older inmate had a different perspective:

*“Yeah, if you see a newbie in the office chatting away to the screws, you know they are going to get hit up about what they were talking about and told in no uncertain terms to keep their fucking mouths shut, the screws aren’t your friends, and to keep out of the fucking office” (Inmate J).*

As evidenced by the preceding quotes, prison is not an easy environment to live in, particularly until the rules have been learnt. Once learnt, however, what once appeared abnormal and strange, is now normal. Being strip-searched, being urine tested, getting locked up for hours, lining up for meals, the dining room, the other inmates, all are now part of her daily life. It is now natural, and soon becomes taken for granted. As the new inmate is absorbed into the inmate body, she becomes, to herself, and to the other inmates, a prisoner.

## **Conclusion**

Navigating the first days and weeks in prison is a trying time. Learning the social mores and unspoken codes of the inmate culture is a transition fraught with pitfalls, and, in the world of the female inmate, the choice is clear – either learn quickly and adapt, or suffer the consequences. Prison is a hard place, and whilst female inmates form friendships with other inmates, they tend to be friendships predicated on shared usefulness, rather than on mutual respect. That is not to suggest that some jail friendships are not genuine, however, the majority are limited to the period of incarceration. It is not all doom and gloom, however, and the vast majority of first-time inmates find their feet and find a group of other inmates to associate with. Soon they are assimilated into the inmate body and begin to identify with the prison culture, use prison argot and settle into their sentences. What they may or may not have fully realised at this point is what identifying with the prison culture means. The

outside world, and that identity, is fading away; they are losing a piece of themselves, and it is how they attempt to hold on to their outside identity that the next chapter will examine.

**Figure 7: Wing One cell at Christchurch Women's Prison**



## Chapter Six

### “And these are the Days of Our Lives”

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*“Jail doesn’t work because you don’t know what you are trying to repair – this is what I truly believe – jail doesn’t work, jail just by itself doesn’t work!”*  
*Inmate D*

*“We do not see things as they are. We see things as we are.” – The Talmud*

#### **Introduction**

Initially, as described in the previous chapter, the prison world is a foreign world, and like adjusting to any new world there is a period of acclimatisation. After the first few weeks however, the newly named ‘prisoner’ has usually settled into the rhythms and routines of prison life and, depending upon the length of her sentence<sup>35</sup>, is starting to think about how she can navigate this world successfully. At face value, C.W.P. does not appear a bad place to be, and compared to some overseas prisons (Walmsley, 2006), it may not be. The cells, although basic, are warm and clean, the meals, while plain, are usually plentiful and there are no forms of physical torture. Inmates can have TVs in their cells, and are able to watch them all night if they choose; there is a well-founded argument that prisoners are better off than some people in the outside world, and, indeed some prisoners would agree. It is not the face value circumstances, however, at issue here, it is what lies beneath. It is the less obvious

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<sup>35</sup> Life inmates generally do not start to think about their sentence and what it means for at least a couple of years as the reality of their sentence does not sink in immediately.



aspects of life in prison, namely the processes, both explicit and implicit, whereby each inmate comes to identify with the larger inmate body and internalise the identity ‘prisoner’ wherein the real punishment lies. It is this growing self-awareness that they are now prisoners with all that this encompasses.

On the surface it appears to be self-evident that a prisoner is a prisoner. She is locked up behind razor wire, her freedom of choice has, to a large extent, been removed, and she is required to follow the orders of the prison staff. Internalising this understanding, however, and recognising what that means on a deeper, more intimate, level is another story, and one that takes some getting used to. The inmate now wears the burden of proof like a second skin; it becomes subsumed into her self-identity and she is beginning to feel the stigma attached to her new status, it becomes a Master Status (Hughes, 1945). She has been transformed “from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (Goffman, 1963:3) and the impact of this has long-lasting effects on the way that both society (Opsal, 2011) and the inmate comes to perceive themselves, how they then unconsciously employ emotional management techniques (Greer, 2002; Hunter & Greer, 2011) and indeed, how they see their place in the world. This chapter will look at the changes in identity that female inmates go through at C.W.P., from free-self to prisoner-self, and what they think about it all.

## **Developing an inmate identity - Who am I?**

Prison, as punishment, is about more than simply locking up the physical body of the inmate; rather it is about the breaking down and subsequent re-forming of conscience and self-identity (Foucault, 1995). This is particularly evident in female prisons; therefore how this is accomplished is of central importance. Bosworth (2000:98), in her study of identity and agency amongst female prisoners in England, states that identity is predicated upon the various life factors of the individual, including “the more diffuse and imprecise ways in which people perceive themselves”. Accordingly, inmates at C.W.P. have a view of themselves based upon their life-experiences. To greater or lesser extents, they have already formed pictures of who they are as individuals, and their place in the world. Upon entering the prison, however, this picture changes and the previous view of self that was imported into the prison shifts in direct response to the new experience, re-negotiated in relation to the inmate’s new social role (Cooley, 1922; Mead, 1934; Rowe, 2011; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Predicated on the basis that people are continuously negotiating and actively creating their sense of self, both through their daily interactions and their current social roles (Cooley, 1922; Mead, 1934), the incarcerated individual begins to experience a series of transformations of self.

Burke (2006) further theorises that individuals develop an internalised identity standard based on shared experiences leading to a set of expectations about what is acceptable behaviour in any given situation. These standards are ever evolving, allowing individuals to ‘fit in’ to whatever social scene they may find themselves in. The prisoner, having now come to the realisation that she is in prison, a different world from the one she was used to, begins to develop an identity standard that allows her to integrate this new persona into her existing identity and achieve congruence. This process strengthens identification with the inmate body and contributes to the development of an “us” and “them” mentality. This separation between the general population and

staff, or “them”, and the prison population, or “us”, is reinforced on a daily basis, both explicitly via the prison staff and media and implicitly through what is not said, and is not to be underestimated.

**Figure 8: New Zealand Female Prisoner in Holding Cell**



The following poem written by an inmate serving five years for possession of Methamphetamine captures this process of separation, and how just “doing your time” is not enough; there has to be an accompanying change in self as well in order to satisfy the discourse of punishment:

### Time Warp

My head's in a spin  
I can't make no sense,  
Caught in a time warp  
Behind a barbed wire fence  
I took it for granted  
The freedom I had  
Now it's gone  
And everything's bad.  
Rules and regulations I flaunted at will  
Now it's “Yes Sir,” “No Sir,” “3 bags full,”  
Follow our orders, dance to our tune,  
Do as we tell you, we're the keepers of doom.  
Puppet masters, they pull at our strings,  
got us locked down, clipped our wings.  
Master control - have our lives in their hands  
Stay right where you are, stay as you stand.  
Don't move an inch, don't even breathe,  
We've got you now; we'll never let you leave

Trying to steal our spirit and soul  
Trying to keep us forever in this black hole  
    But my spirit is one that they'll never break  
    And my soul's coming with me when I walk out that gate!

Written by Inmate S, 2009

When I asked her what she meant by the words “Trying to steal our spirit and soul” she stated:

*“It feels like they [Corrections] want more than my physical body to serve this sentence, that’s not enough. No, they want more than their pound of flesh, they want to break me down, make me subservient to them – I always have the feeling that they think we are less because of the things we have done, and that they won’t be satisfied until we think we are less as well – that’s what I mean by stealing our spirits and souls – just like the towels are stamped “Property of Corrections” we are now stamped with their brand as well – and man we had better know it!!” (Inmate S)*

Another inmate put it like this:

*“Yeah you have to act as if you fit in – not only with the other inmates but the screws as well, act suitably broken, they like that” (Inmate M).*

Citing a specific incident, a first-time inmate states:

*“Yeah, you’re an inmate now and the screws make that very clear – I mean, I asked [officer] for an extra blanket because I was cold and she said to me who do you think you are, she told me to put some more clothes on and harden the fuck up – and then I told her that I didn’t have any more clothes and she said why the fuck not – I was like are you fucking joking what’s it’s got to do with you lady, can I have a blanket or not? – and she gave me half a blanket” (Inmate A).*

And in the words of a long-termer:

*“They never believe you, just never believe you and I guess I understand the reason why, but it’s like so tiring to have to prove yourself all the time; they are always looking at you like you’re up to no good, makes you want to be up to no good, it wears you down after a while” (Inmate J).*

Incrementally, the free-self becomes subsumed, either partially, or in some cases totally, into the prisoner self. The constant reminder that you are an inmate is pervasive; there is no getting away from it. The inmate wakes in the morning, normally to the sound of an officer's voice over the cell intercom, to the sound of the keys being jingled along the corridor, cell doors opening, lining up at the dining room, collecting rations, being re-locked, orders being yelled down the wings, being told what to wear, and what not to wear: the inmate identity is being reinforced in subtle and not so subtle ways. It becomes highly unlikely that the pre-prison self can remain dominant in the face of this relentless pressure to adopt the inmate self. Furthermore, subsuming the prisoner identity makes it easier to survive in the prison, and the majority of women inmates just want to do an easy lag, get it over and done with and get out. What they do not, perhaps, realise is that the adoption of the inmate persona makes re-entry into the free world a more difficult process.

### **Through the Rabbit Hole**

This identity transformation, or at least the growing awareness that now society sees the inmate as less, and the feeling that the prison complex will not be satisfied until they are suitably cowed, is one insidious side-effect of prison; another is the normalising of crime itself. Prison is a world where societal norms and values are turned upon their head (Carlen, 2004; Easteal, 1994; Geiger & Fischer, 2003b; Goffman, 1961; Kruttschnitt et al., 2000). Prison becomes reality; it becomes not only the world where the inmates identify themselves as prisoners, but also the world whereby their behaviour and values and norms are contextualised, and, as a result, the outside world fades away. One inmate spoke of the relief of coming to prison, after being on bail awaiting sentencing:

*“What I did happened 10 months ago, and since then I wasn’t able to talk to any of my friends because they’re the witnesses, I was on the curfew and that was over Xmas and New Year’s, and all my holidays I had tickets booked to go overseas and I couldn’t go. Not being able to go overseas for seven years, now that’s going to suck. I missed out on a career over in Canada because of it, yeah lost heaps of my friends because of what I did, and yeah just being cut out from my social life and half of my families don’t want to know about it. Yeah that’s the sucky part, it’s almost good to be here, to not have to put up with everyday abuse – like I’d walk down the street in my home town and just get shit biffed at me because of what I did, so being here is better than that. Yeah it was pretty rugged, so like jail is not the worst part, it’s all the shit that goes before it and not knowing.” (Inmate A)*

She then went on to say:

*“Yeah, this is getting me away from the shit – I had 10 months of hell and now I’m being looked after, that’s the way that I see it.” (Inmate A)*

That, unfortunately is the way many inmates see prison. Once the initial fear of prison has dissipated, and the knowledge that it is not going to be as bad as they thought, an awareness that everyone is in the same boat develops and the strengthening of identification with the inmate world is intensified. Furthermore, this is exacerbated by the messages heard on an almost daily basis via the television and other forms of media. A recent article in the Waikato Times quotes Ruth Money, a Sensible Sentencing Trust spokeswoman, as saying the cost of healthcare for prisoners was “obscene” (“Obscene amount’ spent on prison healthcare | Stuff.co.nz,” 2014), implying that money spent on prisoners’ health should be less than others because they are prisoners. It is made abundantly clear that society does not want them back via statements that longer sentences are in order, along with harsher parole conditions, tougher bail conditions, and the myriad of other messages that the average inmate

is bombarded with. The world outside the prison gates becomes a cold and unwelcoming place, and the world inside the gates, once feared, is now home, and the inmate, once wife, mother, daughter, is now prisoner.

As already discussed, prison life is a life of contradictions and inverted meanings. Crime is normal; being strip searched or urine tested is normal. To be a lifer is to be at the top of the inmate hierarchy, to be a lifer in society is to be at, or very near, the bottom. This upside-down world is further perpetuated and maintained by the prison system itself, negating what it purports to do, namely rehabilitate and reintegrate (Dorotik, 2008; Geiger & Fischer, 2003b; Micucci & Monster, 2004). The Corrections Department states, “Our staff are committed to supporting offenders to help them address their offending and gain skills that will help them lead a crime-free life” (“Corrections Department NZ - Working with offenders,” 2013). To achieve these goals, they employ a variety of strategies; however, the rhetoric and the reality are discordant. Inmates are told that they need to take responsibility for their actions and their crimes; they are there to pay the price of those crimes and once their sentence is served, they can move forward and go back into society and make a better (crime-free) life for themselves. The reality, however, is quite different, both inside and outside the walls. Prison is a place where responsibility is removed, where not only has responsibility over your body been taken away (Bergseth, Bergeron-Vigesaa, & McDonald, 2011) but practical responsibilities are taken away as well. There are no bills to pay, no groceries to buy, no meals to cook, just present at the dining room and food is there waiting:

*“In lots of ways it’s easier in here than it is out there – I mean, sure I miss my family and being able to go do things, but in here I’m completely looked after, my washing is done, my meals are served up, no bills to worry about .... Sitting out here in the sun it doesn’t seem that bad” (Inmate M).*



An understanding of the futility and hypocrisy of the prison system begins to develop, with the gap between the official discourse of prison and the reality of prison life becoming apparent. This in turn serves to reinforce further the development of new identity standards and the inmate's identification with the inmate body, as they are the people who 'see' this gap, who live with it every-day and who joke about the notions of rehabilitation and reintegration. When asked about the effectiveness of prison, the majority of women spoke of its pointlessness, and how they felt it did not achieve what it set out to achieve:

*"It [prison] sets us up to fail .... I had an idea that when I came here there would be programmes and courses for me to do, you know like anger management or something, but there's nothing – my sentence is too short to get on any of the courses, and all I get to do is sit on my arse all day, I can't even get a job 'cos there aren't any – and they say I'm here to be rehabilitated – how?? Tell me how are they going to do that??"(Inmate D)*

Or:

*"Well if the point is just to lock us up and keep us away from the rest of society, well tick, they do that, but that's it really! I mean, now that I've been to prison, it's not scary anymore, like the thought of coming isn't scary – but it's the waste of time that gets me. I agree that you have to be punished for what you do, but at least make the punishment constructive so I learn something!"(Inmate M)*

And:

*"Jail is a joke – that's all it really is, to me anyway, it doesn't rehabilitate you, I mean it might work for a few, but they were probably never going to re-offend again jail or not, but for the majority of us, it doesn't work, if anything it just makes it easier to come back next time."(Inmate G)*

As well as:

*“There are not enough of us – women I mean – there is not enough women prisoners. All the resources get directed at the men, we get the fucking left-over’s. They even design their programmes for the men and then expect us to do them as well!! There is not enough industry (jobs), there are hardly any programmes running now, all we get to do is sit around and hope the sentence passes quickly.” (Inmate T)*

The theme of the male prisoners obtaining all the resources is a constant one in a female prison. This in turn reinforces the second-class citizen status on another level. Somehow being a female prisoner is a worse crime than being a male prisoner and whether the reality is congruent with the situation is irrelevant; this is what the women believe and this is what they experience. Furthermore, irrespective of prison programmes, once you have been to prison the chances of being able to break-free from the external label ‘ex-prisoner’ and establish yourself in the community decrease markedly (Bagaric, 2000; Girshick, 1999; Hunter & Greer, 2011; O’Brien, 2001; Owen, 1998). The aims of the Corrections Department are noble, but sadly the reality for the majority of female inmates is far removed (Lashlie, 2003). A Corrections Officer, (personal communication) said to me, “The wonder of it is not that so many people come back Michelle, the wonder is that anyone makes it in the first place!”

### **Suck it up, suck it up**

One of the lesser known side-effects of prison, and one that has an enormous impact upon everyday life and personal interactions once the inmate is released, is the degree of emotional management that is necessary in order to survive the day-to-day reality of life behind the bars (DeGroot, 1998; Greer, 2002). The inmate is always ‘on’, keeping her guard

up and not lowering her defences; this is Self-Protection 101. The inmate is explicitly told by staff and fellow inmates alike to “suck it up”. Receive some bad news in the post and show how you are feeling – “suck it up”; have a bad telephone call - “suck it up”; get into a fight with another inmate – “suck it up”; get disciplined by an officer in front of everyone – well, just suck that up too! After a while this becomes so conditioned that it is no longer recognisable for what it is. Show them nothing, keep ‘stumm’<sup>28</sup>, mind your own business, and “watch ya back,” these are the jail mantras. This degree of emotional management permeates all aspects of prison life: strip-searching; urine testing; cell searches; body language; behaviour in the yards and common areas – every single minute of every single day, the inmate is aware of the need to maintain the façade of normalcy, or keep the mask on (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Easteal, 1994; McCulloch & George, 2009; Moore, 2010; Scraton & Moore, 2006; Simmering & Diamond, 1996). Getting locked in your cell at night is now a relief.

#### *Personal reflection*

*“I literally used to breathe a sigh of relief when I went into my cell at lock-up. Once that door was locked, I felt then, and only then, could I truly relax, and even then it is not complete relaxation, but it is the closest you are going to get. It becomes not so much a matter of you being locked in, but the world being locked out.”*

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<sup>28</sup> Saying nothing when questioned by either staff or other inmates

## Emotional management

One of the main areas where emotional management techniques are employed is during a strip search. As a consequence strip searching becomes, within the prison context, normalised. Whilst not minimising the traumatic nature of this experience as described in various overseas studies (Simmering & Diamond, 1996), the inmates in this study developed a certain “gallows humour” about it. They appeared to rely on a sense of humour and again, predominantly, emotional management techniques to deal with the procedure. Different stories about what certain inmates have done when they were searched had become part of the prison folk-lore (Owen, 1998), inmates dancing and pretending to do a strip-tease, laughing and joking as they take their clothes off (Greer, 2002), or even better, stories of how inmates managed to still conceal contraband whilst being stripped elevate them to hero-status. Whatever the inmate’s true reaction to the process, however, most inmates will not give the guards the satisfaction of knowing they are bothered by this procedure. As one lifer put it, they know that it is going to happen anyway, so what is the point of getting upset about it:

*“You just need to suck it up and get on with it – if you start getting upset or showing them that it bothers you, well then they’ve won – and that’s the bottom line for me – I will not show them that it bugs me, they can’t touch me that way, I can keep myself safe, and that’s the name of the game for me – keeping safe” (Inmate Y).*

Another inmate put it like this:

*“You just have to wrap some acceptance around the fact that nothing is private anymore, nothing is yours alone, not even your body – you belong to the man – but, if you are clever, you can remove yourself from it – does that make sense?” (Inmate G).*

When asked to expand on that thought, she went on to say:

*“Well, I guess I mean, they can strip me at any time, they can search my mail and my cell, they get to know my personal business and yeah they can piss test me too – but I can choose to let it bother me, or I can choose to hold my dignity and rise above it and not show them how I feel and that way I am removed from it all – but man, it does get tiring!!” (Inmate G)*

When asked what gets tiring, the inmate replied:

*“Always being on man, never being able to let your guard down, having to be thinking a million steps ahead all the time – a laugh is not just a laugh in this place, it is grounds for a urine test, so you then have to think, fuck did I have a smoke (a marijuana joint) the night before, best not be out in the yard laughing and carrying on in case they think I’m stoned today, then my test will come back dirty – etc etc – see what I mean – always one step ahead of them – that’s how you have to do it” (Inmate G).*

It quickly becomes apparent that showing your true feelings is counterproductive to making it in prison. Learning not to display your emotions becomes second nature, as the fall-out from exposure rapidly reveals itself as a powerful weapon in the officers’ arsenal of social control mechanisms. This constant, unrelenting stress of always keeping your face neutral, keeping your mouth shut, acting “as if”<sup>29</sup>, has a very real flow-on effect after the inmate has been released, and the longer the inmate has in prison, the harder it is to let go of the jail world, to feel that your emotions are not going to be used against you, and to know that it is safe to show how you feel once again.

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<sup>29</sup> Even if the inmate is having a bad day continuing to act as if everything is alright

### *Personal Reflection:*

*This was actually one of the hardest aspects of release for me, and frankly the one that has had the longest lasting impacts on how I relate to my family and friends, and consequently how I interact in society. Inside the prison walls, to show your feelings is to expose yourself, and to expose yourself is to run the risk of having it used against you – in very real ways; being downgraded; urine testing; cell searching, or just general interrogation couched as conversation. Therefore, in order to remain safe you have to become adept at keeping your feelings close and it becomes habituated. My family are always saying to me now “You are hard to get close to; you don’t share anything with us,” and I think, “Man, if only you knew how close I let you get”- it has irrevocably changed the way I see the free world and the way in which I interact in that world!*

### **Conclusion**

The transformation from free person to inmate happens by stealth, and, to compound it even further, it is only by “fitting in”, by being seen to “play the game”, that the inmate manages to get ahead in the system. This, therefore, creates a situation whereby, on certain levels, the inmate knows that she is involved in a game, but by virtue of the insidious nature of the game, it is hard to know where the system starts and where the inmate begins. In this prison world, being honest is not rewarded while manipulating the system is. The inmates who refuse to “toe the party line”, whom the system would deem recalcitrant, are the inmates who are the most honest, who cannot for whatever reason play the game and say that they agree and that the system can work. They see it for what it is and refuse to say differently.

Whether an inmate refuses to “buckle”<sup>30</sup>, whether an inmate chooses to comply, or whether an inmate genuinely believes that the prison system is an effective rehabilitative tool, the one shared commonality is that they are all irrevocably changed. Whether for better or for worse, the woman who walked through those prison gates is not the same one who walks out; there is a part of her that will always remain behind those walls, a part that no-one else, who has not shared that experience, will ever understand. Walking through the gates on release, she is now “the other” and that is something she will live with for the rest of her life

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<sup>30</sup> To say you agree with something just to get along

## Chapter Seven – One Sentence Ends

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*“Being in prison is like having a drug habit – you’ve lost all control and you have no power” – Inmate R*

*Research has shown that re-offending is not reduced simply by incarcerating offenders, or by increasing the harshness of their sentences. However, well-designed and delivered programmes can have a real effect on re-offending. (Department of Corrections, 2014b)*

*“..there is no way that primarily penal methods can address primarily social injustices.” (Carlen & Tombs, 2006)*

### **Introduction**

As stated at the beginning of this thesis there were two primary research aims. The first was to answer the research questions “how do female inmates experience prison” and “what is the impact of prison on a female inmate’s sense of self?” The second was to introduce the women serving sentences at Christchurch Women’s Prison and provide a space for their voices to be heard so they could tell their stories and know that what they had to say was relevant and pertinent. By juxtaposing Corrections’ rhetoric with the voices of the women, by capturing what the women had to say about prison itself, and re-counting how they experienced it on a day-to-day basis, this thesis has gone some way towards fulfilling those aims.



Regarding the first aim, it was shown that although the experience of prison is a personal and private one and is dependent upon a variety of factors including time spent in prison, commitment to a prison identity, and time left to serve, the female inmates in this study had more similarities than dissimilarities. To greater or lesser extents, their experiences of jail were comparable. Four major themes were observed in this study: negotiating the prison world, which involved the reception processes, and finding one's place in the prison social structure; changes in identity, including the genesis and the maintenance of these changes; emotional management, how the inmate's felt that they had to be constantly "on" and the impact this has on relationships, both current and future; and finally how they came to feel that they are owned; they are now "Property of Corrections".

These different dimensions of prison life are not embraced equally by all inmates, and in fact, they may not shape the experience of any given prisoner, however, when taken together, they do comprise the general experience of female prisoners and thus inform the day-to-day life of the female prisoner. Finally, one over-arching theme of prison life ran very clearly through all their stories and that was prison as an ineffective tool for rehabilitation.

Speaking to the second aim, the women themselves have had the opportunity to speak, their voices were heard. Over 90 per cent of the prison population on that Labour Day 2008 took part in the questionnaire, and ten inmates were interviewed. This research, however, through my own unique place within the inmate body, is the voice of more than ten inmates; it is the accumulated insider knowledge of over a decade spent behind the bars of C.W.P. It is the sound of women crying at night for the loss of their children, it is the sound of their laughter and stories shared. It paints a picture of the inanity of prison life, the futility felt about successful reintegration now that the label 'prisoner' has been affixed. It is the reality of prison from the inmate's perspective.

## **Negotiating the Prison World**

As evidenced by this study and supported by previous works (Girshick, 1999; Haney, 2010a; Lamb & Women of York Correctional Institution, 2008; O'Brien, 2001; Owen, 1998; Watterson, 1996), entering prison is more than simply being locked away from the rest of society. It is a world unto itself, and as such has its own particular set of rules, values and norms. As ironic as it sounds, the newly arrived inmate does not have the luxury of time to learn these new rules. She must find her place in this system or risk being ostracised or potentially worse, being physically harmed. Make no mistake, prison is not a warm and loving environment, it is a tough world and in order to survive with any degree of comfort the new inmate must learn the system and learn it fast.

As the data has shown, the importance of reception procedures in this process cannot be either underestimated or over-stated. As Goffman (1961) so clearly identified, entry into what he termed a "total institution" first necessitates a mortification ceremony, whereby the newly named inmate is stripped, metaphorically and literally, of all past identity and clearly and explicitly shown their new place in this world, the bottom. Handcuffed, often having spent hours in holding cells in courtrooms and then at the prison itself, feeling dazed and confused, standing in the receiving office having strangers go through their property, being photographed for the prison records and being asked a series of formalised questions, before any remaining dignity is removed with the mandatory strip search.

As evidenced by the inmates in this study, the strip-search procedures are humiliating with the women either disassociating themselves or feeling total degradation. Therefore, how can Corrections state that they recognise that women offenders have different needs (Department of Corrections, 2005) yet still continue to conduct strip searches in this degrading and barbaric manner? This is re-traumatisation on a high level and reinforces the

lowly status of the inmate comparative to the rest of the population. The women in this study all reported that this procedure was implicitly saying that their societal status was so low as to be negligible, therefore what is done is of no consequence! They understood and accepted that Corrections had a duty to prevent contraband going into prisons in order to ensure the smooth running of their institutions and to keep inmates' safe, however, the cost is high and the detrimental impact of this procedure on a female's sense of self should not be discounted.

### **Who can be trusted?**

As discussed previously, female inmates form relationships with their fellow inmates (Girshick, 1999; Greer, 2000; Jiang, 2006; Owen, 1998), and the women in this study were no different. However, learning who can and who cannot be trusted is a large part of the negotiation process. Prison is a 'dog-eat-dog' world, and transgressing against the social order is not only a dangerous activity, it is something that tends to be remembered and the consequences can be long-lasting. As one inmate recounted, it is not uncommon for female inmates who have committed some offence against the prison social order to be released, return and to find that their original offence is not only still remembered, the consequences are still in place.

Finding a place in the system, learning its unique rules therefore, can, and does, make the difference regarding the relative ease with which an inmate serves her sentence.

A common saying amongst female inmates is that it's not the screws you have to watch out for, it's the other inmates! The importance of having some-one who can watch your back as you go about your daily business cannot be overstated. Not only does it make the lag easier and safer, it also humanises prison, and reinforces the humanness of the inmate. Navigating through a strange world is hard enough, but to do it alone makes the experience even harder.

### **Changes in Identity**

Examining the gulf between the first-time inmates and the longer serving inmates showed the progression of identity change. As the inmate begins to serve her sentence, she also begins to change the way she sees the world and herself. No longer is she a free woman, with all the attendant privileges that go along with that freedom, but now she is a prisoner, with all that entails. Realising the deep meaning of what it actually means to be an inmate, however, is an insidious process. Listening to the messages from the media (Cecil, 2007), and from the Sensible Sentencing Trust (Fensome, 2013), living amongst other inmates and hearing their stories of crime and/or their stories of wrongdoing against them, the sheer physical presence of the prison itself, all begins to permeate the inmate's consciousness and gradually the inmate begins to see herself as 'prisoner'. The inmates in this study clearly identified as mothers, daughters, girlfriends and human beings, however, the identity of prisoner began to take on what Hughes (1945) termed Master Status, not only externally, but internally.

## Emotional Management

One of the major changes to an inmate's identity was the level of emotional management that she must live under and accomplish on a daily basis. The pressure to be constantly micro-managing the majority of interactions: controlling facial expression; watching what is said; who it is said to; thinking how what is said could potentially be used to create problems; all takes an enormous toll on an inmate and it is a direct side-effect of the experience of prison. An accusation often thrown at female inmates is one of being manipulative, however, as the data in this study has shown, in order to survive in this environment the inmate has to be manipulative to a degree or they will find themselves doing a very hard sentence.

### *Personal Reflection*

*"I remember when I first stopped using drugs and the prison staff would say to me – How's it going, Michelle, being drug free – I would answer honestly – It's hard work, being drug free is hard work, but I'm trying! Other inmates would lie and tell staff how much they loved being drug free and how much better their lives were for being off drugs. They got rewarded and upgraded to a lower security wing, for my honesty I got urine tested more and remained in a higher security wing. Being honest in prison is not always, in fact, the best policy – how sad is that!!?"*

This aspect of prison is, to me, one of the most insidious and damaging consequences from a prison sentence. A system that purports to rehabilitate and help the inmate make the changes so they can be released and become useful and productive members of society is structured in such a way that it encourages the inmate to lie and manipulate in order to navigate her sentence. To fight and resist the system is to spend large portions of time locked in a cell, or in segregation. If an inmate wants to get ahead, move through the wings

into the minimum security wings, she must tell staff what they need to hear, which, unfortunately is not necessarily the truth. Saying that being drug free after 20+ years is hard work is not only the truth, it is the only appropriate answer and that is the answer that needs to be rewarded.

### **Property of Corrections**

How does it feel to be owned? Ask a female inmate. The savvy ones will explain how they keep a part of themselves locked up safe, untouchable; however, this degree of control also comes at a price, and the net result remains the same – the inmates are the property of the state and, as such, have no control over their physical bodies. It is not the external denial of choice that is the crucial component in this ownership process, however, it is the internalisation of the ownership wherein the real conundrum lies. If the inmate, simply by having been exposed to prison, comes to feel that they are owned by Corrections, what is the chance that this will lead to further offending? Given that a 60-months analysis of recidivism rates showed that 70 per cent of prisoners reoffend within two years of being released from prison and 52 per cent return to prison within five years, and some return more than once (Nadesu, 2009), it should be a priority of the Department to look at this closely.

Female inmates in this study consistently spoke of how they felt that Corrections did not just want their physical bodies to pay for their crimes, but how, Corrections wanted the inmate to subsume the external ownership, until they were, in the words of the inmates, “broken”. The inmates felt that serving their sentences was not enough, they had to assume an attitude of subservience. Furthermore, the majority thought that the attitude change needed to be genuine, since then, and only then, were the full requirements of their sentences fulfilled.

## **What's the point?**

The other theme that ran through this study was the feeling of hopelessness the majority of inmates felt about the effectiveness of prison. While the majority of female prisoners in this study wanted prison to be a valid mechanism for change, they felt that it was ineffective. However, most recognised that prison was only one part of the problem; the other part lies within society itself. It is stipulated also that there is only so much the Corrections Department can do in terms of rehabilitating and reintegrating inmates, readying them for release. There is, however, more they can do in relation to lessening the negative impact the prison environment has on an already damaged group of women. Prison compounds the already existing problems and therefore makes the changes of re-integration less likely, rather than fulfilling its remit of reducing re-offending. The experience of prison itself is a contributing risk factor to recidivism.

The inmates all spoke of the hypocrisy of the system, how the officers tell you to be more responsible, yet the system takes all responsibilities away, how unless you are doing a long sentence (over 2 years or more) there are few courses available for you to do, and the likelihood of gaining prison employment is slim. The reality of prison is long periods of being locked in a cell, and long periods of doing nothing. This is not rehabilitation; this is warehousing people, locking them away and then releasing them back into a world where they feel unwelcome. It is therefore unsurprising that the recidivism rates are so high (Department of Corrections, 2003; Nadesu, 2009).

The inmates' experience is further corroborated by the official statistics. At 194 prisoners per 100,000 New Zealand now has a higher imprisonment rate than anywhere in Western Europe and sits between African countries Gabon and Namibia in a global league table rate of imprisonment (Fensome, 2013). Therefore, if the aim of imprisonment is as

stated, *“Our staff are committed to supporting offenders to help them address their offending and gain skills that will help them lead a crime-free life”*(Department of Corrections, 2014c) then there can be no doubt that Corrections are falling short. Given the current growth in prison musters and the predicted 18 per cent growth in musters over the next decade (Lomas, 2011), we need to look at what can be done to address this state of affairs, and ask what can be done differently as it is clear that the system we have at present is not working. Furthermore, when you have a situation whereby the very people who are meant to be being rehabilitated think the system is fatally flawed there is a serious problem.

It must be mentioned that it was the system that the inmates had issue with and generally not with the individual staff who upheld the system. The inmates felt that the way prison was structured was the problem and that the officers operated as best they could within the constraints of the system. As previously stated, prisons are structured along vertical hierarchical lines, with a strict chain of command: Corrections Department management; Prison management; senior officers; corrections officers; and inmates. For the prison system to operate therefore, orders must be followed. For instance, approximately six years into my sentence a directive came from Head Office that inmates had to be checked throughout the night, with a torch shone directly onto their faces, to ensure that they were present and breathing. When I asked a prison officer how they could justify shining a bright light on our faces and waking us up twice a night, the answer was, “I have to follow orders”. So, I countered, if you were ordered to pull us out of our beds at night and throw cold water on us you would do that too? I was told to stop being ridiculous, that Head Office would never ask them to do that .... Hmmm, doesn’t really answer the question does it?



So whilst the staff at Christchurch Women's Prison, are for the main part, decent, hard-working New Zealanders, they are bound to a system that is structured in such a way as to reinforce the lowly status of the inmates. The prison structure informs the prison system which in turn informs the social organisation of the prison community. Finally, although this thesis did not interview prison officers, due to my personal experience I would like to add that the majority of officers at Christchurch Women's Prison when I was there hard working people who do a difficult job and maintain a sense of dignity in the face of regular abuse and occasional violence.

### **Areas for Future Study**

There are several possibilities for further study in this area. One of the themes that re-occurred throughout this study was that the female inmates felt that society did not want them back. Extrapolating from that leads to the questions: What is the reality of life for women released from prison? How do they transition from prison to our community? An examination exploring prisoners who return to prison and their perceptions of societal attitudes would be an interesting study to undertake. Is it a false assumption that society does not want inmates to return? Does a high level of negative perceptions of acceptance back into the community by an inmate indicate a reduced likelihood of a successful transition?

Further investigation into the characteristics of female inmate populations could also provide future research possibilities. One area, in particular would be how abuse experiences may relate to criminal offending, and in particular how it may relate to recidivist criminal offending. Do female inmates who have suffered abuse become more likely to reoffend upon release than female inmates who have not suffered abuse? Is there a relationship between the manner in which a female inmate does time and her demographic characteristics? Another

area which would be of social relevance to research is an investigation into the overrepresentation of Māori women, in particular young Māori women, in our prison system. Why are the numbers so high in proportion to the numbers in the general population, and what can be done about it? How can we mitigate the effects of colonisation? Another area that would be of interest to research could involve fuller examination of the intergenerational dimension to women's imprisonment. It would be a useful to undertake qualitative research with women inmates from multiple generations in order to explore contributing factors, both to offending as well as desistance from crime.

Finally, given the impact of imprisonment on female inmates and the damage this environment does to women's sense of self, the question of whether prisons for women should be abolished needs addressing and to be fully researched (Carlen & Tombs, 2006). As is evidenced by this research, prison further disempowers and re-traumatises a group of women who have already faced substantial adversity in their lives (Segrave & Carlton, 2010). It compounds and exacerbates the already lowly held societal status of this population of women, and reinforces a negative self-view and a negative view of society in general. Prison acts as a barrier to successful re-entry, reducing the life-chances of the very population that it is purporting to help. Are we then justified in sending the number of women to prison that we do, when the personal and social costs are so high?

## **Conclusion**

This study has shown how the inmate, upon entering the prison begins to undergo a series of changes, which both overtly and covertly change, not only the inmate, but the way they see the world and the way that they relate to others in the world. The mortification processes, negotiating the prison world, changes in identity, emotional management and finally the sense of becoming the property of corrections, singly and collectively contribute to the inmate coming to think that they are 'less' than, which in turn decreases the likelihood of a successful re-integration back into society, a society which makes it abundantly clear that they do not want the inmates' back.

This research asked the question, how do female inmates experience prison? This study has shown that the experience of prison for the female inmates in this study was at best boring and at worst traumatic. The most traumatic experience for all the females was the reception processes. Being stripped whilst having one's period, just simply being strip searched after having spent up to several hours in a holding cell reading graffiti and wondering what was going on, having personal possessions taken away, and often feeling scared and shell-shocked. It is my position, however, that what happens next is where the real issue lays. This is not to suggest that the reception process is not traumatic, however; it is brief. It is the continuous and pervasive internalisation of the prison system whereby inmates learn how to keep their emotions hidden, becoming further entrenched in criminal culture and live the hypocrisy of the prison system. Therein lays the real trauma.

Day after day, sometimes year after year, inmates remain in a system where the strong survive and the weak struggle. A world where right is wrong, where crime is normalised, where 'straight' people are the outcasts, and where the inmate has to manipulate to move through the system takes an emotional toll. The inmates in this study learned very

quickly that they were now tainted goods; they were 'the other'. These identity labels, whether attached by self or others, then initiated a process of re-negotiation, whereby identity was reconstructed in order to establish social acceptability. In this instance, social acceptability means acceptability in the eyes of their fellow inmates, which in turn impacts upon the chances of successful release back to the community. Research (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Stryker & Burke, 2000) showed that once the pejorative label of criminal had been assigned, female inmates were less able to resist the stigma attached to the label in order re-construct a favourable identity, as compared to their male counterparts. Prison for females has never been solely about punishment of an offence. It is a punishment for transgressing the norms of womanhood, hence, the deeper impact on self for female prisoners. They have offended not only society's laws; they have offended society's cultural mores, and as such they are always going to be viewed differently.

#### *Personal Reflection*

*"I am hesitant to tell people about my past, about having spent time in prison. Not because I am ashamed necessarily, or because it is none of any-one else's business but more because inevitably when I tell people they treat me differently. I either become very interesting to a certain group, or I become scary to another, but irrespective of that I am always viewed through the lens of my crime; I am always subsequently seen differently. Any action on my part is seen through the crime and not just on its own, when all I want is to just be seen as Michelle"*

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix One – Notice for the Wings**

#### **ATTENTION! ATTENTION! ATTENTION!**

**Hi Mitchy here, (lifer from Wing One) and for those of you who don't know me I am doing a Master thesis on the social organization of a female prison – in other words what it is like to be an inmate, how we get on with other inmates, how we 'learn' to be an inmate in the first place, and I am looking for women to interview for my research.**

**Everyone wishing to take part, please write your name on a piece of paper and give it to your Wing staff to pass on to me. I am looking for approximately 10 women to interview – hopefully some long-term inmates, some repeat offenders, and some first-time offenders – but everyone is welcome**

**Make sure that your voice is heard – come and talk to me and tell me what being an inmate means to you – what you think of this place, about your interactions with the staff, all sorts of interesting stuff ☺ Questions such as: how did you 'learn' to become an inmate (to fit in), do you think there is a hierarchy of inmates at CWP, and if so how did you learn about this, do you think we have an inmate code i.e., don't nark, mind your own business, always stick up for other inmates, don't get too friendly with the screws etc, does prison work, and whatever else you want to talk about.**

**I REALLY WANT TO KNOW WHAT YOU THINK, SO DON'T BE SHY ☺**

**In the advent of too many women wishing to take part I will make a random selection, i.e., put all names in a hat and draw them out**

## **Appendix Two – Cover Sheet for Questionnaire**

Hi, my name is Michelle Nicholson, and I am an inmate here at CWP. For those of you who don't know me, I am the inmate librarian and I am serving a life sentence. I started this sentence in 1997 and was released from here on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007. Whilst I was serving that sentence I started studying and completed a Bachelor of Arts (Sociology and Psychology) in 2005, in 2006 I went to Canterbury University and completed an Honours Degree in Sociology and I am now doing a Master's thesis on the social organization of a female prison.

I was recalled to prison in July this year and whilst I am here I am attempting to complete the data-gathering phase of my thesis, i.e., listen to your stories about what prison is like for you, what your experience of prison has been like.

However, before I can get to that part I need to get some 'hard' data – i.e., how many women are here, what was your primary offence, how many sentences have you served before etc. On the following page is a series of questions that I am distributing to the whole of the prison population, so I can then compile several statistical breakdowns for the various categories. For example, from the information that you provide, I will be able to state that x amount of female inmates are in prison for violent offences, x amount of inmates are in prison for drug related offences and so on.

**These forms are confidential and shall provide no identifying information, i.e., do not put your name on the form.**

Participation is completely voluntary, and deciding not to answer some of the questions is completely up to the individual. However, if you do decide not to complete the questionnaire, then could you please just state 'do not want to participate' so I can then add the total number of 'do not want to participate' to my total inmate population.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read this form, and thank you for participating – however much you chose to disclose – all the information is very much

appreciated



## **Appendix Three - Questionnaire**

### GENERAL INFORMATION

Age:

Ethnicity:

Marital status (current and past):

Children: (How many, what ages)

Did you have primary care of you children prior to prison?

Who is looking after them now?

Gang affiliation:

(If yes, then what gang are you affiliated with)

Where did you reside prior to prison?

Religion/Spirituality:

### FAMILY HISTORY

Childhood family environment: (single parent family, two-parent family, grandparents, foster homes etc.)

How old were you when you left home:

Have you ever had family members in prison: (If Yes, who and were they in prison before you came)

Have you ever been pregnant whilst in prison?

Did you give birth whilst in prison?

Did you get to keep your baby with you?

Do you agree with having your children stay in prison with you?

### EDUCATION HISTORY

What age did you leave school?

What class were you in at the time?

What is your highest formal qualification?

Are you doing any education courses here at the prison?

Do you think there are enough courses offered in the prison?

Do you think you get the help you need to address your offending?

Do you think you need help?

If so, what do you think would be of most benefit?

### EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Were you employed prior to coming to prison?

If yes, what did you do?

If no, what was your main source of income?

Do you have a job at the prison?

If yes, where are you employed?

If no, would you like to have a job?

Have you ever been a sex-worker?

### IMPRISONMENT HISTORY

(If your offending is drug/alcohol/gambling related, could you please indicate that, i.e. were you wasted at the time, was your offence motivated by need to get drugs and/or money for drugs etc.,)

Current primary offence/s: (If you were convicted of multiple offences, please list in order of most serious to least serious)

Status: (remand, convicted or accused, sentenced etc)

Length of sentence:

Parole date/release date:

Previous convictions: (If yes, approximately how many and what type of offence/s)

Previous jail sentences: (Which prisons have you been in and for how long)

Have you ever been in a same-sex relationship prior to prison?

Have you ever been in a same-sex relationship whilst in prison?

Do you have regular visits?

Would you like to have regular visits?

Do you support (financial/emotional etc) from family/whanau/friends on the outside?

### ADDICTION/PSYCH HISTORY

Drug history:

Have you done the drug treatment programme at Arohata?

If yes, do you think it is beneficial?

If no, would you want to go?

Alcohol history:

Gambling history:

Psych. history: (have you ever been diagnosed with a mental health disorder, if Yes, could you please indicate what type)

Suicide attempts: (have you ever tried to kill yourself)

Self-harming: (have you ever been a self-harmer)

### ABUSE HISTORY

Did you suffer abuse as a child? (If so, what type of abuse – sexual, physical, mental etc.)

Have you been abused as an adult? (If so, what type of abuse – sexual, physical, mental etc.)

Thank you so much for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire, and if there is anything else you would like to add, or something you feel I have left out, please feel free to add whatever comments you feel would be of benefit to this research ☺

#### **Appendix Four – Informed consent**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, having fully understood the nature and aims of this research project, hereby give my full consent to have the information that I share with Michelle Richards (Nicholson) to be used in this project.

I understand that I have the unreserved right to withdraw from this project at any time, and do not have to supply a reason and that if I then request my data will be withdrawn from this research.

I further understand that the information I share with Michelle Richards (Nicholson) will have no impact on my sentence, nor will any of the information that I share be available for custodial staff to view. A further assurance has been given that nothing that I reveal in the course of the interview will be spoken about to any other inmate.

Anything that I share with Michelle Richards will remain confidential in terms of my identity unless I divulge knowledge of an imminent serious assault, my intention to either self-harm or commit suicide, or escape. I then understand that Michelle has a moral and legal duty to report any incidents of this type to prison management.

Furthermore, I understand that my information will remain in a safe and secure place where it is not accessible to prison staff or other inmates, and the only people who will have access to this information is Michelle and her academic supervisors. I further consent, and understand that the results of this research may be published, with the stipulation that my anonymity will remain preserved.

On this basis, and having fully understood the above conditions I agree to participate in this research.

Researcher Signature:

Participant Signature:

Date:



## Appendix Five – Cell Property Entitlements (2006)

### All Prisoners

- ☐ Legal Papers
- ☐ Educational study material - as per individual Sentence Management Plans.
- ☐ Books x 12 Max
- ☐ Magazines ( 10 at a time ) - Strictly no pornographic/nudity material
- ☐ Radio/cassette/CD - Headphones are permitted, but stereos are not to exceed 40 watts, and size restriction of 60cm X 35cm X 25cm. **NO** detachable speakers. *If the Radio is in a damaged state or has been tampered with, it will not be issued.*
- ☐ TV 14” Maximum - *If the TV is in a damaged state or has been tampered with, it will not be issued.*
- ☐ Pre-recorded Cassette tapes – 12 Total
- ☐ CD's - 12 Total
- ☐ Unit Manager approval for Religious materials, in liaison with the Prison Chaplain
- ☐ Stationary/writing materials
- ☐ Normal canteen/personal toiletries
- ☐ Approved medication
- ☐ Personal/family photo's
- ☐ Cup/mug – prison issue only
- ☐ Ashtray – plastic
- ☐ Watch

**NO OTHER PROPERTY IS**

**ALLOWED**

*Failure to keep to radios or TV'S below a reasonable volume level may result in this privilege being reviewed.*

**You are not permitted to loan or give your TV or Radio to another Prisoner.**

**Note** - As per PPM B18.01R1 you will have your TV and radio removed while:

- ☐ Off Privileges
- ☐ On an At Risk Plan

**You are permitted to smoke in your cell or in the yard areas only.**

**No smoking is permitted in any communal areas or in corridors, resource classrooms or toilets. Prisoners who disregard these rules may face an internal misconduct charges.**