

The Paradox of *Resistance, Control, and*

BY LISA M. FINATERI

The need for specialized pre- and postnatal accommodation, hospitalization during labour and the birthing process, as well as proper medical treatment are all specified.

Cet article parle des différentes théories élaborées à partir du corps de la femme et examine le paradoxe de la grossesse en prison.

Female infirmity result[ed] from women's invisible incarceration in the prison house of femininity. (Ussher 134)

Women experience pregnancy with our whole bodies—from the changes in our hair to our swollen ankles—with all our bodies and perhaps with all our soul as well. (Katz Rothman 37)

To have spent time in a woman's joint is to fully appreciate the status of women in the twentieth century. (Burkhart 20)

The limited availability of data, statistics, and policies concerning pregnant women in prison attests to their minority status within a po-

pulation that itself is considered "*Too Few To Count*." Emerging literature on the theorization of women's bodies during pregnancy and more recently, the bodies of women in conflict with the law both omit this group of women during analysis and discussion.

Considering that this issue reflects the encompassing representations and social construction of both the body during pregnancy and the imprisoned female body, time and consideration should be given to studying the contrasts and contradictions, as well as the similarities and synthesis of these broader theorizations.

By addressing the socially constructed conceptualizations that employ the body (its form and functions) as a point of reference for categorization and definition, the body is viewed as both subject and object in the construction of the knowledge-power relationship allowing for formal and informal disciplinary control (Foucault 1977, 1990).

In analyzing both the biological and societal construction of "female" and "femininity," discussing the body as simultaneously a "site of control" and a "site of resistance" and examining the literature on women's imprisonment, discussing the body in its contradictory conceptualizations of being both "in danger" and "dangerous" (Frigon forthcoming), I shall examine the synthesis and paradoxes of the representations of imprisoned women's bodies during pregnancy, discussing the findings in relation to a multiplication of the body as a site of control and resistance.

The bodies of pregnant imprisoned women

Imprisoned pregnant women are neglected in prison policy, prison research, and prison activism. Until quite recently, women prisoners were overlooked in general. More astounding however, is the absence of feminist theorizations of imprisoned women's bodies, their issues, and concerns. As a population, it seems these women have been disregarded due to their small numbers. While women comprise 2.5–4 per cent of the Canadian prison population (Solicitor General of Canada; Faith), in 1983 alone there were 360 new infants born in Canadian jails and prisons (Faith). In Britain, Holloway Prison housed 200 pregnant women in 1985 (Phillip). American statistics quote a six to seven per cent rate of pregnancy in their jails and penitentiaries (Glenn Dowling; Lessinger). The Standard Minimum Rules For the Treatment of Prisoners, as put forth by The United Nations (1955), sets out various guidelines for the care of pregnant prisoners. While not legally binding, it presents morally-grounded instruction. The need for specialized pre- and postnatal accommodation, hospitalization during labour and the birthing process, as well as proper medical treatment are all specified within this document amongst other recommendations (qtd. in Wilson).

In the United States, recommendations have also been formally documented by the American Correctional Association, the American Public Health Association, and the American Medical Association; notably, these recommendations

Pregnancy in Prison

the Body

concern medical care and do not discuss security or disciplinary concerns (Holt). Nevertheless, the United States does not have an official national policy concerning pregnant prisoners. A survey by Wooldredge and Masters, indicates that just under half of the 52 states retain some form of policy but are not uniformly implemented nor comprehensive: 16 per cent offer Lamaze classes, 15 per cent provide specialize diets (national policy in New Zealand) and nine per cent employ a full-time nurse or midwife (Wooldredge and Masters 1993). This lack of uniformity results in less options and limited, if any, control pregnant imprisoned women may exert over their bodies and decisions that affect it.

Canadian policy and statistics are less available. The Correctional Service of Canada does not employ a national policy on pregnancy in prison, although the Commissioner Directives (Instrupt 1991a), officially states that specialized counselling during pregnancy, in addition to sessions on related issues, will be available as will institutional aid in making postpartum child care arrangements. Emergency health care polices also exist, however they do not specifically address the issue of pregnancy (Instrupt 1991b). Provincially, Wees asserts that four out of twelve Canadian provinces and territories indicate that maternity and postnatal services are provided within their prisons (five did not provide a response). Internationally, other countries are far more repressive where official policy denies women control over various aspects of their bodies. Brazil, for example does not allow imprisoned women the right

to breastfeed (Women Prisoners of the State of Sao Paulo).

Prison, with its medical uncertainties in conjunction with its disciplinary inevitability, functions as a teratogen with debilitating effects on the bodies of pregnant women by increasing psychological and physiological stress (Holt; Lessinger; Pollock-Byrne; Wooldredge and Masters). Such stressors may partially account for statistics that report a 44 per cent live birth rate of prison pregnancies and a 34 per cent rate of miscarriage (Barry qtd. in Wallace and Wedlock). Alternatively, Lessinger indicates that pregnancy outcomes for imprisoned women and those on probation are relatively similar. Disagreement in the outcome of imprisoned women's pregnancy, incidentally does not indicate how women see and feel their pregnant bodies while imprisoned. Research illustrates woman's ambivalence towards their pregnancy and their bodies (Queniart) that is seemingly magnified by imprisonment (Holt; Lessinger). Inadequacies in diet and laborious work detail, in unison with poor health care and constrained choices within limited options (Wooldredge and Masters 1993) are most probably causal factors.

Without updated research and study, imprisoned pregnant women are likely to remain a forgotten segment of the population. Considering current fiscal constraints and a political swing to the right, this likelihood endures. But is it not a plausibility that pregnant imprisoned women are "forgotten" or perhaps remain "hidden" because societal representations and social constructions of the body (in relation to

gender, biological "womaness" and pregnancy) are wrought with contradiction? Further still, does motherhood not wreck havoc on the prison structure, its security measures, disciplinary controls, and basic routinization of the body? Does a baby not place value and worth where both are ritually stripped away?

The body as a site of control

Representations of women's bodies during pregnancy and imprisonment are often in direct contradiction, e.g. the have/hold sexuality (Holloway), the "madonna-whore" dichotomy, and the "good/ bad" mother dichotomy (Phoenix and Woollett). A more in-depth analysis of the prevailing representations of women's bodies is necessary. Similarities and syntheses must be fleshed out and discussed, revealing theoretical contrasts and contradictions. Together, this may enlighten the plight of imprisoned pregnant women in relation to the

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control exerted over their bodies, providing insight and understanding to their social struggle as women and mothers—individually and collectively.

Both the body during pregnancy and the imprisoned body have been discussed in relation to representations of deviancy (Frigon

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forthcoming; Ussher). Under each situation, the body has been simultaneously depicted as being “in danger” yet “dangerous.” Historically, emphasis has shifted in either direction. From the data available, the bodies of pregnant women in prison were viewed as primarily dangerous—they were prisoners first. “Until 1948 women delivered in prison, but this policy was then revised and women are now transferred to the nearest hospital” (Wilson 26). In the 1970s, views began to change, reflected in the way society viewed women and their bodies. Where pregnant women prisoners were concerned, the body was equally seen as both “in danger” and “dangerous.” For example, prenatal units were run by disciplinary and nursing staff.

The role of the nursing and disciplinary staff overlap somewhat because the disciplinary staff are meant to care as well as

discipline, and the nursing staff, while primarily there to nurse must take a slightly different attitude to their charges than they would working in a normal hospital. (Philipp 332)

While women are now sent to local hospitals to give birth, indicating the body as “in danger,” symbolic representation of its supposed “dangerousness” is often present; “In the U.S., women in labour are handcuffed and shackled when taken off prison grounds. Doctors often insist that restraints be removed” (Glenn Dowling 83). This practice is not an unheard off in Canada either (Tompkins). Greater concern for the bodies of pregnant women in prison questions not only medical intervention or the lack thereof, but security and disciplinary practices, as well as how they relate to women under such circumstances. Strip searches, solitary confinement, laborious work detail, and other issues must be regarded as an intrusion on the body and the body as suffering the effects of such an intrusion. Today, changing practices seem to reflect an increasing concern for fetal rights. In the U.S., while some states defer the death penalty until after childbirth (Holt) and others, such as North Carolina, defer women’s prison sentence for six weeks following childbirth or abortion in non-violent cases (Wallace and Wedlock), women are still conceived as not knowing how their bodies work sometimes resulting in the imprisonment of pregnant women for alcohol or drug consumption (Farr; Sagatun-Edwards) under a paternalist concern for the fetus which it encapsulates.

During pregnancy, women’s bodies are depicted as inferior in relation to those of men, by the very means of their reproductive capacity (Ussher; Katz Rothman; Oakley). The pathologizing of pregnancy as the “normal illness”¹ is a logical progression of this line of thought, yielding increased control over female bodies under a pseudo paternalistic

concern for its well-being. It is the body’s inferiority under the ideology of patriarchy² that facilitates the representation of pathology—the “sick body.” The body of the imprisoned woman however, is not only inferior in relation to that of the “normal body” but also in relation to the conceptualization of the “good” woman. A positivistic, scientific view of the body denotes “criminal” bodies as ontologically inferior to “law” abiding bodies. Under such an ideological position, pregnant imprisoned women possess bodies that reflect a qualitative and quantitative multiplication of levels of inferiority by virtue of their criminal “abnormality” or “atavism” and feminine inferiority. Their body is in danger of its dual nature of harboring an illness (pregnancy) in an already “sick” (criminal) body. The irony in this multiplication of inferiority is the decreased medical concern and intervention for imprisoned pregnant women. According to the scientifically derived status of their bodies “dual inferiority,” one would expect increasing medical intervention.

If imprisoned women are denoted as “doubly deviant” by virtue of having transgressed the law, as well as prescribed social norms, would pregnancy not visibly mark the body, by a growing stomach (and later by stretch marks and/or a cesarean scar), thereby reinstating the “womaness” of her undeniably female body? Logically this would make sense but realistically does not reflect the complexity of the representations of women and their bodies in western society. To be woman is to be mother; indeed, “being a woman is synonymous with being a mother” (Ussher 80). But not all mothers are necessarily good mothers and therefore a “bad mother” is a “bad woman.” The confinement of prison takes this even further, rendering a situation where bad “criminal” women are represented as “non-mothers”; to paraphrase Baunach, “You can’t be a Mother and be in Prison ... Can You?” Female prisoners are not even

recognized as women, let alone mothers. They are infantilized through terminology reflecting the body—"we are still called girls and rarely mothers" (Horii 17). Applied terminology goes even further denoting them not as women or mothers, "we become females not women" (Horii 13), equating prisoners with caged animals or livestock as reflected in the following quote: "There is also a separate living area where the mothers and pregnant women can *feed*" (Philipp 331; my emphasis). This logic seems to follow the notion that separation from one's child, renders her a "non-mother" and therefore, a "non-woman."

If a woman's body may be dismissed as "non-feminine" through this aforementioned questionable deduction, does the visible marking of pregnancy on the body not defy this logic, blatantly marking a woman prisoner's body as a feminine body? She can no longer be defined as "non-mother" with her pending motherhood exposed to the human eye. However in prison, the representation of mother applies a social definition of "worthiness" somewhat inconsistent with traditional scientific ideology. Kennedy, a woman imprisoned in Detroit speaks of a fellow prisoner in stating

she and many other prisoners feel that prison authorities do not believe that women in prison are worthy enough to have children and so they work them in contempt for the welfare of the mother or baby. (57)

Interestingly, it is the body at which the contempt is directed. Such a conceptualization may rest in the representation of the body as an unruly body of an "unruly woman"³ in need of taming (Faith 1990). The recent American case of Mrs. Mary Kay Letourneau, a school teacher having an affair with her twelve-year-old student, is an example. Following international media coverage, she subsequently gave birth

to their child and was later imprisoned for child rape. Upon release, she breached a condition of parole by contacting the boy. She is imprisoned and pregnant once again. The cover headline on *People Magazine* (March 1998) reads: "Out of Control" (Hewitt). Her former husband is quoted as saying, "its like taking a picture of our family and throwing it to the ground" (Hewitt 44). This illustrates the defining of both her crime and her pregnancy in relation to her role as wife and mother, negating her current physical condition (pregnant and imprisoned) as inconsistent with the "feminine body" or "womanly" role.

Interestingly, not only was the criminality of Ms. Letourneau's pregnancy discussed but so was a fascination with the unknown identity of the father of her unborn child. This case epitomizes the representation of the unbridled sexuality of "criminal" women. As a sexed body, she is stripped of her pedestal upon which "good" mothers and "good" women are placed. In discussing the pregnancies of imprisoned women, Philipp asserts that

some [women] have hardly recovered from a previous pregnancy before embarking on a new one, and the past abortion rate among offenders before entry into prison is very high. (332)

Such a statement is void of any discussion of pregnancy or abortion trends amongst non imprisoned women and reflects a condemning, if not misogynistic tone in the construction of "sexed" bodies.⁴ De Beauvoir, discussing pregnancy and motherhood of "good" women and mothers three decades earlier, offers a direct contrast to the representation of Letourneau and the women depicted by Philipp:

her bosom, which was previously an erotic feature, can now be freely shown, for it is a source of life; even religious pictures show

the Virgin Mother exposing her breast as she beseeches her Son to save mankind. (496)

The asexual body as a representation of pregnancy is completely in contradiction to the sexed bodies of deviant women, where a rejection of this polar dichotomy is preferable because naturally she is both.

The body as a site of resistance

Control leads to resistance—it is through control that resistance becomes possible, if not necessary for survival. Within prison walls, resistance is confined but subversive all the same. Its effectiveness is both an individual and collective issue depending on the desired results. Acts of resistance, especially in the context of prison, can also be defined negatively as acts of manipulation and thus, delegitimized. The bodies of pregnant women in prison can therefore be viewed as an increased site for resistance or an increased site of control. Indeed, pregnancy within prison may result in either at varying points in time. Both the social construction of the conceptualizations of women prisoners and women in general pose varying threats to the maintenance of the status quo. Both representations construct the body as deviant, enabling and justifying their surveillance and

"Prison authorities do not believe that women in prison are worthy enough to have children and so they work them in contempt for the welfare of the mother or baby."

control. It would seem then, that the bodies of imprisoned women, and more specifically the bodies of pregnant imprisoned women, embody a multiplication of deviancy, thereby increasing the body's potential as a site of resistance and control.

Considering that pregnancy clearly marks the body as that of a woman, it may provide ongoing defiance of the representation of prisoner as "non-woman" and "non-mother." The body is a vehicle for social recognition, allowing imprisoned women to carry out aspects of their identity that are otherwise controlled or negated. The pregnant body competes with the label of prisoner for master status. Another possibility arises where the body may be applied as a site of resistance against the routinization of prison life. Pregnancy may be used to seek alternate accommodation and special privileges.

Quite a proportion of the pregnant women who [go] to Holloway ask to have abortions but many of these, when they see the conditions at Holloway and learn that the babies will be delivered at a Consultant Unit, refuse the abortion. (Philipp 331)

Applying this statement as evidence of simply an act of resistance or manipulation misses a very important point. While prison administration may favour the decision to have an abortion or to give birth, the decision is that of the woman thereby empowering her control over her own body. Reconsidering the decision to give birth or to abort may not be an act of resistance or manipulation but a conscious decision by a woman as to the environment in which her child will gestate within her body and the effects that environment may produce.

Self-injurious behaviour and false labour use the physical state of preg-

nancy as a means of breaking prison routine and expressing emotion. Generally perceived as an act of manipulation, a survey of warden's throughout the United States, reveals false labour as a primary concern when questioned about pregnancies in their prisons (Wooldredge and Masters).

Quite a few prisoners damage their vaginas if they can find a sharp enough object, in order to make themselves bleed, with the purpose of being transferred to an outside hospital. What is more, this self-inflicted damage works, for it would be extremely foolish to leave any woman who had been damaged during late pregnancy somewhere where emergency cesarean section could not be carried out ... prisoners are often surprisingly good, if simple actresses. (Philips 333)

Of course, self-injurious behaviour has motives (un/conscious) but to simply deduce such action as strictly manipulative (or resistive) is to discount the emotion underlying it and neglects the bodily act as a psychological release for past or present suffering.

Finally, pregnancy provides for increased legal resistance. Equality under the law and individual rights and freedoms legally provide for the right to procreation and the right for women to control their bodies and the fetuses within it (i.e. the legal right to abortion). Adequate health care, nutrition, exercise etc., are all aspects for litigation against the penal system (McHugh). The rights of imprisoned female prisoners are slowly emerging through the recognition of the added stress imprisonment inflicts on parenting, reflected through flourishing parenting and pregnancy programs and facilities (i.e. the Mother Child Program in Canada, and the Parent and Children Together (PACT) program in Lexington, Kentucky).

Current Canadian reports (Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women; Wine) on federally sentenced women engenders a call for change based on the need for basic human rights of imprisoned women and their children. Both reports acknowledge that the majority of women in prison are mothers (80 per cent), and that the separation from their children is added punishment, with negative effects on both parties. Within the four new regional "facilities" for federally sentenced women, revised parenting programs have been instituted, along with attempts at implementing the Mother Child Program (Correctional Service of Canada). At the Okimaw Ochi Healing Lodge in Maple Creek, Saskatchewan, on-site accommodation and support is provided for the children and mothers that live there.

Acknowledging imprisoned women as "mothers," especially as "good mothers" is slowly starting to change. It will be interesting and of importance to determine if these programs and initiatives are indeed empowering, offering women increased control over their lives and their bodies or if they offer a greater means of institutional control (i.e. loss of participation in the Mother Child Program). While the significance of these reports and the subsequent changes that ensued are not in question, it is necessary to assert that once again, pregnancy is implicitly but not explicitly addressed. It may be argued that a fetus is included in the definition of children and the state of pregnancy included in the definition of motherhood (although not explicitly stated), however such a definition could have a negative impact on those women who chose to abort.

Interestingly, as this expanding acknowledgment and acceptance of parenting in prison is emerging along with a concern for the harmful effect that imprisonment may have on the fetus, both Canada and the United

States are simultaneously experiencing a trend in the criminalization of behaviour during pregnancy that are otherwise non-criminal acts (e.g., alcohol consumption). Pregnant women are increasingly finding themselves behind bars in the name of fetal safety (Satatun-Edwards; Farr). Considering that imprisonment itself is potentially harmful to the fetus (Holt; Lessinger; Pollock-Byrne; Wooldredge and Master), coupled with the fact that illicit substances and alcohol are available in prison, it seems that once again state policy is decreasing women's control over their bodies in the name of fetal rights, when the consequence of the state policy further puts the fetus "at-risk." The paradoxes of the conceptualization of pregnancy, imprisonment, and the body continue.

Dispelling these paradoxes is not an elementary nor simple endeavor. A primary step must be to distance ourselves from the confining aspects of social representations of women and their bodies, as well as their subsequent categorization based on dichotomous and polar extremities. People are whole beings, their bodies being one facet in the relationship between the mind, body, and spirit—the whole of which is located in a given cultural milieu. Individually, we must transcend that which oppresses and represses us, indeed we must work to transcend all relationships of domination and control.

It is through empowering ourselves and taking control of our bodies as women and people that unity in the collective struggle for social awareness and societal change ensues. The bodies of pregnant women in prison may be the most forgotten and secluded but they expose, in the most contradictory fashion, the representations and constructions of women's bodies in various intersecting aspects of life while acknowledging the body as a site of control and celebrating its resilience and resistance.

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¹Today, we see pregnancy as the "normal illness" where a natural and normal stage in a woman's life cycle is brought under the medical control of physicians (Ussher). "By equating women with their wombs, obstetricians define women as pregnant patients and exclude other social and emotional considerations as irrelevant to childbearing" (Oakley 28). Pregnancy is perhaps the only time when the body is properly functioning—without illness or pathology—that hospitalization and treatment is the norm. It seems then, that we pathologize women's bodies in effort to control them but not to truly discover if there is anything wrong or devise a cure.

²Barbara Katz Rothman unveils the face of the representations of mothering and motherhood in relation to the three intersecting ideologies of patriarchy, technology, and capitalism. By ideology, she refers to the way in which we organize our understanding of how we see the world around us and our place in it—how we experience our bodies and our lives. Under the ideology of patriarchy—of male superiority and female inferiority—women are wives, mothers, and daughters, they are defined in relation to men. Women bear men's children, they are incubators for the male seed. It is the ideology of technology that transform our bodies into machinery; it further assumes a mind (male)/body (female) split. Under the ideology of capitalism, individuals have the right to own and therefore, control property. The body is no exception. If women are people under law, then logically they should have ownership over their bodies. Of course under patriarchy, women's bodies are not worth much. Indeed, owning our body is not sufficient, if during

pregnancy, it is viewed as warehousing someone else's property. ³The unruly woman rejects the informal and formal controls over her body and her womanness. Her body is dangerous because of this rejection and the futility it lends the prison disciplines in rendering her deviant body docile. Of course, this is not to contend that attempts at surveillance and control are not in force. Karleen Faith explicates this concept: "She is the undisciplined woman. She is the renegade from the disciplinary practices which would hold her as a gendered being. She is a defiant woman, who rejects authority who would subjugate her and render her docile. She is the unmanageable woman who claims her own body, the whore, the wanton woman, the wild woman out of control. She is the woman who cannot be silenced. She is a rebel. She is trouble" (i).

⁴Foucault asserts that bodies have been imbedded with sex(ualities). "The power which took charge of sexuality set about contacting bodies, caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatizing troubled movements. It wrapped the sexual body in its embrace" (1990, 44). In the case of women, the treatment of their sexualities was much more extreme. The bodies of women, especially women deemed deviant, had their vagina, clitoris, ovaries, and other body parts ritually probed and prodded, electrically shocked, mutilated, cut, and removed. The discourses surrounding sexuality formulated "... a detailed knowledge of the individual as a sexed subject and as an object for disciplinary control" (Turkel 187). Smart defines women's sexed bodies as both sexually encoded within phallogocentric culture (patriarchal ideology) and therefore, saturated with sex, as well as "biological womaness"; "sex became the ultimate truth of a person, it became each individual's most secret and telling property" (203). As a "bad" woman, a prisoner's body is represented as

harbouring an insatiable sexuality; she is the whore, the prostitute, the lesbian.

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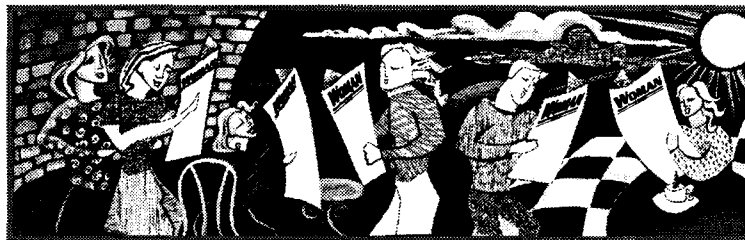
RENEE NORMAN

Checking My Daughters at Midnight with Lotion on My Hands

night climbs over discarded clothes black jeans black camisole
with a trim of white lace under their eyelids other worlds move
across their faces quilts drawn up to nostrils like lilies
like peonies the fragrance of lilacs in the seams of open windows
let in the rush of air from the dark creek a woods lullaby
for those who sleep close to trees in the night's silence
an eloquent language of love and darkness hard between the sigh
of a deep dreamer the rustle of a body turned a fourth wall
reflects the hand smooths the crease off a brow pain
of the whispered
of the whispered....

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Dandelion, and Freefall.*

to learn
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