

CHAPTER ONE

From Representations to Resistance:
How the Razor Wire Binds Us

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I believe that the more we can have a voice, the more we can reach out to bring understanding to our situation, the more outside people are going to positively respond. —VONDA WHITE, *formerly incarcerated*

MAINSTREAM REPRESENTATIONS
OF SOCIALLY INVISIBLE WOMEN

Prisons, by their very nature, conceal the people who live and work inside them. Those who attempt to gain access to prisons for the purposes of research, activism, family visitation, or even governmental evaluation see and hear little more than what prison officials wish to show to the world. Even those who reside within the prisons walls, and many of those who are employed there, will likely never have a full picture of what takes place day to day in the prison as a whole. Prisoners are often grouped together, packed into tight spaces, and forced to cohabitate with more of their colleagues than the prison was designed to hold, yet they are also isolated from other populations within the prison and can live for years without seeing certain others confined within the same border of fences and razor wire. The systematic obfuscation of knowledge about prisons and prisoners makes it challenging to piece together a realistic depiction of how people experience incarceration.

Perhaps it is this mystery that enshrouds the carceral that fuels the desire for outsiders to create representations of those inside prisons. This statement may be particularly true for incarcerated women, who continue to represent a smaller proportion of the prison population (just 7 percent) and seem to perplex society because they do not fit the traditional mold of what a prisoner is “supposed” to be: male and, in contemporary society, of color. Throughout history,

organizations, medical professionals, and the media have rushed to explain what “causes” female criminality and, in so doing, have manufactured representations of women behind bars that are not necessarily congruous with how imprisoned women may frame and understand themselves, their lives, and their experiences with incarceration.

In some ways, society has been preoccupied with representing incarcerated women. In the nineteenth century, women who engaged—or perhaps indulged—in “pleasures of the body” such as drinking in public, having sex outside of marriage, or committing adultery crossed the dividing line between femininity and masculinity and could find themselves serving prison sentences. These women were termed “fallen women” by society and were represented as beyond redemption (Freedman 1981). Gender expectations and a strong double standard meant that men could more freely engage in the same behaviors that led to the social control and punishment of women. It was not until women prison reformers organized to improve prison conditions and establish separate reformatories for “fallen women” that women came to be seen as having potential for rehabilitation (Freedman 1981). This rehabilitation was really a mandate to accept traditional, middle-class gender norms that stressed the maternal role of women in the family; only when a “fallen woman” accepted these values would it be deemed appropriate to release her from prison. Of course, this reform work was focused almost exclusively on white women; incarcerated women of color were overlooked by reformers and remained in separate wings of men’s custodial institutions (Rafter 1990). A representation of the “deserving” female prisoner therefore developed, and this image was of a white, young woman who was in desperate need of guidance and reform.

By the midtwentieth century, Hollywood began to represent incarcerated women. Films like *I Want to Live* (1958) and *Caged* (1950) were melodramatic depictions of prison life. *I Want to Live* is based on the story of Barbara Graham, who was executed at thirty-two years of age in California for a murder in which she was allegedly involved with two other men. Nicknamed “Bloody Babs” by the media, the film describes the media frenzy around her case and its representation of Graham as a “bad girl” or “party girl” because she was involved in prostitution, gambling, and drugs. Such representations clearly depict a gender double standard: men can indulge in gambling and drugs, for example, but women who do so, and women who engage in prostitution, have crossed the line between “pure” and “licentious” and are conceptualized, to use Karlene Faith’s (1993) term, as “unruly.” These representations also remove Graham from the social context of her life and fail to capture the complexity of her time both before and during prison.

On the other hand, the academy award–nominated *Caged* tells the story of a young woman hardened by the prison environment. This film interestingly suggests that healthcare was inadequate in women’s prisons in 1950 (a problem that continues today) and shows a well-meaning warden, who champions rehabilitation efforts, in a power struggle with a correctional officer who thinks women

inside should be treated like “animals.” But it again does little to interrogate the larger social forces that contribute to one’s incarceration and fails to capture the complexity of prison life for women behind bars; it also depicts women in prison as desperately needing guidance and charitable help. Moreover, both films overwhelmingly represent white women prisoners; one wonders where all of the incarcerated women of color were.

More contemporary representations of women in prison are obsessed with the idea of incarcerated women as “hardened criminals.” The E! Network, for example, currently runs a special entitled, *Women Who Kill*, which chronicles high-profile cases of disproportionately white women who have killed their husbands. This special creates a flat and simplistic picture of the lives of such women, sensationalizes crime and incarceration, and suggests, albeit implicitly, that women behind bars are all crazed killers who are to be feared. Larger processes of racism, classism, and sexism, which contribute to the present-day incarceration of a disproportionate number of women in prison, are not discussed or interrogated, nor is it brought to the viewer’s attention that most women in prison are not doing time for violent crimes.

To be sure, sensationalized accounts and portrayals of incarcerated women and their crimes could not be further from the truth. Unlike films, television programs, and even nineteenth-century reformers who turned their attention toward white prisoners, incarcerated women are disproportionately of color and poor: close to 70 percent of these women are black, Latina, First Nation, or Asian (Díaz-Cotto 2006; James 2005; Johnson 2003), and most are poor or working class. A growing percentage of women prisoners are migrant women, overwhelmingly from Mexico.

At least 57 percent of women incarcerated in state prisons report that they have experienced sexual and/or physical violence prior to their confinement; about one-third of imprisoned women report having been raped prior to their incarceration (Lawston 2008; Mauer, Potler, and Wolf 1999). Moreover, incarcerated women are more likely than their male counterparts to be addicted to drugs or to report a drug problem at the time of arrest (Pollock 2002; Owen 1998), more often than not because they are trying to lessen the pain that results from the violence they have suffered. Despite mainstream media portrayals of women in prison as “violent” and “hardened,” the majority of incarcerated women do their time for nonviolent drug or property offenses, with drug offenses—largely due to changes in drug laws—being the largest source of growth for the women’s prison and jail population (see Lawston 2008; Schlesinger 2008; Reynolds 2008; Díaz-Cotto 2007; Johnson 2003; Mauer, Potler, and Wolf 1999). Additionally, at least two-thirds of incarcerated women are mothers to children under eighteen years of age (Mumola 2000). Although imprisoned women experience incarceration directly, then, their children, families, communities, friends, and other loved ones also suffer from their confinement in myriad and no less painful ways.

A major problem with both current and past mainstream media representations of incarcerated women is that the material presented tells us little about

how these women represent themselves, how they conceptualize and process imprisonment and the separation from their communities and families, and how they express dissent and fight for their voices to be heard by those on the outside of prison walls, which as Vonda suggests at the beginning of this chapter is an important goal for many contemporary imprisoned women. Most media representations fail to show the complexity of prisoners' lives, allowing women's crimes and the stigma of criminality to overshadow, and act as a master status to, all other aspects of their identities. These media representations fail to contextualize women's imprisonment within a social system that relies on racism, economic discrimination, and sexism to lock up marginalized groups of women who are our mothers, sisters, wives, partners, and friends. Like all of us, the women that the United States targets for incarceration are infinitely more multifaceted than the simplistic representations that have historically dominated society, and their voices are no less important than any of ours on the outside of prison walls.

CHALLENGING MAINSTREAM REPRESENTATIONS OF
INCARCERATED WOMEN:
PRISONERS, SCHOLARS, ACTIVISTS, AND ARTISTS

While mass media outlets and traditional reform groups like those found in the nineteenth century attempted (and continue to attempt) to represent women who are confined behind steel doors and razor wire, prisoners, activists, scholars, and artists have nevertheless managed to contribute their varied forms of discourse to the historical record of women's incarceration in the United States. Autobiographical accounts of women's imprisonment in this country date back at least as far as the 1860s, when a number of privileged Southern women were jailed as Confederate spies (Boyd 1865; Robinson 1864). These early accounts are few and far between and describe only the experiences of those literate enough to write their own stories. Although the women's prison reform movement of the nineteenth century is brilliantly documented by several scholars (Freedman 1981; Rafter 1990; Dodge 2006), the literature available suggests that the voices of women in reformatory and custodial institutions were muted by activists who were concerned with reforming women who "stepped out of line." More recent literature, such as Wally Lamb's popular anthologies *Couldn't Keep It To Myself: Testimonies from Our Imprisoned Sisters* (2004) and *I'll Fly Away: Further Testimonies from the Women of York Prison* (2007), as well as numerous scholarly articles, books, and volumes, including but not limited to those edited by Solinger, Johnson, Raimon, Reynolds, and Tapia (2009), Sudbury (2005), Hardon and Hill (1998), Boudin (1998), Girshick (1999), Owen (1998), and Richie (1996) have been more successful at highlighting the voices, knowledge, and testimonies of women in prison.

Activism around women's confinement has also served to contest mainstream understandings of incarceration. Nineteenth-century reformers challenged the idea that criminalized women could not be "rehabilitated" (Freedman 1981) but

operated under the assumption that “rehabilitation” is congruous with acceptance of traditional gender expectations. In contrast, more contemporary progressive activism, from the 1970s to today, has not only underscored the importance of women prisoners speaking for themselves, but in some cases has begun to question incarceration in its entirety.

Women activists in the 1970s fell on a continuum: some groups advocated for the reform of prisons (such as through improvement of prison conditions and rehabilitative programs), while others advocated for alternatives to incarceration (such as through the channeling of resources such as education, housing, and jobs in an equitable manner to all communities) (Resources for Community Change 1975). Like many of the men in the radical men’s prison movement (Cummins 1994), incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women were an integral and powerful part of this movement, which helped to reframe understandings of imprisonment.

Activists today still fall on a continuum: some organizations primarily strive for prison reform, while others fight for systemic social change and alternatives to incarceration. Many organizations, though, inhabit the liminal space between reform and abolition of prisons; these groups incorporate prisoner support work into their missions while adhering to a vision of a world without prisons. Organizations that fight for prison abolition—such as Critical Resistance—provide public education on the economic, social, and political roots of the U.S. prison regime, its effects on all of our lives, and community alternatives to imprisonment. Incite! focuses specifically on the effects of violence and incarceration on women and also offers suggestions for beginning to move away from a system that relies on violence and punishment to ensure safety. Such organizations are powerful engines for social change that have the potential to radically alter how the United States conceptualizes and approaches “crime.”

Art has also been a provocative way to reconceptualize manufactured representations of incarcerated women. Imprisoned women have likely produced creative writing and artwork of some kind throughout U.S. history, but artists’ contributions, for the most part, went undocumented until the midtwentieth century. Though it is difficult to document the work of most individual prison artists, a small handful of incarcerated writers, visual artists, musicians, dancers, and theater practitioners have received recognition outside prison walls. Of this select group of published and celebrated prison artists, very few are women, and their work tends to be significantly less well known than the male prisoners working in the same artistic genre.

More organized and larger-scale efforts to promote creative expression in prison began when activist, educational, and artistic organizations made major in-roads into both women’s and men’s facilities from the 1980s to the present. Performer Rhodessa Jones and her collaborators began creating theater with the women of the San Francisco County Jail in 1989 and subsequently formed the Medea Project, a theater collective of incarcerated and nonincarcerated women. In 1990, Buzz Alexander, an English professor at the University of Michigan,

began teaching a theater class in a women's prison and founded the Prison Creative Arts Project, which now facilitates arts workshops in prisons, juvenile detention centers, and urban high schools throughout Michigan. Women on the Rise! a program based out of Miami's Museum of Contemporary Art since 2004, enables professional women artists to collaborate on art projects with girls in the Miami-Dade County Juvenile Detention Center. All three of these organizations are discussed in subsequent chapters of this book.

Arts programs are crucial in that they give participants a creative mode in which to think critically about their lives in relation to the performative and performed power structures of the prison. Incarcerated women's voices and visions, in artistic form, are as essential to struggles for equality and justice as are those of nonincarcerated people, scholars, and activists. The symbols of incarcerated women's fights are embedded in the words and images created by prisoner artists.

Artists from outside prisons also raise awareness and generate dialogue about issues surrounding the carceral by helping unmask the everyday implications of prisons in average citizens' lives.

Particularly unique ways of presenting prisoners' voices and a more complex representation of incarceration can also be found on websites such as *Women in Prison: A Site for Resistance*, run by Beyondmedia Education in Chicago, which includes articles, artwork, poetry, and other creative work by prisoners, scholars, activists, and the families, friends, and children of prisoners. Such work has been critical to challenging archetypical images surrounding incarceration.

REPRESENTATIONS, VOICE, AND RAZOR WIRE WOMEN

It is extremely important to continue contesting monolithic representations of incarcerated women, and in attempting to do so, it is critical that the voices of women who experience incarceration are respected, prioritized, and validated. Returning to Vonda White's statement at the beginning of this chapter, only when imprisoned women speak for themselves—rather than having criminal justice “experts,” the media, and medical practitioners speak for them—will it be possible to shatter stereotypical understandings of crime and incarceration.

But it is perhaps equally important to broaden our understanding of *who* is affected by mass imprisonment. Incarcerated women are obviously affected directly in that they are literally locked up, chained and shackled, and subjected to various forms of humiliation by a system whose goal is the systematic subordination and oppression of marginalized groups of people. But families, friends, children, and entire communities are also deeply affected by imprisonment when loved ones are torn away from them. With 2.3 million people incarcerated—two hundred thousand of whom are women, and at least two-thirds of whom are mothers (Talvi 2007)—it should not be difficult to see that the grip of the U.S. carceral system reaches beyond those who are inside of it. Society has produced

images of women in prison as out of control, drug addicted, unruly, and sexually promiscuous, and often these stereotypes reach beyond incarcerated women to their families, children, and communities. For example, society assumes that incarcerated women's children are somehow tainted by their mothers' imprisonment or that the communities from which women in prison come are inherently "pathological," "bad," or "groomed" for criminal activity. Moreover, families, children, and communities are hard hit by women's incarceration because women cannot take care of their children, help families monetarily, or contribute to a community's growth.

In this book we extend understandings of the effects of women's incarceration to include not just those who are behind bars, but women outside who are also deeply affected by imprisonment. We employ the concept "razor wire women" to describe those women who experience the criminal justice system in ways that shape their lives profoundly. Razor wire women encounter the criminal justice system in myriad ways; in addition to being prisoners, activists, scholars, and artists, razor wire women are the wives, sisters, caretakers, friends, partners, and extended family members of incarcerated people. Ashley Lucas and I are both the children of prisoners, as is at least one other contributor to this volume. Razor wire women share the common ground of knowing what it feels like for the state to police your body and your family. We live in solidarity with women on both sides of prison walls, understanding intimately how the razor wire binds us.

THE GENESIS OF RAZOR WIRE WOMEN

The challenge of realistically documenting the lives of incarcerated women can best be met by combining many different types of knowledge. *Razor Wire Women* brings together the contributions of prisoners, activists, scholars, and artists because the members of each of these groups possess distinct and vital kinds of information about how women encounter incarceration. This book grew out of a cluster issue of the *National Women's Studies Association Journal (NWSAJ)*, now titled *Feminist Formations*, which Ashley Lucas and I edited, on the topic of "Women, the Criminal Justice System, and Incarceration: Processes of Power, Silence, and Resistance." When we solicited contributions for that journal issue, we sought out activists, prisoners, and artists, as well as scholars, who are usually the only contributors to academic journals. As activist-scholars ourselves, we felt that the journal could not adequately describe women's incarceration without the voices of those living within the walls and those on the outside who tirelessly advocate for them. Artists on both sides of the razor wire are able to depict the humanity and the emotional life of incarcerated women in ways that scholars and activists cannot. Such an abundance of high quality work was sent to us in response to our call for contributions that we could not use most of it in the limited space of a single journal issue. Even before

that issue of *NWSAJ* was published in the summer of 2008, we had decided to put together this collection.

The artwork, scholarly articles, essays, poetry, autobiographical narratives, and drama collected here inform one another through their juxtaposition. The creative work gathered in this volume informs and colors the empirical data found in the scholarly and nonfiction writings throughout *Razor Wire Women*. And the categories of prisoner, activist, scholar, and artist are not mutually exclusive. Many of our contributors fill more than one of these roles and blend the skill sets and the modes of understanding that come from being part of these groups. Other contributors share one specific viewpoint that illuminates a particular aspect of how women experience imprisonment.

The prisoners and former prisoners who offered their writings and artwork for this volume provide us with the most immediate and experiential accounts of their lives, while the activists describe efforts to advocate for prisoners and their families and in some cases, to agitate for alternatives to incarceration. The scholarly writing in these pages presents new research on women in prison and their families, with particular attention paid to some of the most ignored groups within these populations: girls, immigrants, and transgender people. Most edited volumes of scholarly work entrench themselves in one academic discipline or a grouping of related disciplines. *Razor Wire Women* brings together scholarship from the humanities, social sciences, and the arts because we believe that each mode of inquiry used to study women's incarceration offers up distinct and valuable insight. We use the broad interdisciplinary lenses of sociology, feminist criminology, and women's and gender studies to unite seemingly disparate kinds of writing and imagery. Visual artists, dramatists, and creative writers as well as scholars who study the arts have pieces in this collection, which show us how women prisoners use creativity and arts as strategies for resistance, modes of describing their world, attempts at rehabilitation, opportunities for building communities, and ideas for decarceration. This book is a collaborative effort among the editors and contributors to deepen our understanding of how women interact with the criminal justice system and how deeply the policing, prosecution, and incarceration of women affects us all.

CAPTURED IN COLORED PENCIL: A WORD ON
3X DENIED BY LESSIE BROWN

The artist who drew the image used for the cover of this book was a prisoner at the time she made this drawing. When Lessie Brown received word from the parole board that she had been denied for the third time, she retreated to her cell and reached for her sketch pad. Before her incarceration, Lessie had never seen herself as an artist. She was a devoted housewife and mother, and if she drew a picture to amuse her children, they laughed good-naturedly at her terrible likenesses of animals and trees. After she was sentenced to a Michigan state prison, Lessie looked for productive ways to spend her time, and eventually

another woman in prison gave her some art supplies and encouraged her to start drawing. Soon Lessie had started a small business from her cell, making cards for women to send home to their families. Her artwork tended to be naturalistic scenes of butterflies, flowers, and the like, because Lessie believed she could not draw human faces. In spite of her record of good behavior and compliance, at her third review the parole board declined to give Lessie the chance to go home to her children. Devastated, Lessie sat on her bunk and began a new drawing without any thought as to what would go in it. She drew feverishly through the night without stopping, and she set down her pad and pencils only when she had to go to her prison job the next morning. She left the drawing on her bed without registering what she had drawn. When Lessie returned to her cell at the end of her shift, the sketch pad lay open on her bunk, with a startling image staring back at her, a drawing she would later title *3x Denied*.

Though the significance of the parole-related studies and campaigns in which scholars and activists engage cannot be underestimated, their writings and speeches convey something very different about what it means for a woman to be denied parole than Lessie Brown's drawing does. The layers of contrasting images in *3x Denied* reveal how incarceration is laden with ideas of freedom, how the machinery of imprisonment works against that which is organic and alive, how people's lives and bodies are impaled on a system that seeks to suppress rather than nourish their humanity. It is our hope that you will read this collection as a series of contrasting yet complementary offerings, as a compilation that enables us to understand women's incarceration through many different types of knowledge.

FRAMING THE DIALOGUE: THE STRUCTURE OF *RAZOR WIRE WOMEN*

This collection has three major sections that reflect important aspects of women's experiences with incarceration and the criminal justice system. All the parts of this book include creative contributions from those who have endured incarceration as well as those who have not, and each section has creative contributions as well as scholarly chapters. Each section begins with artwork by an incarcerated person, which was a deliberate editorial decision: those who have direct experiences with imprisonment have the first word in each section of this book. We privilege this experiential knowledge as a way to ensure that those of us on the outside of prison walls do not mute or overshadow the voices of those who are locked up. In each section we follow the opening artwork with a historical contextualization that connects the chapters of the section to activist, scholarly, or artistic and creative work around women's incarceration.

The first section, "Girls, Women, and Families," provides a rubric for viewing the subjects of this collection as complex human beings who are not solely defined by their relationship to a prison. The contributions in this section interrogate the ways in which the U.S. criminal justice system interrupts familial

relationships and life maturation cycles at all stages of development and fails to take into consideration the unique life experiences of the women inside of it.

The opening piece of art, a colored pencil drawing, *Missing*, by Ricky A. Taylor, shows a woman and a boy sitting at a dinner table. Though there are only two of them, the table is set for three. The boy eats his dinner and looks forward, away from the woman. The woman weeps and does not touch her dinner. The empty place setting is closer to the center of the drawing than either of the two figures.

Chapter 2 is written by Je'Anna Redwood, who is currently incarcerated in California. In "The Voice of Silence," Redwood describes the pains of violence and abuse, the effects of silence, and the importance of voicing oneself especially when one occupies a socially marginalized status.

Following Redwood's personal account, chapter 3, "Doing Time in Detention Home: Gendered Punishment Regimes in Youth Jails," written by Brian Bilsky and Meda Chesney-Lind examines conditions in Honolulu's Youth Detention Center, Hale Ho'omalua, and finds that youth are systematically exposed to punitive gender regimes regardless of facility rules to the contrary. Bilsky and Chesney-Lind show that particularly harsh punishment is found in the girls' wing of the facility, where girls are subjected to long hours of isolation, domestic duties, and work detail for minor infractions. The authors point out that these conditions grow out of an institutional mandate for girls' docility and silence. Not too surprisingly, Native Hawaiian girls disproportionately suffer from these gendered punishment regimes.

Chapter 4 is an excerpt from playwright Ashley E. Lucas' play, *Doin' Time: Through the Visiting Glass*, which describes the experiences of prisoners' family members. A little girl describes the difficulties of visiting her father in prison in this monologue entitled "Healer."

In chapter 5, "Incarcerated Women: Motherhood on the Margins," Barbara Bloom and Marilyn Brown turn our attention to the struggles of incarcerated mothers. They explore how motherhood is enacted within the structural context of the prison and how it is problematized by two constraints: forced separation from children and the imperative toward intensive mothering. Bloom and Brown show that imprisoned mothers struggle with their self-image and identity because of separation from children and social expectations that define a good mother as engaging in complete child-centered mothering. They also examine the impact of recent changes in child welfare laws that have had critical consequences for poor mothers, many whom are incarcerated. They argue that women in particular have been affected by the contraction of the welfare state and an increasingly punitive approach to crime.

In chapter 6, "Doing Time with Mom: A Nonfiction Essay," Shirley Haviland-Nakagawa describes the day her sister was sentenced to fourteen years in prison. The narrative focuses on how the family as a whole attempts to navigate the court system and cope with a loved one's incarceration.

In chapter 7, entitled, “ASFA and the Impact on Imprisoned Migrant Women and Their Children,” Martha Escobar examines some of the structural obstacles that incarcerated immigrant mothers face in maintaining parental rights. While in prison, immigrant mothers have to deal with the prospective of deportation and the additional burden it places on their parental rights cases. The interaction between these policies shapes relationships between immigrant parents and their children and increases the likelihood of family separation. Escobar considers the stories of two immigrant mothers in prison and uses them to illustrate the ways in which immigration laws and incarceration shape relationships within these families.

In the final chapter of this section, Trangdai Glassey-Tranguyen’s nonfiction essay combines autobiographical experiences with an analysis of women’s incarceration. Her chapter, “Carceral State, Cultural Stake: Women behind American Bars and Beyond,” explores the common experiences of women enduring blatant sexual violence, legal inequality, and economic exploitation in the United States and other parts of the world. She argues that incarcerated women are subjected to injustice and violence regardless of their geopolitical positioning. Ultimately she asks how we can be cognizant of these types of injustice so that the rights and safety of women can be ensured.

Section 2 of *Razor Wire Women*, “Sexuality, Health, and Abuse,” explores the ways in which prisons intervene in the physical and mental health of incarcerated women. The neglect and abuse of incarcerated women runs rampant throughout U.S. prisons, and the contributors in this section provide testimonials of their own experiences, descriptions of what they have discovered is happening to others, and analyses of the histories of abusive practices against women in prison.

The opening piece of art in section 2, *Bound*, is a drawing that shows a kneeling woman with her head hanging down bound by ankle chains to prison bars. The scene surrounding the main figure in prisoner Joanie Estes-Rodgers’ drawing depicts the crumbling edifices of a loan office, a church, and a home. A husband and a crying toddler both reach out to the bound woman. A bottle of alcohol sits on the ground in front of her, and a bottle of prescription medicine peeks out of the pocket of her jeans. Phone bills, a bag of groceries, and a broken truck are all impaled on the prison bars around her. In or out of prison, the figure in the drawing is bound by her addictions, obligations, and debts.

In chapter 9, “The Prison Mentality,” Jane Dorotik focuses on the institutionalization of prisoners’ minds. Dorotik, who is currently incarcerated in California, describes the scarcity of resources to which prisoners have access and explains how these living conditions encourage prisoners to believe that people have to dominate one another in order to survive. This chapter specifically engages with the ways in which the prison system exercises power over women.

In chapter 10, “‘If I Wasn’t Suicidal, That’ll Drive You to It’: Women, Jail, and Mental Health,” Angie Moe focuses on the mental health-related needs of women in short-term confinement. Findings are based on a sample of thirty

women who voluntarily participated in semistructured life history interviews while confined in an urban southwestern detention center. The women were asked to talk about their lives prior to and during incarceration from their own perspectives, or standpoint, resulting in rich and descriptive narratives, which included discussions of mental health problems that had been only marginally addressed, if at all, during confinement. Moe argues that detained/jailed women are a neglected population of inmates who are in dire need of mental health care programming. Often entering the system in a state of crisis and emotional turmoil, failing to address the immediate psychological and psychiatric needs of these inmates will only hinder their adaptation to confinement, ability to understand and assist in their own criminal cases, and progress in future treatment, should it become available.

In chapter 11, formerly incarcerated Jen Myers' poem "Patiently Waiting" describes the utterly deficient health care that incarcerated women receive and the terror of knowing that you are more likely to be left to suffer—and even to die—if you develop a serious health problem in prison.

After Myers' chapter, a pencil drawing by former Michigan prisoner Patricia K. Thorn—entitled *Caged Innocence*—depicts a young woman in a prison cell. She sits at a table, arms crossed and head down. Her head and arms rest on an open book with the words "Caged Innocence" on the pages.

Chapter 12, "Transgender Women, Sexual Violence, and the Rule of Law: An Argument in Favor of Restorative and Transformative Justice," is written by Linda Heidenreich. This chapter maps the relationship between gendered violence in the U.S. penal system and the gendered rule of law that structures the larger U.S. society and the "gendered models of citizenship" that flow from it. It places the lives of transgender women at the center of its analysis and asks the questions, "How is it that such intense violence is tolerated when it is directed against transgender women?" and, "If such violence is not tolerable, what remedies are available?" Ultimately it argues that the policing of gender is central to U.S. society and hence intensified in its penal system, which functions as a heterotopia. Thus, the safety of transsexual women is dependent upon a radical transformation of the penal system and the larger gendered society with which it shares a dialogical relationship. Restorative justice provides us all with some concrete steps toward making those changes.

Current Nevada prisoner Johanna Hudnall survived a prison rape. She eventually became a member of the advisory board for Stop Prisoner Rape, a national organization that works to end sexual violence against all people in any form of detention. Chapter 13, "Prison Rape" is an autobiographical essay that chronicles her journey through abuse and into activism.

In Chapter 14, "From Women Prisoners to People in Women's Prisons: Challenging the Gender Binary in Antiprison Work," Julia Sudbury explores the ways in which transgender and gender nonconforming prisoners and activists complicate existing understandings of what constitutes progressive scholarly and

activist work around “women in prison.” As Sudbury argues, prisoners who do not identify as women who are held in women’s prisons and women held in men’s prisons are overlooked by feminist (anti)prison researchers, but increasingly are claiming a space in antiprison activism.

Turning again to violence in prisons, Renita Phifer, a current New York prisoner, writes about instances of sexual and physical abuse involving guards and incarcerated women. Chapter 15 is her nonfiction essay, “Giving the Voiceless a Voice,” which exposes the power dynamics that enable the exploitation of incarcerated women.

Section 3 of *Razor Wire Women*, “Education, Writing, and the Arts,” explores the ways in which women in prison, educators, artists, and activists are creating spaces inside prisons where intellectual growth and creativity can flourish, despite the confining nature of their surroundings. Many of these pieces argue that education and the arts are rehabilitative in nature and that prison arts can be used to educate and inform the public as well. In tandem, the pieces of the collection coalesce to affirm the human dignity of all women, to protest the abuse of already confined and vulnerable people, and to advocate for further opportunities for intellectual growth and artistic expression for prisoners.

Section 3 opens with artwork by Valencia C., entitled *Caught up on the Whirlwind*. Valencia C. is currently incarcerated in California. This piece is rich, drawing our attention, for example, to hands in handcuffs, a mother reaching for her child through prison bars, a sleeping Lady Justice, and a dove weighed down by shackles. Several prisoners stand inside a prison, one in a wheelchair, while the Statue of Liberty—the sign of “freedom” and “democracy,” towers above.

Ana Lucia Gelabert, who is currently incarcerated in Texas, draws a series of comics about a married couple who go to prison. Printed here are two episodes of the *Connie Convicta and Vato Emiliano* comics, which are a combination of captivating drawings and compelling facts in story form about the prison system’s impact on the Texas economy.

Simone Weil Davis used the model of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program to develop a course in English and creative writing, bringing together incarcerated and recently released women with female students in western Massachusetts’s Five College system. Chapter 16, “Inside-Out: The Reaches and Limits of a Prison Program,” describes the class Davis taught, and questions the idea that when women reveal themselves through writing, their story must necessarily follow the conventions of either the confession or recovery narrative. Even when the writing is therapeutic, when women sit in a circle and write these, tales of the individual are not all that are told. The practice of writing itself tells a story, about community building and social change.

In chapter 17 former prisoner Leslie Levitas’s short story, “Desiree,” depicts the life of a troubled woman inside the San Francisco County Jail. Paired with her creative writing are several photographs taken by Levitas of women on the

street in San Francisco. Her work that appears in this collection is part of a photography and oral history project entitled “Tell Me about Your Life,” which was supported, in part, by an Individual Artists Program grant from the Peninsula Community Foundation.

In chapter 18, “Restorytive Justice: Theater as a Redressive Mechanism for Incarcerated Women,” theater scholar Sara Warner analyzes one remarkable theater company’s efforts to use performance and storytelling to move society toward restorytive justice. Rhodessa Jones’ the Medea Project Theater for Incarcerated Women is an internationally renowned community arts organization that has been working with inmates at San Francisco County Jail for almost twenty years. This article explores the Medea Project’s performance praxis, what Warner calls “restorytive justice.” Rooted in testimony and witnessing, Jones’ praxis of restorytive justice provides incarcerated women with the unique opportunity to explore their positions as both agents and objects of crime. The women’s stories are transformed into full-length theatrical productions that are staged by the inmate/authors for the public (the only group in the entire country to do this) at one of the Bay Area’s premiere theaters. Warner argues that restorytive justice enables these women to break through the narrative prison house of legal discourse and facilitates the healing of individuals and communities.

Chapter 19, “On Visual Politics and Poetics: Incarcerated Girls and Women Artists,” by Jillian Hernandez, presents an academic analysis of the artwork created in an arts and incarceration program she cofacilitated for girls. This chapter draws on girls’ studies literature to contextualize artists’ interactions with students and offers pedagogical strategies for youth practitioners working in detention centers. The aim of the *MOD 11* exhibit is to share the experiences of the girls and women involved in order to demonstrate how feminist artistic practice and community coalition building can promote critical consciousness in and social justice for court-involved girls and generate further dialogue among the realms of art, activism, and girls’ studies.

The Sisters of Unique Lyrics (SOUL) is a poetry workshop that meets weekly at Scott Correctional Facility, a maximum-security women’s prison in Plymouth, Michigan. SOUL was established as a poetry workshop in 2004 through the Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP), an organization housed in the English Language and Literature Department of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. PCAP’s mission is to strengthen the community through creative expression. Since it began, more than thirty women have participated, and it is one of the longest running poetry workshops offered by PCAP. At the time the poems in this book were written, SOUL was comprised of eight women, including the two facilitators who provide a loose structure for the workshop but who are fully active participants in the poetic process. Chapter 20, “Hope in a Box: Sanity Sold Separately,” is a collection of poetry from one twenty-week cycle of SOUL’s workshop meetings. The members of SOUL invite readers to view these poems that make up the chapter as not simply a body of poetry but as a representation of their own discovery into the depths of the lives of women and prison.

Writing is a strategy that lets women resist the social death of incarceration and define the terms that shape their experiences. The form of prison writing described in chapter 21, “The Life Inside: Incarcerated Women Represent Themselves through Journalism,” by Eleanor Novek, falls under the broad category of prison journalism and complements Ana Lucia Gelabert’s comics. This article, which closes section 3 of *Razor Wire Women*, offers an interpretive media ethnography of the ways incarcerated women represent themselves in journalistic writing. It is based on interpretive analysis of inmates’ writings from fifty issues of a prison newspaper published between 2001 and 2008. The incarcerated women journalists Novek describes challenge society’s definitions of themselves as deviants with oppositional meanings that are rich in lived experience and self-expression. Perhaps more important, these writers defy the dehumanization that has been imposed on them by corrections institutions and value themselves as people with unique personalities, talents, and insights.

MOVING PAST THE RAZOR WIRE

It is our sincere hope that the multiple knowledges included in *Razor Wire Women* inspire people to think outside of the box when it comes to addressing issues around criminal justice. The incarceration of 2.3 million people does nothing to address the structural issues—such as racism, economic discrimination, sexism, and poverty—that are the root cause of crime and imprisonment. We are committed to a future world where prisons are not relied upon for social control and punishment, where social and economic resources are used for education, healthcare, jobs, housing, and community building rather than the destruction of entire groups of people. We envision a world where dignity and respect are fostered for all human beings and where alternatives to incarceration, such as transformative and restorative justice, dominate. Although this book focuses on women in prison, we also maintain that solidarity must be forged with men in prison—particularly black and Latino men, who make up a disproportionate number of prisoners—gender nonconforming prisoners, and immigrant prisoners and detainees, in the movement for alternatives to incarceration. Such solidarities are critical to a more just, sustainable, and healthy world.

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