

**St. Stephen's College**

Not Being Listened To: A Phenomenological Study with Incarcerated Women

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of St. Stephen's College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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Winter 2019  
Edmonton, Alberta

## Abstract

The phenomenon of “not being listened to” is a universal experience, but particularly poignant for women with the lived experience of incarceration. These women’s voices, educator Max van Manen’s most recent (2014) phenomenology text, along with my discipline and practice of spiritual direction inspired me to pursue a definition, rich in meaning and description, of not being listened to. Five qualitative open-structured interviews took place in May, 2018 with women in southern Alberta aged twenty-three to fifty-six. They had been released from jail and interviewed with me for anywhere from thirty minutes to one hour. The interviews had two objectives 1) that the women interviewed be listened to compassionately 2) that their experiences of not being listened to be used as data. Further to the interview data, secondary data includes published poems and prose by, as well as interview write-ups with, incarcerated women in Canada and/or the United States. The research analysis is reflective and descriptive. I highlight the meaning of the phenomenon of not being listened to with anecdotal prose and poetry, explore it through the dimension of darkness, gain insights into the women’s memories from the Greek and Roman Dido, Medea, and Ariadne, and discuss the corporeality of pain and sickness in an incarcerated woman’s not being listened to. Ultimately the phenomenon is a blow to the woman’s identity, her human dignity, and is destructive to her body and soul.

Keywords: *Not listened to, phenomenology, incarcerated women, anecdotes, poetry, trauma, soul, indignity, unauthentic.*

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to Pat L. Varley, MES whose loving nature in the Holy Spirit and deep listening as my spiritual director brought me out of a place of darkness and encouraged me to step over a threshold and into a new landscape. In her living room one day in 2010, the still, loving voice of Christ spoke within me a scripture that confirmed that I was to move outside the house of my parish, onto the porch of the world and keep going, not returning for anything (Matthew 24: 17). What a sacred, enlivening step it has been!

## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I am grateful to my supervisor Heather Jamieson, PhD. Heather was steadfast and ready with caring support and prompt, astute direction at every stage of my learning from my entry into the program, to candidacy, to completion. She put up with my slow pace, stepped in when I most needed her and boosted me academically and emotionally with her diverse and essential skillset. I am deeply indebted to you, Heather, and I am also a freer thinker and more precise writer because of you.

To my committee members (doctors all) Jeanette Renouf, Kae Neufeld, and Michael van Manen who backed me in essential ways when I approached them, and for all the expert reading and feedback that this job required, a warm-hearted thank-you.

I am grateful to my father Alec and his wife Marion for their love, kindnesses and interest. To my now deceased mom who planted seeds of faith in me which have grown and borne fruit in ways she could not anticipate, peace. To the many loving family and friends socially, in my prayer life, and in my ministry whose hugs, words of wisdom, and questions have kept me afloat on waters that were at times stormy and even doubtful: thank-you, thank-you, thank-you! I have felt very much held in your goodness and friendship.

To all my spiritual directors and supervisors from seed to harvest—I love you! Thanks to Pat Methany and Iliana Matos whose guitar recordings kept me tuned in and spiritually connected to the writing.

Vincent, my faithful and fun-loving life partner provided continued listening companionship, financial and emotional backing, as well as the space and the encouragement I needed to finish the course work, the research, and the writing over the

past eight years. The pièce de résistance was his becoming a spiritual director, too. My doctoral work is so much a result of the two of us being committed to each other. I am genuinely grateful for your generosity in meeting many of my needs and for providing a wide embrace around my interests. Love of the holiest kind to you. We are one in Christ.

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## **Introduction: Listening to the Spirit, to Incarcerated Women, and to Children**

“Are you listening to me?” reverberates in families: parents to children, children to each other, couples trying to communicate. To be listened to is basic to healthy human relationships everywhere. Whether in the life of a child or an adult, to be listened to by others signifies being recognized, feeling worthy, and respected. Such a connection sounds vital, yet not being listened to is common. However, “unfortunately, most of us think of ourselves as better listeners than we really are,”<sup>1</sup> observes Michael P. Nichols, psychologist and author. He further clarifies in his book *The Lost Art of Listening: How Learning to Listen Can Improve Relationships* that “real listening requires attention, appreciation, and affirmation.”<sup>2</sup>

Spiritual directors are trained to do just that in the practice of spiritual direction (SD) and then take the listening process a step deeper.<sup>3</sup> While we sit with directees (those people who seek spiritual direction), we listen to a third voice—that of a holy Presence. We foster the phenomenon of being listened to as we compassionately hear, empathize with and lovingly enter into the spiritual space of others. It is a ministry of love.

Such listening can take place one-on-one or in a group. Group members are selected because of their contemplative nature and their ability to listen with their hearts both to one another and to the Spirit. Listening in the silence is an essential component to

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<sup>1</sup> Michael P. Nichols, *The Lost Art of Listening: How Learning to Listen Can Improve Relationships* (New York, NY: The Guildford Press, 2009), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>3</sup> William Barry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins Publishers, 1982; Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (New York, NY: Roman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1992; Morris Dirks, *Forming the Leader's Soul: An Invitation to Spiritual Direction* (USA: SoulFormation, 2013).

group SD. Rather than attempting to fix life situations, SD fosters mutual silence and prompts directees with questions, which, in turn probe a circumstance or emotion for meaning and eventually draw that person closer to the Divine. Spiritual directors observe their directees, invite the telling of life stories—whether through words, in art, or body movement—and encourage directees to pay attention to their aha and other significant moments in daily life. Everyone involved listens interiorly. Ideally both spiritual director and directee silently check-in with the Holy Spirit or a universal energy of love, together for an hour, once a month.

The Spirit dwells within humans and can be accessed by invitation and by intentional silent waiting.<sup>4</sup> In the case of an abused or traumatized woman, that Spirit-space may be confused and darkened. Claire Carefoot of Buffalo Sage Wellness House, a healing lodge set up by Native Counselling Services of Alberta (NCSA) in cooperation with the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) for First Nations incarcerated women, describes her first steps with these broken women: “So we’ve gotta start building her up, letting her know that she’s first of all, worth it, and secondly, that she just has a life ahead of her.”<sup>5</sup> Sometimes being listened to generously<sup>6</sup> brings about a sense of being loved. My pilot project for this research explored the phenomenon of incarcerated women being

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<sup>4</sup> Huntington Meditation and Imagery “Psychosynthesis and Integrative Cancer Treatment: Reducing Mental Emotional Suffering,” accessed June 26, 2017, <http://huntingtonmeditation.com/articles/psychosynthesis-integrative-cancer-care-reducing-mental-emotional-suffering/>.

<sup>5</sup> Kieran Leavitt, “Inside Canada’s One-of-a-kind Indigenous Prison for Women,” *Star Metro Edmonton*, July 16, 2018, [thestar.com/edmonton](http://thestar.com/edmonton).

<sup>6</sup> Rachel Naomi Remen, “The Healing Power of Story,” workshop, Institute for the Study of Health & Illness at Commonweal, San Francisco, CA, 2008.

listened to in meaningful ways, usually with counselors in treatment programs like the Warrior program for trauma at Buffalo Sage.

In being listened to, incarcerated women are encouraged to address self-loathing, fear, and suspicion. One eventual outcome is that they can safely and deeply connect with nature, another human being, or an all-loving Spirit.<sup>7</sup> As I learned in my pilot project, the experience of being accepted by another person in addition to self-acceptance often causes a tearful reaction. In those tears is the connection to others and a self-recognition (a significant step in reclaiming lost identity). Being listened to encourages honesty in relationships, caring about oneself, and love for one's higher power and neighbour.

We are social creatures with a desire first to be seen, heard, and understood and then to understand others.<sup>8</sup> The implication here is that we need to be emotionally well and free of judgement to listen to another, to acquire a maturity or state of peace conducive to opening to and not judging another. Such qualities are difficult to obtain in a society riddled with worry about what others think of us, and with our ambitions set for increased prestige, power and money.<sup>9</sup> It is even more difficult in abusive households.

Children absorb the values of society from an early age through observation of primary caregivers, friends, and other authorities. While children's innate gifts can be affirmed, it takes a conscious effort to listen with Nichols's guidelines of "attention, appreciation, and affirmation."<sup>10</sup> Abused children lack the recognition and listening of a

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<sup>7</sup> Teresa Elder Hanlon "Being Listened To: A Phenomenological Study of Incarcerated Women" (Pilot Project, St. Stephen's College, Edmonton, AB, January 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Ron Rolheiser, "Blessed by Being Seen," [ronrolheiser.com](http://ronrolheiser.com/blessed-by-being-seen/#.W-M0sCdRegQ), November 22, 1993, accessed September 24, 2018, <http://ronrolheiser.com/blessed-by-being-seen/#.W-M0sCdRegQ>.

<sup>9</sup> Alain de Botton, *Status Anxiety* (Toronto, ON: Penguin Group, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Nichols, *The Lost Art of Listening*, 139.

loving caregiver which makes them prone to addictions as a way to numb their pain later in life.<sup>11</sup>

There is also a subtler threat to a secure attachment in childhood. We live in a society of increasing distraction in which parents who focus on devices can miss the expression in their children's faces and fail to "*attune*" to their children.<sup>12</sup> Without eye contact or recognition of their inner selves, children are not affirmed. *How* they relate to others changes, too.

If two people are speaking and there is a phone on a nearby desk, each feels less connected to the other than when there is no phone present. Even a silent phone disconnects us.

So it is not surprising that in the past twenty years we've seen a 40 percent decline in the markers for empathy among college students, most of it within the past ten years. It is a trend that researchers link to the new presence of digital communications. . . . [H]uman relationships are rich, messy, and demanding. When we clean them up with technology, *we move from conversation to the efficacies of mere connection*. I fear we forget the difference, and we forget that children who grow up in a world of digital devices don't know that there is a difference or that things were ever different. Studies show that when children hear less adult talk, they talk less. If we turn toward our phones and away from our children, we will start them off with a deficit of which they will be unaware. It won't be only about how much they talk. It will be about how much they understand the people they're talking with.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Gabor Maté, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction* (Toronto, ON: Vintage Canada, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Maté, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*, 237.

<sup>13</sup> Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2015), 21-22.

How much they understand the people they're talking with—and also the people from whom they are learning! Students' attention is drawn away from teachers by cellphones and tablets allowed in their classrooms.<sup>14</sup>

Eye to eye, or soul to soul communication suffers generally in this age of personal devices. People who are on the move, waiting in public places, eating at dining tables, and sitting with friends, are all distracted by communication technology, which vies for their visual, sometimes aural, and then full attention. Distraction by electronic devices contributes to not being listened to and leaves any human company, even at one's side, not attuned to, and this disconnection has many implications for relationships.<sup>15</sup> Not being listened to is a growing phenomenon, yet is little understood and under-investigated.

The phenomenon is present in SD, as well. Some directees come to spiritual direction to describe the sadness or disappointment of not being heard by God. Their faith feels shaken when their prayers go unanswered. Not hearing God's voice or not sensing God's answers or presence can leave seekers feeling isolated and angry. In other disciplines some work has been done to explore not being listened to, but by far the academic research to date has emphasized what makes good listening and addresses the competency of listening in many disciplines.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Sherry Turkle. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*.

<sup>16</sup> Lyman K. Steil and Richard K. Bommeljé, *Listening Leaders: The Ten Golden Rules to Listen, Lead & Succeed* (Edina, MN: Beaver's Pond Press Inc., 2004); Nóirín Ní Riain, *Theosony: Towards a Theology of Listening* (Dublin: The Columba Press and Brunswick Press Ltd., 2011); Julian Treasure, *How to be Heard: Secrets for Powerful Speaking and Listening* (Coral Gables, FL: Mango Publishing Group, 2017); Karina J. Lloyd, Diana Boer, Avraham N. Kluger, and Sven C. Voelpel, "Building Trust and Feeling Well: Examining Intraindividual and Interpersonal Outcomes and Underlying Mechanisms of Listening," *The International Journal of Listening* 29 (2015): 12-29.

My research explores the phenomenon of not being listened to in a traumatized population—incarcerated women. Directees, many of whom live with unresolved trauma, can lose touch with the presence of their God, their true self or feel that their prayers go unanswered. Even deeper than sensing oneself as unheard, or misunderstood, is the emotional abuse of being on the receiving end of the silent treatment, or not being understood or heard, especially from a parent.<sup>17</sup> Blatant verbal or physical rejection or dismissal by a listener can be profoundly painful. For a child to be shunned by the one who is supposed to care can create internal wounding in the deepest core of our being, where self-worth and a positive or negative self-image are formed.<sup>18</sup>

This research offers a phenomenological description of not being listened to according to incarcerated women's lived experience i.e. their prereflective memories of those moments. I have listened openly to the stories of women who have spent time in custody, remand, and/or in jail. There are the stories from their childhood, from their experiences of serving time, and from their difficulties with forced isolation during childhood and adulthood. The women's experience of not being listened to is poignant, and sometimes heart-wrenching. Some women have accessed healing for such wounds. They acknowledge and claim their pain as something that has shaped them. Others are still very raw in their suffering and addictions.

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<sup>17</sup> Paul Schrodt, Paul L. Witt and Jenna R. Simkowski, "A Meta-Analytical Review of the Demand/Withdraw Pattern of Interaction and its Associations with Individual, Relational, and Communicative Outcomes," *Communication Monographs* 81, no. 1 (2014): 28-58, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03637751.2013.813632>.

<sup>18</sup> Rachel E. Goldsmith and Jennifer J. Freyd, "Effects of Emotional Abuse in Family and Work Environments," *Journal of Emotional Abuse* 5, No. 1 (2005), [http://doi.org/10.1300/J135v5n01\\_04](http://doi.org/10.1300/J135v5n01_04).

My ministry in spiritual direction has informed my gentle listening to these women, my co-researchers. Their words, in turn, directly influence the phenomenological text. Poetry flows out of their anecdotes through me and onto the page. The phenomenon of not being listened to is revealed in their narratives and I believe, resonates in the poetry and the anecdotes. Throughout chapters one and two, I quote from the transcripts of my interviews with the five women in southern Alberta to share their wisdom with you, the reader.

Chapter one describes spiritual direction in greater depth and explains the evolution of my question, “What may be an incarcerated woman’s lived experience of not being listened to?” How have I been guided over the past many years to that question as it is now worded and to its ensuing answers?

The second chapter is an overview of the pertinent literature in an attempt to understand an incarcerated woman’s not being listened to. It begins with a reference to Jill Stauffer’s book, *Ethical Loneliness*, and my validation of her concern for the unheard stories of those who have been traumatized by their own communities who listen, but do not understand or who reject their member’s truth. A description of incarcerated women in their own words and with others’ descriptions follows. Importantly, I am interested in what the literature reveals about the phenomenon of not being listened to especially in the context of an incarcerated woman’s abused and traumatized state. I pay special attention to the perspective of a thespian, Maud Clark, whose theatre work in women’s prisons in Australia has been groundbreaking and life-giving. How might the soul, the self, the body, and the woman’s memories be involved in her not being listened to? Finally, how

does this topic tie into the contextual theology of Bernard Lonergan S.J. and other philosophers for whom the human lived experience is central to their thought?

In chapter three I turn to the phenomenology of Dr. Max van Manen to investigate this human experience. I attended a methods course in phenomenology in 2013 with him, his son Dr. Michael van Manen, Dr. Catherine A. Adams, and Dr. Bas Levering, a Netherlander hosting the course at the University of Utrecht. This chapter discusses my methods journey and van Manen's methodological influences on my research according to his most recent text, *Phenomenology of Practice: Meaning-Giving Methods in Phenomenological Research and Writing*. I explain how I've applied his interpretation and vision of phenomenology to arrive at my methodology and writing/reflection.

Chapter four presents the data from qualitative interviews in poetry I have written. The following three chapters open up some of the anecdotes derived from the transcripts and the literature. In chapter five I write phenomenologically about an incarcerated woman's not being listened to as darkness. Chapter six explores the corporeality of not being listened to in this population, and chapter seven follows themes that evolve from the concept of not being listened to as a form of abandonment. This reflection and writing discuss the possible meaning of an incarcerated woman's not being listened to in the context of the science of colour, relationality and spatiality (5), corporeality according to Husserl and Heidegger's philosophies of the body meeting the consciousness (6), and three ancient female heroines of abandonment, Dido, Medea and Ariadne (7).

The conclusion includes a reflection inspired by a "Listen for Joy" art card by Melanie Weidner drawn from my spiritual direction practice. I explore the implications of this research for those who live outside the prisons' bars. For all those who encounter



people who are traumatized—spiritual directors, other professional listeners, and the world of communicators generally—I offer my present understanding of what it means for an incarcerated woman not to be listened to. Finally, I suggest topics for further research.

## ***1: Spiritual Direction and Incarcerated Women***

### Spiritual Direction

Even if it's one person, that can listen to you, it can change your life forever. And that's having that one person that cares, that you can be *safe* around. Or—they're going to listen to you and not judge you. 'Cause that's a part of the trust, right? Broken trust is with people that don't want to hear you. If there's anything I can say, it's find one person, at least one person that can listen to you." SH<sup>19</sup>

The woman speaking in the passage above, a co-researcher I interviewed in Lethbridge, AB, describes listening as life-giving for her. She lived many years on the street, a binge drinker/drug-user, seeking escape from memories of a childhood of sexual abuse with a mother who would not listen to or believe her cries for help. One person who listened and believed her in her late thirties changed her life—her perspective shifted from seeing herself as deserving of death to hoping for a better life. Spiritual direction (SD) is one such refuge where the un-listened to are received into the confidential company of generous<sup>20</sup> listeners who love unconditionally.

Imagine a room where you feel at home when you walk through the door and sit down. You sense that the space is safe, the ambience welcoming. Your body relaxes. This bodily trust and mental ease or comfort increases over time as you speak and sit quietly with the woman or man sitting near you. Some of your most vulnerable stories surface. The loving space welcomes the feelings that well up in you. The eventual comment or question from your listener affirms and encourages you to delve deeper into who you are and the meaning of your story. You carry that weight together, light or heavy. The worst and the best of your life can be explored in this caring, confidential place. This is SD at

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<sup>19</sup> SH, Interview #3, interview by author, Lethbridge, AB, May 29, 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Remen, "The Healing Power of Story."

its best—a ministry of opening to the universe, a living Love, the Creator, the Spirit of the Divine Mystery or Christ Jesus (however one might name a higher power).

Contrast this feeling of trust with the scene of someone overpowering you by turning away, cutting you off mid-sentence, yelling, or slamming the door in your face, hanging up on you, or giving you the silent treatment. Note the sensations and tensions occurring in your body now as you read these descriptions! Being listened to and not being listened to both affect our emotional wellbeing, our self-image, and our physical wellbeing. In the first instance, we register the present moment and go deeper into understanding the meaning of our emotions, body reactions, and life circumstances. In the second scenario, we are shut down and to some degree we react angrily or withdraw in shock or fear, and immediately afterward are often unable to think clearly or to act confidently.

I listen for meaning and the presence of the sacred in the feelings and life stories of my directees. Generally, the spiritual director's disposition is loving and trusting of a holy presence, which manifests itself quietly in my thoughts through images, prompts and reminders. In the last decade or so of my SD practice, I have encountered people whose lives have been shaped by abuse from parents, relatives, neighbours, spouses, and partners as well as authorities in residential and other schools. Some directees tell of feeling bereft of God. The common experience woven into these examples is my witness to people's lived experience of not being listened to. A population whose lived experience opens up this aspect of my directees' lives is women who have been jailed.

## A Shift in Focus: Being Listened To to Not Being Listened To

Initially, I intended to provide listening (SD style) for women in jail and then record and analyze the effects of their being listened to. I am continually surprised and heartened by the transformation of detainees who have been broken recently or in the past and find healing in being listened to. In a non-judgmental atmosphere they come to connect with the Source of all life, and understand themselves anew. Over time, they grow in their love of self, a love for who they are, rather than for what they do in life or for how they might please others.

After many turns in the road to a valid research question I arrived at “What may be an incarcerated woman’s lived experience of being listened to?” I wanted to learn more about her soul, her spiritual self, being accepted and heard. In my pilot project I explored the naturally occurring, but rare phenomenon of being listened to in the lives of women who had been released from jail. Interviewing the women behind bars was prohibitive due to a lack of confidentiality, a lengthy and uncertain timeline for securing permission, and a difficulty recruiting women for qualitative interviews in that setting. (Another researcher working in the Lethbridge provincial institution shared that that was her experience). Midway through writing up the pilot project, life interrupted my work and after a one-year hiatus, I saw the need for the rectification of my question.

One day, walking on campus, my research topic appeared in my mind like a clay statue. With each of my steps, blobs of clay fell from the image to the ground revealing a different woman. With conviction, I realized that the uncovered person was a truer depiction of the listening phenomenon. The inner form was the broadly and naturally

experienced phenomenon in the women's everyday lives—not being listened to. Those clumps, which fell to the ground, were my contrived ideas of bringing life into the women's lives through SD listening. What emerged after the clay pieces fell, was a respectful representation of the incarcerated woman, an image faithful to her everyday lived experience of not being listened to. I shed the contrived, personal influences that had glommed onto my research design and unearthed the following question: What may be an incarcerated woman's lived experience of not being listened to?

Who are these women and how can we know them? What is the nature of this phenomenon in their lives?

## 2: Toward an Incarcerated Woman's Not Being Listened To

### Relevant Literature

#### *Unheard Stories and the Present Age*

A key book in regard to traumatized people not being listened to is Jill Stauffer's 2015 volume: *Ethical Loneliness: The Injustice of Not Being Heard*. Stauffer describes "ethical loneliness" as an emotional outcome of trauma survivors not being heard by investigators, reporters and/or reconciliation panels who have inquired of groups or individuals (e.g. Holocaust survivors) about their traumatic, torturous, and/or life-threatening experiences. The term "ethical loneliness" describes the isolation and disconnection people feel when their stories cannot be accepted, heard, or fully understood within their own culture, communities, or by those who love them. Their underappreciated narratives of their past experiences and the dismissal of their present traumatized state negatively affect their trust in social institutions. They struggle with everyday relationships, too. Genuine human connections fail to evolve and hence a deep sense of isolation ensues.<sup>21</sup>

It is not only the not listened to individuals who face the dire consequences of an emotional struggle. Stauffer insightfully remarks on the effect not listening can have in the daily lives of any would-be listeners.

. . . [F]ailure to hear will matter to those who do not listen and those who are not heard, not only because stories without an audience do not survive, but also because being heard or ignored impacts how the past resonates in the present—it *affects human processes of revision*. "Revision" refers not to the lies of revisionist history *but to how human beings live their pasts in the present moment*, with

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<sup>21</sup> Jill Stauffer, *Ethical Loneliness: The Injustice of Not Being Heard* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press), 2015.

different events carrying varying amounts of significance at different times [emphasis added].<sup>22</sup>

Incarcerated women are traumatized and marginalized. Their cause and their stories are largely unheard and forgotten by society.<sup>23</sup> Stauffer's astute observation regarding the collective past which surfaces (or not) in the present action of our lives means that the unheard stories of hundreds of thousands of people in jail sway the events of our everyday life now and in the future. What have years of incarcerating humans and, for the most part, shunning the lessons of their lives from the public domain done to our culture?

Killing sprees by young (and older) men with guns in the United States occur at a rate of nearly one a day.<sup>24</sup> The reason this horrific statistic takes place in the United States is attributed to the numbers of guns per capita—this ratio is higher than all other countries except Yemen.<sup>25</sup> However, I speculate that these atrocities may also be linked to the violent stories from our past, stories which have gone untold and have been pushed down interiorly into the men and women's personal and our social unconscious like a packed canon. Are those who slay others, whether mentally ill or not, responding to this collective unconscious that has been shaped over decades by the ignored, violent, and abusive past of so many of the incarcerated? Hundreds of thousands of unnoticed,

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<sup>22</sup> Stauffer, *Ethical Loneliness*, 2.

<sup>23</sup> The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, *A Place of Redemption: A Christian Approach to Punishment and Prison* (New York, NY: Burns and Oates, 2004); *The Agenda with Steve Paikin*, "Inside Canada's Corrections System," TVO video, 33:15, November 17, 2016, <https://tvo.org/video/programs/the-agenda-with-steve-paikin/inside-canadas-corrections-system>.

<sup>24</sup> Max Fisher and Josh Keller, "What Explains U.S. Mass Shootings: International Comparisons Suggest an Answer," *New York Times*, November 7, 2017, accessed November 23, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/07/world/americas/mass-shootings-us-international.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Fisher and Keller, "What Explains U.S. Mass Shootings."

unheard episodes of brutality from their childhoods and their adult lives may be fueling the numerous outbursts of violence throughout the United States, where incarcerated populations are the highest in the world. Might these smothered narratives, if breathed into, listened to, have transformed our common knowledge and served as a caution or a buffer against the senseless violence of mass slayings today?

Another contemporary social ailment which may be linked to the stifled stories from jail, is isolation. More and more people populating the Western world are becoming lonely and are stressed to the point of an early death.<sup>26</sup>

When separated from others, humans find themselves in a psychological stress state some might refer to as “fight or flight.” Being around other people provides safety and security that stifles this stress state and decreases the perception of loneliness. When alone, or feeling alone, humans subconsciously sense that they must be more aware of threats in the environment, so the body prepares to deal with them via a stress response. Stress triggers a cascade of hormones that orchestrate physiological changes in the body. Most people have experienced a racing heart, muscle tension, or quickness of breath because of stress, all of which prepare us to fight a threat. The body, however, can’t always discern a real threat from an approaching work deadline or, say, feelings of loneliness. Furthermore, repeatedly activating the stress response takes a physical toll, and issues can arise when the body is chronically in that state [emphasis in original].<sup>27</sup>

Not belonging, or feeling lonely contributes to addictive behaviour, too.<sup>28</sup> To ignore the narratives of hundreds of thousands of people isolated from families (and often held in

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<sup>26</sup> Hannah Schulze, “Loneliness: An Epidemic,” Harvard University: The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences,” accessed November 23, 2018, <http://sitn.hms.harvard.edu/flash/2018/loneliness-an-epidemic/>; “Loneliness Research,” Campaign to End Loneliness (UK), last modified November 20, 2018, accessed November 23, 2018, <https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/loneliness-research/>.

<sup>27</sup> “Loneliness Research,” Campaign to End Loneliness (UK).

<sup>28</sup> Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn, *Belonging: Bonds of Healing & Recovery* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1993).



solitary confinement<sup>29</sup>) may be to reap thousands of chaotic killings and a growing phenomenon of human loneliness in contemporary society.

### *The Number of Unheard Stories Rising*

The population of jailed women in North America is rapidly growing.<sup>30</sup> The approach to their welfare is that of warehousing them in crowded facilities. Their numbers increase in part because of the misguided governmental policies which stem from a “tough on crime” ideology. Untold life stories, inaccessible to the mainstream, are therefore increasing as the numbers of incarcerated, especially Indigenous women, rise. What are the implications for the feminine aspects of our culture (nurturing; seeking reconciliation rather than revenge; balancing the quest for power with an attitude of cooperation and inclusion) as these women are removed from families, numbed further, and held apart from society? How might we revision (as Stauffer defines it) in the present this harmful result of our past thinking?

According to Stauffer, our interconnectedness as creatures and our living out of our shared histories affects our present-day consciousness. How might a belated telling of the untold memories of those who have been incarcerated address the upcoming tragedies

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<sup>29</sup> Howard Sapers interviewed by Steve Paikin, “Solitary Confinement Under Scrutiny,” *The Agenda with Steve Paikin*, TVO video, 20:57, May 18, 2017, <https://tvo.org/video/programs/the-agenda-with-steve-paikin/solitary-confinement-under-scrutiny>.

<sup>30</sup> Ministry of Public Safety, *Office of the Correctional Investigator Annual Report 2017-2018* by Ivan Zinger, June 29, 2018 (Ottawa, ON: House of Commons); Catherine Thompson, “Complaints Skyrocket at Grand Valley Women’s Prison,” *TheRecord.com*, November 4, 2016, accessed June 15, 2017, <https://www.therecord.com/news-story/6948432-complaints-skyrocket-at-grand-valley-women-s-prison/>; David Burke, “Number of Women in Federal Prisons is Up, and Advocates Think They Know Why,” *CBC News: Nova Scotia*, October 11, 2017, accessed November 25, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/women-prisons-crime-nova-institution-overcrowding-1.4347197>.

of a society that has not listened? Is the surging wave of spiritual directors trained and in training<sup>31</sup> one source of listening, which might address such a cause?

### *What Happens to Unheard Stories?*

What actually happens to these unheard stories, the memories which go unexpressed and yet, are contained in the physical body? Do they put pressure on the soul (which will be defined and discussed at length later)? Are these memories associated with a biological need to relate to and love others meaningfully? Brian J. Braman, Canadian author and philosophy professor, describes the body's importance when considering the meaning of phenomenological moments.

[H]uman living is a drama that encompasses the whole of human living: we experience ourselves as embodied, which means that the dramatic pattern of human existence does not dismiss the biological exigencies that are also part of concrete human existence. Rather, given proper representation, even these biological demands may be transformed and integrated into higher levels of meaning.<sup>32</sup>

What is the meaning of not being listened to as it affects the state of the body? Emotional memories contained or expressed physically can become central to understanding how we meet and react to others in the context of listening and not being listened to. The question of the body's role in not being listened to is particularly significant if one takes to heart what Jesus of Nazareth says, that "whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me." Christ names a social reality—we are interrelated. The Christian body is all people and that body, especially the least of these, is increasingly

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<sup>31</sup> Seek and Find Guide, [www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org), accessed December 1, 2018, <https://www.sdiworld.org/find-a-spiritual-director/seek-and-find-guide>.

<sup>32</sup> Brian J. Braman, *Meaning and Authenticity: Bernard Lonergan & Charles Taylor on the Drama of Authentic Human Existence* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press) 2008, 51.

criminalized and locked up. This research offers an opportunity to listen to poignant stories of the phenomenon of not being listened to in incarcerated women's lives. Who are they and what is the nature of their lived experience of not being listened to?

## Incarcerated Women

### *An Overview*

An incarcerated woman is one who is presently serving time in jail or one who has been released from jail, a remand centre or a holding cell. This population shares two characteristics: they have been traumatized and their numbers (especially Indigenous women) in Canadian and American correctional institutions are, as mentioned, rising.

A United States watchdog comments that “although women represent a small fraction of all incarcerated people, women’s prison populations have seen much higher relative growth than the men’s prison population since 1978. (The same is true for Canada.<sup>33</sup>) Nationwide, women’s state prison populations in the United States grew 834% over nearly 40 years — more than double the pace of the growth among men.”<sup>34</sup> It mentions that state and local jails, rather than penitentiaries or federal institutions account for most of the dramatic rise. In Canada the numbers of Indigenous women in federal custody is up one hundred percent since 2001.<sup>35</sup>

Although Indigenous women account for less than 5% of the total female population in Canada, they make up over one third (39%) of female admissions to federal custody. Further, they make up 42% of the maximum-security women’s population in Canada, and 50% of the segregation placements. The Government of

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<sup>33</sup> Minister of Public Safety, *Office of the Correctional Investigator Annual Report: 2017-2018*.

<sup>34</sup> Wendy Sawyer, “The Gender Divide: Tracking Women’s State Prison Growth,” Prison Policy Initiative, January 9, 2018, accessed November 25, 2018, [https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/women\\_overtime.html](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/women_overtime.html).

<sup>35</sup> Geraldine Malone, “Why Indigenous Women are Canada’s Fastest Growing Population,” VICE Media LLC, February 2, 2016, <http://222.oci-bec.gc.ca/cntrpt/pdf/annrpt20152016-eng.pdf>.

Canada and its sub-agencies have acknowledged the particular harmfulness of solitary confinement on the psychological wellbeing of women in general and Indigenous women in particular.<sup>36</sup>

Many females in custody in Canada (ninety percent) have been physically abused, two thirds have been sexually abused as children<sup>37</sup> (this number is seventy percent among Indigenous inmates)<sup>38</sup> and many have experienced domestic violence as adults. All of this trauma is in addition to the turmoil and angst of being separated from society and living in harsh conditions in correctional facilities.

The recent jump in women serving time in jail is affected by governments who legislate mandatory imprisonment when, previously, community service sentences would have been an option for judges. Further, Kim Pate, Elizabeth Fry advocate and Canadian senator, with Lisa Neve, an Indigenous woman released from federal custody, elaborate:

There is a direct relationship between neoliberal economic and social policies and the increased criminalization of the most marginalized, especially young, racialized, and poor women and those with mental and cognitive disabilities. . . . The increasing number of women in prison is clearly linked to the evisceration of health, education, and social services. The cycle of inadequate social services, criminalization, and incarceration intensifies in times of economic downturn. It is very clear where current policies are sending the people who are experiencing the brunt of the downturn in the economy. Jails are our most comprehensive homelessness initiative.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The Native Women's Association of Canada, "Indigenous Women in Solitary Confinement: Policy Backgrounder," August 2017 (Ottawa, ON: The Native Women's Association of Canada), accessed November 15, 2018, <https://www.nwac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/NWAC-Indigenous-Women-in-Solitary-Confinement-Aug-22.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> Burke, "Number of Women in Federal Prisons is Up."

<sup>38</sup> Malone, "Why Indigenous Women are Canada's Fastest Growing Population."

<sup>39</sup> Lisa Neve and Kim Pate, "Challenging the Criminalization of Women Who Resist," in *Global Lockdown: Race, Gender, and the Prison-Industrial Complex*, ed. Julia Sudbury (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 27-28.

“Tough on crime” neoliberal policies foster the criminalization of women and create the overcrowded conditions<sup>40</sup> found today in most jails.

There are long term effects of prison on the women and their families as well.

Redmond and Bartlett, editors of incarcerated women’s writing, explain some of the direct consequences of imprisonment on women:

In our culture women must overcome a greater stigma than men for ‘doing time,’ and the societal costs associated with even short-term incarcerations are significant. . . . With so many of their partners already in the prison system, who is left to care for the children? No matter how poorly a woman performed as caregiver, her powerlessness to make decisions from “inside” on their behalf is agonizing.<sup>41</sup>

Thousands of women, given an opportunity to speak, name not being listened to as a common childhood factor for putting them at risk for crime. Kim Bogucki, a Seattle police officer and co-founder of The If Project (an initiative to prevent children from following their parents into jail), asked mothers behind bars, “If there was something someone could have said or done to change your path to jail, what would it have been?”<sup>42</sup> She cites, that in the over three thousand written comments from female felons responding to the question, a recurring overall sentiment was that as a youth, there was “no positive adult role model—no one to guide me, no one to listen to me, no one was

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<sup>40</sup> Ministry of Public Safety, *Office of the Correctional Investigator Annual Report: 2017-2018*.

<sup>41</sup> Marybeth Christie Redmond and Sarah W. Bartlett, *Hear Me, See Me: Incarcerated Women Write* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 5.

<sup>42</sup> Renata Abramson, Kim Bogucki and Kathlyn Horan, “The If Project: Incarcerated Voices,” last modified 2018, accessed November 4, 2018, <http://www.theifproject.com/>.

kind to me.”<sup>43</sup> Many women recount a childhood that lacked care and in which acknowledgement of their deepest selves was rare or nonexistent.<sup>44</sup>

### *The Possibility of Being Listened To*

A few women with the lived experience of prison whom I met in the coffee room at the Elizabeth Fry office in Edmonton one week in September 2014 did have experiences of being listened to late in their lives—mostly by the jail chaplain or through counseling services after their release.<sup>45</sup> Their internalized message of being bad or deserving of violence, which was often derived from not being listened to, can give way to honouring one’s self, when generous listening does happen.<sup>46</sup> Being listened to is so out of the ordinary for incarcerated women, that initially an open, accepting attitude may be met with suspicion.<sup>47</sup> Once trust is established, however, listeners are a welcome presence among many of the women whose freedom has been taken.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Kim Bogucki, “The Value of the Voices Behind Prison Walls.” TEDxMonroeCorrectional Complex, (accessed October 7, 2015), <http://www.theifproject.com/about-if/news/>, 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Wally Lamb and the women of York Correctional Institution, *Couldn’t Keep it to Myself: Testimonies from Our Imprisoned Sisters* (New York, NY: ReganBooks, 2003); Wally Lamb, *I’ll Fly Away: Further Testimonies from the Women of York Prison* (New York, NY: Harper, 2007); Elizabeth Fry Society of Edmonton, *Common Threads: Women who have been in Conflict tell their Stories* (Edmonton, AB: Elizabeth Fry Society of Edmonton, 1993); Peter Tadman, “Martha” in *Fallen Angels: Inside Canada’s Toughest Women’s Prison* (Calgary, AB Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 2001), 135-160; D’Arcy, “You Bring Only Yourself.”; John T. Thorngren, *Salvation on Death Row: The Pamela Perillo Story* (Texas: KiCam Projects, 2017); Redmond and Bartlett, *Hear Me, See Me; What I Want My Words to do to You: Voices from a Maximum Security Women’s Prison*, directed by Eve Ensler, Borrowed Light, PBS Home Video, 2004.

<sup>45</sup> Hanlon, “Being Listened To.”

<sup>46</sup> *What I Want My Words to do to You*, directed by Ensler.

<sup>47</sup> Peter Tadman, “Martha” in *Fallen Angels: Inside Canada’s Toughest Women’s Prison* (Calgary, AB Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 2001), 135-160; Paula D’Arcy, “You Only Bring Yourself,” in *Sacred Threshold: Crossing the Inner Barrier to a Deeper Love*, 61-77 (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2007).

<sup>48</sup> Levi and Waldman, *Inside this Place, Not of it*.

Trust is the connection of seeing oneself in another and believing that other person is respectful of your shared presence. Listening stimulates or frees the dignity and the generosity of those who have been criminalized. Despite the harm, the stigmatization, the addictions, and mental illness associated with the women, those who come to interview or host creative writing groups with female inmates witness the integrity of the women with whom they work and to whom they become emotionally close.<sup>49</sup>

Our spirits are raised not by the topics of the interviews, which are always and inevitably painful, but by the women themselves. Despite being incarcerated under grim conditions, they demonstrate dignity, courage, and generosity as they recount their often traumatic experiences before and since their incarceration. . . . Our narrators describe sexual and physical abuse suffered inside the prison, and the daily indignities they face just trying to ensure they have enough toilet paper, soap, and menstrual pads. In addition, they recount the myriad abusive situations that led to their imprisonment and to recidivism. . . .

These are women who have been silent for most of their lives, whose desires and needs were ignored by often abusive families and spouses, and, later, by prison authorities. They tell us [the interviewers/editors] their stories here because it is, for many of them, the first chance they've had to be heard. . . . While abuse in male prisons is well documented, women in prison suffer serious health consequences and are less likely to complain of abuses within the prison system.<sup>50</sup>

Levi and Waldman's comments raise the question of how the incarcerated woman sees herself and understands the world. Bernard Lonergan's understanding of human authenticity and how we are formed in mind and body provides a philosophical insight into how not being listened to may have affected these women's perspectives and their personalities.

### *Phenomenological Insights into Being and Authenticity*

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<sup>49</sup> D'Arcy, "You Only Bring Yourself"; *What I Want My Words To Do To You*, directed by Ensler; "Hear Me, See Me: Incarcerated Women Write," YouTube video, 55:40, posted by "Burlington Book Festival 2014," September 20, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PgTNyfVFbjw>.

<sup>50</sup> Levi and Waldman, *Inside this Place, Not of it*, 16-17.

Braman compares Bernard Lonergan and Charles Taylor's philosophical writing on authenticity in his volume *Meaning and Authenticity: Bernard Lonergan & Charles Taylor on the Drama of Authentic Human Existence*. How these women perceive the world in light of abuse and not being listened to can be understood more deeply with the following explanations of Heidegger's "thrownness" and "horizon."

[D]rawing upon the work of Heidegger, Lonergan acknowledges that an important element constitutive of dramatic living [that which encompasses the individual, cultural, ethical and spiritual elements of life] is a sense of one's own 'thrownness' (*Geworfenheit*). The person finds herself already immersed within an ongoing drama that is already structured by a particular horizon of meanings and values. And as with any drama, there is for each one of us an underlining vision that shapes the whole of our concrete living. All aspects of our lives are shaped by, more often than not, an unthematized [or socially unconscious] ideal or set of ideals that order all our choices and decisions. In other words, dramatic living is a pattern shaped and formed by an image or ideal of what it means to be a human being. The source of this ideal, or ideals, which is both individual and communal, remains largely unthematized, and quite often the ideals can be conflictual.

In Taylor this unthematized context is the notion of background. For Lonergan, it is a foreground already constituted by others and given over as the point from which I am to decide what I wish to be as a person. Another term that Lonergan, Taylor, and Heidegger use for the givenness of this foreground is *horizon*. We all live out the drama of our lives within a horizon that is both constituted and constituting. It is constituted because it is an already given set of judgments and decisions – judgments and decisions that are both personal and communal; it is constituting because it is the context from which the subject continues to make choices, decisions and judgments concerning one's being-in-the-world. My horizon is the boundary of what I know and value. Anything outside of that boundary does not exist for me.<sup>51</sup>

What is the "unthematized" or unconscious aspect of an abused girl's humanity? What intellectual judgments and communal ideals have shaped her horizon? How does her quiet, often hidden, but powerfully influential horizon inform her life choices?

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<sup>51</sup> Braman, *Meaning and Authenticity*, 50.



The women who live within that particular horizon, ultimately one of trauma, degradation, and neglect have also been silenced. How might we attend to their words as they surface in the published world? Is it possible to come close to their sense of “thrownness” and to glimpse their “horizon” by taking seriously both the accounts of some compassionate observers and their own testimonies of not being listened to?

### *Opening to the Woman’s Experience*

Child abuse, trauma, ensuing addictions, mental illness, and a long history of being subjected to decisions made by men in power are all active ingredients in the lives of incarcerated women. Various fields of study—from neuro-science to yoga to shamanism and genetics—complement the unpacking of the phenomenon of an incarcerated woman’s not being listened to. I begin telling their story with the experience of jail itself.

### *Separated and Lonely*

The majority of people in jail have been subjected to abuse in childhood which has created a devastating loneliness.

Selves are formed intersubjectively, in the presence of others, for better and worse and regardless of whether any of us would have willed it to be this way. Acknowledging that brings us closer to understanding how selves and worlds can be destroyed by human violence, and why human beings can be wounded—not only physically—in such deep and lasting ways. Being abandoned by those who have the power to help produces a loneliness more profound than simple isolation.<sup>52</sup>

I understand that such loneliness is linked to a lack of trust and, in a gesture to placate or please others, becomes a block to the incarcerated woman’s knowing her true self.

Feeling abandoned can restrain her free movement in the world. This singularity of

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<sup>52</sup> Stauffer, *Ethical Loneliness*, 5.

painful separation from others is created largely by societal caregivers—parents, family members, teachers, police officers, and clergy (to name a few) who fail to communicate love and instead emotionally abuse the young ones in their charge often through the abandonment of not listening.

For example, a woman on death row whose mother had left the family and whose father, when she was eleven years old, made sexual advances on her remembers:

It was too much on top of a mother's desertion and [my sister] Joanne's departure. I felt totally betrayed, utterly unwanted by both my mom and dad. . . . Enough. It was enough to have suffered so many emotional upheavals and then to be treated this way by my father. I ran away. Anything had to be better."<sup>53</sup>

Police investigations did not stop the molestations and shortly after returning home, the girl turned to drugs to escape the pain and loneliness. Soft drugs numbed her pain and eventually a cocaine addiction swallowed up her identity and led to a murder for money. She came to find her true self and write her story only after years of incarceration, eventual sobriety, and an experience of spiritual transformation on death row.

#### *What is the Deeper Nature of Not Being Listened To?*

Even when addictions are not part of the equation, Jill Chivers, professional listener and motivational speaker, notes that when we are not listened to “the depth of our communication shallows, our inner self-worth wanes and feelings of unimportance can take over. Hostility, suicidal thoughts, or helplessness may also envelop a person.”<sup>54</sup> The body processes the psychological element of feeling worthless as stressful which hormonally sets off the sensation of feeling unwell and the manifestation of various

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<sup>53</sup> Thorngren, *Salvation on Death Row: The Pamela Perillo Story*, 12-13.

<sup>54</sup> Jill Chivers, “What Happens If We Aren’t Listened to?” *Ezine Articles*, November 4, 2009, accessed October 6, 2015, [http://EzineArticles.com/expert/Jill\\_Chivers/445329](http://EzineArticles.com/expert/Jill_Chivers/445329).

illnesses.<sup>55</sup> In addition to these complications from not being listened to, there is the confusion of poverty, racism, addictions, and finally incarceration.

*What the Women Hold in Common: The Trauma of Landing in Jail*

Going to jail, especially the first time, is traumatic psychologically and physically and is not something for which our Western culture prepares us.<sup>56</sup>

It is fair to say that not one of these imprisoned women hoped to become a criminal when she grew up. A woman's journey to crime is largely related to the unique issues she faces as a result of gender. Several decades of research confirm the pathways to criminal behavior. Females are more likely than males to have experienced poverty and various forms of victimization prior to arrest. The latter include domestic violence, incest, rape, neglect, substance abuse in the household, homelessness, and mental illness, to name but a few. A large proportion of these women commit crimes while under the influence of, or to support, a drug addiction.<sup>57</sup>

Entering prison the first time is an upheaval in one's way of life, and a shock no matter how dysfunctional life was on the outside. It might also be a place where women first feel safe from their violent partners. The lack of information regarding the dos and don'ts of prison life is disorienting and for many, the authoritarian atmosphere can be frightening.<sup>58</sup> The soundscape is also harsh. Barbara Parsons Lane journals her observations about her early days in an institution in the United States:

Since I came here ten days ago, I've been troubled by surprise noises: a raised voice, the slam of a cell door, the slap of playing cards on a table

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<sup>55</sup> Esther Sternberg, *Stress and the Balance Within: The Science Connecting Health and Emotions* (New York, NY: W. H. Freeman and Company, 2000).

<sup>56</sup> Matt Gallagher, "How to Prepare for Prison (Feature Version)" *TVO Never Stop Learning*, 1:23:29, aired April 30, 2017, <https://tvo.org/video/documentaries/how-to-prepare-for-prison-feature-version>.

<sup>57</sup> Redmond and Bartlett, *Hear Me, See Me*, 4.

<sup>58</sup> Piper Kerman, *Orange is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison* (New York, NY: Spiegel and Grau, 2011).

top. I'm on high alert. Who's standing near me? Will she invade my space? Am I safe?<sup>59</sup>

Incarceration eradicates one's freedom to choose and one's sense of security.<sup>60</sup>

Women inmates in North America are subjected to living in an (often) overcrowded cell where the general atmosphere is loud, emotionally cold, and volatile. "The jail experience was not a good one,"<sup>61</sup> recounts CB, a co-researcher, of her two-years-less-a-day sentence. In jail, the women are apt to witness violence as well as other psychologically stressed and angry inmates. "You get a lot of angry people in jail, and that's just how it is."<sup>62</sup> A young woman, released from jail at the time of her interview describes her psychological shock while behind bars.

When you're a prisoner in that environment, you don't feel like you have the power to say no [to sexual abuse]. Your life, your every move, is controlled by these people [the warden and guards]. When you eat, when you sleep, everything is known. At the beginning of my prison term, I didn't feel like I was a human being. I didn't feel like I had any rights. I didn't feel like anyone cared. I never felt like I had the power to say no, until I met my lawyer.<sup>63</sup>

She no longer felt her personal value. Her body had become the property of the state. The guards' control diminished her spirit, and her dignity and her identity were at risk. CB, questioned the abusive power used by the guards. "I have no idea how, how they can turn on us! Are their hours so bad, or if they have a shitty day, that they can take it out on

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<sup>59</sup> Barbara Parsons Lane, "Puzzle Pieces," in *Couldn't Keep it to Myself: Testimonies of our Imprisoned Sisters*, ed. Wally Lamb (New York, NY: Regan Books, 2003), 212.

<sup>60</sup> Kerman, *Orange is the New Black*.

<sup>61</sup> CB, "Interview #2 Not Listened To," interview by author, Lethbridge, AB, May 28, 2018.

<sup>62</sup> Hazel, "Interview #1, Not Listened To," interview by author at Calgary, AB, May 22, 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Robin Levi and Ayelet Waldman, "Maria Taylor" in *Inside This Place Not of It: Narrative from Women's Prisons* (San Francisco: McSweeney's and Voice of Witness, 2011), 66.

people? And there were certain guards that would do that.”<sup>64</sup> In short, the women have been traumatized by the conditions, the physical and social surroundings, and most have been subjected to multiple psychological, some physical, and sexual assaults during their time served.

### *Life in Jail*

The system of incarceration, in its mandate to control and punish, promotes an atmosphere of silencing women through poor listening. Parkes, Bunt, Peter and Booth state in a 2008 Manitoba study, that the institution’s “*raison d’être* [is] the deprivation of people’s liberty and, despite the best intentions, [has] a limitless potential for abuse.”<sup>65</sup> Traditionally the prisons in Canada and the United States provide little encouragement for the dignity of a person to thrive.<sup>66</sup> It is like an emotionally abusive foster home.

Maud Clark, actor and director with several decades of theatre therapy work with women in Australian jails, concurs. She says, “Prison is about [the] destruction of human spirit and soul, in order for a prison to function there must be a systematic and deliberate regime of oblivion to the individual soul needs of those that it houses.”<sup>67</sup> The nameless narrator and lifer in Susan Musgrave’s novel, *Cargo of Orchids*, describes the personal changes necessary for her survival in jail.

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<sup>64</sup> CB, “Interview #2 Not Listened To.”

<sup>65</sup> Debra Parkes, Kathy Bent, Tracey Peter and Tracy Booth, “Listening to Their Voices: Women Prisoners and Access to Justice in Manitoba,” *Windsor Yearbook of Access to Justice* 26, no. 1 (January 2008): 118.

<sup>66</sup> Marilyn Freeman, “One Person at a Time: Tarra Simmons,” Office of Civil Legal Aid video, 05:43, 2018, accessed February 15, 2018, <http://marilynfreeman.com/one-person-at-a-time-tarra-simmons-a-civil-legal-aid-series/>.

<sup>67</sup> Maud Clark, “Creativity—The Great Equalizer,” keynote address at The Conference for Education Leaders, Wodonga, Australia, April 2008, accessed February 17, 2012, [www.abup.unimelb.edu.au/unesco/ejournal/pdf/maud-clark.pdf](http://www.abup.unimelb.edu.au/unesco/ejournal/pdf/maud-clark.pdf).

I've learned to "front," to hoard, to be distrustful, to "mask"—to coverup, to put everything on the outside and cry on the inside. . . .

To "front" means it doesn't matter whether you're rock hard or sullen soft, you've got to be about something and stand up for yourself and rip a girl's arm off if you have to.<sup>68</sup>

The trauma of being emotionally isolated and on the alert affects who a person can be.

Not only is a woman's physical freedom constricted and regulated, but the need for self-protection and safety suppresses her freedom to be herself.

This sudden loss of power and control over one's life can be compared to the dark night of the soul.

Like darkness itself, the dark night of the soul means different things to different people. . . . Whatever the circumstances, what the stories have in common is their description of a time when the soul was severely tested, often to the point of losing faith, by circumstances beyond all control. No one chooses the dark night; the dark night *descends*. [emphasis in original]<sup>69</sup>

The justice system's mandate to incarcerate people as punishment becomes an imposition of the dark night on their lives and generally, it adversely affects them. It certainly tests the soul. The adversity is both internal, to do with the self-image and external, in regard to poor health care and diet.<sup>70</sup>

Women in jail must also dress alike, often in masculine clothes, work boots or running shoes. Like prisoners of war, this sameness affects them psychologically. In her

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<sup>68</sup> Susan Musgrave, *Cargo of Orchids* (Toronto, ON: Alfred A. Knopf Canada), 2000, 128.

<sup>69</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *Learning to Walk in the Dark* (New York: Harper Collins, 2014), 133-4.

<sup>70</sup> Fiona Kouyoumdjian, Andrée Schuler, Flora I. Matheson and Stephen W. Hwang, "Health Status of Prisoners in Canada," *Canadian Family Physician* 62, no. 3 (March 2016), 215-222, accessed December 6, 2018; Denis Campbell, "Poor Healthcare in Jails is Killing Inmates, Says NHS Watchdog," *The Observer*, October 27, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/oct/27/prisoners-dying-poor-care-services-prisons-mental-health-care-quality-commission-report>.

essay, “Lost and Found,” Roberta Schwartz describes a condemning “new voice” arising in her head. She is forced to look like others and begins to lose the self she knew.

I remember glimpsing my own and others’ reflections in the window glass and noting that we were all dressed the same and wore the same early-morning faces. Of course you’re all alike, a new voice in my head scoffed. *You’re all criminals.* . . .

As I sat waiting between stations, I felt like a sexless, formless, useless nothing. In front of me were girls of all shapes, sizes, and ages from seventeen to seventy. They were talking and laughing, joking with the guards, yelling. Everyone looked either ugly and mean or sad and scared. I saw no in-between. I saw no one who looked like me. . . . The thing was: every one of my companions at Fenwick North had a story, a need to be listened to, and a longing to be loved. In that respect, we were all the same.<sup>71</sup>

#### *Not Being Listened To, Trust and Empathy*

The most prevalent lived experience in regard to listening is that of not being listened to.<sup>72</sup> Shannon’s description provides a glimpse of not being listened to while incarcerated.

I kept saying, ‘I need to see the psychiatrist. The doctor won’t let me in to see him.’ And she [social worker] goes, ‘well you know if I make an appointment for you to see him, don’t think you’re getting any medication off of him’. I said, ‘I need to talk to somebody, don’t you understand that?’ I kept saying to her, ‘don’t you understand? Look at me, don’t you understand?’<sup>73</sup>

In this scenario, Shannon’s needs are dismissed as a ploy to get medication. There is no meaningful consideration of the disadvantaged woman’s request. She is the weaker party and not understood because her listener categorizes her as unbelievable, not someone for

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<sup>71</sup> Roberta Schwartz, “Lost and Found” in *I’ll Fly Away: Further Testimonies from the Women of York Prison* ed. Wally Lamb, 132, 134, 148.

<sup>72</sup> Hanlon, “Being Listened To.”

<sup>73</sup> Jennifer M. Kilty, “It’s Like They Don’t Want You to Get Better: Psy Control of Women in the Carceral Context,” *Feminism & Psychology* 22, no. 2 (2012): 170. <http://fap.sagepub.com/content/22/162>.

whom she has to care or have empathy. Not being listened to can lead to not feeling loved.<sup>74</sup> One outcome of not feeling loved is a difficulty in trusting other people.

How a woman's positive energy *can* be shared changes somewhat over the months and years served in jail. Throughout the literature, there are numerous references to verbal and physical offerings between women inmates.<sup>75</sup> Older women can become surrogate mothers for younger women.<sup>76</sup> New inmates may be welcomed with small gifts or courtesies. Giving to another is not the norm, but in times of deep need, such as when someone new arrives, empathy can come through especially from women who have settled into the routine of prison life and have dug deep to know and find in themselves a reserve of resilience.

### *Resilience*

Dr. Catherine Panter-Brick studies the wellbeing of and resilience in impoverished people whose life situations involve risk-taking (like incarcerated women). She defines resilience as “the process of harnessing biological, psychosocial, structural, and cultural resources to sustain wellbeing.”<sup>77</sup> Some Indigenous leaders maintain that “resilience is an

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<sup>74</sup> Hanlon, “Being Listened To”; Heather Wagoner, “The Science of Listening,” *The Huffington Post: The Blog*, July 16, 2016, accessed November 10, 2016, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/heather-wagoner/the-science-of-listening\\_b\\_11030950.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/heather-wagoner/the-science-of-listening_b_11030950.html).

<sup>75</sup> Kerman, *Orange is the New Black*; D’Arcy, “You Only Bring Yourself”; Lamb, *Couldn’t Keep it to Myself*; Lamb, *I’ll Fly Away*; Toni Sinclair and Britani Sorenson, ed. *Honouring Our Voices*, (Edmonton, AB: Elizabeth Fry Society of Edmonton, 2010).

<sup>76</sup> Sinclair and Sorenson, *Honouring Our Voices*; Lamb, *Couldn’t Keep It to Myself*.

<sup>77</sup> Catherine Panter-Brick and James F. Leckman, “Editorial Commentary: Resilience in Child Development—Interconnected Pathways to Wellbeing,” *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 54, no.4 (April 2013): 333-336, <http://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12057>.



innate quality that needs only to be properly awakened.”<sup>78</sup> What constitutes resilience during an abusive childhood may be essential to safety, like keeping silent regarding personal needs—a technique to avoid provoking someone with a volatile temperament. When suppressing one’s needs in favour of an abuser’s needs becomes a pattern in adulthood, the practice can lead to ill-health, especially poor mental health.

### *Self-Silencing*

Incarcerated women may reach out to someone in need, but the likelihood of their voicing legitimate concerns to authorities on their own behalf, as Levi and Waldman mentioned, is less than in the case of male inmates. They do not ask to be listened to for fear of rejection.<sup>79</sup> Riet Bons-Storm, Dutch theologian and social researcher, also observed that abused women will suffer in silence. She researched and reported on women’s domestic abuse and their subsequent interactions with male pastors in the Netherlands.

It is typical of patriarchal culture to call a woman with an unusual story “mentally unbalanced” or “mad.” [An expression of the phenomenon of not being listened to.] “Madness is the impasse confronting those whom cultural conditioning has deprived of the very means of protest or self-affirmation. . . . ‘Mental illness’ is a request for help, a manifestation both of cultural impotence and of political castration,” argues Phyllis Chesler (1989, xxiii) [in *Women and Madness*]. Women’s silence is not only a psychological problem, which the right concern or care can cure, it is also a matter of the right to speak and the right to name.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> John Fleming and Robert J. Ledogar, “Resilience, an Evolving Concept: A Review of Literature Relevant to Aboriginal Research,” *Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)* 6, no. 2: 7-23, Summer 2008, accessed August 8, 2018, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2956753/>.

<sup>79</sup> Parkes et al, “Listening to Their Voices.”

<sup>80</sup> Riet Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman: Listening to Women’s Silences in Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 33-34.

What happens within a person when their truth is denied, when listening fails? Chivers notes some patterns in human behaviour.

People can become withdrawn or angry. . . . They can lose confidence and feel that it is futile speaking because they are not going to be heard. *We can feel as though we are unimportant and that no-one cares for or understands us.* Sometimes we mirror the behaviour and stop listening ourselves. In the most extreme situations, people can suicide because they have not been listened to [emphasis added].<sup>81</sup>

For incarcerated women, the message from childhood and from society often is that they are invisible or not important. They must fend for themselves rather than turn to others for help.

#### *Sexual Abuse and Mental Illness*

Most incarcerated women live with addictions and other mental illnesses, including trauma from sexual abuse.<sup>82</sup> Most have also suffered with abusive spouses or partners.

The voices of the women in my group drift back, and I realize we have this fatal error in common: we stayed with our abusers because we both loved and feared them, and because they were talented manipulators—masters of the bait-and-switch who kept us constantly off balance.<sup>83</sup>

Women I interviewed were manipulated in home and health care environments and described the mental anguish they felt at that time.<sup>84</sup> They questioned their own reality

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<sup>81</sup> Chivers, “What Happens If We Aren’t Listened To?” 1-2.

<sup>82</sup> Bloom, Barbara E., Rohnert Park and Stephanie S. Covington, “Addressing the Mental Health Needs of Women Offenders,” in *Women’s Mental Health Issues Across the Criminal Justice System*, ed. Rosemary Gido and Lanette Dalley (Columbus, OH: Prentice Hall, 2008), 1-30, accessed May 13, 2014, <http://www.stephaniecovington.com/assets/files/FinalAddressingtheMentalHealthNeeds.pdf>.

<sup>83</sup> Barbara Parsons, “Reawakening Through Nature: A Prison Reflection” in *I’ll Fly Away: Further Testimonies from the Women of York Prison*, ed. Wally Lamb (New York, NY: Harper, 2007): 224.

<sup>84</sup> LN, “Interview #5 Not Listened To,” interview by author, Lethbridge, AB, May 30, 2018; BB, “Interview # 4 Not Listened To,” interview by author, Lethbridge, AB, May 29, 2018; CB, “Interview # 2, Not Listened To.”

when as children, they were told by authorities that their truth was deceit. For instance, LN describes her confusion at age twelve when social workers sided with her domineering step-father, a school teacher, and discredited her story of the on-going abuse from him at home.

I felt like maybe it *was* all in my head and that I maybe, I wasn't—maybe I deserved this or this was what was supposed to happen because I didn't really, like, get it. And that this is just going to be my life forever, I guess. I was stuck in this place. Maybe this is what I deserve. I would have to deal with him and everything. Like this is what had to happen. I don't know.<sup>85</sup>

Both her moral compass and power to reason were compromised by the dismissive messages from “caring” authorities who sided with the abuser and told her she was “crying wolf.” Her situation resonates with Stauffer’s insights into ethical loneliness.

Not being believed and not being listened to are also closely linked phenomena. Rejection of one’s truth especially as a child, is disorienting and emotionally damaging. As a child, SH suffered frequent sexual abuse from several men in her home.

I lived in constant fear. Because my mom was supposed to play an important role in my life and her not listening to me—I just didn't think that anybody else cared, or what I had to say mattered. So I just kept it all in for years. It ate away at me.

When I was young and they were doing that to me, they were feeding me alcohol. So I knew at a young age that alcohol would take away all those feelings and stuff. So I masked it all with the alcohol they were giving me as well.<sup>86</sup>

Numbing with alcohol and drugs became a way of life for SH.

Incarcerated women’s not being listened to expresses itself both psychologically and physically. The phenomenon is a story of human rejection and sometimes intentional

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<sup>85</sup> LN, “Interview #5 Not Listened To,” 1-2.

<sup>86</sup> SH, “Interview #3 Not Listened To,” interview by author, Lethbridge, AB, May 29, 2018.

neglect. Not having anyone to turn to or to trust is isolating and contributes to low self-worth. The fallout is a deep insecurity which contributes to defensive anger.

Shame and insecurity are the wounds that make people react violently to criticism. Some people retreat from hurt feelings, others attack. The most shame-sensitive individuals flare up at the slightest sign of criticism. Such people are hard to live with. But reacting to criticism with hurt and anger is something we all do. What varies is only the threshold of response.<sup>87</sup>

Many incarcerated women have experienced isolation, shame, and insecurity which are all associated with mental illness, especially depression. Creative writing facilitators in prison, Redmond and Bartlett observed:

Longstanding cycles of trauma and abuse coupled with drug use can produce a monumental level of psychosis. Indeed, mental health issues are nearly universal; med-cart lines are long and frequent throughout the day within a women's prison.<sup>88</sup>

It is painfully ironic that society's *justice* system uses the inhumane treatment of isolation<sup>89</sup> and forced separation from children and family<sup>90</sup> to handle many people who are acting out of pain, poverty, and affliction. As more and more people with mental

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<sup>87</sup> Nichols, *The Lost Art of Listening*, 115.

<sup>88</sup> Redmond and Bartlett, *Hear Me, See Me*, 4.

<sup>89</sup> Kim Pate "Segregation in Prison Must be Banned," *Globe and Mail*, January 22, 2018, accessed November 28, 2018 <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/segregation-in-prison-must-be-banned/article37682823/>; Courtney Skye and Kim Wakeford, "Indigenous Women in Solitary Confinement: Policy Backgrounder," (Ottawa, ON: Native Women's Association of Canada, August 2017).

<sup>90</sup> Chandra Bozelko, "Sexual Abuse Survivors Deserve Help, Not Punishment," HuffPost Opinion, February 18, 2018, (accessed October 13, 2018) [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/opinion-bozelko-sexual-abuse-prison\\_us\\_5a871e17e4b00bc49f43c39a](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/opinion-bozelko-sexual-abuse-prison_us_5a871e17e4b00bc49f43c39a).

illness and substance addictions are warehoused behind bars,<sup>91</sup> the ineffectiveness of prison can only intensify.<sup>92</sup>

Genetically and neurologically the body expresses or holds onto the personal trauma. The woman may numb her body's memories of brutality and neglect. The ensuing self-hatred and blame, which drive the addictive behaviour, are not simply erased with treatment programs.

It is unrealistic to tell women and girls not to take drugs to dull the pain of abuse, hunger, or other devastation or tell them that they must stop the behavior that allowed them to survive the multigenerational impacts of colonization, poverty, abuse, and disability without providing them with income, housing and medical, educational, or other supports.<sup>93</sup>

The proper timing for the healing of addictions is as important as the type of treatment—all of it is complicated by the specifics of individual cases—and far from straightforward as Irma Rodriguez testifies:

It took me a long time to get clean. I've been in and out of programs. I've worked with sponsors, I've gotten therapy, I've done outpatient. I've had intensive family therapy counseling. It seems that when I did the intensive family therapy, that's what caused me to reuse drugs even more. A lot of the help I got was court ordered; it was nothing that I ever chose to get. I wasn't ready for it, and I was scared. Fear turns into anger and anger turns into resentment and resentment causes you to use, because if you don't know how to deal with the resentment in a healthy way, you have to numb it. So I'd use more. It was only when I was really ready to face all that stuff, when I came to it on my own, that I got clean.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Jason Demers, "Warehousing Prisoners in Saskatchewan: A Public Health Approach," (Regina, SK: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2014), [https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Saskatchewan%20Office/2014/10/warehousing\\_prisoners\\_in\\_saskatchewan.pdf](https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Saskatchewan%20Office/2014/10/warehousing_prisoners_in_saskatchewan.pdf).

<sup>92</sup> Ruth Morris, *Crumbling Walls . . . : Why Prisons Fail* (Oakville, ON: Mosaic Press, 1989).

<sup>93</sup> Neve and Pate, "Challenging the Criminalization of Women Who Resist."

<sup>94</sup> "Irma Rodriguez," in *Inside this Place, Not of it*, edited by Robin Levi and Ayelet Waldman, (San Francisco, CA: Mc Sweeney's and Voice of Witness, 2011), 209-210.

Rodriguez' point about her readiness to get clean speaks to the complexity of the traumatized woman. It is not only a matter of the head choosing to get well. The body, the brain, the mind and the soul share the weight of the pain and the whole person must be considered in the healing equation.

### The Lived Experience of Not Being Listened To

#### *Following Heuristic Questions*

How might incarcerated women experience not being listened to—especially as it is abusive (e.g. being given the silent treatment; neglect), and often happens during childhood? How does the abuse affect the body, the mind, and one's heart and soul? What role do emotions and feelings have in this lived experience? Spiritual writers and healers, medical researchers, neuroscientists, psychologists, and other writers all contribute to my understanding of how the phenomenon of not being listened to is a lived experience of incarcerated women and so also of contemporary society.

#### ***Trauma and Abuse: A Setting for Not Being Listened To***

The women's not being listened to, therefore, has to be investigated within the framework of abuse. Their anecdotes, remembered in the conscious mind, are located at the horizon of trauma. The trauma affects the whole self (and has ramifications also for the members of the woman's community and culture). Not being listened to has a lasting impact on the physical body and one's emotions.

A trauma may be witnessing or being on the receiving end of a violent event, being neglected, or being involved in ongoing stressful situations. The American Psychological Association described trauma as "severe adversities [which] include

exposure to interpersonal violence, the trauma of war, death of a loved one, natural disasters, serious industrial or other accidents, and terrorism.”<sup>95</sup>

## The Body and Human Emotion

### *Emotion and Feelings Defined*

Neuro-scientist Antonio Damasio makes an important distinction between emotions and feelings. The body senses emotion and the mind interprets those sensations as feelings.<sup>96</sup>

### *Trauma: An Overwhelming State of Being*

Rupert Ross, former crown prosecutor and advocate for traditional Indigenous approaches to conflict, discusses the emotional trauma of epic proportions in the survivors of residential schooling.<sup>97</sup> The victim literally loses his or her mind for shorter and longer periods of time. They may be oblivious to what they have just said or done minutes before.

How is emotional trauma transmitted or stored? Furthermore, what is the body’s memory of the trauma within its tissues? How does the body remember? And so, how are the effects of not being listened to stored? Once again, neuroscience is helpful in providing a piece in the puzzle of the lived experience of trauma and not being listened to.

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<sup>95</sup> Steven Southwick, George A. Bonanno, Ann S. Masten, Catherine Panter-Brick, and Rachel Yehuda, “Resilience Definitions, Theory, and Challenges: Interdisciplinary Perspectives,” *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 5, 2014, doi10.3402/ejpt.v5.25338.

<sup>96</sup> Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2010).

<sup>97</sup> Rupert Ross, *Indigenous Healing: Exploring Traditional Paths* (Toronto, ON: Penguin Canada Books Inc., 2014).

## *The Science of Stress*

Esther Sternberg, immunologist and author of *The Balance Within: The Science Connecting Health and Emotions*, investigated the immunological consequences of stress. Exactly what happens in the brain and body during trauma or the stress of not being listened to?

We have advanced to the point where we can really understand much, much better how those inputs, those signals from the outside world, get interpreted by the brain, by all these different parts of the brain. And how they get the overlay of memory on it, so that your memory of certain events can color whether you perceive an event as stressful or threatening or happy. . . .

The discovery I made is that there can be an actual problem in that circuit that predisposes to developing arthritis. It doesn't mean that stress is causing arthritis. It's that the on-off switch is not working right. It's either stuck in the on position or stuck in the off position. In the case of arthritis, it's stuck in the off position because you can't pump out enough of those hormones to shut off inflammation when you need to shut it off.<sup>98</sup>

The traumatizing perception of not being listened to might set up a person for the development of arthritis, as LN's case seems to show.

Dr. Mark Miller and colleagues' research in Boston supports a genetic factor active in predisposing a person to the adverse effects of stress. His work suggest that a gene (AIM2), influences the expression and severity of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).<sup>99</sup> The gene stimulates an inflammation-reducing protein, C-reactive protein (CRP). Early results implicate that people whose bodies do not produce enough CRP are more prone to PTSD as well as to arthritis.

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<sup>98</sup> Sternberg, *Stress and the Balance Within*, 207, 211.

<sup>99</sup> M. W. Miller, H. Maniates, E. J. Wolf, M. W. Logue, S. A. Schichman, A. Stone, W. Milberg, and R. McGlinchey, "CRP Polymorphisms and DNA methylation of the AIM2 Gene Influence Associations Between Trauma Exposure, PTSD, and C-reactive Protein" *Journal of Brain, Behavior, and Immunity*, 67 (January 2018), 194-202.



The nature of our relationships and how we process rejection from others directly affects our bodies. The stress of not being listened to, prolonged and intermittent, interferes with the body's ability to stay healthy. The children and women who have been abused process the lived experience of not being listened to differently from those who have had healthy secure attachments in childhood. How are these emotions that are held in the body through cellular or neurological memory a part of not being listened to? One practice revealed that emotions resonate with meaning and can be retained in the body.

### *Emotions and Focusing*

Focusing, a method that began in Chicago with psychologist Eugene Gendlin in the 1950s, advocates for listening to the emotions via the body. Gendlin studied hundreds of hours in his own practice with clients on tape to determine why some people responded to therapy positively and others did not. Ann W. Cornell, author and practitioner of Focusing, summarizes his findings.

So the successful therapy clients had a vague, hard-to-describe body awareness that they were directly sensing during the session. By contrast, the unsuccessful therapy clients stayed articulate through the whole session! They stayed “up in their heads.” They didn’t sense in their bodies, and they never directly felt something that at first was hard to describe. No matter how much they analyzed their problems or explained them, or thought about them, or cried about them, their therapy was ultimately unsuccessful.

Eugene Gendlin determined to find out how to teach the skill that made all the difference between successful and unsuccessful therapy. . . .

Gendlin did find a way to teach this powerful and effective skill of emotional healing, and he called it “Focusing.” . . . Focusing is a natural skill that was discovered, not invented. . . . Focusing ability is the birthright of every person: we were all born with the ability to know how we feel from moment to moment. But for most of us, the experiences of hurt and alienation in our childhood and from our culture have caused us to lose trust in our bodies and our feelings. We need to re-learn Focusing.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ann Weiser Cornell, *The Power of Focusing: A Practical Guide to Emotional Self-Healing* (Oakland, CA: Harbinger Publications, 1996), 5.

Focusing encourages quiet listening to the body and engages the participation of the body's messaging in order to a) understand the felt senses, yearnings and emotions in the body and b) to take the body's direction by following-up on the actions it suggests.

Focusing is the process of listening to your body in a gentle, accepting way and hearing the messages that your inner self is sending you. It's a process of honoring the wisdom that you have inside you, becoming aware of the subtle level of knowing that speaks to you through your body. . . . Focusing brings us back into our bodies and back into contact with what is real for us, our feelings, wants, and needs. . . . The truth is that our bodies are wise in many ways hardly ever acknowledged by our culture. Our bodies carry knowledge about how we are living our lives, about what we need to be more fully ourselves, about what we value and believe, about what has hurt us emotionally and how to heal it. Our bodies know which people around us are the ones who bring out the best in us, and which people deplete and diminish us. Our bodies know what is the right next step to bring us to more fulfilling and rewarding lives.<sup>101</sup>

Not being listened to may affect this "inner self," the "subtle level of knowing." If "our bodies carry knowledge about . . . what hurt us emotionally," not being listened to registers in the body as rejection or possibly self-hate. The buildup of emotion in the body may explain why the mind's desire for change is not enough to modify one's behaviour. The body needs some recognition of and attention to its own needs.

Emotional banking is a term coined by psychologist John Gottman to capture an interesting body practice. It suggests another dimension in how our bodies discern and process emotion.

### *Emotional Bids*

Cornell described the practice of focusing, how the body is a tool rich in determining how we can listen to our past emotions and present state. Gottman

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<sup>101</sup> Cornell, *The Power of Focusing*, 6-8.

discovered the importance of body and verbal reactions in couples' communication, i.e. how the body naturally listens to others. His team set up a "love lab" to monitor married couples' interactions and stress over several weekends and tracked them periodically for several decades or until they divorced. He and his colleague noted the subtle and overt nature of participants "bidding," or vying for one another's attention.

Bids can be as minor as asking for a backrub or as significant as seeking help in carrying the burden when an aging parent is ill. The partner responds to each bid either by turning toward the spouse or turning away. A tendency to turn toward your partner is the basis of trust, emotional connection, passion, and a satisfying sex life. . . . There's a reason that seemingly small events are fundamental to a relationship's future: Each time partners turn toward each other, they are funding what I've come to call their emotional bank account. They are building up savings that, like money in the bank, can serve as a cushion when times get rough, when they're faced with a major life stress or conflict. Because they have stored an abundance of goodwill, such couples are less likely to teeter over into distrust and chronic negativity during hard times.<sup>102</sup>

Positive responses to bids are examples of being listened to, i.e. to be listened to is to have someone else hear and pay attention to body language, intonation and other unspoken messages before providing a response. Not being listened to is the opposite experience and negatively affects the emotional bank account and one's ability to trust. The level of commitment in listening is vital in other bonding relationships, like parent-child bonds.

### *Attunement*

Gabor Maté, physician and author of *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*, an exploration of addictions, calls the act of listening attentively with children "attunement"

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<sup>102</sup> John Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work: A practical Guide from the Country's Foremost Relationship Expert* (1999; repr., New York, NY: Harmony Books, 2015), 88-89.

and its opposite, a distracted listening, “proximate separation.”<sup>103</sup> Further, he indicates that proximate separation occurs even when a parent or guardian loves the child.

“[Attunement] is deeply instinctive and is easily subverted when the parent is stressed, depressed or distracted. A parent can be fully attached to the infant—fully ‘in love’—but not attuned. . . . Poorly attuned relationships provide an inadequate template for the development of a child’s neurological and psychological self-regulation systems.”<sup>104</sup>

### *Depleted Resources*

How might Gottman’s concept of emotional banking through responding to another’s bids be applied to an incarcerated woman’s emotional state of not being listened to? The body interacts meaningfully in relationships and we unconsciously and consciously respond to cues from others. Rather than building up an “abundance of goodwill” from attentive and loving caregivers in childhood, many incarcerated women enter adulthood operating on a deficit from experiencing an infancy and/or a maturation in an environment of proximate separation, neglect (or other abuse). This bankruptcy can be exacerbated in later life with abusive relationships both in and out of jail. In this deprived state, the child/woman is emotionally numbed and can fill with anger or fear, two emotions associated with survival.

### *Balancing Emotions*

One way to increase their emotional reserve is through participation in the arts, as well as body and meditation practices.<sup>105</sup> For millennia, traditional Indigenous teachings

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<sup>103</sup> Maté, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*, 238, 240.

<sup>104</sup> Maté, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*, 238-239.

<sup>105</sup> Nora Kerekes, Cecilia Fielding, and Susanne Apelqvist, “Yoga in Correctional Settings: A Randomized Controlled Study, *Front Psychiatry*, 204, August 2017, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2017.00204>; “Hear Me, See Me: Incarcerated Women Write,” YouTube video.

have also addressed personal wellbeing. Their approach is fourfold. They address the emotions, the body, the mind and the spirit.<sup>106</sup>

Peggy Shaughnessy, psychologist and founder of the highly effective Redpath program for addicts, embraced the Indigenous model as a person's "four rooms," and put the room of emotions first when working with First Nations offenders in Ontario.<sup>107</sup>

Shaughnessy highly values *the mind* connecting with the body by naming and understanding its buried emotions. An expression like, "I was mad" translates into multiple descriptors of types of anger which lead one back to specific memories of hurt, fear and uncertainty from someone's past.<sup>108</sup> Ross quotes Shaughnessy's perspective from a promotional flyer for Redpath:

Most people will say (that they go through life putting up walls) to protect themselves, that they have been hurt so much that they don't want to get hurt again. Most times, however, this is an unconscious way of not wanting to deal with the pain and the hurt that they have hidden inside . . . the only way the walls will ever come down is if participants are willing to begin the journey of introspection in order to first identify the emotions and the effects they have on their lives. If they are fearful of this journey then they are going to have difficulties for the rest of their lives.<sup>109</sup>

Receiving a negative reaction to a bid is an opportunity to put up a wall. If claiming emotions and their effects are one route to returning order to the traumatized body, it is

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<sup>106</sup> Ross, *Indigenous Healing*.

<sup>107</sup> Lance Anderson, "Peterbio: Peggy Shaughnessy," MyKawartha.com, February 5, 2014 (accessed November 10, 2018), <https://www.mykawartha.com/news-story/4349835-peterbio-peggy-shaughnessy/>.

<sup>108</sup> Ross, *Indigenous Healing*.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 212-213.

also important to consider how the body's expression of trauma is related to the development of the brain.

Ross discusses the emotional fallout from residential school violence and trauma at length in his book on Indigenous healing. He notes, that when working with First Nations offenders, or on friendly outings with residential school survivors, he was surprised to witness that their emotions were often buried, unexposed. They moved about as though numbed, and then suddenly they became extremely angry and violent in brief, unexpected outbursts.<sup>110</sup> The survivors were eerily unaware of their dissociative behaviour. The body is responsive to emotion and it seems, when unguarded or overwhelmed can let loose with pent up or buried reactions to traumatic events. The trauma incapacitates or numbs the expression of emotion. The body seems periodically to shut itself off from everything—the violence, someone's care, innate emotional reactions—to protect itself from further suffering.

Not being listened to may be related to such a temperament and actually disturb the brain's mapping which, ordinarily is part of a healthy consciousness. The ways to make relational or safe interactions with someone who is violent or not willing to listen are limited. Lonergan refers to this registering of emotion as creating patterns through senses.

What we experience is patterned because to be conscious of something involves a patterning of what is perceived and a pattern of the feelings that flow out of and are connected with the perceiving. The perceiving is not by itself, not without a pattern. Consciousness, basically and commonly, is undifferentiated, not

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<sup>110</sup> Pamela Vanmeer, "Taking the 'Redpath' to Success in Treating Addiction and Mental Illness," Van Meer Free Press, February 21, 2017, accessed October 18, 2018, <http://www.vanmeerfreepress.com/taking-the-redpath-to-success-in-treating-addiction-and-mental-illness/>.

in some specialized pattern such as the intellectual. But on the sensitive level it is patterned.<sup>111</sup>

The “sensitive level” may be the body’s perception of the situation through the senses and the emotions. Rejection and not being listened to, disrupt healthy patterns. The body is incapable of registering healthy social interactions or creating normal patterns of a positive relationship. Instead,

abused children “become minutely attuned to their abusers’ inner states. They learn to recognize subtle changes in facial expression, voice, and body language as signals of anger, sexual arousal, intoxication, or dissociation.” The child develops this skill rather unconsciously as a defense against attack. The child ultimately learns, however, that no matter how hard she tries to “be good,” if the offending parent is in a certain mood the abusive acts will follow. . . . Spiritual directors need to remember that their every move is being studied and evaluated when they are working with adults who have been traumatized as children.<sup>112</sup>

Might these children live with the ongoing assumption that relationships are characterized by not being listened to? This phenomenon of not being listened to blocks the child’s natural, healthy response in favour of a skill to survive i.e. intense observation while stopping all natural, emotional requests for love. A spiritual director’s role is to make a space and emotional setting of love to listen in such a way, that traumatized people have hitherto not necessarily encountered. They must be aware of the possibility of the director’s inability to receive love through being listened to.

Distracted parents who are unable to tend to their infants and children’s presence have a detrimental effect on the healthy emotional wellbeing of the coming generations. This is a real and a challenging problem.

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<sup>111</sup> Mark D. Morelli and Elizabeth A. Morelli, *The Lonergan Reader*, (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 365.

<sup>112</sup> Joseph D. Driskill, “Spiritual Direction with Traumatized Persons,” in *Still Listening: New Horizons in Spiritual Direction* ed. Norvene Vest (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2000), 22-23.

### *Body Science and Trauma*

Recent scientific research (neurological, biochemical, immunological, and epigenetic) affirms that hormonal changes in the body occur with stress and the expression of a gene (AIM2) can predispose people to PTSD.<sup>113</sup> The body is working in many ways that we have not yet uncovered at a microscopic or molecular level. Returning to Clark's and Gendlin's experiences, however, the body's communication through the emotions may well have a physiological explanation. When someone is not listened to, the body registers a negative bid, a memory is mapped and stored. In the case of abuse, the shocked body will immediately or eventually shut down or freeze. How does being listened to and not listened to affect the mind?

### *Brain Mapping and Consciousness*

Lonergan's concepts of consciousness, making choices for life out of one's selfhood, one's horizon, in the case of an incarcerated woman, are characterized by a lack of freedom to choose and a paucity of choices.

Damasio describes the unconscious workings in the body in terms of maps in the brain.

The distinctive feature of brains such as the one we own is their uncanny ability to create maps. Mapping is essential for sophisticated management, mapping and life management going hand in hand. When the brain makes maps, it *informs* itself. The information contained in the maps can be used non-consciously to guide motor behavior efficaciously, a most desirable consequence considering that survival depends on taking the right action. But when brains make maps, they are also creating images, the main currency of our minds. Ultimately consciousness allows us to experience maps as images, to manipulate those images, and to apply reasoning to them.

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<sup>113</sup> Esther Sternberg, *Stress and the Balance Within*; Ruth Buczynski, "The Impact of Trauma on Future Generations," National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine, accessed November 12, 2018, <https://www.nicabm.com/trauma-the-impact-of-trauma-on-future-generations/>; Miller, "CRP Polymorphisms."



Maps are constructed when we interact with objects, such as a person, a machine, a place, from the outside of the brain toward its interior. I cannot emphasize the word *interaction* enough. It reminds us that making maps, which is essential for improving actions . . . often occurs in a setting of action to begin with. Action and maps, movements and mind, are part of an unending cycle. . . .

Maps are also constructed when we recall objects from the inside of our brain's memory banks. The construction of maps never stops even in our sleep, as dreams demonstrate. . . . The assembly conjured by the senses involves an active contribution offered from inside the brain, available from early in development.<sup>114</sup>

What is the mapwork of not being listened to which is stored in the unconscious? Is it a disturbance in the interaction within the brain, a decreased clarity or blurring of the images from a lack of interaction with "objects" or with other people? It might also be a combination of troubling images from the outside, combined with the fear mapping from the inside. As mentioned earlier, the body feels emotion and the mind configures feelings.<sup>115</sup> It follows that the body, informed by the conscious mind, has the capacity to communicate the wisdom or the confusion of the phenomenon through the emotions and the senses.

It is helpful, when unpacking the influence of trauma, and the lived experience of not being listened to, to note the observations and descriptions of someone who has worked with both traumatized groups—abused children and incarcerated women.

#### *A Thespian's Encounter with the Traumatized*

Maud Clark, an Australian thespian and a gifted director (especially of plays penned and cast with the traumatized people with whom she works), has mentored, for decades, two groups of people: women in prison and groups of refugee and foster care children who were not thriving in the Australian school system. Reflecting on these

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<sup>114</sup> Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, 65-66.

<sup>115</sup> Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*.

children's HighWater Theatre project and the women's prison theatre, Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company, Clark's reflections act as a touchstone in my inquiry into the distressed physical and spiritual worlds of those living in a landscape of abuse and trauma. She comments, in a keynote address to teachers, that her work with such wounded people has been

one of the most demanding, debilitating and frustrating projects [I have] ever embarked on [with] outcomes [that] were wonderful and the only thing that ever worked for this particular group. . . .

The one common thing all of the young people shared was—not only that school didn't work—but also stories of abuse, neglect and a lack of the most basic support structures that are often presumed to be in place for every child. The [theatre] Company had a history of working with those who, in the main, had been excluded from the cultural and social life of this society. This exclusion usually started from the moment of birth into a life predicated by violence, neglect, poverty and abuse.

While poverty and abuse are easily understood as physical conditions, they are also a starvation of nurture—parts of the soul die, trust dies and the only way to get by is to numb oneself, usually through alcohol or drugs. Some cultures use the term 'soul retrieval.' It is believed that with any great fear, loss, shock or abuse, part of the soul leaves the body.

Often when we first start working with young people or women in the prison they are frozen: *physically* and *emotionally*. Lips that barely move, bodies that can't bear to be touched – too often an emotional response is to hit out in anger because that is how you survive. . . .

Much of the work is body work—being in your body, allowing the body to be massaged, allowing the body to run, roll on the floor. Abuse goes with the territory as most we work with—young and old—have been abused. How often the words echo, 'fly away, numb myself . . . I must leave myself, must never enter my body.' Theatre work is about being totally inside the body, reclaiming your own body, feeling your cells come alive.<sup>116</sup>

Clark describes the women's horizon (to use Lonergan's word) as growing up devoid of love and compassion. The person growing up in "violence, neglect, poverty and abuse" is therefore disconnected from any healthy "source" (that social space in which we develop and come to choose what is our truest self). The horizon's "source" is faulty, full

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<sup>116</sup> Clark, "Creativity," 187-192.

of child abuse and conflicts apt to leave one's mind struggling for clarity, like twelve-year-old LN. Her complaint of abuse from her step-father fell on deaf ears. For these women, anger, shame, and self-blame can fill the gap left by their fragmenting souls. LN spent the rest of that year on crutches because of juvenile arthritis in her ankles. A consistently abusive environment produces beliefs that tear down the self and the stress is registered in the body. LN's thought, "Maybe I deserve this [abusive treatment]," and subsequent arthritis articulates this reality for her.

Psychologists Goldsmith and Freyds' research also suggests that abused children can turn on themselves.

Since their home environments are for the most part uncontrollable and inescapable, children living with abusive caregivers must find ways to either understand or disregard the treatment they receive . . . attributing abuse as stemming from one's own inherent badness inhibits the scarier prospect that a caregiver cannot be trusted, and may help create an illusion of control.<sup>117</sup>

The emotion of fear, fueled by pain, isolation, and the need to survive is reactive and is also a resource that keeps the child engaged in life. Clark's reference to "a starvation of nurture"<sup>118</sup> in poverty and abuse, the extreme of not being listened to, is grounds for a devastating trauma to the soul—which includes a block to or an eradication of healthy trust and a numbing of the emotions and body senses. Her drama work with the abused children and the women in jail invigorates their traumatized, numbed bodies, physically and emotionally. The "feeling your cells come alive" that Clark describes is the sensation of the trauma-numbed body restoring itself in creative acts through the

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<sup>117</sup> Rachel E. Goldsmith and Jennifer J. Freyd, "Effects of Emotional Abuse in Family and Work Environments: Awareness for Emotional Abuse," *Journal of Emotional Abuse* 5:1(2005): 100, accessed October 31, 2018 <https://dynamic.uoregon.edu/jjf/articles/gf05.pdf> (as quoted in Ross, *Indigenous Healing*, 110.)

<sup>118</sup> Clark, "Creativity," 188.

communal naming and the physical processing of the abuse. Clark described theatre work as “about being totally inside the body, reclaiming your own body.”<sup>119</sup> Her experience raises the question, what is the soul and how is it involved with the mind, the emotions, and the body?

### Understanding the Soul

*Is the soul solid, like iron? . . .  
Who has it, and who doesn't? . . .  
What about the grass?* <sup>120</sup> – Mary Oliver

#### *The Mystery of the Soul*

There has not been any scientific proof of the existence of human souls.<sup>121</sup> However, Indigenous peoples around the world, philosophers and major world religions continue to advocate for the presence of souls in our living bodies and as an entity after death. An exploration of the soul as it is understood in the lives and minds of believers is a movement into the mystery of soul and in its relationship to not being listened to in an incarcerated woman's life. What is it and how is the soul connected to the mind, body and emotions?

Cameron Diaz's comprehensive 2014 lifestyle publication for women, *The Body Book*, illustrates one contemporary view of the soul though she does not use the term. That said, she does discuss the reality of the mind-body connection and the importance of

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<sup>119</sup> Clark, “Creativity,” 187-192.

<sup>120</sup> Mary Oliver, “Some Questions You Might Ask” *New and Selected Poems: Volume One* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992), 65. For the complete poem online please see <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1990-09-23-bk-1854-story.html>.

<sup>121</sup> Brent Swancer, “The Hard Road to Evidence of a Human Soul,” *Mysterious Universe*, March 10, 2018, accessed November 26, 2018, <https://mysteriousuniverse.org/?s=the+hard+road+to+evidence+of+a+Human+soul>.

quiet listening to the body's signals and the voices of the mind—which, she says, come itself; it whispers to us that we are incapable, just because it's afraid."<sup>122</sup> The true self speaks "only the truth," and "not only do we need to listen to that voice, but we must honor it."<sup>123</sup> Might the true voice that Diaz honours and experiences be connected to the soul?

#### *A Traditional Definition of Soul*

According to Suzanne Noffke in *The Catholic Dictionary of Spirituality* the soul is "the human individual's inherent capacity for selfhood, self-awareness, and subjectivity, the principle of human knowing and responsible freedom."<sup>124</sup> Diaz's true self fits this description and so the soul (for someone not willing to acknowledge the soul) can be considered a voice within the mind and body. There is more to the concept of soul, however—much more.

Thomas Moore, psychologist and former monk connects the soul to our imagination.

Tradition teaches that soul lies midway between understanding and unconsciousness, and that its instrument is neither the mind nor the body, but imagination. . . .

Fulfilling work, rewarding relationships, personal power, and relief from symptoms are all gifts of the soul. They are particularly elusive in our time because we don't believe in the soul and therefore give it no place in our hierarchy of values. We have come to know soul only in its complaints: when it stirs, disturbed by neglect and abuse, and causes us to feel its pain.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Cameron Diaz and Sandra Bark, *The Body Book: The Law of Hunger, the Science of Strength and Other Ways to Love Your Amazing Body* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2015), 216.

<sup>123</sup> Diaz and Bark, *The Body Book*.

<sup>124</sup> Suzanne Noffke, "Soul" in *The Catholic Dictionary of Spirituality* ed. Michael Downey, 908-910 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 908.

<sup>125</sup> Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life* (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1992), xiii.

His description fits with the lived experience of traumatized women, certainly and our imagination is partnered with the human mind.

Psychologist Larry Culliford in *Psychology Today* differentiates soul from spirit: “the spiritual self (or soul) is to be thought of as personal, and the spiritual dimension (or Holy Spirit) is universal. Soul has an independent quality. Spirit is what holds things together.”<sup>126</sup> Ronald Rolheiser, Oblate priest and contemporary theologian, attributes both of these functions to the soul.

What is a soul, and how can it be lost? Since a soul is immaterial and spiritual, it cannot be pictured. We have to use abstract terms to try to understand it. Going back to Aristotle, philosophers have tended to define the soul as a double principle inside every living being: for them, the soul is both the principle of life and energy inside us as well as the principle of integration. In essence, the soul is two things: it’s the fire inside us giving us life and energy, and it’s the glue that holds us together. While that definition sounds abstract, it’s anything but that, because we have firsthand experience of what this means. . . .

Our vitality and energy can die or we can become unglued and fall apart—petrification or dissipation—in either case we lose our souls.<sup>127</sup>

One more piece in the soul puzzle, comes via a neuro-scientist in his investigation and theories of body, mind and self—in that order.

Damasio offers an evolutionary history of the brain and human consciousness and explains how the “self” came to the mind in several stages over time.<sup>128</sup> He also posits that organisms had adaptive behaviours and interactions before they had brains and minds, which speaks to the body’s emotional memory and its ability to function

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<sup>126</sup> Larry Culliford, “Spirituality for Beginners 8: Soul and Spirit,” *Psychology Today*, June 14, 2012, accessed October 20, 2018, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/spiritual-wisdom-secular-times/201206/spirituality-beginners-8-soul-and-spirit>.

<sup>127</sup> Ronald Rolheiser, *Wrestling with God: Finding Hope and Meaning in our Daily Struggles to be Human* (New York, NY: Image Penguin Random House LLC, 2018), 24-25.

<sup>128</sup> Damasio, *The Self Comes to Mind*.

independently of a conscious mind or a self. Perhaps the soul has its beginnings in this intelligent life energy that preceded the self?

### *The Soul Before and Beyond the Self*

The founders of a heart-centered hypnotherapy Diane Zimmeroff and David Hartman, independent researchers, write at length on trauma and the soul. Their work is based on their Jungian-informed psychotherapy practices.<sup>129</sup> They draw on descriptions of the soul that stretch back in time somewhat like Damasio's neuroscience perspective, but with an esoteric twist.

One way to envision the soul is as the luminous energy field that envelops and organizes the physical body, acting as buffer and filter. "This energy field has existed since the beginning of time, and it will endure throughout infinity, crafting new physical bodies lifetime after lifetime. It molds and shapes our body, and it predisposes us to meet the people we'll work with and marry, along with the crises and opportunities we'll encounter in our lives." (quoting Alberta Villoldo, medical anthropologist in *Mending the Past and Healing the Future with Soul Retrieval*, 2005).

There is an obvious challenge to knowing the soul with the conscious everyday mind. "The soul has its own set of rules, which are not the same as those of life. Unlike the steady progress of history, for instance, the events of the soul are cyclic and repetitive. Familiar themes come round and round. The past is more important than the future. The living and the dead have equal roles. Emotions and the sense of meaning are paramount. Pleasures are deep, and pain can reach the very foundations of our existence. . . . The soul doesn't evolve or grow, it cycles and twists, repeats and reprises, echoing ancient themes common to all human beings. It is always circling home. . . ." [quoting Thomas Moore's website Daily OM, "Original Self."]

If pain can reach the very foundations of our existence, then the incarcerated woman's foundations are cut into deeply. A contemporary and self-described

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<sup>129</sup> David Hartman and Diane Zimmeroff, "Soul Migrations: Traumatic and Spiritual" *Heart-Centered Therapies* 9: 1, 2006, 3-96, accessed October 29, 2018, [http://cdn2.hubspot.net/hub/213128/file-2133485071-pdf/docs/Journal\\_9-1\\_Soul\\_Migrations.pdf](http://cdn2.hubspot.net/hub/213128/file-2133485071-pdf/docs/Journal_9-1_Soul_Migrations.pdf).

Soul practitioner's experience of the healthy soul's function correlates with  
Zimberoff and Hartman's.

*Soul Power and Stretching the Mind*

Taoist and spiritual healer Dr. Zhi Gang Sha describes occasions during his retreats in the last fifteen years when the Divine or the Holy Spirit made its presence known and spoke with him. He heard this Holy voice in his soul and took their lively exchange (during a scheduled teaching session!) to heart. A medical doctor and certified in Chinese medicine, Sha took a step further into caring for the sick. He became a servant of the Divine, spreading the healing and teaching principles of love, gratitude, and forgiveness for all the world.<sup>130</sup>

For Sha, defining the soul draws on a culmination of thousands of years of Chinese spiritual insights he gained through his training in several body and martial arts. He says in one of his many books, "A human's soul is a golden light being. To see a soul, you must open your spiritual eye, which is named the Third Eye. Then you will see clearly that every human being has a golden light being inside his or her body. There are seven main areas where a human's soul can sit."<sup>131</sup> These are the seven chakras, well-known to those familiar with Eastern spiritual traditions. Sha's "seeing" with the third eye is a spiritual seeing, involving a spiritual tuning in to what is not seen necessarily with the physical eye. Such seeing is not foreign to Christian teachings.

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<sup>130</sup> Zhi Gang Sha, "Love Peace Harmony in Thailand," YouTube video 3:04, August 13, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDNrQFJm4cA>.

<sup>131</sup> Zhi Gang Sha, *The Power of Soul: The Way to Heal, Rejuvenate, Transform, and Enlighten All Life* (New York, NY: Atria Books, 2009), 1.



Cynthia Bourgeault, contemporary Christian theologian, describes the ancient concept of the heart as a spiritual eye, rather than a centre for the emotions.

According to the great wisdom traditions of the West (Christian, Jewish, Islamic), the heart is first and foremost *an organ of spiritual perception*. Its primary function is to look beyond the obvious, the boundaried surface of things, and see into a deeper reality, emerging from some unknown profundity, which plays lightly upon the surface of this life without being caught there: a world where meaning, insight, and clarity come together in a whole different way. . . . What [faith] really designates is not a leaping into the dark (as so often misconstrued) but a subtle seeing in the dark, a kind of spiritual night vision that allows one to see with inner certainty that the elusive golden thread glimpsed from within actually does lead somewhere.<sup>132</sup>

That inner certainty can take time and effort to develop. Henri Nouwen, renowned professor and a man who lived the last years of his life in Toronto with the L'Arche community for adults with intellectual disabilities, connects spiritual seeing with love.

If prayer were just an intelligent exercise of our mind, we would soon become stranded in fruitless and trivial inner debates with God. If, on the other hand, prayer would involve only our heart, we might soon think that good prayers consist of good feelings. But the prayer of the heart in the most profound sense unites mind and heart in the intimacy of the divine love.<sup>133</sup>

Spiritual directors also appeal to the ear of their loving heart to open to their directees' souls.

Sha names several characteristics of the human soul which flourish within that sincere love. It is intelligent, emotional, wise, cognizant of the past, flexible, able to share with other souls, powerful, healing, inquisitive, able to anticipate, eternal, and he says that it can move within the universe. He takes the discussion of seeing and the human soul

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<sup>132</sup> Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2016), 54.

<sup>133</sup> Henri J. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 146.

further. He differentiates the body's soul from the individual souls of the body's primary organs. For Sha, these souls are "separate but united. They are separate because they are independent. They are united because they reside in the same body and communicate with one another."<sup>134</sup> These energies of soul compatibly co-exist within the human body. Speaking within this paradigm, I wonder whether the weakening of the human soul during trauma events affects the function of the other soul life of organs active in the body?

Blackfoot friends, indigenous to Canada's plains, have explained to me that they routinely call their "shadow" when they depart from a place. Or, when they are in a dangerous situation, they tell it to stay near. They also comment that certain substances like alcohol or frightening situations can make their mind/body/soul vulnerable to an intrusion of other spirits. Their practice of calling their personal spirits close reinforces the concept of the soul as flexible with and beyond the body.

### *The Body in the Soul*

Richard Rohr, a contemplative Franciscan priest and promoter of the Cosmic Christ (a universal and eternal Spirit of all love), says, "The body is in the soul. It is both the place of contact and the place of surrender."<sup>135</sup> The body is active within the soul even as the soul activates the body. This principle is also rooted in Jewish teachings.

Judaism teaches that the body and soul are separate yet indivisible partners in human life. Rather than imprisoning or corrupting the soul, the body is a God-

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<sup>134</sup> Sha, *Power of Soul*, 4.

<sup>135</sup> Rohr, Richard, *What the Mystics Know: Seven Pathways to Your Deeper Self*, New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2015, 1.

given tool for doing sacred work in the world. It requires protection, care and respect, because it is holy.<sup>136</sup>

Christians have believed the body to be less holy than the soul i.e. the flesh is prone to sin and the soul is pure, but Noffke's contemporary description of the Christian soul disputes that long held belief. She explains that the body and soul are one.

There is, however, no biblical base for the dichotomy between soul and body that very early began to characterize Christian thinking under the influence of Platonism. In this respect, modern anthropology is nearer to biblical thought than the intervening nineteen centuries of Christian tradition. . . .

An integrated spirituality cannot address the soul without addressing bodiliness as essential to humanness and holiness. Pauline and Johannine themes of opposition between "spirit" and "flesh" need to be reclaimed in their original intent, rescued from a flawed tradition that identified "flesh" with everything physical rather than with all that is not filled with, and driven by, the Spirit of God.<sup>137</sup>

Not being listened to affects the soul negatively. Its physical repercussions in the body preclude healthy activities of the soul.

#### *Soul-Divine Communication*

Noffke's "Spirit of God" refers to a universal presence within Creation, in existence from all time. For the last two thousand years, most Christians have understood the Holy Spirit as Jesus of Nazareth's resurrected soul. This man's spirit was transformed through death that it might be shared with followers after his resurrection from the dead. They received it as a peace, as a spiritual fire. In turn, they then passed on the Holy Spirit to new comers of the Christian faith through the rite of baptism and the laying on of their

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<sup>136</sup> MJL, "Body and Soul: Indispensable partners for doing life's sacred work," My Jewish Learning: Beliefs and Practices, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com>, 2002-2018 (accessed October 17, 2018).

<sup>137</sup> Noffke, "Soul," 910.

hands i.e. prayerfully invoking Christ while touching a person. The Holy Spirit boosts and revives souls and facilitates communication with the Divine.

Christians have continued to converse with the Divine since the time of Christ. Saul in the Acts of the Apostles, though not a believer, heard the voice of Christ call his name and was inspired to write many of the letters in the Christian scriptures. In the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, Julian of Norwich in England documented several visions she received on what she thought at the time was her deathbed. She gives what was for her a surprisingly loving account of the nature of the resurrected Christ. She “saw plainly that our Lord was never angry.”<sup>138</sup> Sha’s visions reiterate this sentiment in the one he calls Divine. His chants and exercises emphasize gratitude and forgiveness.<sup>139</sup>

A couple of hundred years after Julian, Saint Teresa of Avila (Spanish mystic, author, and reformer of her Carmelite religious order) wrote of her intimate relationship with Christ: “I was greatly distressed by many things which arose to disturb me. But the Lord [Christ Jesus] said to me then: “What are you afraid of? Do you not know that I am all-powerful? I will fulfil my promises to you.”<sup>140</sup> William A. Barry, a Jesuit priest (following in the steps of St. Ignatius of Loyola active in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century) says of such holy communication which takes place in modern times, “Most people who walk with Jesus in this contemplative way come to realize that following him is demanding and

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<sup>138</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love: Translated into Modern English and with an Introduction by Clifton Wolters* (Markham, ON: Penguin Books, 1966), 133.

<sup>139</sup> Sha, *The Power of Soul*.

<sup>140</sup> Teresa of Ávila, trans. J. M. Cohen, *The Life of Saint Teresa of Ávila by Herself* (New York, NY: Viking Penguin Inc., 1957), 184.

challenging. He promises nothing but his friendship and a share in his project.”<sup>141</sup> For me, his “project” is loving all humans—all reminiscent of Sha’s commitment to serve.

*The Soul in all Creation: Identifying with the Natural World*

Sha sees souls in animals and all life. Reminiscent of St. Francis of Assisi’s affinity for speaking with animals and calling the sun, “brother” and the moon, “sister,” Sha says,

An animal’s soul has the power to heal, rejuvenate, and transform life. The souls of the sun, the moon, and ocean, a tree, and a mountain have the power to heal, rejuvenate, and transform life. The souls of healing angels, ascended masters, holy saints, Taoist saints, Hindu saints, buddhas, and other high-level spiritual beings have great Soul Power to heal, rejuvenate, and transform life.<sup>142</sup>

Traditional Indigenous peoples commune with Creator through the sacred spirits in all Creation.<sup>143</sup> First Nations peoples who practice traditional ways continue to recognize animated spirits in nature and see the land as a source of wisdom. For millennia, they have continued in the way of their ancestors who

made no distinction between the natural world and the spiritual one, believing that the world around them was governed by a panoply of spirits. Accordingly, they sought the good will and help of these powers by showing them respect through a variety of public and private ritual practices. They were assisted in some of these rites by persons who had special powers to commune with the spirit world.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> William Barry, *A Friendship Like No Other: Experiencing God’s Amazing Embrace* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2008), 61.

<sup>142</sup> Sha, *The Power of Soul*, xvii-xviii.

<sup>143</sup> Don Hill, “Listening to Stones, Learning in Leroy Little Bear’s Laboratory: Dialogue in the World Outside,” *Alberta Views: The Magazine for Engaged Citizens* (September 1, 2008), accessed October 24, 2018, <https://albertaviews.ca/listening-to-stones/>.

<sup>144</sup> Arthur Ray, *I Have Lived Here Since the World Began: An Illustrated History of Canada’s Native People* (Toronto: Lester Publishing Limited and Key Porter Books, 1996), 31-32.

My Blackfoot acquaintances speak of the “medicine” which animals communicate through their presence. In my SD office, birds and animals who come to the window or cross a directee’s path communicate, through their habits and colours, certain values and characteristics necessary for healthy living. They share their medicine and are a sign of a Divine Presence interested and engaged.

The grammar in the Potawatomi language illustrates the traditional teachings of animate and powerful spirits in *all* the natural world. Robin Wall Kimmerer describes the animate case in her traditional tongue.

To whom does our language extend the grammar of animacy? Naturally, plants and animals are animate, but as I learn, I am discovering that the Potawatomi understanding of what it means to be animate diverges from the list of attributes of living beings we all learned in Biology 101. In Potawatomi 101, rocks are animate, as are mountains and water and fire and places. Beings that are imbued with spirit, our sacred medicines, our song, drums, and even stories, are all animate. The list of the inanimate seems to be smaller, filled with objects that are made by people. Of an inanimate being, like a table, we say, “What is it?” And we answer *Dopwen yewe*. Table it is. But of apple, we must say, “Who is that being?” and reply *Msimin yawe*. Apple that being is. . . . The language reminds us, in every sentence, of our kinship with all of the animate world.<sup>145</sup>

This kinship continues to this day as an available, traditional source of strength for Indigenous peoples emerging from the devastation of the Canadian and American governments’ policies of genocide (and their continued legacy) which were implemented through acts of violence, racist laws, and the residential school systems. Richard Wagamese demonstrated how soul rejuvenation took place in his life through a sacred relationship with Creation through rituals and by reclaiming and speaking his traditional

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<sup>145</sup> Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 55-56.

language.<sup>146</sup> There is little or no access to the responsive ear of nature in most jails which, by the rules above, would be inanimate in Indigenous grammar, and so, soulless.

*The Moveable Soul: Body and Emotion*

Clark's experience is that the soul can be fragmented during trauma and restored through *creating*. Her reference to the removal (the soul fleeing) and replenishment (the body's cells returning to life) are reminiscent of the body's banking of bids and insufficient resources after registering a partner's body turning away. The body naturally responds well to healthy relationships, like the dormant plant life in the desert springing up after a good rain. What Clark witnessed was that the women's souls were enlivened through the theatre work.

Theatre for me is all about heart and soul, about arrivals at places that can only be navigated by heart and soul. Theatre is all about "humanness" and my work has taken me to an understanding of how potent the act of creating is—not only for finding connectedness as humans but also for survival.<sup>147</sup>

People are numbed emotionally when the soul fragments. The body is limited by this fragmentation of the life source. Women who write and act from the pain of their past attend to what is buried within their hearts and become aware that something is missing. The act of creating is potent. This creative route has proven successful in rejuvenating the women and in stirring up their awareness of a self that has been pushed away as a protective measure. Women in writing circles are encouraged to write spontaneously and honestly about themselves.<sup>148</sup> They also exercise their voices (an emotion invoking use of

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<sup>146</sup> Richard Wagamese, *One Story, One Song* (Vancouver, BC: D&M Publishers Inc., 2011); Richard Wagamese, *One Native Life* (Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 2008).

<sup>147</sup> Clark, "Creativity," 187.

<sup>148</sup> Lamb, *Couldn't Keep It to Myself*; Redmond and Bartlett, *Hear Me, See Me*.

the body) and articulate their pain by reading their poems and prose aloud to a non-judgmental group.<sup>149</sup> In addition, the women in Clark's group get in touch with their bodies through movement and dramatic vocal expression.

However, there is something more to Clark's description. The body is reclaimed; the self may be discovered or rediscovered in the creative act of telling their stories, but she mentions another possible recovery method—soul retrieval. She recalls that the plays' scripts often reference leaving the body—"fly away, numb myself . . . I must leave myself, must never enter my body." The voice crying out in this case may be the soul, hanging on, but largely absent.

### *Dissociative Disorder*

In modern psychology, a dissociative disorder is the term for such an event. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) lists the following symptoms and signs as belonging to a dissociative disorder.

- Significant memory loss of specific times, people and events
- Out-of-body experiences, such as feeling as though you are watching a movie of yourself
- Mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and thoughts of suicide
- A sense of detachment from your emotions, or emotional numbness
- A lack of self-identity<sup>150</sup>

NAMI also lists the prescribed treatments for dissociative disorder: medication, psychotherapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and dialectical behavioural therapy (DBT) (which includes mindfulness) and eye movement desensitization and

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<sup>149</sup> Redmond and Bartlett, *Hear Me, See Me; What I Want my Words to do to You*, Ensler; Lamb, *I'll Fly Away*.

<sup>150</sup> "Dissociative Disorders," National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), accessed October 15, 2018, <https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Dissociative-Disorders>.



reprocessing (EMDR).<sup>151</sup> All of these directives address the consciousness of a person and/or the unconscious mind.

“Soul retrieval” however, is a spiritual approach, in which the therapist interacts with the soul directly. These practices reveal much about the characteristics of the soul and how it might be susceptible to the trauma of not being listened to.

### *Shamanic Psychology and Soul Retrieval*

Sandra Ingerman, a psychologist practicing shamanic methodology, retrieves and restores soul matter to the patient. Author of *Soul Retrieval: Mending the Fragmented Self*, she defines the human soul as “our essence, life force, the part of our vitality that keeps us alive and thriving.”<sup>152</sup> This definition, applied to incarcerated women whose souls have fragmented or separated from their bodies, suggests that the affected person may be alive, but they are not necessarily thriving or creating. Ingerman’s approach is to

[go] into an altered state of consciousness and travel outside of time into the hidden realms that many term non-ordinary. [She sees] non-ordinary reality as a parallel universe to ours. The Australian aborigines call non-ordinary the Dreamtime. It is also referred to as the Other World in Celtic traditions. . . . Scientific study has found that when we are in an ordinary state of consciousness our brain waves are in a beta state. But when the shaman or shamanic practitioner listens to a rhythmic or monotonous drum beat, the brain waves slow down, first to an alpha state, which is a light, meditative state of consciousness, and then into a deeper state called the theta state. And that’s the state that allows the shaman’s free soul to journey into the invisible worlds having access to helping spirits.<sup>153</sup>

In this practice, the “helping spirits” are key to the retrieval of the lost soul or true self.

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<sup>151</sup> “Dissociative Disorders,” National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), accessed October 15, 2018, <https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Dissociative-Disorders>.

<sup>152</sup> Sandra Ingerman, “The Power of Shamanism to Heal Emotional and Physical Illness,” accessed October 11, 2018, <http://www.sandraingerman.com/sandrasarticles/abstractonshamanism.html>.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

In light of Clark's observations and Ingerman's work, the soul appears substantially more than an aspect of the mind and is linked to the true self. The soul can separate from the body, subsist in a "non-ordinary reality" and be returned through an intervention. Another factor of trauma and the human body which Rolheiser referred to as fire, is energy. Sha recognizes the soul as golden light, also a description of energy.

Jean Chagnon, another psychologist/shaman mentions energy in her description of healing for the same traumatized condition. She describes working with clients who were abused as children and notes their blocks to soul wellness.

[S]hamans help people reconnect with their true self. This is done by helping people eliminate what disrupts the flow of the true self and returning parts of the true self that have been lost.

For these reasons, working to heal the impact of abuse, trauma, and violence—an experience that initially has a profound negative impact on the soul—is work that shamans have done for centuries. . . .

However, translating ancient techniques to the realities of modern practice can be a challenge for contemporary shamanic practitioners. This is especially true when working with clients who have a history of childhood abuse. Current psychological research has shown that the experience of childhood abuse is a qualitatively different experience than trauma experienced later in life. Abuse suffered in childhood interrupts the normal developmental process that almost always results in the fracturing of a child's emotional, energetic and spiritual body.<sup>154</sup>

Chagnon's description of the soul fracturing through trauma is more than the onset of shame (a belief in the mind that "I am bad"). The final three words in this quote describe the soul: emotional, energetic and spiritual. When an incarcerated woman is not listened to, these three human qualities suffer.

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<sup>154</sup> Jean Chagnon, "Medicine for the Soul in the Wake of Abuse" Essential Wellness website accessed October 15, 2018, <http://www.esswellness.com/new/newsiten.aspx?newsid=1017&newsitemid=9747>.

## *Healing and the Soul*

In *The Power of Soul*, Sha summarizes soul energy as a source of healing in world religions.

Every soul has its own frequency and power. Jesus had miraculous healing power. We have heard many heart-touching stories of lives saved by Guan Yin's [Bodhisattva of Compassion] compassion. Mother Mary's love has created many heart-moving stories. All of these great souls were given Divine Soul Power to serve humanity. In all of the world's great religions and spiritual traditions, including Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, and more, there are similar accounts of great spiritual healing and blessing power.

I honor every religion and every spiritual tradition. However, I am not teaching religion. I am teaching Soul Power, which includes soul secrets, soul wisdom, soul knowledge, and soul practices. Your soul has the power to heal, rejuvenate, and transform life.<sup>155</sup>

That power to heal is a loving energy associated with creativity and with selfless gestures.

According to Sha's communication with the Divine, to the degree one's soul shares, it also receives a proportional gift of blessing.<sup>156</sup> (Similar to the Christian teaching in Luke 6:38).

## *A Summary of Soul*

When I consider the meaning of the soul, in light of all these explanations, what rings true for me, a spiritual healer in the power of Christ of both emotional and physical ailments, and a spiritual director, is that the soul is a life-giving energy which infuses the body and is present at the cellular level. Sha says that there is soul in the DNA and the RNA.<sup>157</sup> Damasio maintains that physical beings manifest adaptable behaviours in the body in the absence of a brain. This is a level of soul energy, and when increased, can

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<sup>155</sup> Sha, *The Power of Soul*, xvii.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., xix.

<sup>157</sup> Sha, *The Power of Soul*.

transfer light or heat to another, while maintaining its unique identity. It is through this energy that the Divine communicates and that healing and the power of the Holy Spirit move through the body from one person to another. The soul is vibrant, not stagnant and carries the source of life which can connect with all nature and be refashioned after death.

The soul is also susceptible to fragmentation through trauma and abuse. An incarcerated woman's lived experience of not being listened to involves the decrease of soul energy sometimes to the degree that a significant amount of soul matter leaves the body and thereby hinders the expression of emotion and one's freedom to respond to life. Repetitive acts of not being listened to also have the effect of depleting one's soul energy.

An incarcerated woman's soul can be fed in several ways: by creative acts especially in a loving, accepting community which can accumulate and be stored within the body/mind; by shamanic soul retrieval; by the First Nations practice of becoming one with the land; by reclaiming one's mother tongue as an Indigenous woman; through spiritual healing prayer with another; and through other practices demonstrated by leaders in world religions such as yoga.

The body and the soul are intertwined, but the body responds to not being listened to in distinctive ways. Creativity through writing, speech, naming of feelings and body work can all aid in the appropriate release of painful memories and reinvigorate the soul.

### Ramifications of an Incarcerated Woman's Not Being Listened To

#### *The Anecdote Released*

The power of making a narrative in the women's plays and the energy which is awakened through their creative writing, are highly significant for the playwright, actress, and author. It is a process of putting their hurt in front of an audience and so disclosing

the phenomenon of not being listened to. Even as self-discovery and healing accompany the process, there is an uncomfortable, even anxious resonance. The dynamic of not being listened to upsets a broader audience. Listeners identify with the abusive, marginalized history of these women in the prose and poetry of their books, the documentaries of their lives in jail, and their lives portrayed on stage.

Creativity is a life-giving venture for the traumatized woman as it stimulates the healing of the soul. Redmond and Bartlett comment, “Just as these women work toward their potential by reclaiming lost parts of themselves, the larger society, in order to evolve to its fullest potential, must hear and receive the voices of its most marginalized members.”<sup>158</sup> Listeners who pause, who patiently attend to someone’s story encourage the soul-body relationship in the speaker. The soul which experienced a death blow in being shut up, shunned and abused receives from the responsive, creating body and the empathy of the listener the gift of revitalizing soul energy.

Emotions can be recalled with the mind (Shaughnessy), attended and listened to in the body (Gendlin), mapped by the brain (Damasio), and stored in the body (Sternberg). They are one way to detect the health of the soul. The pain of not being listened to is complex and manifested deeply within the human being, body, mind, and soul. One emotional response to trauma is soul fragmentation or dissociation. It is within these aspects of being human that the phenomenon of not being listened to in an incarcerated woman might be named.

What are the ramifications if the women’s stories go unheard, not listened to? Jill Stauffer’s inquiry into the unheard stories of traumatized people suggests a significant

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<sup>158</sup> Redmond and Bartlett, *Hear Me, See Me*, 12.

negative effect on society. How the untold stories of an increasing number of jailed women could impact our society remains to be seen.

Transformation can take place when the women's stories surface and reach the hearts and souls of people who care. The listener's horizon has the potential to shift when they recognize the other's lived experience alive within themselves. This is one goal of the philological methodology outlined in Chapter Three.

### 3: Methodology

#### Introduction

##### *SD Listening: An Entry Point*

Not being listened to is a human lived experience and a phenomenon especially poignant in the lives of incarcerated women—women painfully silenced by trauma. How might my skills as a spiritual director, deeply listening to incarcerated women’s sharing of their lived moments of not being listened to, become wisdom for others?

In 2013, I attended a doctoral level course in phenomenological methods with educator Max van Manen and three of his colleagues. The course work was based largely on van Manen’s (then unpublished) book *Phenomenology of Practice*. Many of his ideas and suggestions for interviewing and writing phenomenologically resonated with me, a practicing spiritual director, a prayerful mystic, and lover of poetry. My research methods flow from this fresh teaching.

##### *Phenomenological Perspective*

Phenomenology, according to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a twentieth century French philosopher, is not a science. He says that it is

the study of essences, and it holds that all problems amount to defining essences, such as the essence of perception or the essence of consciousness. And yet phenomenology is also a philosophy that places essences back within existence and thinks that the only way to understand man (sic) and the world is by beginning from their ‘facticity.’<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2012), 8.

Facticity implies the practical or the real thing, and while philosophers are not necessarily researchers, van Manen encourages an investigative phenomenology, which informs and expands the knowledge base of what it means to be human.

I approach my listening practice, especially with traumatized directees, with this present research. What does not being listened to mean essentially, as a moment in time, felt and creatively considered and reflected upon? This moment occurs prior to any reflections, judgments, or opinions. A philological<sup>160</sup> expression of a lived experience stimulates the reader to broaden their experience of the phenomenon, to take a qualitative magnifying glass to the essence, to see into its subtle character, and how it resonates in the world.

Phenomenology's purpose reminds me of an environmental art exhibit I attended in Germany, the retrospective show of the married artists, Christo (Vladimirov Javacheff) and Jeanne-Claude (Dana de Guillebon). The exhibit featured films, photographs and artifacts of the artistic wrapping of monumental, everyday sites and locations around the world. People had come to take them for granted as their everyday surroundings: bridges, trees, buildings, islands, pathways, etc. The gigantic textile wrapping forced those passing by and the world to take another look at the shapes of things around them and to challenge the meaning and their perception of those landmarks or familiar structures. Phenomenology suggests we take a second look to understand more deeply, that which is everyday and not necessarily paid attention to.

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<sup>160</sup> Van Manen in *Phenomenology of Practice*, page 175, describes Georgio Agamben's philological writing as "stories [that] strive to capture the ineffables of living that the explanatory prose of philosophy is unable to express."



Poetic prose and punctum (a searing image or description which invites the viewer or reader into the essence of a phenomenon) are essential tools in philological writing as van Manen describes it. The well-crafted anecdote is one path to punctum. From Husserl and Heidegger to Merleau-Ponty and van Manen, the epoché and the reduction are understood as “the principle ‘method’ of phenomenology”<sup>161</sup> The epoché and the reduction (radical openness in mind, body, and spirit, and the bracketing of my biases to the best of my ability) are intrinsic to my engaging this phenomenological qualitative method as a researcher.

### *Bias and Objectivity*

What of the researcher’s subjectivity when applying the principles of openness and bracketing? Dr. William West, British psychologist, in his article on objectivity in qualitative research says, “critical subjectivity” should be the qualitative researcher’s goal.”<sup>162</sup> Bracketing who I am and my biases “is impossible” according to West’s findings. So how is the reduction to be realized in this research?

First, I state my biases as completely as I am able. I acknowledge that as an outsider, my view is limited by a lack of experience and coloured by my own perceptions. Second, I believe that more than the mind alone, the spiritual realm is involved in being truly open to another and to a lived experience. When I attend to the data with my spirit, I am open to surprises, to sharp turns in my assumptions, to paradigm shifts, and to specific challenges in my thinking. This open attitude is familiar to me from the SD room. Like

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<sup>161</sup> Van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice*, 219.

<sup>162</sup> William West “Research Report: Situating the Researcher in Qualitative Psychotherapy Research Around Spirituality,” *Counseling Psychology Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (June 2009): 193.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola, I am “willing to choose untraveled roads because [I] know that God will lead and sustain [me] along those roads.”<sup>163</sup> Third, I make no claims to describe a phenomenon definitively. This research is not about proving something, but about fleshing out an aspect of being human which has not yet been artfully reflected upon.

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<sup>163</sup> William A. Barry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins Publishers, 1982), 27.

### *Definitions*

The terms particular to this study and to phenomenology whose definitions may assist the reader are:

Anecdote: a short narrative, focused on a specific phenomenon of human lived experience and coming from first person testimony, from fiction or an edited combination thereof. It invokes in the reader the phenomenon it describes.<sup>164</sup>

Co-researcher: participants whose input is valued as more than data to be examined. In this research the comments and opinions of the women interviewed are sourced as expert opinions on what it means to be an incarcerated woman.

Incarcerated woman: a woman who has been held in police cells, remand, and/or has served time or is serving time in a provincial/state or federal correctional facility.

Lifeworld: Commonplace human existence which phenomenology investigates and describes.

Lived Experience: A moment of human experience lived through, prior to being considered, thought about or judged.

Listening: “The process of receiving, constructing meaning from and responding to spoken and/or non-verbal messages.”<sup>165</sup> (International Listening Association (ILA)).

Not listened to: A moment in human experience arising from having one’s attempts at speaking or spoken words being disregarded, ignored, turned away from, misinterpreted, misunderstood, shunned, neglected or rejected in any other way.

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<sup>164</sup> Van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice*.

<sup>165</sup> ILA website. <http://www.listen.org>, accessed November, 5, 2015.

Philology: A phenomenological written expression, which evokes what it describes.

## Research Design

### *Research Question*

What may be the lived experience of an incarcerated woman not being listened to? The “may” in this question indicates the nature of this research. Phenomenology searches for meaning in lived experience, but does not make definitive conclusions about what it describes. I cannot speak for others, but I venture near their lifeworld to find meaning within their narratives and to expand my own experience of a universal aspect of being human. Catherine A. Adams, phenomenology educator, describes a template of meaningful questions for opening up lived experiences of any kind.

Our lived experiences and the structures of meaning (theme) in terms of which these lived experiences can be described and interpreted constitute the immense complexity of the lifeworld. Existential themes that may prove especially helpful as guides for reflection in the research process are lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived human relation (relationality or communality). We can always ask about any experience the fundamental questions that correspond to such lifeworld existentials. Therefore, spatiality, corporeality, temporality, and relationality are productive categories for the process of phenomenological questioning, reflection and writing. Ordinary language is in some sense a huge reservoir in which the incredible variety of richness of human experience is deposited. The problem often is that these deposits have silted, crusted, or fossilized in such a way that the original contact with our primordial experience is broken.<sup>166</sup>

### *Data Collection*

Women who have been released from jail (at any time in their lives) met the criteria for being interviewed. I chose this population because their lives are rich in the

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<sup>166</sup> Catherine Alison Adams, “PowerPoint and the Pedagogy of Digital Media Technology,” (PhD diss. University of Alberta, Edmonton, 2008), 48-49, <http://www.maxvanmanen.com/MaPVZ/files/2014/10/Cathy-Adams-Digital-Media1.pdf>.

phenomenon of not being listened to. Van Manen calls this “purposive” sampling.<sup>167</sup>

Before contacting any women, I sought out numerous sources connected with corrections and qualitative research, online, by telephone, and in person. It became clear to me in my pilot project that, for reasons of confidentiality, permission for access, timing, and ease of recruiting participants, I had to interview women who had been released from jail.

To recruit co-researchers, I made several phone calls and sent emails to people who had expressed an interest in the research during its several years of gestation and then I handed out and left business cards and posters (presenting my research dedicated telephone number) to be placed in windows or on bulletin boards at some local businesses. The John Howard Society offered to take along a poster to show women at the jail, and I left posters at a transition home for First Nations women (See Appendix E). Several other posters I put up myself around the counseling department at the University of Lethbridge.

In the end, I collected the primary data through convenience sampling. Friends put me in touch with four of the five women who interviewed for this research in April and May of 2018. The women frequented my friends’ or my friends’ friends’ church and church drop-in centres. One woman whom I knew previously, spent one week in jail in April 2018. She saw my poster and volunteered to interview with me.

After connecting through email, one co-researcher texted me a time I could call her using my research telephone to set up an appointment in Calgary, as it turned out, at a quiet cafe. Another texting contact set up times for me to meet co-researchers at a Lethbridge drop-in centre where I could use offices made available to me over a two-day

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<sup>167</sup> Van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice*, 353.

period. A final interview was set up in person and we met on the porch of a private residence. The interviews were fifteen minutes to one hour long and most included two to four anecdotes of not being listened to from anytime within the women's lives. I digitally recorded them with both my research-dedicated cellphone and my personal cell phone set up on the table or desk. The latter was equipped with an external microphone, which provided high-quality recordings.

The five women who interviewed were aged twenty-three to fifty-six. One of the five identified as First Nations. She received from me an offering of sweet sage and traditional Blackfoot mint tea as a gesture of cultural respect for her time and her shared wisdom, in addition to a \$50 grocery card and thank-you letter (see Appendix D), which all the other co-researchers also received in appreciation. Another First Nations woman, nine months pregnant was willing to participate, but after seeing the prompt sheet and thinking about it overnight, declined an interview. No other women of colour interviewed with me. Four women described emotionally abusive treatment of not being listened to during childhood and one mentioned her living with the diagnosis of fetal alcohol syndrome. Two of the women mentioned having a college and/or university education. All of the women themselves had histories of alcohol and/or drug addiction and were in recovery at the time of their interviews.

The research project was located in southern Alberta, where more than one provincial correctional or remand institution for men and women operates. The secondary data has been gleaned from various texts of interviews with and writing authored by incarcerated women. The secondary data extends the geographical reach of the data throughout Canada and into the United States.

### *Sample Size/Rigour*

This study is a philological account of the phenomenon of an incarcerated woman's not being listened to. Although the primary interview sample of five seems small and appears, by quantitative research standards, to compromise rigour, it suffices.

According to van Manen the question to ask is,

How many examples of concrete experiential descriptions would be appropriate for this study in order to explore the phenomenological meanings of this or that phenomenon?" The answer does not depend on some logarithm or statistical criterion or on some formula of data saturation. Data saturation presumes that the researcher is looking for what is characteristic or the same about a social group of people or an ethnic culture. The researcher keeps collecting data until the analysis no longer reveals anything new or different about the group. But phenomenology looks not for sameness or repetitive patterns. Rather, phenomenology aims at what is singular and a singular theme or notion may only be seen once in experiential data. For example, a phenomenologist does not look for how many times a certain word is used by informants or how often a similar idea is expressed. In contrast, *a phenomenologist may actually look for that instant when an insight arises that is totally unique to a certain example (sample) of a lived experience*<sup>168</sup> [emphasis added].

I am confident that the samples and anecdotes in this research accurately reflect the singularity of the lived experience of an incarcerated woman's not being listened to. The phenomenon's singularity can be applied, to some degree, to any instance of not being listened to.

Van Manen's hallmarks of "high-quality phenomenological texts" are "heuristic questioning, descriptive richness, interpretive depth, distinctive rigor, strong and addressive meaning, experiential awakening, and inceptual epiphany."<sup>169</sup> The rigour of

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<sup>168</sup> Van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice*, 353.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 355.

my research depends on these qualities, which are especially evident in the phenomenological writing in chapters four through seven.

### *Ethical Procedures and Considerations*

The research design was approved by an ethics committee at St. Stephen's College on the University of Alberta campus in Edmonton, Alberta (see Appendix F) and renewed and updated accordingly. At the start of the interviews, all of the women were informed of the nature of the research as an academic study and were, along with my contact information, given the phone numbers of St. Stephen's Doctor of Ministry (DMin) chair and my supervisor as well as their email addresses, should they choose to withdraw from the study at any time. Together, we read through and then signed their letters of consent (see Appendix A). I wanted to give the Indigenous women the option<sup>170</sup> of using their own names in the transcripts. However, none of the women chose this option. It was also important to me that the women be comfortable in their surroundings and so, each location was a neutral or safe place, familiar to the co-researcher.

I was well aware of the possibility of the research question raising traumatic memories in the women. I have witnessed women's adverse reactions to sensitive material in my past. At some point prior to meeting with the women, I spent twenty minutes in silent prayer, which brought about a calm in my demeanor and which, I think, addressed any palpable nervousness in me. My approach during the interviews was to carefully prompt or pause when sensitive or painful memories came up. One spontaneous (and then a standard) question, "What colours come up for you with *being* and *not being*

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<sup>170</sup> Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Halifax, NB: Fernwood Publishing, 2008).



listened to?” encouraged four of the five women to answer positively. The fifth co-researcher did not recall a positive listening experience.

I believe that for one woman, actively grieving several recent deaths in her family, the interview was an opportunity for her to increase her awareness of the on-going nature of her grief. She aired her feelings and reflections and, from her comments afterward, my listening and her sharing seemed deeply therapeutic. Hers was the longest interview. Other women, too, received my empathic audience for their memories of past hurts and relationship struggles. Although I was seeking anecdotes of not being listened to, I did not limit their storytelling to that topic. One promise to the women on my posters was that they would be listened to.

### *Interviews*

Once comfortably seated, across from or at right angles to one another with a table or desk within reach, I began the open-ended, semi-structured interviews by showing each woman a sheet with “I remember” prompts (see Appendix B). The prompts evoked memories told in the first person and emphasized sharing their feelings and memories rather than an interpretation of the event. The wording also encouraged present tense descriptive narrative. I told the women that their “not being listened to” memories could come from childhood or any other period in their lives. This decision is in accordance with my phenomenological training with van Manen and company.

I prepared a qualitative interview instrument (see Appendix C), and used it especially for the start of the interviews, but took cues from the women’s narratives to prompt further. My stance as a researcher was to listen respectfully and at length. At the same time, I questioned the co-researchers for their descriptions of pre-reflective

experiences of the phenomenon. I was careful to observe their body language and to suggest honouring together, with moments of silence, any startling or tearful emotions that emerged. The content touched on painful memories and fortunately did not adversely trigger any of the women to bolt or emotionally erupt. My final question was whether they had anything else that they wanted to add.

### *Transcriptions*

I personally transcribed all the interviews using earbuds and a laptop computer. I then listened to each interview, one final time, from beginning to end, following along with the transcript to correct any errors. Once a transcript was complete, I erased that file on the cell phones. All data is stored on my personal laptop, and printed on coloured paper to differentiate one interviewee from another.

Four women received copies of their interviews sent by mail or personally delivered to the drop-in center. One woman had no fixed address and I will wait until we make contact to deliver her transcript. Each transcript was accompanied by a personalized cover letter, inviting the women to read it over and make any desired changes to the text by email or telephone. No changes were made.

### *Secondary Data Collection*

Further to the qualitative transcripts, my review of several volumes of women's writing and some published interviews with incarcerated women also produced anecdotal data. I read these volumes over the course of several years and, with corresponding page numbers, made notes in the books and on the computer of the passages which referred to being listened to and not being listened to. Later I recorded the pertinent quotations in a word processing file. Some anecdotes needed no editing. Most of these women were

incarcerated in the United States, but some collections were collected from Canadian women with lived experience of prison.<sup>171</sup>

### *Co-researchers' Comments*

Throughout this work, when relevant, I have also consciously quoted my co-researchers, incarcerated women (maintaining their anonymity with two letter code names), that their voices may be heard generally, and not only in the data and analysis that I present.

### *Limitations*

It is helpful to be reminded that phenomenological inquiry-writing is based on the idea that no text is ever perfect, no interpretation is ever complete, no explication of meaning is ever final, no insight is beyond challenge. It behooves us to remain as attentive as possible to the ways that all of us experience the world and to the infinite variety of possible human experiences and possible explications of those experiences.<sup>172</sup>

I am one person, one thinker, one writer limited by my life experience and aware that the swirl of emotion and action which settled into descriptive sentences of images in the analysis at my hand, are unique and particular to this study. The quality of the anecdotal material is also subjective. Therefore my perspective and ability limits the written phenomenological reflections. However, research standards of replicating results, typical in quantitative and some qualitative research, do not apply here.

The data might have been richer if

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<sup>171</sup> Tadman, *Fallen Angels: Inside Canada's Toughest Women's Prison*; Sinclair and Sorenson, *Honouring Our Voices*; The Elizabeth Fry Society of Edmonton, *Common Threads: Women Who have Been in Conflict Tell their Stories* (Edmonton, AB: The Elizabeth Fry Society of Edmonton, 1993).

<sup>172</sup> Max van Manen, "Phenomenological Inquiry is Practiced as Phenomenological Writing," *Phenomenology Online: A Resource for Phenomenological Inquiry*, last modified 2011, accessed July 30, 2018, <http://www.phenomenologyonline.com/inquiry/writing/>.

1) there were women interviewed who had not suffered emotional, physical or sexual child abuse (albeit, they represent a small minority among incarcerated women).

2) more Indigenous women were included. Their numbers are proportionally higher in Canadian jails, when compared to their representation in the general population. One of the five women identified as First Nations. Several attempts to recruit Indigenous women through word of mouth and posters placed in an Indigenous women's transition home were unsuccessful. My non-indigenous status may have affected the willingness of Indigenous women to participate.

### Data Analysis and the Process of Writing

#### *The Philological*

Phenomenological insight and writing are complex, and appeal to the whole self including the ethereal. According to van Manen the process works both philosophically and philologically. The lived experience filters through the senses, loaded with influential, remembered, personal experience, and through the mind's judgments, based on past learning, until it emerges in the phenomenologist's writing. The prose is a rendition of the lived experience that indeed evokes the phenomenon itself—the philological method.

As I transcribed all the interviews myself, I became very familiar with the women's voices and intonation. I then reviewed the transcripts, and marked all sections which were present tense anecdotes describing not being listened to. I edited the data by creating anecdotes according to van Manen's guidelines.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice*.

To begin the analysis I pondered the data, piece by piece in *lectio divina* style (four successive, meditative readings aloud: one for content, the second for meaning, the third for relevance to life and the fourth for added significance to rise up in me. Each reading is followed by several minutes of reflective silence). From that prayerful practice, poetry began to spring up in me. I then edited the poems over several months.

Often as I walked or rode my bicycle, insights into the context and meaning of the data came to me spontaneously (surprise being one of several steps in Lonergan's description of the process of insight<sup>174</sup>). One challenge for me was to correlate the reality of their lived experience with accurate, inspired prose, as Parker Palmer, spiritual writer, relates:

Every time I rewrite a piece, I'm driven by curiosity: what lies around the next bend of the road in this convoluted world, or in my own convoluted mind?

I'm often surprised by what I discover, and by the sense that it had been sitting there waiting for me to find it. . . . Here's a question at the heart of both writing and faith: As we explore reality with words or leaps of faith, are we discovering or inventing our findings? My best guess is that the answer is "Yes." That answer is important not only because I think it is true but also because I believe it can help keep us humble about our convictions. . . .

For a happy marriage between reality and words, reality must be honored with words that reveal its nature. Even the simplest realities won't reveal themselves if you use the wrong words—and even words that seem right won't reveal things that aren't there. As with any marriage, we try to meet in the middle, in "the place just right." Then we fall away from that place and have to work to get back there again. . . . I'm willing to commit conceptual suicide as often as necessary to get to a place where my words can have a live encounter with reality.<sup>175</sup>

For instance, an encounter with the text for me was to experience "feeling worthless." I sat with the anecdotes and let images arise in me. In that way, ideally, the Christ in me

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<sup>174</sup> Morelli and Morelli, *The Lonergan Reader*

<sup>175</sup> Palmer, Parker J., *On the Brink of Everything: Grace, Gravity & Getting Old*, (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc., 2018), 101-103.

emotionally empathizes with something of the women's pain and struggle. The women's own choices of stories and words describe powerful moments of feeling worthless. I internalized and synthesized these moments into poems using their words and editing for punctum.

One of van Manen's online resources relates that the writing process is a series of moments: "moments of seeking, entering, traversing, gazing, drawing and touching."<sup>176</sup> *Lectio divina* had the feeling of seeking, entering and gazing. Then the drawing occurred with the editing of the anecdotes and finally, the poetry processing, writing and reflections in prose amounted to touching. One anecdote and several found passages in the women's published writing did not draw forth any poetry in me and were, in their original form, poignant and evocative. I included this data in the format that it was found.

I enter into the mystery of all life when I listen, spirit attentive, over and over again to the narratives of these women and to my own body-mind-heart-soul response. In this way, the poems open to the women's emotional, physical, and soul experiences.

### Understanding the Epoché-Reduction

#### *The Philosophical*

Van Manen's recent text provides two chapters of methods: the philosophical (epoché and reduction or openness and bracketing) and philological (vocative, pertaining largely to the work of writing). This section highlights his extensive explanation of the epoché and reduction and the connections I make with it in my research approach i.e. how I have applied his ideas to my research methods.

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<sup>176</sup> Van Manen, "Phenomenological Inquiry is Practiced as Phenomenological Writing."

*Relating to the Epoché-Reduction and Reduction Proper*

Several points van Manen made regarding the philosophical epoché-reduction<sup>177</sup> stayed with me and were incorporated into how I carried out the research. My attitude was one of questioning with wonder what I have until now “understood”—to take a second look at this “knowledge” and name it. This act freed me to open to what had not yet been uncovered. For instance, PTSD, and various kinds of abuse have been well researched in the health and social sciences. While I am quite familiar with this knowledge, the phenomenologist in me had to let go of what has been stated as fact, and move beyond the science of trauma. I questioned heuristically. I pondered and waited on what had been silent and unnoticed, until its eventual emergence *from* the anecdotes, *through* me, and *into* the poems and prose. The *lectio divina* approach to exploring the data actually fanned it open piece by piece, so that the hidden crevasses of not being listened to, a phenomenon couched in the experience of abuse, could be opened in a methodical and powerful way.

During the pilot project I let go of several assumptions I had made, based on my reading e.g. the characteristics I had assigned to incarcerated women. My initial conclusions were inaccurate. My ‘knowing’ that jail was a place where women “lived” was corrected early on in the pilot project by Elizabeth Fry staff. Jail is not ‘home’ even when women live there for decades. Likewise, other characteristics I had assigned to incarcerated women—that jail was worse for them than life on the outside; that prison time was an unhelpful period in one’s life—fell away or were affirmed accordingly case by case—not predictably and so, erroneously when applied broadly.

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<sup>177</sup> Van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice*.

I also took time to explore my personal biases as van Manen's hermeneutic guidelines suggested (see pages 16 and forward,). My interview instrument sought out the prereflective experiences of not being listened to. I did not sway consciously the women's narratives with pointed questions related to my concept of what it means not to be listened to. Rather I prompted them to delve deeper into the experiences they recounted. Finally, *lectio divina*, combined with awareness, and appealing to the spiritual and the unconscious, promoted an inventive and a creative outcome with the data. The process of the epoché-reduction engaged my sacred work as a spiritual director with the role of phenomenologist.

Van Manen also speaks of varieties of the reduction-proper.<sup>178</sup> I can relate my research to his lengthy discussion in particular ways. What came to me, alive and fresh, in the *lectio divina* analysis was the matter or *eidos* of the phenomenon. In class we had assignments to write at length about the *whatness* of an object, to explore its meaning, as with new eyes. In addition, I appreciated the face-to-face experiences of meeting with and ethically listening to the stories of the women in a manner respectful of their past memories, each one a rich account of lived experience.

Van Manen holds up Levinas as the phenomenological mentor and trendsetter in the act of ethically meeting with others to allow the truth to come through and to speak responsibly and spontaneously. This gesture was accomplished, I feel, in my attitude as a spiritual director, generous in my listening, seeking an ethical encounter even as the phenomenon emerged.

To approach the Other in conversation is to welcome [her]  
expression, in which at each instant [*she*] overflows the idea a

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<sup>178</sup> Van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice*, 223-239.



thought would carry away from it. It is therefore to receive from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity. But it also means: to be taught.

— Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (gender change and emphasis added)<sup>179</sup>

There are social justice implications in this fringe population not being listened to and also, I met these women and listened with compassion, while accepting their person, one human being to another. Their presence overflowed heuristically.

Finally, so much of who I am and what I do is *dependent* on serendipity (like the convenience sampling). What is serendipity for van Manen lives out in my life as trust in God. I am inspired by the significant signs and meaningful moments which show up in my own and the lives of others. This research is alive with the energy of serendipity.

### Personal Bias

#### *Addressing Bias*

The French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty says that, “[t]he most important lesson of the reduction is the impossibility of a complete reduction.”<sup>180</sup> He reflects:

We witness, at each moment, this marvel that is the connection of experiences, and no one knows how it is accomplished better than we do, since we are this very knot of relations [Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s expression]. This world and reason are not problems; and though we might call them mysterious, this mystery is essential to them, there can be no question of dissolving it through some “solution,” it is beneath the level of solutions. True philosophy entails learning to see the world anew, and in this sense, an historical account might signify the world with as much “depth” as a philosophical treatise. We take our fate into our own hands *and through reflection we become responsible for our own history*, but this responsibility also comes from a decision to which we commit our lives; and

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<sup>179</sup> 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Goodreads Choice Awards 2018, “Emmanuel Levinas Quotes,” [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com), accessed November 19, 2018, [https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/1603038.Emmanuel\\_Levinas](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/1603038.Emmanuel_Levinas).

<sup>180</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xxvii.

in both cases it is a violent act whose truth is confirmed through its being performed (emphasis added).<sup>181</sup>

Can I hear something that is foreign to everything that I have previously perceived? How can I make sense of another's experience when it is emotionally foreign to me? Through conversions and ongoing transformation, my perspective and understanding can shift even as I take responsibility for my own story in this research.

*Who Am I?*

I am unabashedly a Christian and carry in me both the unusual love of Christ and the collective guilt of thousands of years of harmful actions of Christians who, for many reasons and rules, chose not to listen to the weak, to their own personal vulnerability, or to the power of Christ in the stranger and the outcast. Such closed hearts and blindness have plagued the Christian church and humbled me. Weakness is a paradoxical power, which I understand to be present in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Love expressed through his Spirit is vulnerable yet attractive, like an infant<sup>182</sup> and because of that quality, is capable of entering broken hearts, closed minds, and/or traumatized bodies.

I am encouraged by teachings from Blackfoot elders to be, as well as I am able, non-judgmental of the people I meet. I believe that I live in others and they abide in me, which is to say that the harm others do comes from a place that exists in me, too. In addition, I am accountable for the times I, and my ancestors, rather than listening lovingly, have insisted on our own way (1 Corinthians 13: 5). A horrific example is the

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., xxxv.

<sup>182</sup> Ronald Rolheiser, "God's Power as Powerlessness," [www.ronrolheiser.com](http://www.ronrolheiser.com), last modified January 30, 2017, accessed November 17, 2018, [http://ronrolheiser.com/gods-power-as-powerlessness/#.W\\_DYBCdRegQ](http://ronrolheiser.com/gods-power-as-powerlessness/#.W_DYBCdRegQ).

genocide of First Nations through the residential school policies in Canada. My accountability as a Christian is an exercise in humility.

I attribute my personal approach to life and to this research to several influences, which have been shaping me like a potter's hands: my family of origin—a privileged upbringing with five siblings (in which I came fourth), my father, my mother (who lived with schizophrenia most of her adult life and is now deceased); my heterosexual marriage of nearly forty years woven with the wonder, woes and growth through mothering, empty nesting and now a new found identity; witnessing the near deaths of all of those I love most and the death of my eldest brother in my early twenties; travelling the world including several continents with our young family; a lived experience of religious conversion and embracing mindfulness and mysticism in Christ (which has gifted me with a healing prayer practice for both physical and emotional illnesses); and finally, my post-graduate education—the grounded theory and ethnographic fieldwork, research and philosophical lessons of my Masters degree in the late 1990s and this nearly eight year academic journey in the D. Min. program. For twenty-five years of my life I have taken an active interest in imprisonment and the plight of men, women, and children in jail. This unasked for, but welcomed passion in me to learn from those who are incarcerated, in whom I believe Christ dwells, is the impelling force behind this research and its design.

However, I have not served time in jail, nor have I been traumatized by sexual assault or other physical abuse. I have lived through the trauma of my mother's mental illness, but also led a privileged life economically, racially and in my formal education. Drug addictions, although part of my family of origin, are not one of my personal trials. Therefore, I make no claims to understanding practically the lifeworld of the women I

interviewed and met vicariously, but I do feel confident that something of their experiences can be captured through writing poetically, phenomenologically, and by spiritually appealing to a universal Love found in all creation. In the spirit of trusting the unknown, I invite you, the reader, into the following rich description of what may be an incarcerated woman's not being listened to. Emotionality, corporality, spatiality, and relationality categorize and expand my reflections on their anecdotes of not being listened to. The varied emotional reactions of three heroines from Greek and Roman classics guide my reflection on the pain of abandonment.

#### 4: A Walk with the Incarcerated Woman's Not Being Listened To

##### *A Traumatized Forest*

Not long ago, fires ravaged the Waterton Lakes National Park in Alberta, Canada. In part, the swiftness and heat of the fire was due to our collective lack of attention to reducing the factors which increase climate change and its effects on the environment. On a visit to the park a few months after the massive burn, I noted that my walk through the treed area deeply troubled my soul. Blackened trunks stood forlorn over broad sweeps of the land. These trees will never again see green. Then there were others dead, but mixed with charred-limbed trees like skeletons that were still alive, but scarred for life. Some members of the forest miraculously escaped with very little burn along their branches. It was winter, but the sight of a few surviving trees gave me hope that one day a variety of greens, high and lively, would once again bless these woods. What I heard that day, I heard again in the tones and overtones of my data.

##### *The Etymology of "Listen To" and Lonergan's Principle: "Be Attentive"*

Not listened to is the negative of "listen to" which comes from an Old English word, *hlysnan*, "pay attention to."<sup>183</sup> To pay attention resonates with one of Lonergan's four precepts for promoting meaning and values in an authentic life, "be attentive." Values which derive, however, from *not* listening, *not* paying attention or from *not* being attentive "are unauthentic in the measure that they are the product of cumulative inattention. . . . Unauthenticity leaves power naked [without legitimacy]. It reveals power

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<sup>183</sup> Google search: "Etymology of listen," October 25, 2018, <https://www.google.com/search?q=etymological+of+listening&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&client=firefox-b-ab>.

as mere power . . . and insofar as [people] are unauthentic, they will resist legitimate claims, and they will support illegitimate claims.”<sup>184</sup>

The significance of Lonergan’s insight in the case of levels of authority—from that of parents, to the justice and correctional systems’ governance (and our duty to reverse or slow down climate change)—is that our inattentiveness has led to the dismissal of and so, our ignorance of, the life stories of incarcerated women. Their legitimate voices of trauma and abuse have not informed the social institutions of justice nor our social consciousness. (Given the relationship of Indigenous peoples to Creation, it could be said that Western cultures have also dismissed the life stories and the wisdom of the trees).

### *Inconspicuous Listening*

Some Heidegger scholars refer to awareness and the process of paying attention as “heedful circumspection.”<sup>185</sup> The opposite term is inconspicuous. Generally, the only times incarcerated women’s voices are conspicuous is when those women are our loved ones or when their cause is picked up by the media, often because of a very few attentive and listening advocates on the outside of prison walls and the sensationalism of a penitentiary event. After a day or two of newsworthy pictures and reports, public curiosity fades, the deafness returns, and the women and their stories once again become inconspicuous and categorized as “other.” This state of affairs is largely due to a misconception of who the people in jail are.

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<sup>184</sup> Morelli and Morelli, *The Lonergan Reader*, 553-554.

<sup>185</sup> Henry, “Phenomenology of Space,” *The Dominant Mood*, [www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com), February 16, 2013, <https://thedominantmood.wordpress.com/2013/02/16/the-phenomenology-of-space-part-two/>.

### *Paying Attention to the Incarcerated Woman*

Sarah Jobe university instructor, accompanied in the jail by her non-prisoner students, writes from her experience teaching in the Raleigh Correctional Center for Women (RCCW) in North Carolina.

‘Anthropology’ is a fancy word for what we believe about the fundamental nature of human beings: who people are and what they can become. “*Criminal anthropology*” indicates who we believe incarcerated people are and what they can (and cannot) become. The criminal anthropology at work in our culture starts by separating people who have been incarcerated into a permanent sub-category. Being in this group becomes one’s primary label. We label these people felons, offenders, criminals, convicts, and inmates. Even after incarceration ends (if it ends), people in this category continue to be labeled and categorized in this way. Once a felon, always a felon. Once an offender, always an ex-offender. Once a convict, always an ex-con. . . .

Once incarcerated, never again to be trusted. This label renders finding a job after incarceration a herculean task.

Criminal anthropology serves a very important social function. By marking this group of people as ‘not quite so human as the rest of us,’ it allows those of us who are not incarcerated to treat other men and women inhumanely without any guilt over our inhumane actions. . . .

One problem with this story we tell about “criminals” in our society is that it is not true. It is not true that incarcerated people are fundamentally untrustworthy, twisted, and beyond change. . . .

For Christians, there is a second problem with criminal anthropology; namely that it stands in direct contradiction to what [Christ and] the Bible say about who people are (emphasis in original).<sup>186</sup>

Jesus’s comment is that to visit those in prison is to visit Christ himself. To ignore and to treat them unjustly is to do likewise to the one who is God.

### *A Walk with the Lived Experience of the Incarcerated Woman Not Being Listened To*

A sampling of the devastating scenarios from the lived experience of children and women who are traumatized and to whom we are not paying attention, are contained in

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<sup>186</sup> Sarah Jobe, “Project TURN: Portrait of a Prison Ministry,” Center for Christian Ethics, 2012, 74-78.

the following poems. We allow their steady stream of cries for help to remain inconspicuous because they have been labeled liars or criminals. I attempt to render the primordial phenomenon of not being listened to as it occurs so traumatically in their lives. I have been inspired by and dedicate this writing to the women who sat with me and shared their stories.

Many incarcerated women have not made it out of the fires of neglect and trauma. Some suicide behind bars. Others continue to swallow their pain through addictions. However, in the lives of those I spoke to, there is a desire for a renewed life in self-discovery and an openness to their giftedness. May the pain give way. May healthy changes take root. May they continue to share their stories.

I invite you to take a slow walk through a forest of poetry inspired by the incarcerated woman's story.

### Poems of Not Being Listened To

#### 1. Take No Notice (From Anecdote 1a, Hazel)

I am nineteen, in jail,  
when blond, brown-eyed Jill—twenty-six, white, overweight, with a mole on her face—  
gets in *my* personal space.  
She's a bully.  
A head taller than her, I'm standing up for  
myself, and she doesn't like it.  
"I'm going to slit your throat," she thrusts at me, angrily.  
I believe her.

Later, I take my life in my hands and raise it up  
to the ears of a screw.<sup>187</sup>  
"Well, I don't want to get involved."  
Her cold comment comes back at me, flat as a slap.  
My life is suddenly, and painstakingly,  
slow motion nothing, reeling worthlessness.  
My concern dismissed, I am dismissed.

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<sup>187</sup> A "screw" is slang for "prison guard."



Her message is so freely, uncaringly delivered that the words fill my skull,  
run critiquing circles inside my confused head.  
Their hardness forms a millstone around my neck and  
it pulls me down, a heavy reminder of my being nobody here.  
I might as well be dead.

## 2. No Voice (from Anecdote 2b, CB)

The smell of alcohol on her breath,  
my mother tells me the celebration of 16  
is cancelled.  
No friends over.  
No trip to the beach.  
No birthday.  
My attempt at a protest makes little progress as my father  
states matter-of-factly,  
“Back off. What your mom says goes.”

Every word I ever wanted to say goes unspoken, unheard.  
My anger gags me.  
My throat seizes.  
My breath reaches in and catches the tears  
that I pinch and squeeze away.  
Once again,  
I have no voice, no choice.

## 3. Silencing Conspiracy (from Anecdote 1b, Hazel)

The morning is raw,  
Barely peeking over 2 a.m.  
I feel pushed to the limit,  
exhausted,  
upset,  
beside myself  
with loneliness.  
I dial my resident house “on call”<sup>188</sup>  
for a compassionate ear.  
Oh, how I yearn for someone soothing!  
Over the phone, I share my horrific tale and Julia screeches at me,  
“Well you accused my staff of smoking weed!”  
“You don’t even want to hear *my side* of the story!” I fire back.  
I’m a liar to them, a troublemaker.  
Nobody believes me.  
I am helpless, my story now crumpled up  
in the pit of my stomach.

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<sup>188</sup> “On call” is a term for a help line for residents in housing with supports.

I am a fly bound up in a spider's web,  
defeated, stung, deflated. I don't matter.  
I feel like shit.

#### 4. Doctor's Orders (from Anecdote 4a, BB)

Thirty-three, addicted to morphine  
And pregnant, I look into  
the psychiatrist's eyes and blink.

He's just told me that I am to call the police  
and report  
my baby's father  
for helping me inject my needles.  
It is an ultimatum.  
No call, no help.

Trapped in his ignorance  
I fumble with my life's facts.  
There's no way through.  
My baby and I  
are now both at risk, perched  
on the brim of a medical-legal  
cesspool.  
No sense or sentence penetrates his ears.  
The room grows very dark.

Heart accelerating,  
Tensions tearing at my insides,  
My thoughts race, careen  
around and around, furious now.

I have no way out.

I flinch. The silence sizzles between us.  
In his eyes I see that  
I am not understood.  
Spinning light years from the contents of this man's head,  
my world finally disconnects.  
My voice is lifeless.  
He cannot hear what he does not know.

Caught, the phone between us,  
quiet screams  
scrape along the inside of  
my head.

I punch the numbers,  
fumble with the tale as the  
child within my womb tugs.  
I barely swallow the doctor's orders.

5. Emotional Abscess (from Anecdote 2a, CB)

Cutting away all love, these bars  
Deny me my grief time.  
One sweet cousin dead.  
My heart breaks as I remember her voice,  
her face,  
her memory  
darkly nestled somewhere in my heart, buried.

A tear finds its way down my cheek.

The guards are indifferent.  
This hell hole,  
in its every cinder block,  
yells out the evidence  
of how very far away I am  
from who I am.

I have no voice.  
My integrity splinters.  
My dignity drains away to near nothing.  
Hard pain is stacked around my heart and  
as it lights up, the fire of my grief is then  
stomped on,  
pushed  
down, down.  
Rules forbid  
the consolation of  
human touch.

All the loving words are gathered together  
but *away* from me  
*away* from here—  
at the church, with family—  
elsewhere and  
achingly  
unreachable.

I live,  
still and silent,

day after day  
in the abscess of forced  
isolation,  
my grief tender  
and unmet.

6. Ground Under (from Anecdote 2c, CB)

I am forty years old, a nobody,  
now locked in my parent's basement  
by order of the court.  
In my addiction, in their ignorance,  
all communication fails.  
He isolates his emotions.  
She hoards and flaunts her parental power.  
Their silence pushes me down, deeper  
into this hole. There is  
*no* help.  
I feel lost—stuck,  
alone,  
abandoned emotionally.  
Day after day, my senses retreat  
and this under world grows darker and darker.  
My heart is constricted; my mind confused, all clarity clouded.  
No one touches me. I go deep, deeper  
into the depression.  
And there, when I can go no lower,  
a prick of light pressed in on all sides by black—  
a darkness like heavy ebony curtains—  
a forgotten spark within me,  
erupts in a desperate cry to connect,  
“If there is a God, I need you now. . . .”

7. Mom Accuses *Me*; No One To Listen (from Anecdote 3a, SH)

Part 1

When I tell her of the pain down below  
and my fear of the men she leaves me with,  
my mother says I'm a liar.  
At six years old, I cry a blue moon and  
abruptly the cold of her shoulder hits me.  
Her silence numbs my senses. In the middle of the night  
I scream, cry out in protest only to hear  
“Shut up Sheila! He's only trying to cuddle you.”

I clamp up and begin the descent of

a lifetime—falling into a  
bottomless, lonely hole.  
No booze or drug oblivion can stop the  
drop.  
Down,  
down, I go.  
Unheard year after year,  
the longer  
I crash,  
the darker it is;  
the farther I feel from my truth.

#### Part 2

Isolated, sickened memories,  
suck my life away.  
Whatever I told her,  
she blamed me.  
My stomach clenches;  
nausea surfaces.

No ear to listen, no mother's love offered  
to pull me from this  
turmoil and  
tunnel of  
fear.

I shiver  
in the chill of silence,  
empty and lost;  
as I stuff  
down,  
deeper  
the ulcerous  
shame.

#### 8. Mortified (from Anecdote 4b, BB)

I sit across from a man who holds  
my baby's future.  
A physician with  
power and connections to take us  
out of this poisonous position.

I explain my morphine dependency,  
the circumstances of my untimely pregnancy.  
My father and mother tell their story

of my life.  
He says nothing, but  
unbelievably  
pushes papers across the table  
and states that my parents  
are to become my guardians  
because “she’s not capable of making  
life decisions on her own.”

He has not seen my thirty-three years, my university education,  
nor has he witnessed my deep concern for my unborn child.  
Rather, he has heard only the inner stream of his well-schooled voice.  
A shadowy curtain of “drug dependent” prejudice  
separates us.  
As I cower from his slow blow  
my anxiety builds: bricks piling up  
against my CHEST,  
forcing my chair to  
screech backward  
and then the room darkens  
with my not being  
taken seriously,  
not being heard.  
Blah, blah, blah, covers me;  
My tongue becomes a cake of dry mud.

He discards me from his deck  
“Take the papers home and think it over,”  
he instructs my parents.

He didn’t receive  
a word  
I said.  
I am sick with doubt,  
mortified.

### *A Final Poem*

I finish this difficult walk with a poem that came together from reading the literature,  
immersing myself in the anecdotes, and reflecting phenomenologically on an incarcerated  
woman not being listened to. I dedicate it to LN whose life flows through these lines.

9. On Not Belonging, for LN - Teresa Elder Hanlon

Apart.

Fragments of the past, trusted beliefs and honoured memories shake free as I realize  
nothing is sure.

I am a seed, separate now and floating mid-air  
any which way  
the breeze of time blows me.  
Nothing to attach to, all the potential for further growth trapped and held, waiting.

Body cells cease. They come to a full stop and reverse their gift of life.  
Their healing power gives way as my life switch turns “off.”  
Systems start to shut down in my so-carefully-crafted corpus.  
My soul’s significance swirls away.  
My young body begins to manufacture pain. Physical pain, and metaphorical.  
The “not listened to” in me becomes a sentiment harbouring  
a resentment and a fear stored in  
my painful joints, my tense gut, my heavy shoulders, nausea.

I let go of the hope for anyone’s recognition.  
I no longer see the light or hear the singing.  
Gently the world fades into a grey fog. Black moves in.  
Strong, oppressive, opaque, BLACK.  
I disconnect from the recognition of myself in others.  
I linger with the bitter taste of non-compliance, shuttered windows, doors closing.  
Inner voices are shouting, “Out!”

## 5: Not Listened To—Dimensions of Darkness

*“When you’re not being listened to, it’s dark.” BB*

### The Colour Black and the Unconscious

#### *An Absence of Colour: Darkness and Not Being Listened To*

In grade one my six-year-old son was put outside of his classroom. It was a disciplinary action provoked by his refusal to do the actions in a group recitation of a poem. He was an observant and articulate boy and he told me that evening that as he sat there alone in the hallway for what seemed a long time, “Everything looked grey, Mom. I couldn’t see any colours.”

Robert Hoss, MS, a psychologist researcher of dreams, created a chart of emotional significances for the basic colours to access the dream’s meaning from the unconscious. Based on his research questioning several thousand university students about their emotional associations with colours, he explains:

In my investigation of dream color what I observed was that, indeed, specific dream colors appeared to relate to specific groupings of emotional associations, similar to our subliminal emotional response to those colors in the waking state. . . . In particular I found the Luscher test to be well suited to the investigation since it provided a well-studied combination of “objective” and “functional” associations while eliminating cultural symbols (although the color naming convention was of a “Western” culture). In order to establish the emotional content of the dream image, I used a Gestalt based role-play technique, using a standardized script, which had proven effective in revealing emotional content within dream imagery. I then compared the dreamer’s responses as they role-played color imagery from the dream, with the Luscher Color Test associations for the same specific color preference. The correlation was then confirmed with the dreamer as it related to an associated waking life situation.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Robert Hoss, “The Dream Experience: Color,” *The Science of Dreaming*, accessed September 20, 2018. [http://www.dreamscience.org/idx\\_science\\_of\\_dreaming\\_section-2.htm#2.4\\_Color\\_](http://www.dreamscience.org/idx_science_of_dreaming_section-2.htm#2.4_Color_).



Without fail, when my co-researchers were invited to contemplate a colour which fit their lived experience of not being listened to, they chose the words “black,” “dark,” and “grey.”

Hoss explains black in his color chart this way. It is

[t]he unconscious realm. Moving into darkness = suppression, “death of the ego.” . . . [To connect with this colour] try [the following statements for their resonance in daily life]: 1) I am anxious and don’t know why. 2) I am fearful of or intimidated by the situation. 3) I have been dealt an unacceptable blow. 4) Nothing is as it should be. 5) I refuse to allow it/them to influence my point of view. 6) I can’t accept the situation and don’t wish to be convinced otherwise. 7) I feel the need for extreme action, perhaps in revolt against or to compensate for the situation.<sup>190</sup>

With the exception of number five, all of the emotional descriptors of black correlate with the women’s descriptions of not being listened to. They show up thematically in the women’s anecdotes and from their unconscious colouring of the lived experience as black or dark, I can describe an incarcerated woman’s not being listened to as:

- a) anxiety provoking: (I am anxious and don’t know why). Many women described anxiety at the time their tenuous situation was ignored, dismissed, or violently rejected.
- b) frightening: I am fearful of or intimidated by the situation. The girl/woman lives in an environment dominated by an abusive, authoritarian presence in which she can no longer raise needs for herself.
- c) unjust and soul-searing: I have been dealt an unacceptable blow. The blows in this case are all too real and the violation of sexual abuse reverberates through the body, often fragmenting the soul.

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<sup>190</sup> Hoss, “The Dream Experience.”

- d) confusing and a reversal of care-giver/child roles: Nothing is as it should be.
- e) uncomfortable or unbearable. I can't accept the situation and don't wish to be convinced otherwise. e.g. A girl who has been taught in school to report abuse and is not believed because of an abusive parent swaying the opinion of social services or a counsellor, is confused and has a disturbed conscience.
- f) anger-inducing: I feel the need for extreme action, perhaps in revolt against or to compensate for the situation. Angry acting out is characteristic of a woman desperate for survival.

These statements of emotion evoke the poetic memories of the previous chapter. The unconscious realm of the phenomenon of not being listened to is dark. The lack of colour speaks to someone pressured, panicked, feeling unjustly treated, uncomfortable and/or in a place from which they want relief. The essence of black is also very much a plea for help, a desire to be noticed and loved, and an expression of a need for justice.

#### Two Existentials of Darkness: Spatiality and Relationality

##### *Spatiality*

The darkness of an incarcerated woman's not being listened to is one of being excluded, rejected, or dismissed. It is not only felt interiorly, but it can drain the enveloping world of its liveliness. The space surrounding the woman seems less welcoming. Her body perceives the room as small or closing in as her intimacy with others shrinks.

A good analogy is like feeling like a mouse trapped without a hole.  
The room is black and there is no hole to get out. LN

In this space, there's nowhere to go. "Trapped" infers feeling constrained and sensing an impending doom. She is confined in a space of not being believed when one's wellbeing depends on being heard. Everything gets black and blacker.

Trapped. Injured. Helpless. Alone. No rescue in sight. More and more and the abusive relationship continues, the self of the one not listened to retreats, the soul weakens, and the woman operates out of a numbed disposition. When no one supports the woman's truth with generous listening, the lights go out and the danger descends with no escape. One co-researcher mentioned that the following first two verses of "The Dead Man Walking," a poem by Thomas Hardy, resonated with her experience.

They hail me as one living.  
But don't they know  
That I have died of late years,  
Untombed although?

I am but a shape that stands here,  
A pulseless mould,  
A pale past picture, screening  
Ashes gone cold.<sup>191</sup>

### *Community and Relationality*

The natural hopefulness or resilience of the human soul is crushed in the momentary awareness that no one will attend to and validate the truth. At the heart of this moment of not being listened to, the sentiment is one of disbelief. Disbelief, because we are naturally inter-relational beings and our truth depends upon the relationality of our lives. How utterly black is the darkness when one's hand cannot be seen even when held up to one's own face. How dark also the experience of one's voice not accepted or

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<sup>191</sup> Thomas Hardy, "The Dead Man Walking," in *Hidden Graces: Poems for Crisis, Struggle, and Renewal*, ed. Gretchen L. Schwenker and Mathew J. Kessler (Ligouri, MO: Ligouri Press, 2010), 16.

respected by family or trusted ones. An incarcerated woman's not being listened to is a denial of the right to community.

Community means people with a common field of experience, with a common or at least complementary way of understanding people and things, with common judgments and common aims. Without a common field of experience people are out of touch. Without a common way of understanding, they will misunderstand one another, grow suspicious, distrustful, hostile, violent. Without common judgments they will live in different worlds, and without common aims they will work at cross-purposes. Such, then, is community, and as it is community that hands on the discoveries and inventions of the past and, as well, co-operates in the present, so it is community that is the carrier of power.<sup>192</sup>

Lonergan's view of community resonates with Stauffer's understanding of revisioning, where the past is in some way lived in the present. Passing on the "discoveries and inventions of the past" is storytelling heard and appreciated.

The outcome for the one not listened to is often powerlessness in a broken, fractured community. The reality of violent indifference to a woman's presence or her story is that the worlds within the relationship split apart. To feel oneself as an outsider is confusing and confounding especially when the bond at stake is that of the child to an abusive care-giver. The dysfunction robs the self and soul of the opportunity to grasp any fundamental truths (like Lonergan's precepts: Be attentive; Be intelligent; Be reasonable; Be responsible;<sup>193</sup> Be loving) which can establish roots in "a common field of experience."

Without meaningful connection, healthy maturation fails. The mind continues to map make, but from a now fragmented, confused unconscious. What does it mean when "common judgements" and "common aims" are absent, blank? A person's sense of

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<sup>192</sup> Morelli and Morelli, *The Lonergan Reader*, 551.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 553.

belonging and purpose is uncertain. I recognize in directees who live with PTSD a floundering to define their purpose in the world. They report their life situation often as meaningless.

I went through a lot of emotional abuse from my mom, growing up. She became an alcoholic and I really didn't have a voice in the house.

When I would ask for something my dad would say, "Back off! Whatever Bev [Mother] says goes!"

I only just got by. It was lonely. I was confused. The unspoken rule was 'what goes on in the home, stays in the home.' My mind was twisted. My truth was definitely not the real truth. CB

"I was confused" suggests that the darkness of not being listened to obscures one's truth in relation to others' (often overpowering) messages. The trauma of being ignored drains the soul's energy necessary for everyday living: "I only just got by."

#### *De-distancing and Relationality*

The emotional distance between people widens within the phenomenon of not being listened to, rather than narrows or de-distances (Heidegger's *Ent-fernung*).

"Initially and for the most part, de-distancing is a circumspect approaching, a bringing near as supplying, preparing, having at hand,"<sup>194</sup> says Heidegger. Internally the self as part of the body feels unsafe and so there is a distancing from the "loving" authority (in the woman's case, her parents) rather than a de-distancing. The speaker's self is blocked or "twisted" as her parents silence her desires. This is not a phenomenon of healthy relationality or the loving ideal which usually occurs in bonds between parent and child.

Often the physique of the other, of the beloved, has more nearness to us than our own body. The self and the body are distinct phenomena. When we say "my body," we acknowledge this distinction, speaking of the body not as synonymous with the self but as the self's possession. If 'me' no longer refers to

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<sup>194</sup> Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* quoted in Henry, "Phenomenology of Space," February 16, 2013, <https://thedominantmood.wordpress.com/2013/02/16/the-phenomenology-of-space-part-two/>.

my body, there is no objective way to measure distances in relation to the self. This is especially true if the self starts off from an over there that is distinct from the here of its body.<sup>195</sup>

The power of the parent over a child is first of all very near and influential (the beloved has more nearness to someone than her own body) and second, forces the girl's self to alienate itself from her own body. Not being listened to is distancing. Although the body is distinct from the self, the body itself can respond through de-distancing (or not) and by banking the positive responses to its bids, as Gottman observed (see pages 40-41).

The fate of the neglected self, on the other hand, overruled by an authority figure is a disturbing part of the phenomenon of not being listened to. The distance created is not measurable, but it is great—in regard to both the abuser/speaker relationship and with the experience of the self within the body. It is the aching self within the wounded body perhaps, which seeks a state of numbness or relief through addictive behaviours, drugs and alcohol.

### *The Relationality of Being Separated*

In the darkness of not being listened to, there is no obvious path for the self to follow or establish itself (as there is with loving affection). The parent's world severs from the child's world. This void or confusion amounts to a blindness to the possibilities for getting closer. The soul suffers malnourishment. "The energy or vitality to create is engendered from the soul."<sup>196</sup> Any bright colours of the emotions seem stifled or

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<sup>195</sup> Henry, "Phenomenology of Space," February 16, 2013, <https://thedominantmood.wordpress.com/2013/02/16/the-phenomenology-of-space-part-two/>.

<sup>196</sup> Sue Monk Kidd, *Dance of the Dissident Daughter: A Woman's Journey from Christian Tradition to the Sacred Feminine* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 208.

unavailable to the imagination. The relational indifference or dominance of the “beloved” over the child/woman suppresses the perception of colour.

Rejection and isolation may be parts of the relationality of the phenomenon of not being listened to and have the same darkening effect as in the case of my six-year-old son sitting in the hallway. The separation from the other children, the rejection of the teacher and the physical removal of his body from the room traumatized his ability to see. His world became colourless. The pressure of the forceful words and actions of an oppressor, act on the body and the imagination of the one not listened to. All the child’s creative energy may go into scenarios of hope until there is no hope and the body turns on itself with illness, depression. A person’s vision dims as the self is denied and the fire of the soul dissipates, unaffirmed.

### *Resilience Considered*

What of the resilience that surfaces in the human drive to survive? Brené Brown, researcher, notes in one of her TED talks<sup>197</sup> that children are “hard-wired” for struggle. The emotions in the not-listened-to person do adapt to survive. In the philosophy of some Indigenous leaders “resilience is an innate quality that needs only to be properly awakened.”<sup>198</sup> Perhaps the colours of life lie dormant.

As the liveliness of an incarcerated woman’s life is dampened and distorted by not being listened to in crucial relationships, what might have been a genuine smile becomes a mask ready to appease another (recall Clark noticing the female theatre troupes

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<sup>197</sup> Brené Brown, “The Power of Vulnerability,” YouTube video, 20:50. Posted by “TEDx Houston Expanding Perceptions: January 3, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=makDyyCHvmw&feature=fvhl>.

<sup>198</sup> Fleming and Ledogar, “Resilience, an Evolving Concept: A Review of Literature Relevant to Aboriginal Research.”

had “lips that barely move, bodies that can’t bear to be touched.” Lies or withdrawal into silence may replace statements of one’s discovered truths. Curious questions, because of rejection and disapproval, are buried in fear. These questions are pivotal to wake up the body, to undo the deception. This is the realm of the spiritual director, the caring friend, the professional listener, or the care-giver. As long as not being listened to is an everyday lived experience, the pain lingers. Through the power of compassionate listening, that which was buried or lost in not-being-listened-to can potentially be regained. The restorative, creative mind-body work of theatre, writing, and yoga also stimulates the resilient, but disturbed soul and the hidden self.

#### In Summary

An incarcerated woman’s lived experience of not being listened to is perceived as black, dark. With the assistance of Robert Hoss’s colour chart for the emotions of the unconscious, this phenomenon can be said to provoke anxiety, fear, feelings of injustice, confusion, discomfort and anger. These diverse emotions act relationally in distancing the woman from primary care-givers especially as a child. Spatially, the darkness of not being listened to describes a sense of being trapped and isolated. Relationally community is weakened rather than fostered through loving kindness and support. It is possible that the power of resilience remains dormant during the trauma of not being listened to and can be called upon later in life when the woman finds herself in safer surroundings.

And what is the woman’s experience of not being listened to in her body? How is her flesh a meeting point where her consciousness connects with the world? The body can hold, along with the unconscious, a potential for renewal. In chapter six I turn specifically to the corporeality of the phenomenon of an incarcerated woman’s not being listened to.



When the soul has been struck a death blow at a critical juncture in life and the pain of several traumatic events successively diminishes her emotional well-being, the woman's body can respond in significant ways as it receives the shock and conveys the pain of not being listened to.

## 6: The Corporeality of an Incarcerated Woman's Not Being Listened To

*"It is the body, the flesh, materiality itself, that prevents consciousness from floating in the air, devoid of any content."*<sup>199</sup> –Edmund Husserl

### Corporeality

#### *Corporeality Defined*

"Lived body (corporeality) refers to the phenomenological fact that we are always bodily in the world."<sup>200</sup> In chapter five I noted that not being listened to affects the incarcerated woman's unconscious self, i.e. she sees not being listened to as the colour black (technically the absence of all colour). The darkness of the phenomenon is linked unconsciously to her emotions and may affect her body's ability to see in colour. Consequently, an incarcerated woman's not being listened to is a lived experience that is black, replete with painful emotional significance which is negatively amplified through the body. Not being listened to can affect more than the body's sense of vision.

Trauma and mental illness can induce delusional states in which the lived body experience is a weightless sensation,<sup>201</sup> or one of being bent over in fear of others,<sup>202</sup> or an

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<sup>199</sup> Edmund Husserl quoted in Otto Doers-Zegers, "Phenomenology of Corporality in Delusional Depression," abstract, *Salud Mental* 25, no. 4 (August 2002): 1-9, [http://www.researchgate.net/publication/282724394\\_Phenomenology\\_of\\_corporeality\\_in\\_delusional\\_depression](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/282724394_Phenomenology_of_corporeality_in_delusional_depression).

<sup>200</sup> Max van Manen, "Corporeal Reflection," *Phenomenology Online: A Resource for Phenomenological Inquiry*, last modified 2011, <http://www.phenomenologyonline.com/inquiry/writing/>.

<sup>201</sup> Otto Doers-Zegers, "Delusion and Mood Disorders," *The Oxford Handbook of Phenomenological Psychopathology*, September 2018, accessed December 20, 2018, doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803157.013.73.

<sup>202</sup> Otto Doers-Zegers, "Phenomenology of Corporeality. A Paradigmatic Case Study in Schizophrenia," *Actas Esp Psiquiatr* 43, No. 1 (2015): 1-7.

uncontrollable twitch in the limbs.<sup>203</sup> Husserl, in the epigraph to this chapter, asserts that our consciousness meets the flesh. What is the corporeality of an incarcerated woman's traumatized state of not being listened to even as the consciousness of trauma meets the body?

### *The Body's Potential*

Cornell's focusing work reveals that corporeality includes the wisdom of a body attentive to the world.

The truth is that our bodies are wise in many ways not acknowledged by our culture. Our bodies carry knowledge about how we are living our lives, about what we need to be more fully ourselves, about what we value and believe, about what has hurt us emotionally and how to heal it. Our bodies know which people around us are the ones who bring out the best in us, and which people deplete and diminish us. Our bodies know what is the right next step to bring us to more fulfilling and rewarding lives. . . .

The gift of the body is that it is always in the present time, always here. . . .

Focusing lets you listen to the whispers of your body before it has to shout.<sup>204</sup>

The general practice of not listening to our bodies contributes negatively to the phenomenon of not being listened to. When that phenomenon is the trauma of physical violence, rejection, or confusing messages from loved ones, the body does shout.

Devastating circumstances distress the body. In a case of "delusional depression with nihilistic ideas [in which] . . . the symptomatology revolved around the idea of being dead," phenomenologist and psychiatrist Otto Doerr-Zegers describes a woman patient with a body which seems dead. Her senses are inoperative and she describes not feeling

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<sup>203</sup> Chellis Ying, "What I Learned While Teaching Yoga in a Women's Jail," [www.mindbodygreen.com](http://www.mindbodygreen.com), accessed November 24, 2018, <https://www.mindbodygreen.com/0-27409/what-i-learned-while-teaching-yoga-in-a-womens-jail.html>.

<sup>204</sup> Cornell, *The Power of Focusing*, 8-9.

her children when holding them. Even her dialogue with others is incapacitated. She is suicidal. Doerr-Zegers quotes Husserl in regard to what may be happening with the woman's consciousness and her body.

Only by virtue of its experienced relation to the organism does consciousness become real human or brute consciousness, and only thereby does it acquire a place in the space belonging to nature and the time belonging to nature – the time which is physically measured.” (53)<sup>205</sup>

Given Husserl's observation, the woman's distressed and weakened consciousness does not relate fully to her body. It cannot “acquire a space” in her own flesh. The unconscious and our human consciousness influence corporally how we are present in the world.

### Corporeality of an Incarcerated Woman's Not Being Listened To

#### *Not Being Listened To as a Silent Crying Out*

The corporeality of an incarcerated woman's not being listened is an appeal for assistance. The corporal experience of not being listened to is evident in both the woman's language and her physical wellbeing. Her perception of the phenomenon in her body may be figurative as CB describes in the last line of this anecdote.

I was about fourteen at the time my grandmother passed away. I remember just being left alone. No one to talk to. My dad was the type of man that was, “Deal with it. Get over it and move on.” My mom lost her mom. I was not comforted as a girl and not having somebody to work with me through grief was scarring. It put a hole in my heart for a lot of years. CB

The absence of her parents' comfort through listening in the time of grief is a physical, aching absence in the woman's chest. The repetitive nature of not being listened to prolongs the painful effect on the body. The hole in her heart is a chasm of emptiness. It

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<sup>205</sup> Otto Doers-Zegers, “Phenomenology of Corporality in Delusional Depression.”

reveals a gulf in her relationships with others that impairs her ability to give or receive. Her need for comfort is a missing piece in the puzzling condition of her loss—a scar. As such, the ache of not being listened to persists.

When the woman's consciousness is disturbed to the point that her emotions fragment and somehow detach from her body, she can no longer sense the world around her—she does not belong.

Steering wheel in my hand, fist hits my face, mouth clamps shut, tears hit my lap. I still control the car, manage the corner, my cheek is hot. Mind racing. Screaming in my head. Yes, silence fills the air. Heavy. Sick of feeling so wrong while longing to feel so right. Lost. Alone. I don't belong anywhere.<sup>206</sup>

The phenomenon of not being listened to in this anecdote is the combined force from a physical assault aimed at shutting up the woman and an emotional attack on her person. The woman spoke and was hit while driving a vehicle. Some of her motor skills, though traumatized, thankfully remained intact enough to turn a corner. She stays on the road and maneuvers the automobile as an act of survival even as her inner self shatters with the blow.

The act of being struck reddens and burns her cheek. Her face is altered—that is, both the sensation of the tears and the heat from the strike—and the image of herself when she looks in the mirror will be changed. The bruising will affect her identity in public. The phenomenon of not being listened to is now relational to the concern, shock, or other reactions her disfigurement prompts in anyone who notices her.

The phenomenon of not being listened to is both corporal in the burn of her cheek and in the sick feeling in her soul of not belonging anywhere. After this woman is struck

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<sup>206</sup> Heather, "Screaming in Silence," *Hear Me, See Me: Incarcerated Women Write*, ed. Christine Marybeth Redmond and Sarah Bartlett (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 53.

on her face mid-sentence, the atmosphere is emotionally “heavy.” There is weight to the violence of not being listened to. The physical act restricts her ability to communicate and so the insult of not being listened to goes deeper. She is not listened to for who she is as a person. She perhaps was expecting approval to her comment in order to “feel so right.” Instead she feels “wrong.” Nothing more of who she is can be spoken. She automatically silences her scream, that primal cascade of pain within her mind, because an audible voice risks yet another blow. The disrespectful and shaming action of the listener is an assault on the core of her being, her soul.

Not being listened to is distancing. It is the equivalent of not being loved. At the moment of not being listened to, the incarcerated woman does not “belong anywhere.” Not being listened to is a death blow to her soul’s feeling accepted in a community. The phenomenon is a bodily state of extreme distance from her passenger, her world, her own self.

#### *Not Being Listened To as Heavy*

The weight of an incarcerated woman’s not being listened to is not easily lifted.

Because of years of nobody listening or being heard, I felt that’s all I deserved, that’s all I was worthy of—and I wasn’t going to be anything more. It was like carrying a heavy horrible thing inside me. I had a pressure on my shoulders and the thinking about it made my stomach nauseous. SH

Once again, the pressure of not being listened to is both internal and external. It became a “heavy horrible thing” on the inside and a “pressure on [her] shoulders.” The weight increases with the traumatic nature of what she has to hold in—the years of undisclosed sexual abuse and the phenomenon of not being listened to in the fact that her mother would blame her and minimize her complaints. The stress of thinking about it, her mind-body connection “made [her] stomach nauseous.” Such nausea is reminiscent of

Sternberg's immunological discovery that stress causes such discomfort. The abdomen is triggered and so, also, one's taste.

After school that day, I went directly to Grandma's next door instead of stopping at our house first. Now I find my suitcase on our front steps. The door is locked. It's October 1957. I'm nine.

"Mom!" I yell, trying to force the door handle open. "Let me in!"

My mother appears at the door.

"You want to spend all your time with your grandmother? Go ahead! Move in with her!"

When she walks away my tummy gets tight. There's a bad taste in my mouth. I pound on the door, crying and screaming useless apologies.<sup>207</sup>

The abandonment of this girl's not being listened to tastes bad. The bad taste starts with the tension in her abdomen at the sight of her mother's back, together with the locked door and her suitcase. Not being listened to is felt as a rejection, the absolute of not being heard. It is manifested in her tummy tightening. The tension in the young girl's body mirrors the tension in her mother's stance of not listening. The bad taste is a warning from her body that any further words, crying, or screaming will only intensify the bitter reality that she is not listened to.

#### *Not Being Listened to as Corporal Unauthenticity*

When the child is denied the opportunity to trust her inner truth, to attune with her parent through being listened to, and therefore to move authentically in the world, her body lives from a consciousness that is unauthentic. How her consciousness meets her body lacks authenticity. I call this corporal unauthenticity.

. . . In fact, the question of authentic human existence does not begin from some theoretical stance . . . Rather, the starting point ought to be . . . how the person is situated in the actual here and now. Heidegger's approach to the question of authentic (*Eigentlichkeit*) or unauthentic human living, then, begins by first describing the lived and concrete situation of the person. Heidegger calls this

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<sup>207</sup> Barbara Parsons, "Reawakening Through Nature: A Prison Reflection," in *I'll Fly Away: Further Testimonies from the Women of York Prison* ed. Wally Lamb (New York, NY: Harper, 2007), 215.

situated entity *Dasein* (there-being) because it alone has a unique comprehension of Being.<sup>208</sup>

Phenomenologically a disease is *Dasein* and is a sign of corporal unauthenticity.

An example is the following story from a co-researcher's not being listened to. The phenomenon expressed itself in her juvenile arthritis. As a young teen, this woman suffered twice in one school year from not being listened to when her abusive step-father, a teacher in her school, convinced social workers and a school counselor that she was "crying wolf." The punishment for her "lying" included an emotionally taxing and physically humiliating challenge.

I had to literally stand up publicly in my school and apologize to the teachers and him for making up all this STUFF about him. So I felt not very blissed about this. Not listened to at all. LN

The repetitive nature of not being listened to increases the body's discomfort. The strength of her symptoms reflects the depth of the meaning of her lived experience, her *Dasein*.

I was on crutches almost the whole year because of the pain and the arthritis swelling up my joints. I'd literally have to walk on the balls of my feet or the sides 'cause they were so swollen. I couldn't bear the weight of all that pain. LN

In physical terms, the body interprets the painful phenomenon of not being listened to as literally unbearable. Her lived experience of reporting the abuse to deaf ears, followed by the punishment of retracting her complaint and apologizing for being truthful, establishes itself as a crippled body. Her ankles and feet swell and give out. The body shouts out the story of abuse as the phenomenon of not being listened to is manifest in her flesh. Her body's being, her *Dasein* or there-being is authentic in that the illness distorts her body even as the forced apology distorted her truth.

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<sup>208</sup> Bramen, *Meaning and Authenticity*, 9.



### In Summary

The body's voice is loud and clear even as the incarcerated woman is forced to hold in her grief, her screams, and her objections. In this way the body is a telling element of *Dasein*, being there. The unconscious, one's consciousness, and the body itself carry the knowledge of the phenomenon of not being listened to. A silent dismissal of her grief, a physical blow to stop a woman's speech, and the suppressed truth of abuse all trigger a corporeality of the phenomenon of not being listened to. The phenomenon can make itself known in sickness or ill effects like a bad taste. It lingers in the body like a hole in the heart.

One facet of an incarcerated woman's not being listened to that is present in every anecdote is a sense of abandonment. In the next chapter, three classical characters of Greek and Roman mythology assist us in understanding the incarcerated woman's lived experience of not being listened to as an abandonment.

## 7: Not Being Listened To and the Emotionality of Abandonment

### Three Heroines

Miriam Kamil, a PhD student in the Classics department at Harvard University, describes the reactions of three classic heroines whose partners renege on their commitments to love and suddenly leave the relationship.<sup>209</sup> Kamil points out that the three women react differently to the abandonment. Dido kills herself. Medea becomes murderous, and Ariadne eventually turns to Bacchus, the god of wine and ecstasy. I interpret the life with Bacchus (or Dionysus) as a symbol of turning to drink and drugs. In the nature of the bacchantes (feral women known for tearing apart animals and eating them) is some of the unpredictability and the alienation characteristic of mental illness. The meaning of abandonment in an incarcerated woman's not being listened to can be informed by these ancient tales. The heroines' stories loudly echo the suicidal pain, anger, and disillusion in such a traumatic lived experience.

Dido (Emotion: suicidal)

(also called Elissa: from the Hebrew *Elisheba*: Oath of God)

*"I'd give up on myself.*

*It was almost suicidal, 'cause I believe sometimes I would drink to die."* SH

Dido's story begins in Greek legend, is taken up by Virgil, put to poetry by Ovid, and became a libretto for an opera by Purcell in which we hear the heartbreaking "Dido's Lament."

In Virgil's tale Dido gave refuge to Aeneas, a Trojan warrior who comes to her city of Carthage on his way to establish the city of Rome. Out hunting one day, the two of them make a mad dash to take cover from a storm and end up in the same cave. There she gives herself to him in lovemaking, thinking they are destined for marriage. However, Aeneas forsakes her after several

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<sup>209</sup> Miriam Kamil, "The Abandoned Heroine Archetype in Greek and Roman Myth," Ancient Origins: Reconstructing the Story of Humanity's Past, August 23, 2014, accessed December 10, 2018, <https://www.ancient-origins.net/myths-legends/abandoned-heroine-archetype-greek-and-roman-myth-002002>.

months to continue his quest. In Ovid's poem (Heroides VII.3-9), Dido speaks these words before killing herself from despair:

I don't speak with hope that you will be moved by my plea,  
For as I begin, the gods are already against me!  
But since I have wretchedly wasted my chaste reputation  
And body, and mind, to waste a few words is a trifling thing.  
Are you still determined to go and leave poor Dido?  
Will the same winds carry your sails and your promise away?<sup>210</sup>

*Feeling Worthless: "Poor Dido"*

Abandonment by parents who side with abusers through complicit silence, denial, or dismissal of a child's complaint sears the psyche with the traumatic phenomenon of not being listened to. "I felt pretty worthless. Like, maybe I'm not good enough or important enough to be heard," commented LN on her mother's denial of the abuse and her social worker siding with her abusive step-father against LN. Being called a liar is a form of not being listened to that fractures the trust in the relationship. Two other destructive forms of not listening are minimizing the not-listened-to person's truth and making her feel responsible for the violation.

I come from a really, really bad childhood. I was like sexually abused from age six to eighteen every day of my life, sometimes three or four times a day. I remember trying to tell my mom, like give her hints, but not directly tell her because of fear. Because they told me that if I told her (pause). But I remember saying, "I hurt down there." She would call me a liar. Like, I'm lying. Or say, "What are you doing?" She always blamed me. I was hurt. I felt unloved.

She would just like, when I would get mad in the middle of the night and he was touching me, and I would scream and stuff, my mom would be, "Shut up SH. He's just trying to cuddle you."

Eventually I wouldn't even say anything because it was like whatever I had to say didn't matter and that was the way that I felt. So I learned to hide my feelings. 'Cause I would just take in everything and shove it down and suppress all my feelings. I lived in a place that I wasn't allowed to feel or be heard or almost be seen, too, sometimes. SH

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<sup>210</sup> Kamil, "The Abandoned Heroine Archetype in Greek and Roman Myth."

The message of being worthless can be so strong that it becomes engrained in her self-regard. SH spoke further to the decades of her life spent trying to escape the feeling of worthlessness brought on by her mother's not listening to her complaints of repeated rape.

It affected my life for so, so many years. I'd give up on myself. It was almost suicidal, 'cause I believe sometimes I would drink to die. I'd drink until I was in an oblivion. I'd keep going for days and non-stop. Day and night, right? SH

Eventually the lack of her mother's love and her own personal resources led to suicidal thoughts or actions.

A parent's abandonment of a child through not listening distorts the person's sense of community and the value of her own voice.

My mom not listening to me about the sexual abuse, I just didn't think that anybody else cared, or what I had to say mattered. I felt like a bad person, a dirty person, and all the shame and guilt that came with that. SH

The woman's memories of her mother's opposition and neglect fed into her sense of the world as unwelcoming, unaccepting. Whoever the survivor is and whatever she does, the feeling of shame discredits her personhood. The thought, "I just didn't think that anybody else cared" is a direct consequence of her mother's not listening. Her dignity is undermined when her truth is denied by her mother's deaf ear. That tension intensifies her alienation from herself, her mother, her community. Eventually, to free herself from the weight of that non-acceptance, the woman succumbs to an emotional surge to escape—a desire to suicide.

*Not Being Listened To: A Need for Relief*

The tension of what should be—parents lovingly listening and protecting, social workers recognizing and acting to remove the danger—and the reality of the (often ongoing) psychological abuse demands relief. In not being listened to the girl's sense of her true self gradual wanes and her sense of value to her community doesn't develop. Eventually there is no felt value remaining in her life. Dido's last words are a testament to the sense that one's life is a waste. ". . . I have wretchedly wasted my chaste reputation / And body, and mind." "I felt like shit," Hazel commented when the value of her life was discredited by a prison guard. Dido's oath to end her life is a desperate strategy which coincides with the indignity of feeling worthless. Suicide is one option which promises to release the not-listened-to from the pain of desertion.

Medea (Emotion: angry)

(From the Greek '*medos*' cunning, and '*med*' to limit, measure, consider)

*"I was really mad."* BB

In Euripides' retelling of the [Greek] legend, the Colchian princess Medea has married the hero Jason. As the play's action begins, Jason has decided to cast off Medea and to marry the daughter of Creon, king of Corinth. After a dreadful struggle between her passionate sense of injury and her love for her children, Medea determines that she will punish Jason by murdering the Corinthian princess and her own sons, leaving Jason to grow old with neither wife nor child. She carries out the murders and escapes in the chariot of her grandfather, the sun-god Helios. Despite the monstrosity of Medea's deeds, Euripides succeeds in evoking sympathy for her.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Merriam-Webster. *Encyclopedia of Literature* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster Incorporated Publishers, 1995), 146.

### *Not Being Listened To: Anger in a Wounded Heart*

Betrayals wound deeply and anger rises up in the betrayed person as a secondary emotion to the hurt. Not being listened to can feel like a betrayal. It is to have one's statement, question, person, or predicament ignored at a time of need. There are certain betrayals that injure significantly more than others within the phenomenon of not being listened to. The people that are in relationships of trust—spouses, parents, teachers, doctors, clergy—can leave tremendous pain in their wake as they turn from the responsibilities and social expectations of their positions and then place their allegiances and aspirations elsewhere. Medea's anger and "passionate sense of injury" leads to killing those she loves (her two children) and others (Jason's lover and that woman's father). Medea carries out her own version of justice by killing all the people to whom Jason is attached leaving him as destitute for affection as she feels. The anger of retribution springs from the pain of being cast aside, seen as a nobody, as an undesirable companion. The rationality of Medea's revenge ends in incredible harm, including self-harm.

An incarcerated woman not listened to may also experience several different expressions of anger. My research reveals various qualities of abandonment in incarcerated women not listened to. Not being listened to provokes an anger for justice, an internalized anger, and an anger that breaks through the boundaries of the body—the emotion and its spatiality.

### *Not Being Listened To: Anger for Justice*

Then the psychiatrist said, "Well, I need to meet with you and your parents tomorrow."

So the next day my parents came down and we sat in his office. I was thirty-four or five at that time and was admitted to the psych ward. I was trying to explain my opiate addiction history and what was going on in my life with my pregnancy and he wasn't listening. My parents were

trying to tell their side of the story and he basically put some papers in front of them and said, “This is so that we can sign her over so her guardianship is under you. She’s not capable of making life decisions on her own.”

I was really mad at the psychiatrist. He wouldn’t listen. He wouldn’t listen to a word I had to say. He didn’t listen to my parents. When I’m not listened to my fight or flight kicks in. BB

At the heart of this interaction of not being listened to is a dismissal of the woman—her presence is no longer a viable factor in making decisions regarding the future of her own life. Her ability to speak for herself and her baby appeared to be of no value to the physician. Not being listened to in this case means that one’s credibility is undermined. An “unquestionable” authority, the medical doctor, acted without attending to the story of the speaker. There is a bias against the patient that leaves her in a position of needing to stand up for herself. Anger fuels that initiative.

Anger ignited in this way can be a source of energy. It carries a power to reverse the injustice served. In the anecdote, not being listened to was an attack on the woman’s internal locus of control. It ignited a fight mode in BB because her dignity and personhood were at stake, like Medea’s identity as Jason’s beloved and his spouse.

The doctor’s inability to see her value reminds me of a scene in Christian scriptures in which Jesus enters the temple and is overwhelmed by the numbers and the noise of the sellers of sacrificial animals and the currency money changers. He senses a deep violation of the prayerful and personal nature of God’s presence in the temple. The space has been mal-purposed by the sellers i.e. rather than respectful, the area appears, feels, and sounds like a market place. In his

anger Jesus turns over tables and chases animals and their keepers out of the temple. His flaring temper is justified for the sake of the preservation of something sacred. As the identity of the worship space was at stake, so too, the sacredness of the identity of the traumatized woman not listened to.

The experience of not being listened to challenges the speaker to recognize that something has been lost. Grief gives way to anger and once aroused, that force can be used to hurt in a manner comparable to one's own pain, as Medea's actions illustrate. The phenomenon is an infringement on the woman's right to be heard.

Not being listened to is a rejection. Like shouting or blaming, fury is an attempt to overpower the betrayer's authority. Rather than succumb to the insult, the emotion of anger also fuels the fight and any attempt she might make to escape. The phenomenon of not being listened to as it is lived through may be quickly buried as shame, but it ignites the fight in the speaker to be reckoned with as credible, and very present to the situation at hand.

*Not Being Listened To: Anger Internalized*

Sometimes the woman's anger is directed inward. There is no one present to fight and the reason for the anger is the state of not being heard, not having one's feelings understood.

. . . The anger burns within my soul, swallowing my pride, leaving a hole, wounds so deep no one can see the bottom. Tears add up leading to oceans of sorrow, rivers of drugs, seas of pain, wishing I could go back to that first day. I don't know who I am anymore, what I have allowed myself to become, why I am sitting in this cell alone.



The orange of the flame burns bright like the intensity of my heart for you. Chains shackle my soul as I drop to my knees wishing you knew how I feel, but my screams go unheard. Why can't you tell I love you?<sup>212</sup> AT

AT identifies the colour orange flaming within her. This colour of “the intensity of her heart” is, according to Hoss’s Dream Colour Chart, an affirmation of the phenomenon of not being listened to within her. There is a yearning to be recognized and, as the colour suggests, that need is rooted in the unconscious. I have italicized the phrases of “orange” which resonate with this position.

*1) I want to expand my interests and develop new activities. 2) I want a wider sphere of influence. 3) I feel friendly and welcoming. 4) I want more contact with others. 5) I feel enthusiastic, outgoing and adventurous. 6) I am driven by desires and hopes toward the new, undiscovered and satisfying. 7) I feel driven but need to overcome my doubts or fear of failure. 8) I must avoid spreading myself too thin (emphasis added).*<sup>213</sup>

The anger can act as a springboard for the expression of other emotions such as yearning to be heard. The emotions of orange are a cry for relationship.

The prison structure physically embodies a not listening stance. It blares messages of not caring. An echo of one’s voice in the hallways comes back empty. The overpowering intercom is indifferent, impersonal, and disturbing. The clang of a door reverberates through the cell block, a reminder of things closed to the women: closed minds, opportunities removed, gestures of touch refused.

The brain maps generated in this setting are reinforced daily. Not being listened to limits the life force of the soul. The mind’s maps broadcast and reiterate the message of being closed off from life on the outside. Numerous times the woman’s existence is

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<sup>212</sup> AT, “Burning Anger,” *Hear Me, See Me: Incarcerated Women Write*, ed. Marybeth Christie Redmond and Sarah W. Bartlett (Maryknoll, NY: 2013), 86. Used with permission.

<sup>213</sup> Hoss, “The Dream Experience: Color.”

recognized as unworthy. The depth of her love fails to reach the loved one. Love is not incoming, and the incarcerated woman's love is disabled, not heard or understood.

Anger that is internalized pushes her body to its knees in solidarity with her shackled soul. Not being listened to as it is lived through the body is a position of pleading. The intensity of her "undiscovered" love walled in by the jail, "screams." The phenomenon of not being heard is heavy, debilitating, and creates a bottomless pit of longing.

*Not Being Listened To: A Spatiality of Anger*

There is another reference to the unheard torment and joy in jail. Through anger, the phenomenon of not being listened to can continue to scream even after the owner of the pain has left the room.

**Laughing from Inside**

How barbaric of these officers to hold the women  
From the sun which shines from the bright blue sky. . . . [They are]  
Stagnating laughter that should thrive and can't because the man  
holds  
each and every one of us back.  
Yet angry screams embedded in the cement  
walls rage so deep it's buried in the foundation. . . .  
Looking around now, these women hold hands, feel free  
laughing together. This is how prison should be  
if only the officials would stand up and hear our cries;  
but we laugh from the inside, we mustn't cry.<sup>214</sup>

The final line, "we laugh from the inside, we mustn't cry," is the cunning of Medea. Not being listened to means an incarcerated woman has to hide her pain in silence. Medea is carried away in a chariot, but the anger embodied in her actions

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<sup>214</sup> Tonya, "Laughing from Inside," *Hear Me, See Me: Incarcerated Women Write*, ed. Marybeth Christie Redmond and Sarah W. Bartlett, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 152. Used with permission.

has resonated for millennia. The wrath of hundreds of women also persists. In fact, the anger of rejection and frustration at not being heard is timeless as it can be “embedded in the cement walls.” Captivity may constrict and contain people, but their anger spills over spiritually into the structure itself so much so that it is palpable to those who come there afterward.

These women yearn for the healing light of the sun. They laugh and cry in secret. The officers will not have a last laugh at their expense. An incarcerated woman’s speech is guarded because of numerous occasions when her words were met with rejection. Her disposition can be measured (the Greek *med*). She is selective in regard to who hears her voice, what they hear, and how it is delivered. The phenomenon attempts to stave off any further rejections by its remnant and resident pain in her body—the gnawing reminder of not being listened to. She spares herself subsequent blows of not being listened to by remaining silent. There is a well-thought-out maturity in this action of editing what the guards will see and hear. The cost is that she often suffers alone like Medea, bereft of her husband and children.

Ariadne (Emotions: fragmented, lost)  
(From the Greek *ari*, most and *adnos*, holy)

*“Am I nothing?”* Hazel

The tale of Ariadne is one of her shared resourcefulness turned somewhat psychotic through her lover’s abandonment. She cleverly assists Theseus in his quest to kill the minotaur within her father Mino’s maze. Her gift is a ball of string or wool (in some versions he receives glittering jewels) to mark his path for a safe exit. Their agreement is that he will marry her and together they will leave her father’s kingdom, the island of Crete. However, Theseus abandons her on the isle of Naxos where she becomes a bacchante, or lover/follower of Bacchus, the god of wine and ecstasy. The bacchantes “were believed to possess occult powers, the ability to charm snakes and suckle animals, as well as preternatural strength that

enabled them to tear living victims to pieces before indulging in a ritual feast (omophagia).”<sup>215</sup>

Ariadne’s reaction to her abandonment is often portrayed by artists on the shores of the island of Naxos as fearful (e.g. Titian’s “Bacchus and Ariadne”), despondent (e.g. Delacroix’s, “The Autumn Bacchus and Ariadne”), or about to come into the company of Bacchus and his feral bacchantes (e.g. Lovis Corinth’s, “Ariadne on Naxos”). These portrayals of Ariadne represent emotions in an incarcerated woman’s lived experience of abandonment: fear, depression, and a need for relief from the pain. The lived experience of not being listened to feels like a desertion. All three of these emotions can lead to numbing with alcohol and drugs or process addictions. The trauma of not being listened to may also leave the woman vulnerable to dissociation and the fragmentation of her soul.

*Not Being Listened To: Isolation, Fear, and Anxiety*

So then I asked the doctor, ‘cause I was stressed and I didn’t know how I was going to maintain a steady amount of opiate in my body for the fetus, could she prescribe something? The methadone clinic was closed. It was Christmas. Abortion was not an option. Getting opiates off the streets is very expensive. I was worried about the baby with a sudden withdrawal. She had told me it could harm the baby. She obviously was like, “No, I’m not a drug dealer. I can’t do that.” Basically, “Deal with it.”

I was filled with anxiety. I felt trapped and it felt like no one would help me—no professionals. I was very anxious and scared. I started to cry. BB

In the moment before feeling trapped, isolated, and all alone to face her predicament, the woman’s body fills with anxiety, fear. The phenomenon of not being listened to occurs just after the off-hand response of the doctor. There are no practical resources in the small city doctor’s office for a morphine addicted pregnant mother at Christmastime. Clinics are places where one expects a helpful outcome. There is no empathic tone in the “deal with

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<sup>215</sup> “Baccantes,” *Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster Publishers Incorporated, 1995), 94.

it” attitude of the doctor. Danger closes in and not being listened to is a rush of panic in the woman’s body. She is fearful for the baby and inadequate to the task of keeping the fetus out of distress. Her body’s response is to collapse tearfully under the abandonment of not feeling listened to.

*Not Being Listened To: Feeling Worthless, Depressed*

One may interpret not being listened to personally, as feeling worthless.

Next thing Jill’s coming back to me. I’m sitting in a chair at one of the tables on the unit. Overweight, white, with a mole on her face, she comes right up in my personal space. She starts saying really nasty stuff. This woman was very angry, the way she talked. She said, “I’m going to slit your throat.” I felt a shiver go through me. I was scared for my life.

Then I ended up telling a screw, a jail guard, and she told me, “Well, I don’t want to get involved.” I felt a bit of anxiety over that. I’m like hearing in my head, ‘What the hell? Am I nothing?’ I remember feeling that I didn’t matter. I felt worthless after. I was thinking, ‘I’m just an inmate. I’m a nobody to her.’ But that comment, “I don’t want to get involved”? I think that will always stay with me. Hazel

“Am I nothing?” is a response that speaks to the shock of being dismissed outright. The body shivers, the palms sweat, the tongue dries, and the heart races. Worthlessness is shame. The body emotionally responds to the mind as it considers the possibility that “I am nothing.” The guard doesn’t care about her life. She is isolated, alone, and vulnerable. Once again, an authority, her female guard, fails to protect and denies any responsibility for her charge who fears for her life. Her statement of not listening, “I don’t want to get involved” is a direct hit to Hazel’s worth and her dignity as a human.

*Not Being Listened To: Fragmented, Lost*

Not being listened to or having no one to confide in generates a feeling of invisibility to the point that the traumatized woman’s emotions can quietly explode.

### Breaking Silence

Silence was what echoed in my life, as a young girl,  
I lived in the silence of things not spoken  
for so long I become the silence, longing  
for a voice, finding  
none, frozen with fear.

Oh, but for a comforting word,  
a sound, any kind  
of vibration from within—a scream  
breaks through shattering the silence  
of my existence, shards of emotion fall  
all around, splinters and slivers,  
no whole piece left. I am left  
naked for the world to see—  
such damaged goods, raw  
emotions are my blanket. At last  
the silence  
is broken. Norajeane<sup>216</sup>

Ariadne wakes up isolated and alone. As she notes Theseus's ship in the distance she screams in the grief of being forsaken. She was eviscerated—full of life one moment and then completely alone and ill-equipped for the silent void of rejection in the next moment. The abandonment in a strange place prompts the question: "Am I nothing?" Separated from Theseus, Ariadne seeks to belong. She yearns for a way to express the pain.

Norajeane, in her poem, "Breaking Silence" also seeks a compassionate ear, "a comforting word." What comes from within her is a scream of longing. I am reminded of my own soul cry from my infancy. When I was a baby, six weeks old, my mother was hospitalized in a psychiatric unit for several months and I was separated from my parents and my three siblings for nearly half a year. More than thirty years later, in a session for

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<sup>216</sup> Norajeane, "Breaking Silence," in *Hear Me, See Me: Incarcerated Women Write*, ed. Marybeth Christie Redmond and Sarah W. Bartlett (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 52. Used with permission.

inner healing for emotions of abandonment, my prayer minister told me she could hear my soul screaming an infant's heartbreaking cry, "I want my mama!" My primal pain had not been heard or attended to over the years. In a similar manner, Norajean's fragmenting of her soul through neglect is a wound that waits to be heard. Whereas my infant's pain was buried, Norajean's is "naked for the world to see."

An abrupt trauma of being turned away or left behind is scarring. Worthlessness gives way to a new identity with behaviours involving alcohol and drugs. For many traumatized women the overindulgence of wine or alcohol and frenzied activities involving sex and/or drugs (i.e. the Bacchus alternative solution) may temporarily disguise the pain. This oblivion offers a new, if short-lived, pain-free identity. The Ariadne or "most holy," is lost. The true self cannot be grasped. The memory of being forsaken becomes for Norajean a scream buried in her soul, and then "raw" and in the open.

Hazel's comment, "I think that will always stay with me," is indicative of the indelible quality of the mark left by the lived experience of not being listened to while under a veritable threat to her life. The incarcerated woman may spend a life time harbouring a remark that stabbed or a silence of indifference that stunned. Both are indicative of not being listened to and so, feeling worthless, lost, or fragmented.

### In Summary

Dido, Medea, and Ariadne are women characters from the Greek and Roman classical era whose stories display the painful emotionality of not being listened to as it is lived through in the lives of incarcerated women not listened to today. A loved one abruptly and heartlessly abandons her, and whether she is a child or an adult, the impact

on her body and soul is tremendous. Whether suicidal, angry, or lost and fragmented the tendency of the body and soul to heal or to spiral downward depends largely on the listening community who does or does not step in to empathically welcome the traumatized woman.



## **Conclusion: “If We Had Listened”**

### **An Incarcerated Woman’s Not Being Listened To**

The phenomenon of an incarcerated woman’s not being listened to is mired in trauma. This fact became very clear to me in the early stages of the research, from the time of changing my question to “What may be an incarcerated woman’s lived experience of *not* being listened to?” to reviewing the published works of incarcerated women with an ear to that phenomenon, to writing the literature review. In the interviews that followed, I learned that the women’s sense of not being listened to is a dark place. The woman’s lifeworld emotionally gives rise to feelings of anxiety, fear, a sense of injustice, confusion, discomfort socially, and anger.

The phenomenon adversely affects the body in a corporeality of bitter tastes, nausea, body tension and twitching, heaviness on the shoulders, and/or swollen joints. This corporal unauthenticity is an immunological and neurological response to her conscious self and her unconsciousness together meeting in the flesh, expressing the grief and confusion of not being listened to.

Ultimately not being listened to is experienced as an abandonment and a rejection. The memories of the lived experience of not being listened to are a testimony to a fractured community. A trusted caregiver who betrays a child or a lover who abuses a woman profoundly disturbs her soul. A distancing takes place in the woman’s psyche in early childhood relationships and in the prison environment. The separation contributes to her feeling unworthy of care from others and creates a sense of not belonging. Like the ancient Roman and Greek characters Dido, Medea, and Ariadne, the abandonment in an incarcerated woman’s not being listened to manifests in thoughts and actions of suicide,

vengeful anger, and often desperate attempts to self-medicate. Her self-knowledge is suffocated by the knowledge that she is not listened to. Her true identity and her life force (part and parcel of her soul) are often silenced or shattered when the not being listened to is abusive. The result is often a descent into mental illness. For an incarcerated woman, not being listened to is also expressed in feelings of being lost. Her identity is elusive even to herself. Resilience lies dormant in her disturbed soul (ready to awaken through creativity and love). She may seek refuge through escapist behaviours such as substance abuse.

Our society's options for "justice" for the traumatized appear to be locked into an incarceration model that has not been successful.<sup>217</sup> We are not good listeners generally, nor do adults necessarily identify well with a child's experience. We are increasingly inattentive in this digital age and often deaf to the voices of the needy. In Lonergan's terms, our inattentiveness produces a value system which is unauthentic. We criminalize the women (and other prisoners) as "other," as a sub-category of humans, and so, treat them as deserving of more abuse. Their experience of not being listened to is intensified and prolonged during incarceration.

If we begin to listen interiorly, to our flesh, if we listen to the earth, to the source of life in this universe resident in our souls, if we listen to the lived experience of an incarcerated woman not being listened to, a change in perspective is possible. We may come to realize, like Jesus, that the incarcerated woman's story is our story and that her not being listened to is a phenomenon which affects us all.

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<sup>217</sup> Morris, *Why Prisons Fail*.

## An Art Card

### *If We Had Listened*

A recent tool that I use with directees (and myself) in spiritual direction is a set of eighty art cards, “Listen for Joy,” designed by Melanie Weidner, spiritual director and artist. Each mini art image bears a title and a spiritual word to invite directees into a reflection. There’s also an explanation of this word’s significance i.e. to check whether the word’s action is in or out of balance in our lives.

I invited the Sacred Presence of Christ to assist me in concluding this dissertation and I prayerfully drew (like the drawing of lots in the Christian scriptures), sight unseen, the card, “If We Had Listened.”<sup>218</sup> (To see this image, please access Weidner’s website [www.listenforjoy.com](http://www.listenforjoy.com) or use the URL in the footnote below). The image is of two long bones and the stapes (a stirrup-shaped bone in the ear), all red, lying on the ground of a landscape. The skeleton of a large left hand rises from the soil into a yellow and then blue sky. The multiple bones in the hand graduate in colour from red at the base of the palm, to orange mid-finger, and then to yellow at the fingertips. Black birds, very small and then larger, ascend from the large bones on the ground into the sky. The words, “If we had listened to our bones” flow down the margin along the side of the outer finger to the base of the hand. The spiritual word to ponder along with this image is “Warning.” Weidner provides the following prompts:

***Invitation:*** *To seek honest answers. To dig into the core of things. To find the collective wisdom we carry in our bones, from generation to generation, about how to care for each other and our Earth.*

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<sup>218</sup> Melanie J. S. Weidner, “Warning,” No. 39 in *Listen for Joy Art Cards: Come Through Collection* (New Mexico: JS McCarthy Printers, 2017), <https://www.listenforjoy.com/shop/standard-print/if-we-had-listened/>. Content of card and explanation used with permission.

[When this aspect of our lives is]

***In balance:*** [we are] *Bringing clear sight and healthy restraint to our choices. Heeding danger signals from our communities and the Earth. Attending to what nourishes life at the deepest levels.*

[When this aspect of our lives is]

***Out of balance:*** [we are] *Being blind to anything beyond a surface appearance, convenient reaction, or easy answer. Staying stuck rather than taking corrective action (emphasis in original).*

I was taken aback at the significance of the card to this research. The word “warning” resonates with Stauffer’s call to listen deeply to the traumatized and to learn from their stories of ethical loneliness. For me, the word also suggests that as a society we begin to “*heed the danger signals*” from the communities of the wounded behind bars. The “in and out of balance” commentary speaks to whether the community is listening generously (*[a]tending to what nourishes life at the deepest levels*) or not (*[b]eing blind to anything beyond a surface*) as in the cases of children’s unheard complaints of abuse. We can take into account generations of not-listened-to lives. We can begin to hear their truth, and to open ourselves to change our ways of thinking accordingly. We can be generous listeners and advocate for other ways than imprisonment for convicted traumatized individuals.

This research touched the pain that has accumulated over many years of incarcerated women suffering. That pain is now present in the phenomenon of girls and women not being listened to. When I listen to my bones, and in them the generations of women who have come before and are with me, I can extend my hand to receive their stories as a spiritual director. I recognize that the incarcerated woman differs from other women in that her pain and loneliness are intensified through the jail experience. If I am

to “*attend to what nourishes at the deepest level*,” then I must also listen to the research and apply what I learn to my own life. Weidner’s phrases provoke another look.

*“To seek honest answers”*

I sought “honest answers” to the question, “What may be an incarcerated woman’s lived experience of not being listened to?” My pilot project’s question felt self-indulgent and did not open widely enough to the women’s dominant lived experience. Changing the question allowed me to learn more from the women I listened to. It taught me that this phenomenon speaks clearly emotionally, relationally, spatially, and corporally in the anecdotal lifeworld of incarcerated women.

*“To dig into the core of things”*

Van Manen’s phenomenological approach encourages listening to the wisdom of the elders in phenomenology. Heidegger, Husserl, Lonergan, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas offer a wisdom of inquiry into consciousness and the body. Their work bridges my current search to understand the drama of not being listened to as it relates to the human unconscious and the horizons from which the women experience not being listened to. Van Manen emphasizes allowing the gift of wonder to assist my pondering the phenomenon and to go beyond the surface of what is taken for granted. Offering the women an opportunity to speak to the phenomenon from any point during their lives gave voice to the context and the import of their lived experience.

The secondary data comes from women writing honestly about the memories of life in jail and beforehand. The writers who enter the jails take a risk and ultimately, they foster a creativity of honesty which is restorative to the women’s lost selves. They “dig to the core of things” by listening to the buried burden of not being listened to.

*“To find the collective wisdom we carry in our bones.”*

The description of incarcerated women not being listened to is disturbing. I have been open to the collective wisdom of these women as it speaks through the anecdotes of their lived experience. It invites us on the outside, those free of the correctional institutions to make changes in the way we think, to challenge the way we and the justice system criminalize, and to make changes to our current laws regarding the use of imprisonment with the traumatized.

*“Bringing clear sight and healthy restraint to our choices.”*

As I re-read Weidner’s suggestions for living in balance and consider my interest in those behind bars, I feel a strong emotion of solidarity rise from my abdomen up through my chest and finally, come to moisten my eyes. I am grateful for having heard these stories.

The handful of people I encountered working on the street level at Elizabeth Fry in Edmonton and Streets Alive in Lethbridge are like the sun rising in the darkened lives of the women. They, like the writers and interviewers who work with the women in jail, unravel the stereotypes of female offenders held by society. These friends, artists, yoga instructors, and reporters advance an acceptance and respect for the dignity of each woman as a person, a sister.

*“[A]ttend to what nourishes life at the deepest levels.”*

Sarah Jobe brought students with her from her college into a prison classroom, not to convert anyone, but to find Christ among those women whom she teaches behind bars. Her attitude of listening and learning transformed her understanding of Christ even as the director’s honesty transcends a spiritual director’s experience of the sacred. Jobe’s work

is conversion at its best and draws out the latent resilience of the incarcerated women. My research models Jobe's approach.

### Learnings for Spiritual Direction

#### *The Body*

Spiritual direction is inter-relational and although much of our communication with directees is conversational, this research has taught me that I cannot approach directees without considering the wealth of wisdom contained in their flesh. We really do have to listen to our bones and encourage our directees to do the same. The corporeality or body-reality of incarcerated women is that they physically carry the trauma of not being listened to. Listening to emotions (which are body-centered) is an important practice in SD.

The body is more, though. It is ancient, yet continually, genetically renewing itself. Gendlin's discovery of focusing and the techniques he tailored to inquire of the body, as well as the practice of listening to its responses are invaluable. For directees who feel not listened to, who carry past traumas, the body offers its own truth to clarify those experiences, inform the mind, and transform the pain or confusion. The Jesuit healers, Sheila Fabricant, Dennis, and Matt Linn, taught me to ask in prayer, "Christ Jesus, when did you in your earthly life go through what I am experiencing?" In light of this research, I suggest asking as well, "When, Jesus, did you know in your body, what I am sensing today?" If we are not listening to the body, we are only half-listening.

#### *Listening is Life-giving; Not Listening is a Death Blow*

When we are truly open to the other person, as I discovered in my pilot project, then the act of listening is life-giving. In this research it is clear that not listening can be a

death blow. It negatively affects the soul, the body, the self. It generates a poor self-regard for children who are abused or ignored. Not being listened to is detrimental to their souls. Spiritual directors can listen for such messages of negative self-talk and attend to them by offering a loving response that awakes the soul and “bids” for the lost self.

We have not been “*heeding the danger signals from [these] communities*” as Weidner submits. One danger signal is that the number of incarcerated women continues to skyrocket and their children are left bereft of mothers. Failing the efforts of innovative thinkers and actors like Kim Bogucki (The If Project) who address the needs of the women’s offspring, this trend will continue. It is foreboding. We continue to live in the aftermath of the Canadian and United States’ government policies of cultural genocide against Indigenous peoples which forced children and parents apart. Jailing Indigenous mothers is also devastating for families. Spiritual directors need to address abandonment issues in traumatized directees. Abandonment is a key emotion arising from not being listened to.

Unlike Indigenous peoples, Western culture is not one to “*listen to the Earth,*” but such listening is not unlike attending to the body’s voice. The source of life resides in creation and gives of its wisdom without cost. Spiritual directors can learn to trust nature as a resource for its faithfulness in meeting the not-listened-to directee. Disturbed directees can be introduced to a simple practice of connecting with the ground, a tree, or an animal in order to receive a non-judgemental response to their need to belong. Since undertaking this research, I have taken some traumatized women outside to lie down on the grass. Creation can awaken a resilience within the shattered soul.



Many of the women expressed their not being listened to through their own writing, dramatic performance, and artwork. The arts in spiritual direction are invaluable for connecting directees to their wounded selves and to the Sacred Presence. Maud Clark's work advocated bringing alive the traumatized flesh through creativity.

Spiritual directors are also multiplying rapidly. Their numbers raise a critical consideration for me. This research presents a challenge to the community of believers to listen to Christ present in the marginalized and criminalized. To answer the call to listen to the lives of those in pain is to respond to a wounded part of our own being. For Christians it is an essential consideration. How will spiritual directors address the women in jail, the women who leave prisons, the ones traumatized and needing a compassionate ear?

#### Further Study

Not being listened to is a fundamental flaw in human communication. It therefore needs to be addressed in spiritual direction, psycho-therapy, mental health and the healing arts and more generally in professions dealing with health, education, communications, and justice. Whenever inequality defines a relationship, the phenomenon of not being listened is likely present. The result of not being listened to for the speaker who is not heard, especially those who face a loss or may be reprimanded at the hands of a boss, teacher, or parent is emotionally draining. Not being listened to troubles the mind, traumatizes the body, and weakens the soul. Researching this phenomenon is especially important in the lives of children, those vulnerable to abuse, and those who suppress their truth in order to please authorities on whom they depend for survival. Children growing up with distracted parents may be adversely affected by the

phenomenon of not being listened to. These family experiences would benefit from philological studies.

In an age of extensive and involuntary human migration (likely to increase with global warming), agencies which work with displaced persons should be made aware of the potential dangers of not being listened to. Their clients' mental and physical health is already stressed and at increased risk if their stories are not listened to. As loneliness becomes more prevalent, the study of not being listened to becomes more urgent.

Finally, further understanding is needed in regard to the experience of listening in the lives of women and men generally. If the incarcerated woman's lifeworld is the extreme, how is not being listened to lived out in classrooms, work places, and among friends and family?

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## Appendix A

### Letter of Consent

**I understand that if I agree to be a research participant by telling at least one memory of mine of not being listened to at any time in my life—what happened, what it felt like, what I remember:**

1) These personal stories and memories of my not being listened to will be audio tape-recorded. The researcher destroys the tapes along with transcripts after the work is completed. (Shredded paper, tapes/digital files erased)

2) There is no deception in this study. It is not for exploiting people, making money off them, but rather for research and learning purposes.

3) Maintaining confidentiality, results of the study will be part of presentations (which may be recorded and posted on-line in conjunction with that conference or workshop), a written work (dissertation) and/or other publications such as articles and/or books. Written publications and public presentations based on the study are intended to inform and help people who listen, to listen better.

4) Parts of the stories/memories will be used to help the researcher understand what it may mean for a woman with experience of being in jail not to be listened to and describe that experience. The final written work will be a scholarly document with an analysis of the material. (No transcripts will be published as a whole.)

5) Participants' names will not be shared by the researcher with anyone.

6) Unless requested otherwise by a participant, identities of participants will be kept confidential. Code names will be used in any writing.

7) Participants can look at, read and change their own transcripts if so desired.

8) A participant can withdraw parts of or their whole interview, no questions asked, no problem.

9) The transcripts and written work will be kept confidential and locked up until no longer needed, at which time they will be destroyed.

*I agree to participate and want my name kept confidential and unpublished.*

---

Signature

---

Printed Name    and Date

*I agree to participate, but REJECT confidentiality of name and, if necessary, prefer that my own name or first name be used in written and spoken context of this research's data.*

---

Signature

---

Printed Name    and Date

## Appendix B

### Participant Instrument

#### **PARTICIPANT INSTRUMENT (in a different colour from the Researcher Instrument)**

As though telling a story to someone, consider the moment, that memory when you felt not listened to by someone. Describe the moment as you remember feeling it. Start with “I remember this particular time when . . .

#### **Helpful phrases you might use for your memory:**

“I remember seeing . . .

“I remember feeling . . .

“I remember hearing . . .

“The person’s expression/body language was \_\_\_\_\_ and

I \_\_\_\_\_

“Their voice was \_\_\_\_\_ and I

\_\_\_\_\_

“Inside me . . .

“When he or she \_\_\_\_\_, I

\_\_\_\_\_

“I knew what it meant not to be listened to when I felt

\_\_\_\_\_

Also, \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix C

### Interview Instrument

#### **RESEARCHER INSTRUMENT: For Recalling a Memory of Not Being Listened To MEDITATION**

**Co-researcher can be seated comfortably with written prompts.**

#### **Researcher, also sitting, says aloud**

So remember a time when someone did not listen to you. Take a moment of quiet to remember, if you like. Let me know when you remember a time.  
Picture the room or space, what you were telling the person, how you felt at the time.  
What did you notice about the other person that indicated he or she did not listen to you?  
Take a minute to reflect and remember first, and then tell me your specific memory. As you take time to remember, you may respond to some of the following details,

What do you remember about:

the time of day,

how you felt when you met together,

where and how you sat down or stood and talked,

your body's temperature and comfort level,

perhaps what the conversation was about,

your feelings at the time and

one specific moment when you realized and felt that person was not paying attention to what you had to say, to who you are—a moment when you felt misunderstood and not listened to.

What did he or she do or say that you felt they were not listening?

What happened **in you** in that moment?

## Appendix D

### Thank-you Letter

Date

Dear Participant,

THANK-YOU!

Your TIME and PARTICIPATION are important to me.

Here's a \$50 GIFT to say THANKS again.

Sharing your memory was voluntary and you can still withdraw from the study by calling me or my supervisor (see numbers below).

Grateful to you for sharing your memory,

Teresa Elder Hanlon  
Cell 1-403-XXX-XXXX  
Local Number

Change your mind?

If you would like to withdraw from this study, please call

Teresa @ 403-XXX-XXXX

Or contact Heather by email: \_\_\_\_\_@\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

Poster



# Not listened to?

Do you remember anyone who did NOT listen to you? How did you react? What did it feel like not to be listened to? I would like to hear your story for a research project on what it means for people to NOT be listened to.

April-May, 2018 Participants receive a grocery gift card

We can interview in libraries, outdoors in any public, quiet place.

Contact Teresa text/call:

403-XXX-XXXX

## Appendix F

### Ethics Letter of Approval

**From:** Nicole Beal  
**Subject:** Ethics Review Results  
**Date:** April 27, 2017 at 2:07:18 PM MDT  
**To:** Teresa Hanlon  
**Cc:** Heather Jamieson, Henriette Kelker

Good Afternoon Teresa,

As we all expected your application has gone through ethics without concern. You are approved to move forward with your research with an ending date of May 1, 2018. Should you require an extension, please contact me with the reason for the request and new timeline and we will forward it on to the panel for approval.

Good luck with this research and your dissertation.

Regards,

**Nicole Beal**

**Executive Assistant to the Principal and Dean**

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