TEACHING WOMEN'S STUDIES TO CONVICTED SEX OFFENDERS

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Abstract

Simon Fraser University, in conjunction with the Correctional Services of Canada, offers university credit courses within four federal penal institutions in Southwestern British Columbia. A first year introductory Women's Studies course was taught at a medium security prison housing an entirely male population, ninety percent of whom had been convicted of sex offences.

Sex offender inmate students were found to be more traditional in their gender beliefs than were other male inmate students, and were initially more resistant to the ideas of women's studies. After an initial testing of the instructor by the students, some trust developed between students and instructor. Subsequently, the students seemed highly motivated to learn and found the material helpful to them in their quest for understanding of women, themselves, and the reasons for their crimes. In the end, they were very enthusiastic in their acceptance of feminist ideas and principles and were very supportive of women's studies for sex offenders. In conclusion, it is recommended that Women's Studies for Men be offered as a component in voluntary rehabilitation programmes for convicted sex offenders.
TEACHING WOMEN'S STUDIES TO CONVICTED SEX OFFENDERS

Background

Simon Fraser University, in conjunction with the Correctional Services of Canada, offers university credit courses within four federal penal institutions in southwestern British Columbia. This programme is unique in that regular university courses are taught by university faculty within the confines of the prisons. Inmates involved in this program are enrolled at Simon Fraser University, usually as special entry mature students. They may complete their B.A. degrees while incarcerated or may continue their studies, with no change of student status, if they are released from prison before graduation. Most courses offered are drawn from a humanities program and may be combined with correspondence courses to complete degree requirements over a period of several years.

In the summer of 1987 I was hired to teach an introductory women's studies course in Mountain Institution, a grade three medium security prison. Mountain has the dubious distinction of housing those inmates in the British Columbia penal system who require protective custody because they are considered to be in danger of being harmed by other inmates. Sex offenders constitute the largest portion of inmates requiring such protective custody. Guards and inmates currently estimate the sex offender population at Mountain to be upwards of ninety percent of the inmates incarcerated there. Other inmates who require protective custody include informers and those inmates no longer young enough to defend themselves against exploitation and aggression at the hands of their prisonmates.

When I first offered "Perspectives on Women: An Introduction to Women's Studies" in a prison setting, it was at Matsqui Institution in the first trimester of 1986. That marked the first time this course had ever been taught in any of the prisons. When I offered it again in the summer trimester of 1987 it was
the first time the course had been offered to a class of inmate students who were predominantly convicted sex offenders. A similar version of the course has been running more or less continually for ten years on campus, with myself acting as teaching assistant during five of those ten years. It had never before drawn more than four male students in a class. I had also acted as tutor for the same course when it was first offered by correspondence in late 1984. More men enrolled in the correspondence course but they still constituted a small minority of the students even under those conditions. As a result, the course had, before 1986, always been taught from a perspective which assumed female students. Consequently, when first presented with the prospect of an all male student body, I had to alter the course somewhat to suit their perspectives. I then made further alterations to the course in 1987 to reflect the more restricted composition of the student body at Mountain Institution and the unfortunate requirement that the course be presented in only seven intensive weeks.

It was understandably with some trepidation that I undertook the teaching assignment at Mountain. Several people, familiar with the population there, attempted to comfort me with the information that the prisoners at Mountain were polite, well mannered, well behaved, well educated, and almost middle class by comparison to the inmates at Matsqui Institution. I took little solace in these reassurances. My reasoning was two fold: (1) I assumed that their manners would only serve to mask their negative attitudes towards women behind a facade of false chivalry; and (2) I presumed that their lives had been shattered by their convictions for crimes against women and children, and that this experience would have been likely to aggravate preexisting hostilities towards women. I assumed that the fact of their having been officially labelled as sex offenders would make them even more defensive and sensitive to any issues relating to sexuality, and/or women, and/or power relations between the sexes.

The first dilemma arose for me from the fact that these same issues formed the core of my course. I was faced with the decision as to whether to choose to offer a highly rarified and academic course which avoided issues of power and sexuality, or to confront these issues head on. The first choice would allow me to teach a course which was easy on both myself and the students. The second option would require a great deal of us all. Based on the remarkable success I had acheived using a direct approach with the
inmate students at Matsqui the year before, I chose to go the more difficult route this time as well. I also chose that path because I wanted to take advantage of this unique opportunity to talk directly, and frankly, to the perpetrators of sexual crimes against women and children. Based on my experience at Matsqui Institution I felt that there was some slim possibility that I might actually be able to reach far enough into the hearts and minds of a few of these men that some future women or children might be saved from abuse at their hands.

Method

Each day, at the end of class time, I went directly to the nearest public park. There, on the shores of a huge lake surrounded by snow capped mountains, I spent an hour or two writing about what had transpired in class that day. I made notes about what I had observed, what conclusions I was drawing, my speculations, my plans for future classes, and anything else which seemed relevant. I made sure that I wrote directly after class to insure that my notes where based on fresh recollections. Those notes served three purposes. Firstly, the writing of them helped me to cleanse myself of some of the more unpleasant, or simply tenacious, experiences of each day's class. Secondly, the writing helped me to clarify for myself both what was happening and what I wanted to see happen in subsequent classes. Thirdly, those notes served as the basis for this paper.

The Students

The initial enrollment of thirty students at Mountain in 1987 constituted close to two-thirds of the total university enrollment there that trimester, and as such, represented an even higher level of student interest than there had been at Matsqui the year before. As is normal at any institution of learning, class size dwindled somewhat by the final drop date, when it became necessary for students to pay their fees if

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1 See H. Devor, "Teaching Women's Studies to Male Inmate Students" Women's Studies International Forum, in press.
they were to continue to attend the class. A total of twenty students completed the course. Both
enrollment and attendance remained unusually high throughout the course, the significance of which must
be seen in light of the fact that few of these students are concerned about formal university requirements
and therefore enroll in these courses largely for their own edification. If a course fails to retain their
interest, or offends their sensibilities, they have little to deter them from simply abandoning their studies
and doing their time in another part of the institution. To my knowledge the women’s studies students
gained no extra privileges for attending my course. Therefore, the relatively low dropout rate in these
women’s studies courses is a fairly strong indicator of their popularity with the students in these
institutions.

The students in the class at Mountain tended to be somewhat older than those at Matsqui the year
before. The age distribution may perhaps be a reflection of the fact that older inmates, being more
vulnerable to exploitation by their peers, require protective custody in larger numbers, or it perhaps may
be a characteristic of sex offender conviction patterns. The class, educational, ethnic and racial
backgrounds of the students at Mountain also differed from those at Matsqui. The students at Mountain
tended to have more solid educational backgrounds and more stable work histories than those at Matsqui.
There were fewer career criminals, fewer men who had lived their lives on the fringes of legitimate society,
and they were more uniformly of white anglo-saxon protestant backgrounds than had been the case at

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2 Comparison data on enrollments in competing courses.

3 In at least one instance, taking women’s studies might have worked against a student’s self
interests. One student was called for a parole board hearing during class time. When he
returned to class he told me that one of the women on the parole board had made
disparaging comments about his attendance in a women’s studies class. He reported that she
had suggested that such a course was a waste of his time and that he should be taking
courses which might be of future vocation use. This particular student was not incarcerated
for a sexual offence. Presumably, the dynamics would have been different if he had been a
sex offender.

4 At Matsqui, the students under the age of forty outnumbered their elders by three to one.
Whereas, at Mountain there were as many students over forty as there were under forty.

5 Three students at Mountain already had B.A. degrees and several others were clearly
comfortable with being at school even though they were new to the SFU program. Several
had had trades training in addition to high school and a larger percentage had completed
high school as teenagers rather than as returning adults.

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Matsqui. These factors did seem to contribute to their being a more well mannered group than the inmate students at Matsqui had been. I do believe, though, that their identities as sex offenders also contributed to their apparent docility. These men were aware of the fact that they faced brutality, and possibly death, at the hands of their fellow prisoners if they were to be released into a general prison population. They were also painfully aware of the contempt in which they are held by most members of society. I suspect that these factors worked in tandem with a pre-existing low self-esteem to incline convicted sex offenders towards the presentation of an image of non-aggression in an attempt to neutralize some of the stigma attached to their status. As the course progressed and they became more engaged with me and the course materials, I would guess that their desire to appear to be no longer dangerous to women and children increased and also served as a motivating factor in their generally polite and well-mannered behaviour.

The Course

The 1987 course was structured as a lecture/seminar complemented by films and video tapes. Class time of five hours each week was supplemented by two hours for informal discussion and consultation every week, for a total of seven hours of contact each week. The reading material for the course consisted almost entirely of reprints gathered from diverse sources by myself and previous instructors. I altered the curriculum to reflect both my differences in philosophy from those instructors and my perceptions of the needs of an entirely male student body.

My course differed from the ones normally given on campus in that it was organized to be more emotionally demanding and to give more attention to a feminist perspective on masculinity. To this end, wherever possible I chose reading materials and general course contents in such a way as to encourage the personal emotional involvement of the students. In this way, I directed their study of the social, psychological, and economic aspects of women's lives by bringing facts and figures alive through the use of

\footnote{The three Native students at Mountain were the only non-whites in the class of twenty.}

\footnote{See Appendix A for the course description and outline.}
materials containing evocative personal testimonials. The only differences between the 1986 and 1987 versions of the course were the condensations and minor omission that I was forced to make due to the length of the course having been shortened by about one third. I also made some minor improvements to the list of reading assignments.

"Perspectives on Women: An Introduction to Women's Studies," as I taught it most recently, was comprised of six main sections. The main body of the course began with an exploration of the biological bases of sex and gender differences and similarities. This was followed by a brief look at evolutionary theories and the possible lessons to be gained from the study of technologically primitive societies. The next section covered psychological theories and descriptive materials concerning the development of gender during early childhood, youth, and adolescence, including a discussion of the physical and sexual abuse of children. The third section looked at the economic position of women, beginning with pre-industrial societies and ending with a look at the present status of women in the Canadian economy and the effects of unionization on women's work. This was followed by a discussion of the institution of marriage, during which economic, emotional and psychological aspects of marriage for both men and women were examined. Sub-topics in the marriage unit included housework, sexual relations, and wife battering. The fifth section began with a look at the ways that women are portrayed in the arts, advertising and the media. This led into a discussion of the social role of pornography, which was followed by class time devoted to the question of why men rape. The final class was spent in study of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Many students began this class by expressing confusion and dismay about the changing roles of women and the demands that those changes placed on men. They seemed disgruntled by those changes and expressed some hostility towards feminists who they identified as the force behind changing gender roles and their own unhappy circumstances as convicted sex offenders. I therefore made it a priority that

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9 They argue that feminist attention to the issues of rape and child abuse had resulted in increased conviction rates for these crimes. Thus, some of them felt that they would not have been imprisoned for their crimes had feminists not been active in these areas.
they understood that feminist propositions offered them both increased adaptability in a changing world and increased freedom from the restrictions of their own gender roles. In doing so I found it helpful to call on similarities between the life experiences of the students and the experiences of women. I therefore repeatedly made comparisons between sex/gender prejudices and class, racial and ethnic discriminations. I also found it useful to call on their experiences within the prison system as powerless and disenfranchised people, and the experiences common to many of them as physically and sexually abused children. I attempted to convey to them the idea that acceptance of the premises of the course would not forever lock them into a losing and blame-filled situation.

I found it necessary to be able to communicate with the students through the culture of men, from the perspective of women. This required that I be able to couch the messages of the course in terms that would be sufficiently familiar to the students to enable them to grasp the ideas easily, without obscuring the feminist nature of the material. The composition of the group, as both inmates and men, meant that they functioned within a masculine social order which placed a high value on concealment of emotions, aggressive sexuality, toughness, and a disregard for authority and middle-class social values. Thus, I had to find ways to evoke emotion and empathy in the students without myself appearing to be weak or emotionally involved.

Throughout the course I attempted to build within the students a sense of empathy with the experiences of women. I attempted to do this by taking what amounted to a social learning perspective combined with a large dose of rational calculus. I tried to convey to them that girl (boy) children and women (men) are taught that they must behave in certain ways if they are to be able to think of themselves as normal females (males). I argued that the power of these socializing factors is so pervasive that few

10 The sex offenders group, though, was less uniformly masculine than the group at Matsqui had been. The men at Mountain seemed to break into two types. Close to two thirds of them were either slight or quiet, passive seeming men. The remaining men were physically large and imposing, although restrained in their behaviour. Most of the men never told me what they had been convicted of but I found myself speculating nonetheless. It became my suspicion that the larger, more aggressive men were more likely to have been convicted on rape charges while the smaller, more passive men were more likely to have been convicted of sexual crimes against minors. Nonetheless, the sex offenders group as a whole was more subdued than the general population inmates had been at Matsqui the year before.
people are even aware of their action. I further suggested that the effects of socialization are too strong for most people to completely counteract even if they do become aware that there are reasons for them to resist what they have been taught. I then asked them to consider their own socialization process and to try to imagine what choices they would make if they had been socialized to think and feel and desire as women do. I wanted them to understand that they had made what seemed to them to be rational choices from within the framework of their masculine socialization, and that women do the same thing from within a differently socialized world view. I tried to convey to them that (1) we all make the best choices that we can see for ourselves while (2) our choices are limited by the circumstances and socialization of our gender, race, class, ethnicity, etc., and that (3) our present system disables women more than it does men but that it effects all of us perniciously; and (4) feminism's goal is to increase freedoms, choices and opportunities for all people. 11

My challenge was to be able to speak to their world view while remaining true to my feminist vision. This meant that there were many incidences where the students presented me with a reality from a masculine point of view which I found unsettling. I found repeatedly that the pat answers that were easy to use among groups of women, or even among more "enlightened" men, seemed hollow and evasive in the context of this prison classroom. This was especially true during our many discussions concerning sexuality. One particularly dramatic example came during our discussion of the dynamics of rape. A standard feminist line on this subject is an unequivocable "no means no." I found that I could not look these men in the eye and deny that women frequently do start out saying no and end up later acquiescing to male demands for sex. I was forced to deal with both women's ambivalence towards the sexual advances of men and the realities of the coercive powers of men. I was able to gain their trust by being willing to

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11 My feminist work with men is predicated on the assumption that the status of women cannot be improved without inducing change both in the institutions of society and in the individuals who sustain them. Consequently, I believe that major social change for women requires significant changes both in the behaviour of individual men and the institutions which they control. It is for these reasons that I consider it essential that feminists take an active role in retraining men to behave more in accordance with feminist principles and to see such changes in themselves as to their advantage and betterment. At this historical moment I do not yet trust men to do this work properly entirely among themselves. As a result, the task must presently fall to women.
validate their own feelings of being confused by the behaviour of women, and then use that trust to force them to recognize that what they would like to think of as seduction is more often submission to powerful psychological coercion. I thus walked a difficult line between a "one of the boys," and a radical feminist attitude towards the many discussions which alluded to sex. I was concerned that the classroom not become infused with sexual tensions, and I assumed that the students would cease to respect my position of authority if they came to see me as sexually engaged or available for conquest. I found that the best approach was to appear to be extremely sexually knowledgeable and at the same time project no sexuality of my own. This necessitated my being able to take a matter-of-fact, almost clinical, attitude toward subjects which I would have normally found either intensely personal, or disturbing, or both.

In general, I made every effort to not become personally offended or morally outraged by anything that the students said. I made it my business to find the kernel of truth (or at least their truth) in each comment that they made and use it as a connecting point from which I might lead them to the conclusions that I considered the most correct. This method was designed to allow each student to find new ways of perceiving his own reality without feeling forced to deny his own experience. I tried to open them up to the view that they had been trained, as men, to selectively view the world in accordance with their gender interests, and that women had been trained to selectively view it differently. My goal was to convince them that neither version of reality was complete or accurate without a thorough consideration of the other. In order to do this, I had to both accept and validate more of their masculine vision than I would have otherwise been inclined to, and to temper my own women-sided tendencies to unrealistically glorify the ways of women.

I wanted my students to have the feeling that they could ask me anything that was even vaguely relevant to the course. (And ask they did!) I wanted them to never feel stupid for not knowing something and to never hesitate to ask something for that reason. I wanted them to feel that even if what they had to say was incorrect, it was the right thing to do to ask. I also wanted the students to feel that the course was not supposed to be therapy. I endeavored to present the material, and myself, as removed from their personal trauma and turmoil. At the same time I recognized that the course would affect many of them in
a very personal way. I felt that the best approach was to remain uninvolved in the unfolding of the effects of the course in each individual. Nonetheless, I made it my business to be aware of the effects that my presentations were having on the men, and I worked to maximize those effects wherever possible.

A Progressive Account of What Happened

I began the course with a short general lecture addressing the question of why there is a need for women's studies courses at all. This engendered far more discussion than I had anticipated based on the 1986 rendition of this course. It seemed to me that the sex offender group had more pent up commentary to make on feminists than any previous group of students that I had encountered. My first day with the initial group of approximately thirty students left me with the sensation of being a target for a steady barrage of questions, comments, and grievances about feminists which these men had been harbouring, unexpressed, for some time. Many of their comments had a strong tinge of resentment towards women: many comments reflected frustration with the fact that women, as a group and as individuals, were inconsistent in their demands and expectations of men; several complained that women had too many privileges as it was; others suspected that all feminists were "man hating dykes." Unlike the group at Matsqui the previous year, the men at Mountain were less aggressive and more indirect in their complaints against women. Some clearly displayed anger, others seemed to see themselves as innocently victimized by women. As I came to know these men better, most failed to effectively maintain the victimized stance for very long and slipped into either anger or simple confusion.

I allowed a limitless number of digressions and interruptions during the first class as I wanted to establish an open atmosphere in the classroom. I wanted the students to realize that they could express their opinions and feelings in my classroom without getting quashed for not agreeing with my feminist perspective. I wanted to make it clear to them that I was a feminist teacher who was willing to listen as well as to lecture, and that I would take them as they came. In other words, I wanted to establish right from the beginning that they need not be afraid to display their ignorance and that I was willing to teach
from my level to theirs, if they would show me where their level was.

I also tried, during the first class, to establish some sense of mutual respect and a cooperative atmosphere by asking for a round of introductions and suggestions for direction in the course. I started the round off by talking about myself. I then asked each student to say something about his personal history in terms of his educational and vocational background, his family and place of origin, important relationships with women, and expectations from the course. I was thus able to learn something about who my audience was to be, the students learned something about me, and we developed an incipient sense of group cohesion as a result of our mutual self-disclosures.

In the next class period I took a more controlling stance. I explained to them that it was necessary for me to narrowly limit discussion and commentary to the content at hand if we were to be able to proceed through the course materials at a reasonable pace, given the limited time available to us. I then lectured on the biological and evolutionary bases of gender differences and similarities. I started the course in this way because I felt that it was necessary to lay to rest, as quickly as possible, inflated claims about the "naturalness" of our social structures. Beginning the course in this way also served to lend authority to my store of knowledge by taking advantage of the respect that most people afford to the hard sciences and anything that relates to medical matters.

This was followed by a brief introduction to some forms of social organization used in other cultures. I used cross-cultural materials which introduced the concept of separate women's and men's cultures embedded within what can appear, on first look, to be sexually integrated societies. I further alerted them to the fact that both women and men think that their version of social organization is the sensible one and that that of the other gender is foolish and misguided. This material seemed to be unprotected by the impermeable aura of "science" and as a result the more argumentative students in the class again found their voices and attempted to discredit my presentation as feminist propaganda. I found

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that in some instances I could argue away their complaints and that in others I had to resort to pointing out that there are always differing opinions in the academic world and that I was engaged in presenting those which I believed to be the best reflections of the truth as well as we may know it at this time. This admission of bias was reasonably effective in quelling argument.

I then followed a approximately life cycle exploration of the experiences of women (and sometimes men) in Anglo–American society, focusing on the Canadian experience. I began with a unit devoted to childhood socialization. I included in this section more material on the socialization of male children than would be usual in a women's studies class, with its normal complement of mostly female students, and only one or two males. In particular, I carefully included an entire lecture on the physical abuse of children, knowing that many of my students came from homes in which they had been chronically physically abused.

The material on socialization and physical abuse of children seemed to be very absorbing for most students. They seemed to be fascinated by my explanation of their own socialization experiences and curious about how women got to be the way we are. When I spoke about the physical abuse of children their attention became very intensely focused. This class period marked the first plateau in our developing relationship. Prior to that lecture and its discussion, there was a near constant stream of ignorant and quarrelsome commentary from the students. There was a noticeable decrease in such argumentativeness after the class on the physical abuse of children. My conclusion, after having seen the same thing happen at Matsqui the year before, is that this discussion fostered in them an incipient awareness that feminism understands and cares about their pain too. This class seemed to touch many of them deeply.

I also found that my own attitudes towards teaching these students started to change after the class on child abuse. Up until that point I had been feeling a strong resentment towards my students as sex offenders. I found it difficult to see them as individuals rather than as sex offenders. Thus, I found myself not wanting to extend as much energy to my students as I normally do in a classroom, and feeling angry
that I had agreed to teach them at all. As I watched the silent and lonely pain in their eyes, and listened to their stories about the abuse they had experienced in their own families, I began to soften a bit towards them. I began to be able to see them as individual people with lives before and after their offenses. As they began to trust me more, I also began to feel more willing to expend energy to teach them. At that point I started to think that they might be teachable after all.\footnote{This class also happened to fall after the final drop date for the course. Thus, the students who were there that day were those who had self-selected as the ones who were willing to stay through the course and at least give me a hearing. In other words, I had lost the most hostile students, and the curiosity seekers, before I came to the first round of difficult material.}

It was during this class that the students first started to ask what appeared to me to be sincere questions about feminism. They wanted to know what feminism was going to do about the mess that society is in. I had found an issue that feminism was concerned with that also concerned them and they wanted to know what feminism had to offer. They listened very intently as I explained that feminism’s goals were not about turning the present inequality on its head, nor were they about making women the same as men. I tried to explain to them that although men have a far better deal than women in our present society, that men too are denied their full potential under the present state of affairs. I took the opportunity to talk about the severe emotional limitations of masculinity, the profound loneliness, and the burdens of the provider role. I then connected the failures of masculinity to provide them with full human options with feminism’s goals for changing both men and women. The looks on their faces and the commentary in class, and after class, made it clear to me that they had liked what they had heard. Many of them took some important first steps towards feminism that day.

I followed that class immediately with a discussion of the sexual abuse of children. I entered class that day with some nervousness. I was going to tell the abusers about the reasons for and the results of their abusive behaviour. I was concerned that my analysis would be too academic, fail to hit the mark, and run up against severe resistance. I was not disappointed. Not surprisingly, they clearly resisted this discussion. Students complained that we were spending too much time on the sexual abuse of children, when we were spending less time than we had on the physical abuse of children. One student tried to
deflect my attention from the issue by suggesting that it had no relevance to women's studies. When that tactic failed he resorted to arguing that "women sexually abuse children too" and until I could give that topic equal time I should desist. I countered their protests and doggedly persisted despite a somewhat sinking feeling. Fortunately, there were also some few students who came to my defense. They helped by responding to some of the more negative students, saying that just because both women and men do something doesn't mean that it's acceptable behaviour or that it need not be criticized in a women's studies class.

The real reward for my persistance came after class when two different delegations from non-academic sex offenders' self-education groups came to me and asked me if I could come back another time to talk to the rest of their groups. One delegation went so far as to ask me to come to their group and give a five or six week abbreviated version of the course they were taking. They told me that they felt that my presentation on the issue had been one of the better ones that they had heard and that they felt that the other sex offenders in their groups would benefit from hearing the point of view that I had presented. It would seem that my doggedness had not deteriorated into dogmatism.

The next two classes were devoted to the study of the economic status of women. I began with a brief historical introduction to the topic, which I then followed with a short overview of statistics and trends describing women's current economic position in Canadian society. Having done that, I presented them with some prominent theories which claim to explain the reasons for women's generally disadvantaged economic status, and looked at some of the ways in which unionization can benefit workers.

During the discussion of unionization, one student requested a digression onto the topic of sexual harrassment. This allowed us to explore their typically masculine questions about why women dress the way they do if they don't want sexual attention from men and what's so bad about that kind of attention anyway. This gave me an opportunity to reinforce the socialization materials about women's gender identity and femininity. This was another discussion which seemed to hold their attention very closely. I tried to make them understand that society expects women to dress and act in ways which define them as
female and attractive. I introduced the proposition that women do not dress and behave the way they do to necessarily make themselves sexually provocative but rather to conform to the current standards of feminine beauty. I argued that to the degree that they fail to do so they lose femininity in their own eyes, and that if they fail to do so entirely they run the risk of undermining their very gender identities as females. 14 I then pointed out that women suffer from a steady stream of unwanted attentions from men, and I tried to call up in them some empathy for the feelings of harrassment which develop from having one's attention repeatedly demanded by others. I made comparisons to the standards for masculine attractiveness and pointed out the privacy that men enjoy when navigating through the public sphere. Clearly, this was a topic which they had pondered before but been unable to satisfactorily answer for themselves. My replies seemed to provide some answers, at least for the moment.

By the end of the economics section we had reached another plateau. The serious hecklers had either dropped out or decided to be more co-operative. The students seemed to have come to trust me enough to sincerely ask some of the questions that had been troubling them about relations between men and women. More men were staying after class to talk with me in smaller groups and to make more intimate disclosures about their crimes and their relationships with women. I found that I was moving further away from my generalized anger towards them as sex offenders and coming to feel more sympathy towards them as people trying to understand. As more and more men said to me that they were enjoying the class, or learning a lot, or just getting twinges in their stomachs from things that were happening in class; as they started to act like they really wanted to be there, learning there, we began to coalesce into a group working together. We began to feel like a team.

There were several incidents of teamwork during the next few sessions in which we studied the meaning of marriage in the lives of women and men, housework and child care, and wife abuse. One such incident arose when one of the better students raised his hand said that women only do so much housework because of their own expectations. It seemed to me, and to several other students, that he was

condemning women for their conformity to gender role expectations. I was pleased to be able to let some of the other students respond to his comment. One man pointed out that he pressured his wife to do a lot of housework when he had been married, and I pointed out that many such demands are backed by emotional or physical abuse. Another student asked us to consider the woman who is a full time housewife. He argued that, in such cases, housework becomes one of the few accomplishments that such a woman can claim with pride and hence she will be highly motivated to do an exemplary job of it. As it turned out, the original commenter had been misunderstood and had meant only that women's housework standards are socially determined and often artificially elevated.

Wife battering and abuse was the next topic, which this group of men actively resisted discussing. This topic seemed to bring out more of their hostility towards women than had any of the previous ones. They seemed to feel attacked by much of what came up in my lecture and the film about a transition house that I used to supplement the lecture.\textsuperscript{15} Even one of the most astute students resorted to implying that the women's movement was a "bunch of man-hating dykes." Another student asked what the women in the film had done to the men who had beaten them, and a third started talking about women who beat men and abusive lesbian relationships. I found it difficult to remain calm in the face of the undisguised hatred of women that I was being exposed to. I was relieved to find that the class time had expired before things had deteriorated entirely.

I resolved that I would have to deal with the implications of their comments during the next class. I began by asking them if they felt that there were any circumstances under which a man was justified in severely beating a woman. I made it a point to be clear that I was not talking about using some force to restrain a woman who was physically attacking a man but rather about the kind of violence which results in severe injuries. Put to them that way, no man could justify such behaviour. What they could do was offer reasons for a man to become violent with his mate. This prompted me to ask them a further question. It occurred to me that I had tried to answer for them the often asked question "why do women stay?" but I

\textsuperscript{15} Transition House Films, \textit{We Will Not Be Beaten} 16mm, 35min. nd. distributed by the National Film Board of Canada.
hadn't addressed the question of "why do men stay?" I used this as an opportunity for me to learn from them, and as a pedagogical tool to engage their participation in the discussion of wife abuse. I asked them why they thought men stayed in relationships where they were so unhappy with the women they were involved with that they felt moved to chronic and sustained violence towards them.

The answers that I received showed me that they had been thinking and absorbing the messages of women's studies. More importantly, in the process of having to answer that question they were forced to confront the fact that the men in those situations also have choices. One man talked about the fact that men who batter are at least able to vent some of their frustrations on their wives. Two other students talked about religious training and the sanctity of the marriage vow. Another student preceptively talked about batterers feeling out of control in their lives, probably in more areas than the home. He suggested that if such men where to walk out of their marriages it would be tantamount to admitting that their whole lives were out of control. Staying in such relationships allow batterers to retain some sense of control in their lives, and to avoid the stigma of a "failed marriage" while retaining the respectability of being "married men." As a result of this discussion, they had to recognize that the men stay because they choose to stay and that they get rewards from such situations. The men found that they were no longer able to hide behind a stance of innocent victimization at the hands of shrewish women. They had to own their responsibility for their actions and their exploitation of women's vulnerability.

The last major unit in the course covered the difficult topics of pornography and rape. This section of the course is always disturbing to many of the women who take introductory women's studies, and had also proven to be disturbing to the male inmate students who took the course the previous year. The earlier group of men had been drawn by this material to the realization that women often have good reason to fear and distrust men. When I began teaching this section, on the same day that I concluded our discussion of wife battering, I fully expected the men to fight me on these issues as well.

I introduced pornography as one example of the images of women used in advertising, the fine arts, and the media. I avoided entirely the question of the censorship of pornography and instead focussed on
pornography as one means of educating the public to view women as sexualized objects. I placed modern pornography as an outgrowth of rennaisance traditions in oil painting but emphasized its special position as an exceptionally potent (and possibly the only) form of sex education for most men and many women.

I built my discussion on the premise that our sexuality is socially constructed in much the same way as other aspects of our personalities and our desires. In doing so, I relied heavily on one of their reading assignments which catagorized masculine sexuality as being socialized into a pattern of objectification, fixation, and conquest. One student took up this point and made the connection that masculine socialization in general could well be characterized by these same three concepts, and that masculine sexuality was only a logical extension of everyday masculine socialization. He further connected these ideas to the competition and aggression that men feel toward each other and their propensity to also objectify, fixate and conquer one another in their competitive zeal.

I was heartened by the perspecacity of this student and the support that his comment garnered from other students. I used his insights as a jumping off point for a digression into psychological theory about masculinity being rooted in separation and denial. As they seemed interested in this, I went on to discuss, in terms of everyday human behaviours, how our socialization process trains little boys to sustain and cleave to the pain of separation stoicly and from a very early age. Once again I had hit a nerve. Their attention was rapt, their eyes showed pain, and their faces softened. We had come to the end of the official class time but they made no indication of wanting to end our session and leave. So I pointed out the time and said that I was willing to stay longer if people wanted to stay and talk more informally. A few men left, but most of them stayed on for another half hour.

The discussion really opened up then and it became clear to me that these men had been giving the tenets of feminism some heartfelt thought. They were engaged in trying to figure out if it really was a feasible proposition. One student brought up the connection between the needs of capitalism and the

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training of men to ruthlessness and competition. He then wanted to know what feminists were doing to
prevent women from becoming as bad as men when they entered into the capitalist workplace along side of
men and into organizations constituted in the image of capitalist men. The same student also expressed
concern about the fact that women seemed to be making important changes in their lives while most men
were either standing still, or in the way of women. He wanted to know what feminists were going to do
about that. Finally, he wanted to know how men who were changing were supposed to deal with the
intense loneliness, isolation, alienation, and resistance they felt from other men, and from many women as
well. I replied with honesty that there were no easy answers. The dangers were there and progress has not
been, and would not be, without pitfalls and failures. I said that all we could do was to proceed with our
eyes open. I tried to make feminism seems less of a forlorn endeavour to them by pointing out that there
are men’s organizations and that there are feminist women clamouring for feminist men to relate to. This
seemed to cheer them somewhat.

Another student worried about the effects on the next generation if all the mothers go off to work
and “throw their kids into day care.” I took exception to the implication that day care was second rate care
and talked about quality day care. I also introduced the possibility of restructuring the workplace so that
mothers and fathers could both share child care and children could spend less time away from their
families. I also emphasized another student’s comments about quality time by pointing out that children
need to know that they are loved and that fewer hours of quality time were worth more to a child’s
self-esteem than twenty-four hours a day of neglect and indifference. Another student then asked if it
wasn’t going to work against the goals of feminism to have fathers doing more child care. He reasoned
that men would teach their children values that were inimical to the women’s movement and thus
undermine our ends. I answered that that was a chance that we were just going to have to take but that I
thought that the experience of raising children would soften men in the process.

17 National Organization for Changing Men, P. O. Box 451, Watseka, Ill., 60970, U.S.A.

18 It looked to me as though my comments about quality attention brought one of my
 toughest students close to tears.
The final discussion was initiated by one of the very largest men in the class, a man who had already identified himself to me as a convicted rapist. He asked, with some concern, what we were going to do about the fact that when all was said and done it came down to a question of brute force. Men were bigger and better trained to violence and women would lose every time. The same man who had talked about quality time for children turned to the first man and started to talk about socializing our children away from violence and to a co-operative ethic. He talked about giving children the power to do things, and teaching them to share power rather than teaching them to gain power by taking it away from others. I was pleased to be left with nothing but to agree with his excellent response.

The next class was devoted to the question of rape. I was very anxious about approaching this issue with this group of men. I believed that I had earned a fair measure of their trust by this time but I also knew that I could lose it far more easily and quickly than I had gained it. I decided to try to go gently with this topic. I began with some firm statements of principle. I stated that I believed that although there are no justifications for rape, there are reasons for it. I said that I was interested in discussing those reasons with them and that I considered them to be able to tell me things about the reasons for rape that I would not otherwise have access to. Having offered them both my condemnation and my willingness to listen, I proceeded to talk about some of the myths about rape and about the different varieties of rape. I began by making it clear that I was aware of the excuses that are commonly used by men and that I was not persuaded by them. I then started to explain to them how women perceive rape. I gave them some statistics about date rape, soft rape, and stranger rape. I tried to explain to them why so many experiences that they think of as seduction are rape in the eyes of women, and that women acquiesce to sex that they don’t really want because the psychological or physical price of resistance is too high. I talked about rape as an act of terrorism. And then I showed them an excellent film in which convicted rapists talk about their own reasons for raping women.19

I was somewhat surprised at the silence in the room as I talked. I had expected some protest from them that I had it all wrong. They did not appear to resist what I had to say and in fact seemed quite

19 Why Men Rape 16mm, 40mins., nd. Distributed by the National Film Board of Canada.
intensely interested. It seems possible that they were too ashamed of themselves, as rapists, to protest anything that I said. But I don't believe that that was the reason for their silence. Their silence was not one of turning away from, but rather of leaning into, what I was saying. They seemed hungry to understand how women experience rape. Their eyes stayed riveted to me as I talked and their expressions were intent, as if they had to be careful not to let anything slip by them because they were hearing something arcane and essential that they would not again have the opportunity to hear.

During the film, I observed the students as much as I watched the screen. I was aware of them moving into and out of rapt attention as the film hit on analysis that spoke to their own lives. The rapists on the screen talked of their woeful ignorance of real life women and their reliance on pornography and media generated fantasy for the formation of their desires. They told of their own histories of childhood sexual abuse and of their own self-hatred both before and after their rapes. I was certain that my students were busily comparing themselves to the men speaking on the screen.

The film ended a few minutes past the official end of class time. Not a single man stirred in his seat or made any move to leave the room. They all just sat there in silent self-reflection waiting for me to lead us on. I waited a moment in the silence, looking back at them. Then I asked them simply: "Did they get it right?" I waited while they slowly collected themselves sufficiently to respond. Few spoke, and those that did supported the themes of the film. They seemed too lost in their own thoughts to speak much, but I could detect no hostility or defensiveness. Mostly, they seemed sad.

In the face of their silence, and their reluctance to leave, I began to take the floor again. I talked to them about the horror of rape, the degradation of rape. To my surprise I found myself also talking about the horror and degradation of rape for the rapist. I talked about the rapist as a man who feels himself to be unworthy of being loved by a woman, but who feels that, as a man, he deserves the pleasure of sex with a woman. I painted a picture of the rapist as a man who feels that it is his right to take a woman by force but who, having done so, drives himself further into self-hatred. The cycle begins with self-hatred and low self-esteem in the rapist who blames women for his inability to successfully relate to them. The man
seeks to bolster his ego by the sexual conquest of another person. When that conquest fails to achieve its goal of ego enhancement because the use of force only confirms the rapist's unloveableness, he is plunged further into self-hatred. Not only has he proven to himself that he is unredeemable, but he now knows himself to be the socially despised rapist. Rape is horrific for women and it doesn't even work for men.

I felt that I was taking a big chance saying these things to these men and pretending that I knew what I was talking about. As I spoke I watched them very closely and waited for their faces to close to me. It never happened. They stayed with me, watching me intently, with pain in their eyes, and nodding their agreement with my analysis. They stared into me again with that same expression of old anguish mingled with relief that I had seen in their faces on the other days that I had spoken to the pain in their lives. At twenty minutes past the hour, I pointed out the time and gently thanked them for staying late. Most of them quietly left at that point and I heaved a quick sigh of tension release before continuing on with a few interested students who stayed behind to talk further. We talked briefly about rehabilitation methods for rapists and then went on to other less intense subjects.

The one remaining class after that one was sorely anticlimactic. Their final papers were due on that date and most of them were off finishing them up. The last class was devoted to a lecture and discussion of the novel which I had assigned them to read and I suspect that many of them never found the time to read it and so quietly absented themselves from that last class. Finally, I suspect that all of us felt that after the intensity of our discussion of rape there was not much left to be said. Those of us who were there talked about the novel, I handed out the course evaluation forms and we said our good byes.

**Evaluation and Conclusions**

I agreed to teach women's studies to this group of convicted sex offenders having grave doubts, concerned that I would be engaging in a futile and depressing endeavor. I feared that, at best, I would exhaust myself trying to teach into gale force hatred of women; that their attitudes towards women would enrage and disgust me. In my worst case scenario, I envisioned the classroom deteriorating into a pitched
battle and the net result of my efforts being that I had armed rapists and child molesters with a more sophisticated understanding of women thus enabling them to better impose their perversities on unwilling victims. I had been unable to even imagine the level of success that we did achieve in that classroom.

The completed course evaluation forms confirmed much of what I thought that I had seen happen for the men as the course proceded. All seven of the men who completed the course evaluation forms said that they would recommend this course to their friends. One man said "Most definately [sic] - all men should take it!!" Another said that he would also recommend it to his wife and his son and his daughter. Two men said that the course had changed their lives, and the remainder said that they had learned a lot. All made comments thanking me, or commending me, for a good course. One man, with three years university behind him, called it "one of the most interesting I have ever taken."

To me, the most important comments were those that showed something of how far these men had come in seven short weeks. One said "We're in this together and it is to our benefit to make some changes in the way we treat each other." Perhaps that man had such opinions before the course began, but consider this comment made by a convicted rapist nearing the end of his term:

I feel that I learned more about women that will assist me intimately and generally in my relations with women. I came away feeling that it wasn't "us" and "them" but rather "we." I understood feminism for what it is - it's not a bunch of "ball breaking dykes" seeking to emasculate me. The feminist perspective is a totally valid point - and one which I embrace.

This man had repeatedly made negative comments about radical, man-hating feminists throughout the course. I had never denied to him that such women exist but only said that they were a minority voice within the women's movement. Apparently, for the moment, he has abandoned some of his fear of feminists.

The value of teaching women's studies to sex offenders was summed up for me by the anonymous comment of one man who said, "If I could have had this course twenty years ago I would not be in the mess that I am in today." For each man who is in jail for sexual offences there are many many more women and children whose lives have been shattered by what those men have done to them. The

10 See Appendix B for a copy of the course evaluation form which I used.
motivations of the men who commit rape and the sexual abuse of children are far too complex for me to understand, but I have learned from this experience that masculine ignorance of women’s reality is definitely a factor in a great many instances. In their ignorance, men are left with little alternative but to assume that women act from motivations and circumstances similar to their own. They misunderstand the meaning of women’s actions and act according to their own masculine set of values. They see confrontation and challenge where women intend none and they retaliate in masculine ways. They feel manipulated and made to appear foolish where women have other intents, and they strike out in their humiliation.

This women’s studies course offered this small group of men a first step out of their ignorance. It also allowed them a safe and legitimate route to begin to not only understand more about the ways of women but also to begin to appreciate the value of those ways. If these men want to be able to put into practice some of what they have learned, they must also become more like women in some important aspects. Probably the most important being that they must learn to empathize with the experiences of others. In order to do that they must develop richer emotional lives at the same time as they must become more adept at maintaining a reasoned perspective on the relations between the sexes. They must learn to put themselves in the place of women and see things from our point of view.

In order to do that they must have knowledge. We raise men in our society to be ignorant of the lives of women. These sex offenders are not unique in that regard. Men have few legitimately masculine ways to learn to understand women, and sexual offenses are one result of that state of affairs. I therefore strongly recommend that women’s studies be made available to sex offenders as a rehabilitative measure, and to men generally, as a preventative measure. I do not recommend that it be made compulsory for any adult men but that any who have the motivation to lessen their ignorance be granted the opportunity to do so.

I believe that much masculine hatred and fear of women comes from their need of feminine acceptance and their concomitant vulnerability to rejection by women. I gave these men some direction as
to how to help alleviate that sense of vulnerability and dependency. I showed them that feminism encourages men to be more responsible for their own emotional lives, and can give them some of the tools to do so. I taught them that one of feminism’s goals is to free women from their financial dependency on men, and men from emotional dependency on women. I taught that that freedom comes at the price of women learning to shoulder more of the burden of the provider role and men learning to be better caretakers. Feminism could thus diminish women’s emotional leverage over men, and men’s financial control over women.

I believe that this women’s studies class for sex offenders was as successful as it was because the men who came to women’s studies were highly motivated to learn. Their lives had been entirely restructured as the result of their convictions; they had come to be among the most despicable members of society and they wanted to understand how they had gotten there and how to inoculate themselves against ever returning. But I did not make it easy on these men. From the beginning, I took pleasure in pounding away at them that their behaviour was totally unforgivable. I made it clear that I had heard all of the excuses before and they did not work on me. In a way, I think they took comfort in my unforgiving stance. It allowed them to give up on making justifications, conniving for sympathy, or bullying for power, and just get on with learning what they could. I believe that they also felt supported by the fact that I was still there teaching them, and listening to them, even though I knew what they had done and condemned them for it. I believe that this success could be replicated with other groups of sex offenders.

The key reward of feminism for these men seemed to be its potential to make them more acceptable to women. This may also be a key to sex offenders for feminists. If my suppositions are correct, their anger towards women can begin to abate as they find greater acceptance from women. Greater acceptance can only come as these men learn to act in concert with the interests of women. Women’s studies can give men some of the insights and the information on which to build empathy with women and to act for the betterment of women, while the very presence of women’s studies in their lives can demonstrate to them that they haven’t been abandoned by the women who criticize them the most vociferously. This can only be a boon to their rehabilitation, and to the future safety of women and children.
WOMEN'S STUDIES 100-4
WOMEN'S STUDIES FOR MEN: AN INTRODUCTION TO GENDER ROLES

Course description:

An introductory course examining the construction, maintenance, and communication of sex/gender in everyday life from conception to old age. Biological, psychological, social, economic and cultural influences on sex/gender will be considered in conjunction with issues such as child rearing practices, sexually and emotionally intimate relationships, and contemporary cultural institutions.

The course will be presented from a feminist perspective which, while focusing more closely on the experience of women, recognizes that the lives of men and women are inextricably bound together and that one sex/gender cannot be studied independently of the other. All subjects will be approached in a manner which is designed to accommodate both feminism and the perspectives of masculinity.

Assignment Schedule:

The class will be organized in a lecture/tutorial format. Lectures will be supplemented weekly with videos or films. There will be weekly reading assignments and students will be required to read The Handmaid's Tale, a dystopian novel by Margaret Atwood. There will be one short paper required of each student for which students will be able to choose their own topics. There will be two exams. Class participation will count towards the final grade.

Required Readings:

A reading package will be supplied.
The Handmaid's Tale. By Margaret Atwood.

Grading Schedule:

Exam I: 25%
Exam II: 25%
Essay: 40%
Participation: 10%
Course Outline:

Week 1:
- Introductions and administrative details.
- Why Women's Studies?

Week 2:
- Biological sources of sex differences and similarities.
- Some possible evolutionary explanations of gender roles.
- Anthropological and cross-cultural perspectives on women's status.

Week 3:
- Psychological theories of gender.
- Early gender socialization.
- Childhood.
- Adolescent gender socialization.
- Child Abuse – Physical.

Week 4:
- Child Abuse – Sexual.
- Exam I.
- Women in pre-industrial economies.
- Industrialization and Women's work force participation.

Week 5:
- Economic theories about women's work.
- Women and Unions.
- Marriage.
- Housework and child care.

Week 6:
- Wife Battering.
- Exam II.
- Images of women in art, advertising and pornography.

Week 7:
- Rape.
- The Handmaid's Tale.
- Course evaluations.
- Papers due.
APPENDIX B

COURSE EVALUATION

1. What level of education did you have before you entered this course?

2. Why did you decide to take women's studies?

3. Which reading assignments did you find most personally useful to you?

4. Where there any reading assignments which you felt should not have been used? If so, which ones and why?

5. Which subjects were of greatest interest to you?

6. Which subjects were of the least interest to you?

7. What was the best thing about your experience of women's studies?

8. What was the worst thing about your experience of women's studies?

9. How do you feel about having taken this course?
   a. It changed my life.
   b. I learned a lot about myself.
   c. It was good entertainment.
   d. Neutral.
   e. It was better than working.
   f. It was a waste of my time.
   g. It made me angry.

10. Would you recommend this course to your friends?
    a. Yes.
    b. No.

11. How would you do this course differently, knowing what you know now?

12. Any other comments that you'd like to make? (For more room use the back of the page.)