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The BASH HOUSE: Within the Bluestone Walls of a Maximum Security Prison

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ABSTRACT

This paper is about my supervision of the two probationary psychologists who were employed in a maximum-security prison to run a high-intensity violence intervention program for maximum-security inmates. The psychoanalytic frame became the initial trigger, a scapegoat, for my dismissal as their forensic psychology supervisor. An informal ministerial enquiry followed. I was re-instated. The context of this breakout/breakdown was the ruptured container of a maximum-security prison which violently torpedoed into the therapeutic container and reflective edge of the consulting room. The prison's walls hide the dark secrets of crimes. The haunting screams of those murdered are silenced but they ricochet down the corridors of the cell-blocks. The inmates held captive cry "Mummy, help me, please help me!", but their cries have been killed off long ago, neither heard nor answered.

This paper is a tribute to the psychoanalytic frame. It is also an indictment of aspects of the prison system for psychologists and inmates in Australia. Copyright © 2013 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: psychoanalytic frame, Australian prison system

INTRODUCTION

Hard breathing in my ear, callused hands, rough whiskers abrasive to my tender skin.
Visions moving in dark shadows across my mind. The last vestige of warmth leaving me forever. Searing white pain. The words "It might hurt a little" . . .

Him monster snore loud curl up in chair by coals soft cry scared no sleep must fall asleep
wake up light in hut monster look at me come can't sore scared no walk monster scream
me have to go no make stop please mummy me be good boy. (Tippet, 1997, p. 14)

One day in 1995 Tony Lock snapped. He picked up an axe and in a frenzied attack killed the man who had sexually abused him from the age of four. He was screaming “Mummy, Mummy, please help me!” as he slayed the monster man (Tippet, 1997). He got 19 months for manslaughter.

In this paper I reluctantly tell the story of the prison world captured in The Bash House which houses cesspits, secrets, scapegoats, bashings, breakdowns and explosive breakouts of offence re-enactments: a severely borderline world where there is no reflective space. This world is a threat to the psychoanalytic mode of reflection, pushing it to the very limit and constantly threatening disruption (Rousillon, 2010, p. 91). Mark “Chopper” Read, the notorious Victorian criminal who spent many years in prison wrote in his recent book, *One Thing Led to Another: The Real Story*, wrote that HM Pentridge Prison, which opened in 1850, had a number of nicknames: the “The Bluestone College”, “The College of Knowledge” and “The Bash House”, adding that the prison “always had a reputation for being ferocious in the way prisoners were treated” (p. 98). He described the criminal world in bald, vivid terms: “. . . the truth is the underworld is a cesspit, not a science” (2010, p. 192, emphasis added).

This paper tells the story of the dismissal of myself as an external supervisor to two probationary psychologists who were employed in a maximum-security prison in Australia to run a high-intensity violence intervention program for maximum-security inmates. The dismissal led to an informal state ministerial enquiry and several departmental investigations by the Victorian Department of Justice. Notwithstanding the facts of the dismissal and enquiry, I emphasize that this is my story, my interpretation of events, both subjective and speculative, and that in writing it I have not consulted any person involved in this enquiry. I have protected some identities and censored some facts. Nonetheless, I feel compelled to tell the story as it unfolded.

The psychoanalytic theoretical perspective, a rejected system of therapy, became the initial trigger, a scapegoat, for my dismissal as their forensic psychology supervisor. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is the principal therapeutic modality in the prison system in Australia. This paper is intended as a tribute to the psychoanalytic frame, and an indictment of aspects of the prison system. In Australia, we do not have the equivalent of London’s Portman Clinic, providing multidisciplinary help for released inmates and those who have a forensic history in the community. We do not have therapeutic communities and psychoanalytic contributions in prisons, as they do in HM Prison Grendon, in Buckinghamshire, England. Prisoners do not receive the benefits of psychoanalytic understanding or psychotherapy in Australia. Psychologists in the prisons do not receive any psychoanalytic training that might assist in the processing of their work in the prison system which might lead them to understand the potential for violent re-enactments. The paper has been written, ultimately, to draw attention to the plight of psychologists working in the prison systems in Australia, to the inmates who do not receive psychodynamic

or psychoanalytic psychotherapy or insight, to the perils for external supervisors in the prison system and to the salvation offered by psychoanalytic thinking.

THE PSYCHOANALYTIC FRAME: A PREAMBLE TO THE STORY

Freud said that the unconscious proper resembles a maximum-security prison that holds antisocial inmates – languishing for years or recently arrived. Though harshly treated and heavily guarded, the inmates are barely kept under control and forever attempt to escape (quoted in Gay, 1998, p. 128). Their breakouts succeed only intermittently and at great cost to themselves and to others. The psychoanalyst working to undo such repressions, at least in part, is therefore bound to recognize the grave risks of the unconscious.

In this paper, through the telling of two stories, (although there are three) I will talk a little more about the unconscious and how it can explode into violent enactments and link it to the prison setting where antisocial inmates indeed can languish. Firstly, I describe at length a *breakout/breakdown* that occurred in the prison setting and torpedoed into the therapeutic container of the consulting room in my capacity as supervisor. The context conjured up the spectre of Orwell's *1984* and Kafka's stories were not far away. Secondly, I describe the grave *risks* of repression and how, in the absence of remembering and reflection, it can lead to parallel actualizations of past repressions in the form of offence re-enactments and create a bash house world of unconscious breakouts. In each scenario, there is the template of the child murderer and murderousness in various guises. It is a paranoid-schizoid world marked by concrete thinking and an absence of reflection. In the first, the embryonic minds of inexperienced psychologists are, it could be said, bludgeoned, and a supervisory relationship is attacked. In the second, a senior prison psychologist has a relationship with an imprisoned child murderer.

The third story entails the stories of the prisoners who have lived in the rigid, narrow systems of the prisons whose stories of enacted and unmetabolized pain have been repressed and suppressed; such as the story of Tony Lock and about his explosion into murderous action – how he got an axe and drove it “straight between the cheeks of his (the perpetrator's) arse”. He wanted to see him “bleed from the arse”. He said he “just wanted to do to him what he did to me”. It is a story about his buried, bleeding pain. This scenario captures the innocence of a child murdered by abuse and how “the law sat on its hands” (Tippet, 1997). There is not time to tell his story and perhaps the material is too raw, but his cries, like those of other prisoners, are embedded in the prison walls and indeed in this essay.

THE UNCONSCIOUS WORLD

Freud said that repression was the cornerstone of psychoanalysis, its most essential part. In 1915 he chose the word “repression” to represent all the modes of

defense designed to repress or exclude an instinctual wish from awareness (quoted in Gay, 1998, p. 365), such as Oedipal desires and murderous wishes. “The essence of repression”, Freud stated, “lies simply in turning something away and keeping it at a distance from the conscious” (Freud, 1915/1991, p. 147). In the 1920s Freud reduced repression to one of a number of defenses. What has been repressed has not been wiped out or forgotten. Repressed material has been stored in the inaccessible attic of the unconscious, where it continues to luxuriate, waiting for gratification (Gay, 1998, p. 366). Repressed material – the impulses and its derivatives – are subject to censorship and denied expression.

The unconscious world of prisons can be thought about theoretically in terms of defensive maneuvers and the repression (and consequent explosion or repetition) of dangerous impulses, wishes and memories. More specifically, the unconscious world of prisons employs the primitive and intense defenses of “splitting” and “projective identification”, a kind of scapegoating that can lead to concrete thinking, unprovoked and sustained assaults, and an emphasis on punishment rather than restoration. As a preamble to the story of the bash house I will briefly elucidate some key theoretical concepts which can render explicable the happenings in this story which also renders explicable the mindset of prisoners and the parallels in the prison world.

Scapegoats

Scapegoating is the practice of singling out a person – whether a child, employee, member of a group of peers, ethnic or religious group, or country – for unmerited negative treatment or blame. The most commonly known scapegoat is that of the Hebraic tradition. Part of the ritual of atonement originally conducted by the High Priest Aaron (Shaverien, 1987, p. 31), the scapegoat is ceremonially embodied by a goat banished into the wilderness that takes away the evils of the community, purging it of evil. When a crisis becomes out of control, an incipient crisis is brewing, or ethical boundaries are violated, a scapegoat may direct attention from other people’s failings, violations or hostility. The scapegoat is usually outside general awareness and represents the denied polarities within the attacker or attackers, which are being split and projected onto the scapegoat. In representing intrapsychic conflicts, the scapegoat unconsciously takes on the denied aggression and conflict of the individual or group. Thus the scapegoat becomes a container for the denied, repressed or projected emotional valences of other group members (Gemmil, 1989, p. 407). This dynamic allows the dysfunctions and destructive aspects of a system to be ignored and remain unexamined.

Splitting and Projective Identification

The process of scapegoating works via the mechanisms of splitting and projective identification. Melanie Klein first introduced the concept of “splitting” in 1946 in

her paper “Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms” (Klein, 1975, p. 8), in which she described the early processes of idealization and denial whereby an infant splits off the good from the bad breast (pp. 6–7). This method keeps the bad parts of the self separate as a way of dealing with the fear that the destructive impulses will destroy the source of goodness. Klein stated that bad parts of the self, in fantasy, are got rid of and projected into the object (Segal, 1979, p. 116) and then become feared persecutors. Projective identification takes this process a stage further, by literally experiencing (identifying) the self and the object as the same thing (Caper, 1997, p. 39). Klein describes this process as the paranoid–schizoid position.

Disturbance

Segal, writing on symbolism (Caper, 1997, p. 43), notes that a great deal can go wrong with the projection. If there is a disturbance in the mother–child relationship, she notes that there can be a disturbance in the development of symbol formation and a consequent disturbance in the development of Klein’s depressive position – one of guilt, concern and reparation from the paranoid–schizoid position (Caper, 1997, p. 43). Segal proposed that there was a schematic distinction between symbolic equation and symbolization and in normal development there is a transition from the former to the latter (Caper, 1997, p. 40). The symbolic equation, Segal says, is concrete thinking and the basis of psychotic thinking. For example, a psychoanalytic patient may symbolize murderous impulses in dreams whereas a criminal, in the absence of symbolism, will enact the murder in concrete deed. The transition to symbolization is predicated on the acknowledgment that the good object is not oneself but the mother’s breast. Such recognition requires the developmental and painful task of mourning to restore the loss of the good breast, through displacement. For example, the growing infant/child may replace the nipple with the thumb, which relives and recreates the good breast and marks the beginnings of symbol formation, self-integration and creativity. If there is a disturbance, and a failure to mourn, it can lead to narcissistic object relations (Caper, 1997, p. 55), and a hatred of the good object separate from the self. Such hatred can cause one to attack the good object. Control of the object proceeds, preventing the free and imaginative development of a mind of one’s own.

Unprovoked Assaults

Such disturbances can lead to an absolute intolerance of the depressive position; instead there is a total and psychotic denial of loss and a need to enact (Sohn, 1997, p. 70). Leslie Sohn argues that where there is a defective symbolization of loss, there can be violent and unprovoked assaults (p. 72). He notes that there can be a dread of loss but it is not located in the depressive position; instead loss becomes experienced as a threat in a profoundly paranoid way (p. 73). There

can be the horrifying threat of a double loss: the loss of good objects and the loss of the ability to get rid of this threat. In the depressive position, the capacity for projection is linked to the urge to regain and restore the object (p. 73). The absence of the capacity to produce an adequate symbolic expression of this situation, Sohn states, can lead to manic enactments that provide the reassurance that everything is as it should be (p. 73). In Segal's terms, then, the act of violence is itself a truly symbolic equation (Sohn, 1997, p. 74).

Putting the Boot In

“Putting the boot in” is a saying that captures the quality of primitive, almost mindless violence, often conducted by standover men, which serves to annihilate an object felt to be damaged and vulnerable (Anderson, 1997, p. 75). In “Acting on Fantasy and Acting on Desire”, Segal (1992) describes violent defenses against vulnerability, which take the form of attacks on an object felt to contain unwanted parts of the self. She gives the illustration of a forensic case where a child had been murdered. The child was murdered at the point at which he became frightened and started crying. The murderer did not know why he did this. As a small child who suffered abuse he had been terrified and lonely. At the age of three, he tried to kill himself. In such a case, Robin Anderson states, what is attacked is not simply a hostile object but a vulnerable and suffering part of the self that it is imperative to silence (Anderson, 1997, p. 76).

I also recall a forensic case where a young man killed an adolescent boy. The murderer had been in the army and was on leave at the time with some other army mates, one of whom was a tough mentor. My client, the murderer, told me he did not intend to kill the boy, who at the time was tied up and being assaulted by his mates. But it was my client who put the final boot in to the head and caused the fatal blow. He said he did this at the point at which the boy began to scream. He had to silence the terrible screams. We later learnt that he was silencing his own screams, of his own physical abuse at the hands of some brutal kidnappers in his own adolescence.

Expiation as a Defense

Ruth Riesenber-Malcolm (1997, p. 105) speaks of expiation as a defense that can occur when the depressive position has not been negotiated and when a dread of harboring dead, damaged and accusing objects prevails. The defense leads to tight, rigid, closed behavior with a relation to an omnipotent primary object that creates a paralyzing impasse. Expiation refers to a belief in making “reparations” for damage done – punishment takes the place of the restoration of internal objects that have been attacked in fantasy or in reality (1997, p. 103). Punishment and control create a static, paralyzing situation that keeps dread within limits, where it does not have to be faced.

THE PRISON WORLD

The preceding theoretical foray provides a frame for several stories from the prison world and has informed my understanding of the mindset of prisoners. Before I accepted the job in Pentridge in 1995, I asked to see the prison and the office of the psychologist to be appointed. It was a stinking hot day. I was taken on a tour of the Bluestone Cottage (Read, 2010, p. 98) by a couple of prison officers. They showed me where Ryan was hanged in D Division. There was a wooden trap door on the third level. With relish they showed me how far he had fallen with the noose around his neck. We got to the wet cells in G Division – dark concrete claustrooms – and then they showed me the prisoners' weapon collection, from the “overcoat-brigade” days of Chopper Read. They told stories of the razor blades hidden in remelted soap which now sit, neatly catalogued, behind locked glass cabinets in the Governor's office. Funny what one remembers and what made an impression. I saw the steel doors of Jika Jika and the silence and the isolation of the high-tech metal walls imprinted like hot molten lead in the mind. I remember getting into my car, once beyond the walls, and gagging. I wanted to shower, change my clothes and decontaminate.

The prison bluestone walls hide the dark secrets of crimes. The haunting screams of those murdered are silenced but they ricochet down the corridors of the cell-blocks. The inmates cry: “Mummy, Mummy, please help me!” (Tippet, 1997), but their cries have been killed off long ago, neither heard nor answered. Port Phillip Prison, a few years ago, had a 24 hour lock-down in B Division for a few days. The men banged relentlessly in protest on their cell doors.

The prison world is a cesspit. As Read writes of J Ward: “People slept on a concrete floor. There was a shitbucket in the middle of the room. Meal times were like feeding animals” (2010, p. 115). Primitive, violent behavior is rampant. The prisoner mindset is one forged in a dog-eat-dog world, and the need to be on top, to be the top dog, the standover man, is a predominant paradigm. You watch your back. In lyrics penned by the notorious Read:

Thugged out like Pentridge Prison
When Chopper was choppin' up convicts with vein incisions in H division
A Stanley knife is a manly vice, that will madly slice, and badly blind, behind bars we
improvise.
You sleep at night, I'm in 'ur mind, with demon eyes,
Shanking your spleen inside with a concrete knife three feet wide ...
Street fighter, standover man, I BRING FEAR!
(Read, 2010, pp. 233, 236)

Gangs develop and provide a safe place reinforcing protection and toughness. The custodial system of control, blame and punishment requires a toughness to survive. The top dog in the pecking order is the man who has murdered and the lowest in the hierarchy is the paedophile, the “tamperer” or “rock spider”.

Concern is denigrated and can evoke the vulnerability of past abuse and the child being beaten. To “watch your back” is the daily mindset employed against hidden danger. Deception, denial, suspicion, and trickery are the devices employed to survive day to day. Read recalls the cruel tricks of prisoners hiding the razors in the soap, putting shit in food and more to damage other prisoners (2010, p. 124). Enemies patrol and menace the yards and cells. As Read recalls: “I had a lot of enemies in Pentridge because even your friends are enemies when you’re in jail” (p. 122). Freud noted that the criminal possesses a strict, punishing superego and not a weak or absent one (1915/1991, p. 196). Persecutory judgement, in the face of heinous crime, is externalized and the internal enemy is projected into a world that becomes a cesspit, in which the enemy can be viciously assaulted to ward off the enemy within. Thus, you are a “dog” or a “rat” if you tell the truth. Honesty is deplored, for truth heralds the truth of the crime and brings guilt to the fore. Instead, a paranoid–schizoid world of persecutory guilt, denial, revenge, enemies, threat, and control pervades the prison world. Punishment is the mandate and not restoration; despite rehabilitation and non-recidivism being the stated treatment goals. The macho culture recoils and lashes in vicious retaliation at any shameful encounters. To defend oneself as a man, to be a standover man and not a “wimp” or a “fool” (Gilligan, 1991) becomes an imperative in prison and a driving force of violent crime. One supervisee counseled a man who felt singled out for violent treatment by a father who had castrated him and repeatedly called him a “wanker” as a child. He became murderous when his boss hung up on him, so he killed him and wrapped him in plastic, like a condom. He did not like to be treated with scorn, demeaned or ignored. He violently attacked a prisoner who taunted him in the yard about being gay.

In the prison world, thinking is killed off and enactments abound. There is no access to a feeling internal world. The walls imprison the pain and the cries of “Mummy, Mummy, please help me!” and everyone lives in a perpetual state of lock-down. To get inside one has to pass all sorts of identification tests, searches, and go through turnstiles of the mind under the watchful eyes of the internal officers. How can anyone think? Dead and damaged bodies litter the cells of the concentration-camp minds: dead men walking. Nothing is allowed to live in the graveyards. Creativity and curiosity, the hallmarks of growing healthy children, are crushed. What does one think? The unthinkable? Dead bodies cannot be resurrected. Mourning has no place; life is severed. The internal walls of the criminal perpetrators had once been breached by violent trauma and abuse, and they have gone on to assault and kill. Tony Lock slayed the man/monster who killed his innocence as a child. There is no concern to bandage their wounds. The crimes are not commonly spoken of in depth – they might prejudice the minds of the psychologists or lead to the molten meltdown of the mind of an inmate – so criminal deeds are silenced, crimes are buried in files and problem-solving programs abound. However, the unconscious explodes in the riots of the prison and terrible parallel offence re-enactments follow and find receptacles for the guilt, blame and the shame of the criminal outcast. Meaning

and understanding are annihilated and cover-ups and falsifications abound. The inner recesses of the walls of the prison incarcerate repressions, memories, the haunting and writhing shadows of past crimes, past violence, murdered screams, dead bodies, threats and grievances. This is the eternal stench of the cesspit.

THE BREAKOUT – THE DISMISSAL

Around June 2008, a breakdown occurred in the supervision process. Two things happened. Firstly, the probationary psychologists were refused annual increments and told by Corrections Victoria that their performance was poor and did not meet the standards. They were penalized for spending time debriefing with each other before and after group, for submitting an essay to an internal publication without permission on the use of the psychodynamic frame in understanding the offence enactments in the group processes and much more. To me this inexplicable assessment signaled a crushing of embryonic good minds and a disturbance in the internal assessment system that was tantamount to punishment or abuse. The probationaries' work had been regularly passed as satisfactory by the Psychologists Registration Board of Victoria (PRBV) and they only had between a few months to six months to complete their registration requirements. The prison governor and senior departmental clinicians had applauded their work with the violence intervention program. The prisoners had described the benefits of the group program as "huge". The probationaries were conscientious and hard-working, completing consistently good work that was documented for the PRBV. The standards of performance held by Corrections Victoria clearly differed to the standards of the PRBV. Secondly, subsequent to the assessment of the probationers I was dismissed as their supervisor without explanation. Both were unprovoked assaults.

For a three-month period from August 2008, after having had their increments refused, the supervisees were encouraged to think about a change in supervisor – one who was involved in "not psychodynamic" (polite for psychoanalytic), but rather in "best practice", "evidence-based practice", and so on. During this period we chose to ignore this recommendation, given the near end of their required supervisory program. One probationary had only three months or so to go before reaching the end of her probationary period and the other about six months. The probationary psychologists told the seniors they did not want to change supervisors. But the recommendation escalated into a virtual command and the probationaries were expected to comply. I knew my dismissal was imminent for certain when I sighted a list of names of supervisors that was given to my supervisees. They were told that they could choose a supervisor from this list and if they decided to continue to be supervised by me, as of the end of the year, in a few months time, they would not receive financial subsidization. They would receive on-going subsidization if they chose any other supervisor. I was not informed directly of the final decision to replace me. I knew I had some evidence which could illuminate the inexplicable (if not prejudiced) nature of the dismissal, for

some of the psychologists listed were not qualified to supervise to meet registration purposes and some were not forensic. At this point, with the breakout landing directly into my consulting room, I was able to act. I could no longer ignore the realities of the external world of injustice. I now had something which enabled me to shift the battle to myself and to name and fight some of the abuse the probationary psychologists had sustained.

The week before the list of recommended alternative supervisors was given to the probationary psychologists, one repeatedly cried in the supervision. I was very concerned. I spent a tormented weekend. During her regular supervision with the senior psychologist she was asked about the progress of her external supervision and for a report. She broke down and left the room of the senior having told her repeatedly that it was the onus of the senior psychologist to make contact with me. The protocol required that the seniors make regular contact with external supervisors, which this senior had failed to do. The supervisee was called back in and re-questioned. Again she broke down. She was made to be accountable on my behalf. I felt that a line in the sand had now been drawn of what was acceptable and what was not and that they now had to pay a rather heavy cost for having me as supervisor. I told the supervisee she was being harassed and abused on my behalf. At this point I knew I could no longer stay in the relative safety of my consulting room; otherwise I could be like a parent turning a blind eye to the abuse of a child, failing to protect. A month or so later, this probationary left the prison in distress and retained me as supervisor. Then I saw the list of alternate supervisors.

Until this point, I had primarily focused on processing and containing the psychological work with the probationary psychologists and had strongly advised them not to take action in an environment that was about punishing control, rigid protocol and standover tactics. Initially they had complained to the governor, without my knowledge, about being solo practitioners in a maximum-security prison. The senior psychologist was on leave and there was no replacement. When she returned she commenced performance reviews and deemed the probationary psychologists poor in performance. Her assessment was supported by the chain of command. I warned the probationary psychologists that taking action would render them completely powerless and advised them to get on with their work and seek their registration. In a somewhat tyrannical and closed system I knew action could bait a "monster" and elicit further control. I had advised them that I was also completely powerless to take direct action in this situation. I promised them I would take the matter of their harsh treatment and so on to the registration board at the end of the supervision process and when they had graduated as psychologists. In the supervision sessions we focused primarily on the clinical work. I was very engaged in the material and so were they. The group issues of the men, the dynamics, the offence re-enactments, their disclosures and their struggles were compelling.

I was amazed at how they were able to use the supervision process. In order to manage the violent group processes we discussed the group at the beginning and

end of the week and they would process the discussion between them and return with digested ideas to the group. Sometimes they would come in angry, bewildered or disheartened by the stonewalling of the men – their anger or their deadened responses – but they would leave the sessions empowered with experienced insight and return to say they were able to shift the rage of the men to their pain and enliven the dead responses. They resonated with the interpretations and analysis of the psychoanalytic frame. During this time they wrote their reflective paper on their work as facilitators of the violence program and how they used the analytic perspective.

In this paper the probationaries described how they initially envisaged their role in the group as a “boxer stepping into the ring”, their “boxing gloves” providing protection from the defensive maneuvers and re-enactments utilized by its members. During the first half of the program they described how “surviving under fire” became their primary purpose which entailed thinking about the group processes helping to “contain” and “detoxify” the hostile projections. When words themselves became too persecutory, they turned to metaphors, stories and images to deliver the program content. The story *The Wrong Stone* (Deal, 2008), (which they found in a nearby bookstore) about a stonemason who must select only the “best” stones to build a stone wall, was used to explore the men’s violence. In the group, the stones in the story were used to represent the violent or the disowned parts of themselves, however as the men underwent a transformation and came to understand and accept the triggers to their violence, the stones also transformed and came to represent the men’s journey and transition.

I found the lost increments and poor performance assessment appalling and incomprehensible in the face of their hard, more-than-good-enough work: it felt akin to child murder. The premature axing of the supervision process was an added and unprovoked assault on their successful work. Were they being punished for speaking out about the problems of the management system such as expressing concern about the absence of senior psychology staff, which they did prior to and during the running of the violence group? Were they being punished for their good work? They were demoralized, distressed and enraged. Their performance and the reviews were subject to shifting assessment with shifting evidence and to intense fetishization. An enormous amount of time was taken up with this process and with the probationers being required to defend allegations of poor performance and dispute the claims of the internal, senior psychology assessors. Meanwhile, they had run, successfully, amongst other work, a three-hour session with 12 maximum-security prisoners three times a week for seven months. Witnessing the micromanagement and control of their work, which they experienced as abusive, was very painful indeed. Sometimes they began a supervision session in tears or broke down during the sessions. They had nightmares (due to prison psychology management and not just the group), and went on stress leave. They were, however, able to process and reflect and bounce back. It was their courage, their sustained gutsiness, and their own capacity to relentlessly return to the boxing ring that gave me

the courage to enter the flaming firing line and do battle on their behalf. I had been an area senior psychologist in a mainstream psychiatric health center and hospital supervising many psychologists and I had never witnessed such ongoing distress and such systematic crushing of enthusiasm and conscientiousness. I had never witnessed such fetishized performance plans. I had never witnessed such a severance or axing of supervision.

Whilst I knew I had no choice I initially trembled at the thought of action and confrontation and felt shame at my cowardice. I rang a senior member of Corrections Victoria, Department of Justice, pen in hand, to ask what was going on and to express concern about the ending of the supervision a few months before the registration program ended. I was taken aback at the inconsistencies of argument, the attempt at fancy footwork, and the hostility projected in response. My concern was met with aggression. Initially, the reasons given were financial and locational – he wanted the probationary psychologists supervised closer to the prison which could save time in terms of work leave. This was closely followed by him questioning my CBT experience, which he reminded me was the main frame of the programs. Amongst other reasons offered, the senior official suggested I was loath to end the supervisions because I could “lose a client”. He finished up saying that my “supervision was responsible for their poor performance” and “that the chance to alter the supervision arrangements could be seen as positive by the probationary psychologists due to the issues that had arisen in their performance plans”. When he said this I knew that I was being scapegoated for internal problems (that I had outed, on the face of it, the real reason for the dismissal) and that the psychodynamic (analytic) frame was blamed. I reminded him that at no point had a supervision report ever been sought from me. He was also “flabbergasted” that I should seek an explanation for my sudden and unexplained dismissal. Orders were not to be questioned. He put the boot in. My concerns and my request were deemed foolish. I crawled off the phone. I had experienced what my supervisees had first-hand. I felt abused and shamed. I now believe he was truly “flabbergasted”: I had questioned the ruling and refused to comply and submit. For the next three months the department, from the deputy commissioner down, reiterated that CBT and forensic skills were required by a supervisor, with the clear inference that my psychodynamic, analytic expertise made redundant the CBT and forensic expertise I in fact possessed.

When I recovered, I no longer felt afraid or paralyzed. I exploded. The next morning I sent a letter to the Commissioner of Corrections of the Department of Justice. I included the essay written by the probationary psychologists cited earlier and documented the plight of the probationary psychologists. I had been in a lockdown once when he was governor of one of the prisons and I reminded him of this episode in the letter. I thought the lockdown was an apt metaphor and apt reminder. I sent a letter to the PRBV at the same time, expressing grave concern about a disruption to supervision programs that were nearly complete and concerns about the performance assessment and treatment of the probationary psychologists.

I considered my credentials and my capacity to take on the fight to defend my reputation. I knew I had a good forensic curriculum vitae and knew what some of them did not, which was that I had redesigned the problem-solving “state-of-the-art” program in the prisons and in the community in Victoria for released women – adapting a current and highly regarded program developed by a professor in the United Kingdom, Professor James McGuire. This program was cognitive-behavioral in its theoretical frame. This professor was also involved in some forensic research I was currently undertaking at the time. I had worked with other professors in the forensic field and had publications and ongoing research to my name; including evidence-based and cognitive behavioral papers and research.

I rang a psychoanalytic colleague and she advised I take it to the minister’s office. I also received advice from a Federal MP whose opinion I solicited. He strongly advised that I reframe the concerns in terms of external supervisors and not the treatment of the probationary psychologists *per se*. I sent a comprehensive and restrained set of documents to the Minister of Corrections at the Department of Justice. It was a considerably more considered and digested document than the one the Commissioner received. The minister’s office agreed to review the matter of external supervisors and probationary psychologists. Whilst the story may seem to be all about me it was political to make it so, despite, but also because of, my concern for the probationary psychologists. I had no doubt that the way in which I was being treated paralleled the prison’s treatment of them. Once the process of review commenced I knew the probationary psychologists were protected from any departmental injustices, for I now had a direct line of communication to the office of the Minister for Corrections.

For most of the year, following action, I felt plunged into a state of demoralization and paranoid anxiety. The Executive Director of Police, Emergency Services and Corrections was given the task of reviewing my dismissal. The Acting Executive Director commenced the review. I reflected on my own potential to enact and questioned whether I had got caught up in system enactments. I felt I was acting at odds to the role of psychoanalytic psychotherapist engaged in reflective reverie and believed few would have left the consulting room. Sometimes the fight broke into the reverie of the consulting room. It certainly disrupted holidays; the department had a knack of sending provocative letters in holiday times such as January. I know I felt a delightful sense of triumph at times, when I outsmarted them in the cat-and-mouse game of timing or trumped them with the truth and caught them out. It helped that a senior advisor in the minister’s office was consistently supportive and mediated the correspondence between myself and the department and directors and commissioners. The MP was supporting me in the background and maintained a monitoring role with the minister’s office. Once I took action, I protected the supervisees from any knowledge of what unfolded. I had to struggle with feelings of shame with my supervisees as I was the dethroned supervisor and they knew it. I had to struggle with the guilt of knowing they were no longer receiving financial subsidization in agreeing to see me.

The Executive Director undertaking the review advised me that she was unable to resolve the matter. She had been friendly in her communications with me. I advised her on a number of occasions that she was not receiving correct information and that I was being further and further maligned and put to false trial. I said I felt like Mr K in Kafka's *The Trial*, deemed to be "a horse trainer when I am a bank manager" (1935, p. 129), asked to "prove countless subtleties" (p. 129) that are "impervious to proof" (p. 133) and "out of which an enormous fabric of guilt will be conjured up" (p. 129). No, I was told, it was not the issue of best practice and psychodynamic frame; no, it was not the poor performance of the probationary psychologists. Instead, it was reiterated that financial reasons including my geographical proximity to the prison predominated, irrespective of the fact that one of the proposed supervisors lived further away from the prison than me. When this was pointed out, the rationale of geographical location was replaced by another rationale, and so it went. For example, a letter to me from the Acting Executive Director, Police, Emergency Services and Corrections outlined concerns "regarding you allowing one of the supervisees to assist in vetting a list of names in order to support your issue with her employer". Yet I had been given the list to assist one of the probationary psychologists to consider another suitable supervisor, to cooperate with the requests of the employer. At this point, I encouraged the supervisee to consider an alternative supervisor. It was said that I was uncooperative and refused to consider alternative times for supervision. I managed to find, with relief (if not triumph), an email I had written to the senior supervisor agreeing to a change in supervision time a week following her request, a change that was agreeable to us both. Finally, months later, I advised the minister's office that I was off the tennis court and was no longer going to write letters countering what I believed to be the continual, ongoing distortion of truth. A week later, to my surprise, the Executive Director suggested that since she was unable to resolve the matter, that another executive director, the Executive Director of Regional and Executive Services, would have the task of reviewing all the correspondence between me and Corrections Victoria. I agreed but I was not hopeful. I thought they hoped to wear me down with another political ploy.

A few months later, however, the second Executive Director appointed found in my favor. There was finally a good outcome for me, though it came nearly 18 months after the review began, weighed down by a boxful of correspondence. Corrections Victoria was found to be at fault. They were found to have breached the requirements of the supervisory framework by not meeting at least quarterly with me. An apology from the Executive Director Regional and Executive Services was made for any distress caused and it was reiterated that Corrections Victoria had no issue with my competence. Indeed this Executive Director said she would "liaise" with the former Executive Director "to ensure that in future Corrections Victoria abide by the Clinical Services Supervision Framework". With this finding the Executive Director considered the matter closed. I replied that the subsidy needed to be repaid in full to the supervisee if the matter was to

be closed. The department had earlier and finally agreed to repay the subsidy but chose an arbitrary date of three months later (March and not December) as the date for backpay, which set off another process of derailment and a flurry of fetishized correspondence. Financial wrongs against the probationary psychologist who still remained were righted and I was retained as a supervisor. The two probationary psychologists were passed by the PRBV, and graduated. A few months later, one psychologist went on to complete her masters, getting first-class honors, and to give a conference paper at an international conference on her thesis topic, namely group process in the forensic system. The other psychologist secured full-time employment and her work was applauded and her forensic skills are in much demand.

THE RISKS: FACT OR FICTION

There are grave risks when working in prisons. At the time, as I have said, my out-of-the blue dismissal did not make much sense and I knew something very disturbing was responsible. As a forensic psychologist I could not put my finger on the pressure or the disturbance. The MP, when apprised of some of the details, at the outset said "This is mad!" confirming my response and encouraging me to take the issue of injustice further.

One morning a year later I began to read an article in the *Age* titled *Psychologist, killer in affair*. Suddenly, I recognized a name with a reeling shock. It was the senior psychologist of the two probationary psychologists who for 11 months or so of their probationary period had managed them within the maximum-security prison and whom they experienced as a controlling micro-manager (instructed from above or not) and who had begun to mutter "psychodynamic", "best practice" and so on in the endeavor to seek a change in supervision. It was the same psychologist who had reduced the probationary to tears in her office. There had been another explosion at the prison. The psychologist had been suspended and was seeking to gain back her registration. She had confessed to a two-year affair with an inmate who had committed child murder. I was stunned at the timing of things mentioned in the article. I checked the dates. The timing of the confession, noted in the newspaper article, occurred approximately one month after she had requested the probationary psychologists to seek another supervisor. The timing was extraordinary. In August 2008, at the same time the psychologist confessed to the PRBV, I had complained to the same body about my own pending dismissal and the treatment of the probationary psychologists. The subsidy to the probationary psychologists for supervision was to be cut if they continued with me beyond a date that coincided with the move of the senior psychologist to another part of the prison.

I wrote an email to the minister's office and said that the missing piece of the puzzle had now been found. I acknowledged that this psychologist had no doubt been a victim of the vicissitudes of the prison system and that her terrible predicament had no doubt been exacerbated by the absence of psychodynamic/analytic processing of therapeutic interactions in the prison. The two probationary

psychologists were re-traumatized. I reflected on the meeting I had had with this psychologist, in which I had submitted to the regal countenance and gatekeeping in order that I could be allowed to carry out the necessary observations of the probationary in the prison. I hypothesized with a sudden shock that I had been scapegoated. I had, as has been said, suspected that the internal problems of the prison had been foisted onto the supervision and its psychoanalytic nature. Now the story jelled with uncompromising truth; to me a veil was lifted and a horror scene revealed. The psychologists saw it too, independently of me, and both contacted me in shock that morning. I was the perfect scapegoat; an external supervisor who was psychoanalytic in practice and could be easily disposed of. I said in my letter to the minister's office that I had been deemed the incompetent psychologist by this very psychologist and others – the one who had to be ousted and was ousted. Yet the truly incompetent one had been protected by the department, and allowed to go on working despite its knowledge of her breaches of professional practice and her treatment of the probationers, whom she had reportedly reduced to tears on more than a few occasions. Her culpability to me was clear even if others were involved and she was a cog in a controlling chain of command. More importantly, *the probationary psychologists were also scapegoated for their good work*. The newspaper article, while shocking and enraging to me, gave clarity about the dismissal. The senior psychologist and the department had seemingly projected their own incompetence onto the supervisor and the probationary psychologists who for two years had been subject to punitive and abusive treatment where their enthusiasm and learning was relentlessly killed off. Certainly her actions, which led ultimately to her own dismissal, constituted the grossest ethical violation and no doubt represented a crisis for the department, or were the culmination of a terrible crisis in the department.

A year later the registration board lost the case for the license of the psychologist to be cancelled. The PRBV disbanded. I did hear later how some of its members had been appalled by the case and the blind-sightedness and seeming collusion of the department. In holding grave concerns for the way prisons can train probationary psychologists I want to emphasize what I do know. I do not think it is negligence which is the issue *per se*, for there can be a painstaking attention to protocol and practice, no doubt in the face of intense paranoid anxiety and the evasion of pain, but this controlling and rigid approach comes at the expense of knowing, understanding, curiosity, truth and creativity.

I do not think the seeming harsh treatment of the probationary psychologists or of myself was deliberate or intended but rather manifested unconscious denial originating from repressed pain, and murderous crises which can entail grave risks. The actions of the department were also grounded in the violent milieu of the prison world and the mindset of prisoners. Two good psychologists were deemed to be bad psychologists. A good-enough external supervisor was dismissed. Perhaps the dismissal also reflected an unconscious desire and need for a psychoanalytic psychotherapist by the psychologist and department. The crisis revealed an appalling and distressing downfall for a senior psychologist that

pointed to gross systemic failure to process the dynamic and dangerous psychic processes that are rife in the prison world: she was a *tragic casualty* of languishing inmates, and her situation embodies the grave risks of repression and the explosive power of the unconscious. In hindsight, I suspect shame, a terrible shame, motivated the wish for concealment by the department. I wore some of this shame for a year or more. The departmental officers prided themselves on their best practice. The truth was galling. It was not the probationary psychologists who had shamed them; it was their senior. I think this paper is a testimony also to the ordeal of this senior psychologist – experiencing shame, humiliation, exposure and exile.

CONCLUSION

The author hopes this paper contributes to the possibility of psychoanalytic understanding in Australian prisons being sought for both inmates and psychologists in the future and provides a testimony to the grave *risks* of repression and how it can lead to parallel enactments of past repressions.

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