

Playing The Game: Staging Maternal Incarceration

Am and obviously you're under
the rules and restrictions
of being in prison.
So you have to play the game.
You know you have to...
ah its...I don't know,
you can't really be true to yourself.

In this paper Dr Helena Enright of Bath Spa University will discuss her findings from the creation of her latest testimony play, *Playing the Game* which features testimonies from mothers in prison, prison officers alongside voices from the archive. The play was created in association with Geese Theatre Company and the women of HMP Peterborough as part of the *On the Inside* project commissioned by the University of Warwick who were interested in exploring the contemporary lived experience of mothers in prison. As part of the process, Enright and Liz Brown of Geese Theatre ran a series of drama workshops and interviewed the participants along with prison staff about their experiences in prison. The project drew on the historical research produced as part of a major Wellcome Trust funded project on the health of prisoners, that enabled reflection on continuities and change over time for women giving birth and mothering in prison and their experiences of health care. In this paper I consider how creating spaces to listen to the experience of others without judgement or agenda can open doors that may have otherwise remained closed. These testimonies offer a rare glimpse into what it is like to have your baby in prison and to be faced with the possibility of having to 'hand your baby out'. I also explore the potential of conducting the interviews alongside a series of drama workshops positing that combining both methodologies led to a deeper sense of trust between interviewer and interviewee which led to some revealing insights about what it is to experience life behind bars as a mother.

Dr Helena Enright is an award winning playwright and director who has written a number of plays which incorporate the testimony of real people. These plays have incorporated the testimony of real people and have dealt with subjects such as domestic violence, cancer, road fatalities, war and the environment. She has also worked as an actress and producer in both theatre and film, and also as a teacher and facilitator on many outreach, community, school and university theatre projects in both Ireland and the UK. Helena is currently Senior Lecturer in Drama at Bath Spa University.

Key words: Testimony, theatre, prison, mothers, lived experience