

how the issue or problem can be dealt with by society's existing problem-solving apparatus, without radical changes being required." What makes us think that after many reports and studies, the government will listen to the Panel's report if it means radically altering the status quo?

The Panel is a feasible option for the federal government because it is easily implemented and visible, because it is not as fiscally or politically costly as assistance or restructuring activities such as income redistribution, and because governments are not bound to implement any of its recommendations.

Currently, measures are being taken in a hodgepodge manner, and the government recognizes in its rhetoric but not yet in its actions the connection between the issue of violence against women and economic inequality, or violence, pornography, and the portrayal of women in the media and in school materials. Feminists must make clear that a Panel is not a substitute for immediate action on violence against women. It can only be an addition to: removing the spending limit on the Canada Assistance Plan, which funds shelters for battered women, child care, programs for the disabled and social assistance; increasing funding for new shelter spaces and rape crisis centres; maintenance of existing shelter spaces including funding for counseling, follow-up, outreach and children, culturally appropriate services for aboriginal and immigrant women; public education, and mandatory training in women's equality issues for judges, court officials and police; and restoration of funding to social housing and job training programs.

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# Building Mishpocheh

By Sandra Butler

**This text is a summary of Sandra Butler's speech to the 1991 Canadian Mental Health Association conference, "Women in a Violent Society." It is reprinted from the Summary Report of that conference.**

The number of women present today illustrates the loneliness and difficulty of the work we do, and the urgency of building *mishpocheh*, or extended family, said Sandra Butler, internationally recognized counsellor and writer on child sexual abuse. In this setting, she said, it is unnecessary to educate the audience about violence against women. Everyone here is aware of the degree to which women "live in exile from our bodies"; we all know the ways in which women "live as prisoners in the castles that are men's homes." As a group, participants at *Women and Mental Health* have gathered to express our concerns, priorities and passions, and to connect with other women.

"As we create community," Butler said, "we combat the isolation and exhaustion, the sense of being overwhelmed by an avalanche.... As this movement expands, we must ensure that it also deepens." Women must ask hard questions, and create our own answers, rather than listening to "gurus" who put forth set answers.

Healing, an important word in the lexicon of feminist therapy, has come to refer to women's journeys through the cobwebs of half-forgotten memory, through the tears which can bring relief. It is a slow, arduous process, in which women eventually come to remember our own history, to appreciate the mechanisms which have enabled us to survive, and finally to move to a place of our own identity, which includes our memories.

"Skillful, empathic healing work has come to be seen as an end in itself," Butler said. "Now it is time to ask whether feminist therapy became too much therapy and

not enough feminism." It is important to use our psychological skills in the service of social change work, she emphasized. "The focus should not be on individual healing, but on doing what we set out to do in the first place, and that is ending violence against women."

The question of what is meant by "wellness" is also fundamental: we are now seeing the effects of poisons which are drawn into people's bodies, and which concentrate in women's sensitive reproductive organs. "Every 10 minutes, a woman dies of breast cancer," Butler said, noting that last year alone, this disease claimed 44,500 women—more than the total number of deaths from AIDS since that epidemic began. Ironically, people suffering from disorders of the immune system are now faced with "a barrage of psychobabble," which states that not only do we create our own wellness, but our illnesses, too. This ignores factors such as capitalism, pollution and toxic dumps, and violence against women and children. "It is the same consciousness that invades the body of a little child that invades Grenada or Nicaragua," Butler said.

She stressed that she was not describing these widening spirals of violence in order to overwhelm or paralyze, but rather to remind us of the danger of the masculinist hierarchy that defines women's lives. "We are all engaged in the same struggle on different fronts," Butler said, noting that to be involved in the struggle against misogyny is to be part of the larger movement for liberation around the world.

"What does it mean to say that we are 'empowering' women, in a world where women still have no power?" she asked. There is an inward focus involved in much of the work of recovery, but once the "first 11 steps" have been completed, it is crucial that the message be carried outward. "Recovery is an important first step, but must not be an ending," Butler emphasized. "Our world must begin to expand,

into building community, redressing our hurts and wounds, and confronting our oppressors."

Butler commented that in her work, which has recently involved travelling to a number of small Canadian towns to talk about the effects of child sexual abuse, women constantly note that her words affirm their own emerging beliefs. "Never once has a woman come up to me to say she'd never thought of this before," Butler said. Women do know what it feels

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like; it's living with the consequences of the consciousness that is so difficult.

"How do we bear the grief that our work forces us to confront?" she asked. "This grief must be recognized, it must be acknowledged, and it must be incorporated into our work. We owe these women and children no less." As a "small embattled political community" surrounded by the larger forces of patriarchy and capitalism, it is possible to sink into weary exhaustion, rather than "using that righteous indignation which has as its foundation the motto, 'Not one more woman. Not one more child'."

One of the lies we face every day, Butler said, is that we are not supposed to bring our work home with us. "But there is no reason to do the work, unless we care passionately about what we do. We need to remember not to blur the distinction between our grief and the possibility that our work inspires the work of other women." Women judge the adequacy of our work according to the context that surrounds us, Butler pointed out, noting that the larger culture is often both unwilling and unable to hear what we say. Ultimately, she said, "We are all we have."

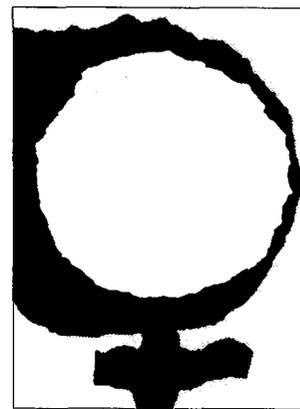
For real healing to occur, women need justice. "We have shifted responsibility for justice to the justice system, which is both inadequate and disinterested," Butler stated. Real justice, however, begins when there is transformation which leads to transcendence. The trauma of violence can never be undone, but the fates of women who have been abused are connected to the fates of all the women in the world.

Butler described some of her own struggle, in which she works with Jewish and Arab women against the Israeli occupation of Palestine. "As a Jew," she said, "I have to align with the struggle for justice." Arab women are aware that the struggle will continue for a long time, and that there will be many failures — but they also know that the Intifada cannot and will not stop. This movement has gone beyond ongoing acts of resistance, transforming the Palestinian population into a nation. "This struggle keeps me connected with all other struggles for justice," Butler emphasized.

There is no public monument analogous to the Vietnam memorial in Washington, to honour the fallen in the war between the sexes. "We need to make a living monument," Butler said. "This room is full of people making a monument to the fallen." She pointed to the infrequent moments "which reach beyond any known possibility" in the lives of survivors — moments when a teacher showed she might be open to hearing, or a widowed neighbour spent a Sunday afternoon playing a game of Chinese checkers — as treasured memories for women who have too few good ones.

"This is the most important part of our work," she said. "Every moment has the potential to become transformative, to become reparative. As a secular Jew, this has become my relationship to the sacred." Butler urged each member of the audience to find her own relationship to the sacred within herself, and to live in its service. "Each act carries the possibility of transformation, of reparation, of mending the world. I hope each one of you can bring that political, psychological, moral and sacred imperative to the urgency of your work."

*Sandra Butler is a writer, counsellor, trainer and organizer in the field of child sexual assault and violence against women.*



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