

Fortaleza's Feminisms: Searching for Feminist
Theory in the Centro de Referência da Mulher
and the Delegacia de Defesa da Mulher

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Imagine living in a world where there is no domination, where females and males are not alike, or even always equal, but where a vision of mutuality is the ethos shaping our interaction.

bell hooks

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	4
Definition of Terms.....	5
Abstract.....	7
Methodology.....	8
Social Relevance Statement.....	10
Personal and Academic Motivations.....	12
Location of Research.....	14
Introduction.....	15
Analysis of Findings.....	18
Conclusion.....	38
Indications for Further Research.....	40
Bibliography.....	41
Primary Sources.....	43
Appendix.....	44

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Definition of Terms

- 1) audiência: a meeting between the woman who has filed the report, her aggressor, and the delegada or social worker.
- 2) Boletim de Ocorrência: the initial police report upon arrival at DDM
- 3) Cartório: the room in the DDM where evidence and testimonials are collected for the purpose of going forward with a protective order or with criminal proceedings.
- 4) Casa Abrigo: shelter for victims of domestic violence who are at risk for death.
- 5) Centro: the Centro de Referência da Mulher, which will be referred to by this shortened title.
- 6) Delegacia: police station
- 7) Delegacia de Defesa da Mulher (DDM): the police station, staffed exclusively by female officers, that deals only with violence against women.
- 8) delegada: a police chief who is part of the civil police and has a law degree.
- 9) escritã: the title for all the police officers who work inside the DDM, taking police reports and working in the Cartório.
- 10) Lei Maria da Penha: a federal law passed in August of 2006 that improves services for victims and increases penalties for abusers.
- 11) machista: an adjective referring to 'machismo,' which generally refers to sexist attitudes where the male is the dominant party, making the female submissive, and there is an excessive amount of male pride.
- 12) Medida Protetiva: protective order

13) prefeitura: the government of the municipality

14) técnica: the title of the professionals who work with victims at the Centro –
includes the lawyers, social workers, sociologists, and psychologists.

Abstract

This study attempts to focus on the issue of how violence against women is combated in Brazil through interviewing the women who work at the Delegacia de Defesa da Mulher and the Centro de Referência da Mulher. I attempt to compare and contrast the policies and procedures of these two institutions, as well as the opinions of the women who work there, to understand how they reflect and/or resist feminist theory values. As the basis of this analysis, I am using feminist domestic violence theory, which states that the cause of domestic violence is rooted in sexism and patriarchal power and control. In bell hooks' words, to understand violence against women one must accept that, "...domestic violence is the direct outcome of sexism, that it will not end until sexism ends...it requires challenging and changing fundamental ways of thinking about gender" (62). The goal of the research is to understand the relationship to and vision of this feminism through the eyes of the women in each institution so as to evaluate the status of feminism in the fight against domestic violence in Brazil. This study provides evidence that suggests that various definitions of feminism are alive and at work in both institutions in complex and differing ways, and that Lei Maria da Penha has had an enormous impact on the way that the professionals express their feminism, principally in the Delegacia de Defesa da Mulher.

Methodology

My methodology was comprised of three components: reading secondary sources, doing interviews, and in-depth observations. The interviews and observations were mostly limited to the “delegadas” at the DDM, and to the “técnicas” at the Centro. For the observations portion, I mostly observed the “delegadas” conducting “audiências” and the “escrivãs” doing intakes. I had planned on structuring my research mainly around face-to-face interviews, but because the women I was working with at the DDM were so busy and had very little free time during their days, my research ended up being mostly based on observations. This was successful in its own way, because I found that I could answer most of the questions I had planned for interviews through observing the women and the way that they interacted with the victims. It would have been ideal to have more interview time, but the women’s schedules, combined with the limited time of the ISP period, made that impossible. Also, because of the confidentiality and structure of the Centro, it was not allowed for me to observe intakes, so my observations are limited to employee meetings and the waiting room.

The largest limitations of my research are the short amount of the time and the language barrier. Because I only have one year of training in Portuguese, my level of communication during interviews is not as deep as I would like it to be. Similarly, the interview transcriptions may not contain all of the nuances of the responses that the women intended to give. Because of the time constraints of the ISP period, I could not do a full investigation of all aspects of the domestic violence network in Fortaleza, and my research was limited to only the Centro and the DDM. However, this could also

actually be beneficial for my research because it gives these institutions the deeper focus that they deserve. When making generalizations about the fight against domestic violence in Brazil, however, it should be noted that I only spent three weeks conducting this research in one city in the northeast of Brazil, so the information is not inclusive of all Brazilian society.

Social Relevance Statement

It is my belief that violence against women is one of the most massive and underreported forms of social injustice maintained by all societies throughout the world. Interpersonal violence perpetrated primarily by one gender against another in such large numbers perpetuates the oppression of women and guarantees the maintenance of patriarchy, making it impossible for women of all races to achieve emancipation. This research is important because it will attempt to better understand the intricacies and multi-institutional levels of the fight against domestic violence in Brazil, hopefully bringing theories about domestic violence one step closer to ending the violence and working towards gender equality and a culture where men and women can exist together without sexism.

In Brazil, statistics of violence against women have been disturbingly high for many decades. In 2001, Brazil was condemned by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights for its ineffective pattern of judicial action and its tolerance of violence against women (Lei Maria da Penha 6). In 1991, Human Rights Watch conducted a study of 6,000 violence crimes against Brazilian women and found that over four hundred of these women were murdered by their husbands or lovers. Over seventy percent of reported cases of violence against women occur in the home, and over forty percent involve serious bodily injury including punching, slapping, kicking, tying up, spanking, burning of breasts and genitals, and strangulation (America's Watch). Brazil is a country where wife-murder has a long history of being ignored by the court systems and murderers have been protected by the honor-defense, which excuses husbands or lovers

from murdering women because their own honor has been destroyed in some way by her actions. This history makes domestic violence in Brazil even more important to study and combat; for example, Human Rights Watch reported that a judge in the interior, in 1991, confirmed that he believes the honor defense is still successful eighty percent of the time.

It is important to consider, also, the timeliness of conducting a study about Fortaleza's mechanisms for dealing with domestic violence in the year 2008, less than two years after the implementation of Lei Maria da Penha. From a social justice and human rights perspective, this law is a huge step forward in making the fight against domestic violence as politically and legally serious as it deserves to be. The law has already improved many systems within Fortaleza, including changes that are underway to build more DDMS, safe houses, and improve services for victims through the construction of more Centros de Referência. It is important to understand the implications of this law, as well as to monitor to what extent it is actually implemented in these institutions, which has major ramifications for victims and abusers.

Personal and Academic Motivations

As a student of Women and Gender Studies at an American university, it is easy to fall into the trap of limiting my vision of feminism to only the movement within the United States. As both a personal and academic goal in conducting this research project, I wanted to involve myself in the knowledge created by the international feminist movement and develop, within myself, a deeper understanding of the issues that plague women around the world, regardless of nationality. As a student, I am involved in groups and movements on and off campus that attempt to combat violence against women through education and support. It is with this effort in mind that I selected domestic violence as my research topic, combined with a deep interest in the varied systems that exist throughout the world for attempting to fight this problem that is so intensely embedded in our cultures. While different gender struggles exist for different countries around the world, every culture is forced to deal with the devastating problem of violence against women. Though this is a tragic reality, it also gives feminism the unique opportunity to organize globally around one cause. This research is an attempt to understand the fight against domestic and sexual violence in a culture different from my own, which allows me to learn both as a student of gender studies and as an activist who hopes to devote myself to this cause.

For both personal and academic reasons, I hope to bring this research back to the United States in order to broaden students' understanding of the feminist struggles that are happening on a global level. The way that Brazil's government and feminists have constructed systems for dealing with domestic violence can teach activists in the United States many things about this fight that they may never have imagined. There is often the

assumption in the United States that the North American feminist movement is more advanced than the movements in South America or other countries around the world – I believe that the new generation of feminists in the United States must make it our job to destroy these false assumptions. The differences between the North American and Brazilian systems for fighting against this violence are both fascinating and useful; hopefully this research can be a model for feminists all over the world to learn how to work more interdependently, to share ideas and become part of each other's solutions.

Location of Research

I conducted my research in Fortaleza, Ceará, Brazil. Fortaleza has a population of around 2.5 million people (Estimativas das Populações Residentes). In the entire city, there is only one Delegacia da Mulher, and it is located in the “Centro,” which is a neighborhood in the center of the city, near the neighborhood of “Benfica,” which is where the Centro de Referência is located. These institutions are within walking distance of each other – the specialized judge for women is also located within walking distance, as is the “Casa Abrigo.” This provides a necessary convenience for the women using these institutions. There is also a large avenue that passes through these neighborhoods, and there are many buses that pass on this avenue, making it easy for women to find and arrive at these institutions.

Introduction

Domestic violence in Brazil is a problem that has been both historically rampant and historically ignored as a “private” issue. New statistics show that 43% of Brazilian women have been victims of some form of domestic violence at some point in their lives (Pacto Nacional). Brazil’s history of gender relations is entrenched with wife-killing, which is the practice of killing one’s wife or lover because she has been unfaithful or shameful in some way; it was not until 1991 that the honor defense, which acquits men of these crimes because their honor has been destroyed, was declared illegitimate by Brazil’s highest court (Nelson 135). This decision was the result of the beginning of an anti-violence movement in Brazil that began in the late 1970s and came into full force in the 1980s and 1990s. Feminist organizations, principally SOS-Mulher, began to spring up all over Brazil and demand changes to the way that legal systems handled female victims of violence; similarly, they began to create support networks for these women. Two famous cases of wife murder in 1979 and 1981 provoked the women’s movement to push even harder for governmental response; this, combined with liberalization and the election of a civilian president for the Brazilian Republic in 1985 resulted in the creation of the Delegacias (America’s Watch 8). These specialized Delegacias are staffed exclusively with female officers and deal only with violence against women. They were the first of their kind around the world. The Delegacia de Defesa da Mulher (DDM) in Fortaleza is the subject of this research project, as is the Centro de Referência da Mulher, which is a support center also created by the government due to pressure by feminist organizations.

The Delegacia is only one institution within a network of organizations that exists in Fortaleza to fight domestic violence and give support to victims. This network is supported financially by the “Prefeitura” and is relatively new; for example, the Centro de Referência was created in March of 2006. Some of the components of this network include: Casa Abrigo, DDM, Centro de Referência, a women’s hospital, a specialized women’s social service center, and a specialized judge for women and families. This study focuses on the DDM and the Centro. The DDM has the responsibility of processing all reports of violence against women made in the city of Fortaleza; there is only one DDM for the entire city, and currently, only one “delegada” is employed there. The DDM processes, on average, between sixty and eighty police reports per day (Dias, Cecília^{*}). There is usually a long line in the waiting room of the DDM, and it is not uncommon for women to wait for hours. Between January of 2008 and May of 2008, the DDM already processed 3,332 reports of domestic violence, including 706 bodily injuries, 17 rapes, and over 1,500 threats, including death threats (Estatística Geral 1). The DDM processes more reports than any other Delegacia in the entire state of Ceará – there are more people at this Delegacia on a day-to-day basis than any other police station in the state (Dias, Cecília).

The Centro de Referência da Mulher is a support and resource center for women who have been victims of interpersonal violence, and is also home to the domestic violence hotline for the city of Fortaleza. The Centro employs various professionals (“técnicas”) including psychologists, lawyers, sociologists, educators, and social workers. Any woman who comes to the Centro receives a private meeting with any of these

^{*} All first and last names have been changed to protect the privacy of my informants.

professionals, and continuing support with whatever she needs, including health care, legal advice, professional training courses, education for her children, etc. The Centro itself provides conversation groups, self-esteem groups, therapy groups, and educational activities. In 2007, the Centro attended to 1,514 women, 43% of these women were new clients, and 57% were return visitors (Balanço Anual).

While the DDM and the Centro have their established missions and roles within this network, the opinions and beliefs of the women that work in these institutions are equally as important as those formal missions. Through this research, I attempt to better understand the feminism that is active in these institutions through interviewing and observing the women who work there. Important to consider in this exploration is the effect of policies, like Lei Maria da Penha, which directly alter the work, motivations, and goals of these professionals.

Analysis of Findings

“More than the body, violence wounds the soul, destroys dreams, and destroys the dignity of women” (Poster #1). Displayed on the wall of the waiting room of the Centro de Referência, the poster displaying this message illustrates the importance of working to end violence against women, which is the ultimate idea and motivation behind any study of domestic violence. Though violence against women has been “wounding the souls” of women for centuries, it was only with the feminist movement that domestic and sexual violence became an urgent issue that demanded social change and political action; thus, studying the systems in place for dealing with violence against women in conjunction with a discussion of feminism is crucial. In the words of bell hooks, feminist domestic violence theory is the understanding that, “...domestic violence is the direct outcome of sexism, that it will not end until sexism ends...it requires challenging and changing fundamental ways of thinking about gender” (62). While this is one way to define the fight against domestic violence, it is important to understand the way that the women who actually work in the field, directly with victims, understand feminism and its place in their work. The simple fact that the Delegacias and Centros de Referência were established as necessary “women’s spaces” highlights the importance of thinking about gender relations in any discussion of violence against women; without understanding patriarchal structures and the way that sexism plays into domestic and sexual violence at every level, the study of this type of violence will be fruitless.

When the specialized DDMs were created in the 1980s, they became a popular site for study by both Brazilian and American researchers because of what they seemed to

say about the role of gender in the fight against violence. Feminist researchers raised questions about the implications of creating police stations with only female police officers, understanding this decision as a statement of essentialism. In this context, essentialism is understood as the belief that women are naturally better at understanding “women’s issues,” therefore making them more suitable for this type of work (Hautzinger, MacDowell Santos, Nelson, Ostermann). In general, these researchers found that this Brazilian “experiment” of female-staffed specialized police stations did not work because: “...the sole rationale for the DDM’s existence seems to rest on the essentialist notion that providing a private ‘women’s space’ in which to report an incident of violence will facilitate justice” (Nelson 141). Therefore, most of these studies conclude that the DDMs are unsuccessful and in need of radical transformations or complete abolishment. However, these studies were conducted well before Lei Maria da Penha, and it is even more important now to study the feminism of the DDM in conjunction with the Centro in order to understand their current operation, theoretical foundations, and the changes in place because of this new law.

Through observations and interviews, I found that the feminism expressed in the Centro is one of empowerment, of changing these destructive and unequal gender relations through strengthening women’s self-worth. At the Delegacia, feminism appropriately takes a more legal tone, focusing on the necessity of punishing abusers and encouraging women to come forward to report the violence; this feminism, however, is less attached to the title of “feminism” and more involved with the “cause” of ending violence. I found that Lei Maria da Penha and the hope that it gives of disrupting the culture of violence against women especially motivate the feminism at the Delegacia.

Therefore, while the theories of feminism expressed through the actions and words of the women at both the Centro and the DDM have different motivations and are varied and complex, both institutions recognize a “machista” and sexist culture as the foundation of domestic and sexual violence.

To understand the feminism expressed in the Centro de Referência, it is important to first understand the way this organization functions everyday, and within the wider network of domestic violence support. The Centro is open to all women suffering from any form of domestic or sexual violence in Fortaleza. It is organized as a resource center, and while it offers counseling and therapy services, it is primarily used as a starting-off point for women in need of other services. The Centro puts the women in touch with legal services, the “Casa Abrigo,” and various other social services. The physical space of the Centro is well-kept, open, and cheerful – it is full of bright colors and artwork and posters on the walls. It has a spacious waiting area and private rooms for individual meetings. The space shows the women that they are respected and that their problems deserve attention; the attitudes of the women who work at the Centro also show the women that this is “their space.” When a woman arrives, she will be offered coffee and water and usually she will not have to wait more than fifteen to thirty minutes to be seen by a “técnica.” If she needs a shelter, the Centro and the “Casa Abrigo” combine their services to make sure she has transportation to the shelter. On more than one occasion, I observed the “técnicas” themselves driving women to various services in their own cars. More than services for individual women, the Centro also houses the domestic violence hotline, which has a rotating schedule to decide who answers it each day. There is also a computer room, which is used to compile statistics about the women who come to the

Centro. Each time that one of the “técnicas” has a meeting with a woman, she gathers information from her about her specific situation, including marital status, number of children, occupation, place of residence, etc. All of this information is then compiled and kept in a data bank on the computers. In this way, the Centro can keep track of who is hearing about their services and what types of women they are reaching – this gives valuable information about how they can improve their dissemination of information and what gaps exist in who is using their services.

Unlike the Centro, the DDM is interested in penal and legal processes, as opposed to offering psychological or emotional resources. Because the DDM processes so many reports per day and usually has only three “escrivãs” taking in these reports, there is almost always a long line in the waiting room. When a woman arrives, she is given a number by the receptionist and told to sit in the waiting room. The “escrivãs” do intakes number by number in the “Boletim de Ocorrência” room. When the woman enters this room, she will sit across from one of the “escrivãs” and answer questions about what has been going on in her relationship. The “escrivã” will print up a report of what happened, along with a notification that will be delivered to the aggressor. Both of these papers have an “audiência” date written on them, which tells the victim and the aggressor when they need to return to the DDM to have their meeting with the “delegada.” At this point, the woman still usually does not know if she wants to go forward with the criminal processes, a protective order, or just file the police report by itself. If she decides to go forward with criminal proceedings, she must go to the hospital and get a medical examination to look for signs of injury and abuse. She must also return to the DDM with two non-relatives, and all three must file specific evidence reports in the “Cartório.” If

the woman decides to go forward with a protective order, she can skip the step of getting the medical examination, but must file the evidence reports with two non-relatives. She then must set up a meeting with the specialized women's judge (her aggressor must also be present for this meeting) where the judge will decide to grant the order or not. In all three of these situations (criminal proceedings, protective order, or just the police report), the woman, her aggressor, and a "delegada" must all be present for an "audiência," which usually happens several weeks after the original police report is filed.

The bulk of my observations at the DDM consisted of watching these "audiências." When a woman arrives for her "audiência," she is told to wait upstairs in the smaller waiting room outside of the "delegada's" office. When the man arrives, he is told to wait outside of the DDM building, and they will call him when the "delegada" is ready to begin. The "Delegada Titular" at the DDM explained to me why the man has to wait outside: "Because we have had various problems when he comes inside and sits in the Delegacia, waiting for the victim, for their meeting, because he'll sit there watching her" (Dias, Cecília). The woman is called into the meeting first, and then the man is called in after the woman has sat down. From this point, the "delegada" will read the police report aloud and give each person a chance to explain what happened in their own words. This is the point in the meeting where things get messy and usually loud or emotional; the man inevitably has a different idea of what happened than the woman, and it is the "delegada's" role to keep the situation calm. The objective of the meeting is to come to some sort of conclusion about what will happen from this point. If the woman has already decided to go ahead with a protective order or criminal process, the "delegada" will explain to both of them what either of those options entails. If the

woman is still undecided, the “delegada” will explain her options and give her advice on which path she thinks is most appropriate for this woman’s situation. Once a decision is made, or the decision is made to keep thinking about the best option, the two are sent out of the office and the meeting is over.

Before I was able to understand the types of feminism that were expressed in the DDM and the Centro, I realized I had to study Lei Maria da Penha, as it is essential to the motivation of this work, especially in the DDM. Lei Maria da Penha was passed in August of 2006. The law calls for many things, but the most prominent changes are: tripling the maximum sentences for abusers (from one to three years), increasing services for victims, mandatory arrest for men who are witnessed abusing their partners, and the creation of judges that deal specifically with women and families. The law is named after Maria da Penha, a woman from Ceará who took her story of abuse and transformed it into a fight for the rights of female victims of domestic violence (Lei Maria da Penha 5). In many ways, the law is very progressive, especially in its understanding of violence against women as an outcome of societal structures of gender inequality. As it states in the law itself, “This law attempts to correct power inequality between men and women in our society, that is hidden and protected by walls of ‘the home’ and maintained by a ‘machista’ culture” (7). The law was written by the Special Secretary for the Policies of Women, with the help of feminist NGOs. One of the first things that the law mandates is the creation of specialized judges for women; one of the main roles of these judges is to grant urgent protective orders through a process that is shorter and easier than the previous protective order process. The law states that it ensures that every woman, regardless of race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, culture, income, educational level,

age, and religion has the basic human right to live a life free from violence, and to preserve her physical and mental health. The law goes on to state that every woman should be able to pursue safety, health, education, etc., which can only truly occur in a life without violence. Importantly, the law details the definition of domestic violence to include: physical violence, psychological violence (threats, isolation, ridicule, humiliation, manipulation, etc.), sexual violence, economic abuse, and moral abuse. Specifically, the law calls for specialized judges and public defenders for women, the encouragement of research/studies about domestic violence, respect of ethical values of the family, eliminating stereotypical roles in families that legitimize and exacerbate domestic violence, the implementation of more DDMs, the implementation of education about violence against women in public schools and the dissemination of this knowledge to the general public, conventions and other events by NGOs that organize programs to end the violence, the training of government-employed police professionals about domestic violence, and the creation of school curriculums that highlight human rights and the problem of violence against women.

One of the places where Lei Maria da Penha is most celebrated, discussed, and explained to victims is the Centro de Referência. Through the formal interviews that I conducted with three of the “técnicas” at the Centro, combined with informal conversations and observations, I was able to formulate a deeper understanding of the way that these women conceptualize feminism in their work and in their lives. I found that their feminism is based in the idea of empowerment and of correcting imbalances in gender equality, which is appropriate as they work in a support center that is dedicated to empowering women to change their lives. When I asked the “técnicas” how they

envision the goals of the Centro, they had various responses, but all focused on the women having a space of their own where they can talk about the violence without judgment and improve their concepts of themselves. When I asked Angela what the goals of the Centro are in her own words, she said, “I think that if we reach this goal of the woman having this power, this autonomy, to strengthen her self-esteem, that she is capable of constructing her own story, I think that we have succeeded one hundred percent in our goals” (Melo, Angela). Angela’s response is not focused on what the employees at the Centro should be doing in order to accomplish their goals, but rather, she is interested in how the woman feels, and how this woman can leave the Centro feeling better about her life. Similarly, Maria talked about helping the woman to reach a better place in her life: “So we look for, not what we think is best for her, but what she thinks is best for her own life. She has the autonomy to search for the best way to live her life. To listen and to support, in my opinion, are the two most important goals of the Centro” (Barros, Maria). This idea of not telling the women what they *should* do to make their lives better, but instead, searching for answers *with* the woman and understanding that she is the expert in her own life, is an important tenant of the feminist theory that I found expressed in the Centro.

The “técnicas” at the Centro also expressed deep concern and understanding of the origin of violence against women and the importance of the feminist movement in the fight against this violence; though the “técnicas” made it clear that they do not take part in an explicitly feminist organization, all of the women I talked to personally identified with feminism and were able to express to me how they define their personal feminism. When I asked Ana how she defines feminism for herself, she said, “It is this perception of

opposition...I was raised by a machista mother, who said that if I didn't have certain things, I would never find a man...So for me, my individual feminism is this: I don't accept what was culturally imposed upon me" (Carvalho, Ana). Not only does Ana identify with feminism when it comes to her job, but she also has a personal feminist theory that she applies to her everyday life. In the same way, Angela defines feminism through her personal life: "I identify with feminism through the question of autonomy, that I don't want to depend on anyone, that I am capable of accomplishing anything I want or desire. And like I said, this has a strong base in my family, mainly through my mother" (Melo, Angela). Both of these women's responses demonstrate that they internalize their work at the Centro to the point where the feminism they participate in as part of the jobs has become part of their whole lives. I could also see these women's individual feminisms through the way that they talked about the origin of violence against women. All three of them had a deep understanding of the way that violence against women is rooted in the patriarchal history of society. Ana described the origin of violence when she said, "Brazil was colonized, very brutally...the women came as commodities...So I think it's very related to this question of gender and power, because of this vision of possession" (Carvalho, Ana). Here, Ana is showing that she understands violence against women as based in historical inequalities and in the idea of a wife being the possession of her husband. Maria expressed similar beliefs, and related them to how we still think about gender today: "So you see that the priests, the bishops, God, the Pope are all men. So violence comes from these many things – that men are superior, in charge. Gender equality still doesn't exist" (Barros, Maria). Ana and Maria referred to both colonization and the Catholic religion as sources of violence against women in

Brazil, which shows that they take the work of deconstructing cultural beliefs seriously and express that deconstruction through a feminist vision of gender equality. When I talked to the women at the Centro in both formal interviews and informal conversations, I noticed that they all talked excitedly about their work of empowering women and deconstructing destructive gender norms, which is the way that I see the definition of feminism taking shape at the Centro de Referência.

Because the DDM is part of the police force and therefore must be interested in filing police reports and making arrests, the ways that feminism is expressed through the words and actions of the women who work there is more complex and less straightforward than the feminism of the Centro. As Sara Nelson explains, “The very existence of a feminist-inspired institution within the coercive arm of the state seems paradoxical, especially considering Brazil’s history of military rule and police repression of resistance movements” (131). This points out the struggle present in the DDM between working toward the goal of ending violence against women, while at the same time focusing, as an institution, on punishments and legal processes. The majority of my time at the DDM was spent observing intakes with the “*escrivãs*” and observing “*audiências*” with the “*Delegada Titular*,” and the social worker who acts as a “*delegada*.” When I watched the “*escrivãs*” doing intakes and writing up police reports, their interactions with the women seemed more like business transactions than meetings where women were disclosing interpersonal violence for the first time. As the woman told her story, the “*escrivã*” would type what she was saying into the computer, often interrupting to clear up a fact or get the spelling of a name, rarely making eye contact with the woman. Often, the women would cry, put their head in their hands, or get angry

and shout, but the “*escrivã*” rarely reacted to these emotional indicators and would take the report as if nothing was happening. Of course, there were different styles of doing intakes among the “*escrivãs*” and some were more sensitive than others, but in general, this seems to be a process where the woman’s feelings are not taken into account at all. This is especially disturbing because when a woman comes to the DDM, chances are that it is the first time she is talking about the violence to anyone outside of her family or close friends. I noticed that the “*escrivã*” would sometimes question the woman’s story and ask her repeatedly why she was reporting so long after the event took place, why she ever went to his house in the first place, why she loves him even though he beats her, etc. As I watched these intakes, I felt that these questions were putting the blame on the women for the violence, suggesting that something they did provoked the violence. However, I do not want to read the “*escrivãs*” interactions with the women as heartless or completely insensitive, because I believe that would be oversimplifying the reality of the situation. When I talked to the “*Delegada Titular*,” I got a better understanding of the challenges of the work that the “*escrivãs*” do: “After eighty reports a day, it’s difficult to attend to a woman who comes here at 6:00 at night the same way that she attended to a woman who came here at 8:00 in the morning” (Dias, Cecília). Cecília goes on to talk about how they do not have psychologists to work with the officers, to let them unload their job stress, and it creates a lot of anxiety and problems for the officers. Therefore, I think that the way these women are treated when they enter the DDM is problematic, but I hesitate to put the blame on the officers themselves. The reality is that there are too many women making reports for the number of officers on staff to take in those reports. I

believe that once the State increases the number of DDMs and the number of officers on staff at each DDM, the style of intakes will improve.

In comparison to my intake observations with the “*escrivãs*,” I noticed that the “*audiências*” with the “*delegadas*” had a more supportive and involved tone. The social worker who acted as a “*delegada*,” Estela, explained to me that the DDM is not required by law to conduct “*audiências*.” “We do it by our own accord because every case is different. The woman needs a response because the inquiry takes time” (Alves, Estela). The fact that the DDM does these intensive meetings even though they are not required by law is a statement about the amount of attention they are willing to give to their cases; without these meetings, it is possible that women could go through the whole process without understanding the legal mechanisms, and the man could never be notified about why he is being charged with a crime. I noticed in my “*audiência*” observations with the “*Delegada Titular*” that when the woman talked, the “*delegada*” would lean in towards the woman, make eye contact, and let her know she was listening by saying, “I know,” in a soothing voice every few minutes. When the man would start talking, the “*delegada*” would lean back in her chair and nod to show that she was listening. It was clear, in these meetings, that the story of the woman was given priority. The “*delegadas*” would often explain to the men that they believed the woman’s story because they do not believe she would take the time to come to the police station, sit in a waiting room for hours, and return for the meeting if it were all a lie. Both “*delegadas*” also became quite involved in the stories of the victims and the relationship problems between the two; the meetings would sometimes last for more than an hour, with the “*delegada*” just listening as the two talked about their relationship. Often, the “*audiência*” did not come to any concrete

solution, but it was clear that the women were appreciate of the attention and the “preference” given to their side of the story. The “delegadas” did not hesitate to explain to the men that their situation was serious, that they had to change their ways or they were going to jail, and that their names were in the police system and therefore they needed to watch what they said and did. I noticed that hearing the “delegada” say this to the man was often enough for the woman and she would decide not to go forward with criminal proceedings from that point. The “delegadas” never expressed discontent with the woman’s decision, but instead, they seemed to express the same sentiment that I found at the Centro, which is that the woman should be able to make her own decisions about her life, with support behind her. In this way, I see the “audiências” as a concrete expression of the feminism of the DDM because they are given without a legal mandate, because they allow the woman to make the ultimate decision about the situation, and because they affirm the woman’s story and show her that she is believed.

To complement the observations that I conducted at the DDM, I was able to interview both of the women working as “delegadas” to better grasp their beliefs on their work, their goals, and feminism. I found that in the conversations I had with the two women about feminism, they were less willing than the women at the Centro to personally identify with the movement, but they still identified with “a cause” and described gender inequality as the source of violence against women. When I talked to Cecília about the origin of violence against women, she talked about the problem of the history of marriage: “This question of masculine culture, the possession of the woman by the man. Today he still thinks that he is the owner of the woman. For example, when he marries, when the wedding happens, it’s a situation of buying and selling” (Dias,

Cecília). She went on to allude to the social construction of gender roles and how that plays a part in creating a culture of violence against women: “She raises her daughter to stay in the home, to take care of the family. She raises the boy, the son, to play in the streets, to play on his bike. So this machista culture comes from the beginning” (Dias, Cecília). In the way that she talks about the origin of violence against women, Cecília gives responses that recognize gender subordination and how men and women are taught to perform their genders; however, when I asked her about feminism, she was hesitant to identify her work at the DDM directly with feminism. She talked about the feminist movement in the past tense: “It was a very important movement, for a woman to have the things she has today...The question of equilibrium – it’s not about women being above men, but to find this equilibrium between the two” (Dias, Cecília). Cecília distanced herself from the movement by talking about how feminism “was” important and emphasizing several times that she does not believe in women “being above” men. At the same time, however, she is still acknowledging the important role that feminism has played in the work that she does. Similarly, the other acting “delegada” did not identify herself or the DDM directly with the movement, but spoke about the crucial role that feminism plays in the way that the DDM functions today: “Yes, we work along a feminist line because these women have to be respected...So we have a feminist form because our work needs to be different...Because this old machista culture transfers from father to son, so it’s important that these people get rid of this machista idea so that we can achieve equality between the sexes...” (Alves, Estela). Here, Estela talks about the goal of feminism: equality between the sexes. However, she does not relate the movement directly to her work, but instead refers to the “feminist line” that the DDM works along,

which simultaneously identifies her work with feminism and distances it from the movement. This complicates any reading about the expression of feminism given through the words of the “delegadas,” because they are hesitant to be “feminists,” and yet they clearly understand their work as part of a larger fight against “machista” culture.

In the same way that the “delegadas” view their work within a larger culture that oppresses women, they also both expressed an understanding of the importance of training the police officers to be sensitive to the issue of domestic violence, and also of taking care of the officers so that they can do their jobs to their utmost capacity. Cecília expressed frustration with the fact that the DDM cannot give equal attention to all cases and must focus most of its attention on the most serious cases, and she relates this frustration to the way that the officers are forced to handle the cases, which she says is stressful for them: “Today, all of our officers are trained, they are prepared to deal with violence against women, they have the preparation. But the stress of this work, it affects a person. For us, to analyze the risk, to know it’s not a very serious risk, but for the woman it is very serious...So it’s very heavy, very difficult...” (Dias, Cecília). I read Cecília’s frustration with the way that the DDM is forced to ignore less serious cases as a demonstration of her commitment to her work and a sincere desire to do this work better. Similarly, she understands how important it is for the officers to handle the cases sensitively, but she also sees the reality of the situation and knows that this is not always possible. At the same time, as a person in charge of an entire squad of police officers, she is concerned about the mental and emotional health of her employees, which is certainly a legitimate concern in this line of work. Cecília values the decision of the officers at her Delegacia to work there, and she explained to me that they all care about

“the cause:” “So for everything to get better, the first thing is for the profession to be valued. Because all of them are here because they care very much about this cause, because it’s not every officer who would come to the DDM” (Dias, Cecília). Here, Cecília refers to their work at the DDM as a “cause,” which seems to align it even more strongly with the feminist movement. This phrase is important because it demonstrates that no matter what “the cause” is called, the most important thing is that there are people working for “the cause” who believe in it. Similarly, when Estela described to me how she got involved in this field, she said, “It wasn’t a planned thing, to work with this cause....I liked to work with these issues, but I was never interested in the feminist movement, I was never an activist” (Alves, Estela). Again, Estela intentionally distances herself from the movement, while at the same time she identifies herself strongly with “the cause” of fighting violence against women. She makes sure to say that she was never “an activist,” and yet, in reality, she is the person carrying out the work of the feminist movement’s fight against domestic violence. Perhaps it is less important what “the cause” is named, and more important that it simply exists.

Knowing that it would be important to discuss the fact that only women are employed at the DDM, I asked the two acting “delegadas” about the importance of having only female officers at the DDM, and whether or not they believe that identifying as a woman is an important part of their job. I found that both of the “delegadas” discussed the importance of having female officers in relation to the feelings of the victim; they both believe that it is important for a victim to be able to talk to another woman so that she does not feel intimidated. Estela described the importance of differentiating this as a woman’s space: “Because of this machista culture, if someone

saw a fight between a couple, they would have thought it was natural to see the man beating her – it was permitted. It’s important so that she’s heard and understood” (Alves, Estela). In this answer, Estela brings up the important point that the DDM, especially when it was first created, brought significant attention to domestic violence and began to transfer this violence from the private to the public sphere. Estela sees this all-female space of the DDM as important so that the woman is “heard and understood,” which she believes would not happen in a mixed-gender space. Similarly, Cecília discussed the importance of victims not being intimidated by male officers: “But here’s what happens – the woman feels safer, because of her life situation, to talk to a woman...she won’t feel right when she’s raped by a man, she doesn’t want this contact with men when she’s talking to them. Unfortunately, she wants to avoid the masculine, that represents her aggressor” (Dias, Cecília). Cecília states that men often represent aggression to the victims, which shows that even though she has to be most concerned with punishments and legality, it is important to her that these women have a “safe space” to report the violence. While Cecília believes that it is important for the DDM to be an all-female space, she rejects the essentialist idea that women are naturally more sensitive to these issues than men: “There are male police chiefs, my colleagues, that are much more sensitive than some female police chiefs about the question of violence against women” (Dias, Cecília). Therefore, while much of the criticism of the DDMs from researchers has been based on the idea that they are essentialist structures that assume women are more sensitive than men, Cecília’s response rejects this conclusion and focuses on the needs of the victim, rather than the capacity of the officer. Her response shows that she believes making the victim feel safe is more important than creating a mixed-gender

space that might be more professionally beneficial. In this way, part of the feminism expressed through the DDM is an understanding of the victim as the most important person throughout the police process, and the desire to keep her safety and comfort a top priority.

Through any definition of feminism expressed by the women in both of these institutions, whether it is focused on empowerment or inequality between the sexes, Lei Maria da Penha can be read as a feminist law. As I spent time at the DDM, I became more and more aware of the profound effect that Lei Maria da Penha has had on the work of the women at the DDM. It is, after all, the primary responsibility of these women to implement Lei Maria da Penha in the city of Fortaleza. During the “audiências,” I noticed that the acting “delegadas” constantly brought up Maria da Penha and explained to the man and the woman the implications that it had for their particular situation. In one very serious “audiência,” the “Delegada Titular” (Cecília) explained the law as “cruel” and told the man that if he filed a report against the woman to contest the report that she had already filed, the law would favor the woman. When the man protested and talked about how unfair the law is, Cecília was quick to tell him that the law has to be this way because so many wives are killed by their husbands, and the opposite is not true. Similarly, when I interviewed both of the women, they constantly brought up Maria da Penha, even when my question did not relate to the law. For example, when I asked Cecília about how she became interested in working with violence against women, she explained her career history and then concluded by talking about the law: “When we arrived here, it’s already been two and a half years, the Maria da Penha law did not exist yet...Because we saw before that the law did not help, did not combat domestic violence,

mainly for the cause of the woman. And now, with Maria da Penha, we have more effective instruments, more rigorous, to succeed in fighting the violence” (Dias, Cecília). Through Cecília’s words, it is clear that Lei Maria da Penha has become the way that the DDM defines its fight against the violence. I believe, also, that the DDM rests its hope for future change on Lei Maria da Penha. I asked Cecília about the goals of the DDM and how she sees those goals being accomplished, and she responded that because of Maria da Penha and the attention brought by the law, the DDM is working with the State to construct fifteen new Delegacias throughout Ceará, along with more support centers and shelters. When I asked Cecília about what needs to change in society so that violence against women stops, she said, “I believe that the law, this law, intends to stop it...I really defend this question of the law...If we start now, I believe we can stop the violence in ten years” (Dias, Cecília). Therefore, it is evident that the DDM is counting on Maria da Penha to not only improve the structure and system for domestic violence support in the state, but also to eventually end violence against women. I also noticed this hope in my conversation with the other acting “delegada,” Estela. When I asked her about the goals of the DDM, she immediately began talking about the law: “The law, the law Maria da Penha, is welcomed by Brazilians...This specific law was waited for – victims and organizations fought for this law...justice had a new vision...I believe that as time goes on, there will be a coming to consciousness on the part of men and women” (Alves, Estela). This echoes Cecília’s sentiments about the law, that it will eventually be able to bring about the change that everyone has been fighting so hard for: ending violence against women. While it may seem like too many expectations are being placed on one law, the radical changes that the law brings about, combined with the relevance of the

law to the everyday work of the women at the DDM, make these expectations logical. Through the hope and interest in the law expressed by the DDM, they are aligning themselves with the feminist motivations of the law; therefore, this law can be seen as the backbone of the feminism expressed at the DDM. Because the “delegadas” are using this law as the foundation of their work, and the ideas and basis for the law comes out of the feminist movement, the DDM is essentially adopting a feminist belief structure in order to carry out the goals of this law. I believe that if I had conducted this project before Lei Maria da Penha was passed, I would have had much different results; in my opinion, the hope and energy about ending violence against women that I found in both the DDM and the Centro are largely a result of the momentum created by the passage of Lei Maria da Penha.

Conclusion

The fight against domestic and sexual violence in Fortaleza is complex and multi-institutional; not only are there many organizations working toward the goal of ending violence against women, but these organizations have different and individual roles within the network, therefore complicating any general understanding of the theories used within these institutions. My focus on the DDM and the Centro has allowed me look into these two institutions in order to gain an understanding of the feminism expressed by the professionals in each place, so as to begin to comprehend the way that the war against domestic violence is waged in Fortaleza. I found that the feminist theories expressed in both the Centro and the DDM identify violence against women as based in gender inequality, but the specific ways that the women define feminism in their jobs and in their lives vary from institution to institution. While the feminism at the Centro is inspired by the women's work with empowerment and building self-worth within victims, the feminism at the DDM takes a legal tone and is very much motivated by the implementation of Lei Maria da Penha.

Through interviews and observations at the Centro and the DDM, I feel I was able to gain a reasonable understanding of how the institutions work individually, how they are situated within the larger structure of Fortaleza's system, and how the words and actions of the professionals in each location express feminism in their work and lives. While much of the previous research about these specialized Delegacias found that they were not functioning effectively and the women who worked there did not express any feminist ideas that might benefit their work, I feel that the results of this study are much

different. I see Lei Maria da Penha playing a large part in the feminism and the hope for future change that the professionals at the DDM expressed to me. Lei Maria da Penha recognizes the work of these women as part of the fight for human rights, which validates the hard work to which they are dedicated, and it gives them the feeling that their government is supporting them in that work. Not only are the “delegadas” hopeful for change, but they also fight for that change by getting involved in “audiências,” which are important for victims, by their identification with “the cause” of fighting against violence, and with their understanding of the need to overturn “machista” culture. While the DDM is far from perfect, and the long waiting lines and often-insensitive intake processes are problematic, I see the fact that the “delegadas” recognize these shortcomings and are working towards fixing them as a step in the right direction. Like the “delegadas,” I see a new vision of feminism and a new vision of justice within Lei Maria da Penha, and I am hopeful for the changes that are being realized in Fortaleza as a result of this progressive law. Through the hope expressed by the women in both of these institutions, combined with an awareness of the hard work of these professionals (which is necessary for progress), I see this law continuing to improve services for victims, spread consciousness, and deconstruct harmful gender stereotypes.

Indications for Further Research

While this project gave me a deeper understanding of the systems in place for fighting domestic violence and the opinions of the professionals who work at these institutions, there still exist major holes in this research that I hope can be filled in by further research. I think it is important for the voices of the actual victims to be added to a research project like this. It would be both interesting and pertinent to talk to the women, after they leave these institutions, to understand their feelings about how they were treated and to understand their perceptions of the help and support that is available to them. Of course, none of these systems of support matter if the victims do not understand that they exist. Similarly, I think it would be important to include a full investigation of all the institutions within this network, including the Casa Abrigo, the women's judge, the women's hospital, etc. The voices of the professionals at these institutions should be added to the dialogue begun by this project. Finally, to truly make this study an examination of domestic violence structures in Brazil, one would have to investigate the systems in more than one city; it would be important, if this study were not limited by time and money, to give a deeper profile of Brazil by conducting similar studies in other communities throughout the country.

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Appendix

- 1) Could you have done this project in the USA? What data or sources were unique to the culture in which you did the project?

As a whole, I could not have done this project in the USA. Certainly, I could have investigated police stations in the U.S. and how they deal with domestic violence, and I could have looked into resource centers for women dealing with violence. However, these specialized police stations only exist in Brazil, so my research is very specific to this particular phenomenon here in Brazil.

- 2) Could you have done any part of it in the USA? Would the results have been different? How?

I could have investigated how feminism is expressed through professionals working in police stations and resource centers in the United States, but I believe the results would be much different. The results of this project are affected very much by the recent climate of change in domestic violence law in Brazil, principally because of Maria da Penha. I think the energy behind my project has a lot to do with the Lula administration's improvements in these laws, and my research would have been lacking that in the U.S.

- 3) Did the process of doing the ISP modify your learning style? How was this different from your previous style and approaches to learning?

Yes, the ISP process definitely modified my learning style. Before the ISP, I always worked at my own quick pace and did not stop for anything until I was finished. With the ISP, I learned that I had to be flexible enough to work within other people's schedules, and also I had to adjust to the slower learning process that happens with in-depth observations. It's impossible to get all the answers at once, but rather, it's a soaking-in process.

- 4) How much of the final monograph is primary data? How much is from secondary sources?

My monograph is probably about 20% secondary sources and 80% primary data. I tried to use mostly the data that I collected while in the field, but I feel that secondary sources are very important for my particular project, especially when explaining laws and relevant history.

- 5) What criteria did you use to evaluate your data for inclusion in the final monograph? Or how did you decide to exclude certain data?

As I was working in the field, I began to pick out important themes that I thought must be mentioned in my final monograph. From those themes, I constructed an

outline and included all primary data related to those themes in the monograph itself. The data that was excluded was excluded because I wanted to have a tightly-structured paper and did not want to include too much extraneous information that would detract from my thesis. Overall, there are too many observations and interviews to include every bit in the monograph itself.

- 6) How did the “drop-offs” or field exercises contribute to the process and completion of the ISP?

Learning how to navigate Fortaleza during the drop-off was important preparation for my experience during ISP. Especially because I was not working directly with an organization and did not have a set schedule or activities, it was up to me to navigate my way through people’s schedules, the fast pace of the police station, and the network of people who work in both of the institutions I studied. If I had not had the community project or the drop-off, I would not have felt prepared to do this, but because of the confidence I got from these activities, I felt slightly more at ease during the ISP.

- 7) What part of the FSS most significantly influenced the ISP process?

The community project was by far the most helpful preparation for my ISP, especially because I worked with the Centro de Referência for both. The

experience of learning how to keep a field journal during the community project was indispensable.

- 8) What were the principal problems you encountered while doing the ISP? Were you able to resolve these and how?

My biggest problems had to do with getting interviews, due to the demands of people's schedules. It was impossible to completely resolve this because these women were so busy that they literally did not have enough time during their days to talk with me. But eventually, I got one interview from each woman I wanted to talk with, and I was able to compromise my interviews by doing in-depth observations, which ended up answering some of my questions quite well.

- 9) Did you experience any time constraints? How could these have been resolved?

I did not have serious time constraints. I felt that I was able to observe a lot during the time I was allotted and I gathered quite a bit of data. My only constraints were that the Delegada Titular at the police station authorized me to be there only (or mainly) in the mornings, which sometimes limited the time I was able to spend at the Delegacia.

10) Did your original topic change and evolve as you discovered or did not discover new and different resources? Did the resources available modify or determine the topic?

As my ISP observations and conversations developed, I began to modify what I thought my project was going to be about. Originally, I was just planning to talk about the different expressions of feminism I encountered, but I discovered that Lei Maria da Penha was too important to this movement to be left out of my project, so I decided to dedicate a significant portion of my final project to this law and the changes that it is bringing about in this network.

11) How did you go about finding resources: institutions, interviewees, publications, etc.?

My community project put me in touch with the Centro de Referência, and my advisor, Janaína, was able to put me in touch with the Delegacia and she made sure I was able to do my research there. My interviewees were easy to find because they consisted entirely of the women who worked at both of these institutions. Similarly, publications were easy to find at both places because the DDM and the Centro hand out pamphlets about violence, Lei Maria da Penha, and the Pacto Nacional regularly. Both institutions also gave me access to their statistics.

12) What method(s) did you use? How did you decide to use such method(s)?

I combined interviewing and observations. I had planned on doing more interviewing than observations, but field conditions limited my ability to do interviews and so my project ended up being mostly observations. This is both a positive and a negative for my research, but it was not a conscious decision – it was a compromise based on time constraints.

13) Comment on your relations with your advisor: indispensable? Occasionally helpful? Not very helpful? At what point was he/she most helpful? Were there cultural differences, which influenced your relationship? A different understanding of educational processes and goals? Was working with your advisor instructional?

Working with my advisor was occasionally helpful. She was very helpful in setting me up with the Delegacia, and took me there three times to make sure it was authorized by the Delegada Titular for me to be there. She also went over ideas with me and gave me advice for how to organize my data after I had collected it. This was helpful, but also not completely necessary. It was great to have her available to answer questions about the systems of both institutions that I was still unsure about after my field process was over. Overall, working with my advisor was helpful because she was able to get me access to the DDM, but

because we didn't see each other that often, it's difficult to say that our relationship was indispensable.

14) Did you reach any dead ends? Hypotheses which turned out to be not useful?

Interviews or visits that had no application?

I had planned on asking the professionals at these institutions about how the work affected them personally, and also how they felt about their work and their triumphs or frustrations with the work. When I got in the field, though, these questions seemed inappropriate and not very relevant to my research. Other than that, all of my planned interview questions were very helpful.

15) What insights did you gain into the culture as a result of doing the ISP, which you might not otherwise have gained?

I gained insight into the laws and systems surrounding domestic violence, as well as the general attitudes about violence against women that pervade Brazilian culture. I also got a better understanding of the free-flowing schedules that people keep, as opposed to rigid, time-based schedules.

16) Did the ISP process assist your adjustment to the culture? Integration?

The ISP certainly assisted by integration into the culture because I spent all of my time around Brazilians, only speaking Portuguese. As far as adjustment, the DDM is not a comfortable or “homey” place to be, so I would say that the ISP did not help me adjust to the culture, but rather made me uncomfortable, as a place such as the DDM should make a person.

17) What were the principal lessons you learned from the ISP process?

The ISP process taught me to be flexible with my expectations and to not be afraid to adapt, even if I think it might hurt my research, because it might actually end up benefiting the information that I collect. I also learned to be forward when I am in situations where people don’t really understand what I’m doing there. I had to learn how to ask again and again for interviews that kept getting pushed back and pushed back. I learned how to do this respectfully, and in a way that was not irritating to the women (I hope), which I think was a valuable lesson because it is sometimes difficult to be nuanced and subtle when you aren’t fluent in a language.

18) If you met a future student who wanted to do this same project, what would be your recommendations to him/her?

I would tell them to be prepared for what they were going to see. I had no idea that I would be sitting in on meetings with victims, their abusers, and the police

officers. These meetings were very intense and I feel I would have handled them better if I had known I was going to see them. Also, I would tell them that the atmosphere of the DDM is very unpredictable, so to be flexible and to not count too much on appointments set at a certain time. Sometimes things come up that are much more important than your research, and you have to be able to understand that and adjust to it.

19) Given what you know now, would you undertake this, or a similar project again?

I would certainly undertake this project again. It was amazing to have so much access at the DDM, because it was something I was not expecting. Also, it was wonderful to meet the women in both of these institutions and get to know a little bit about the work that they do everyday. It's one thing to study domestic violence and a completely different thing to be one of these women working in the trenches everyday, doing the work that no one else wants to do. With this in mind, I would love to do this project over a longer period of time, with a more in-depth look at every institution involved in the network of Fortaleza's domestic violence support system.